



# BELGIUM



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	1	Contact Addresses
	2	General
	3	Passport
	4	Money
	5	Duty Free
	6	Public Holidays
	7	Health
	8	Accommodation
	9	Resorts & Excursions
	10	Sport & Activities
	11	Social Profile
	12	Business Profile
	13	Climate
	14	History and Government
	15	Overview

## 1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

**Location:** Western Europe.

Office de Promotion du Tourisme Wallonie-Bruxelles  
(Belgian Tourist Office - Brussels & Ardennes)  
61-63 rue du Marché-aux-Herbes, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium  
**Tel:** (2) 504 0390. Fax: (2) 504 0270. E-mail: info@opt.be  
**Website:** <http://www.belgique-tourisme.net>

Toerisme Vlaanderen  
(Tourism Flanders-Brussels)  
Grasmarkt 61-63, B-1000, Brussels  
**Tel:** (2) 504 0300 or 504 0390. Fax: (2) 513 8803. E-mail: info@toerismevlaanderen.be  
**Website:** <http://www.visitflanders.com>

Brussels International - Tourism and Congress  
Hôtel de Ville, Grand-Place, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium  
**Tel:** (2) 513 8940. Fax: (2) 513 8320. E-mail: tourism.brussels@tib.be  
**Website:** <http://www.tib.be>

Embassy of the Kingdom of Belgium  
103-105 Eaton Square, London SW1W 9AB  
**Tel:** (020) 7470 3700 (general enquiries) or (09065) 508 963 (recorded visa information; calls cost £1 per minute) or (09065) 266 663 (visa application forms by post; calls cost £1.50 per minute). Fax: (020) 7259 6213. E-mail: info@belgium-embassy.co.uk  
**Website:** <http://www.belgium-embassy.co.uk>  
**Opening hours:** Monday to Friday 0900-1700 (general enquiries); 0900-1130 (visa section).

Belgian Tourist Office - Brussels & Ardennes  
(Office de Promotion du Tourisme Wallonie-Bruxelles)  
225 Marsh Wall, London E14 9FW  
**Tel:** 0906 302 0245 (calls cost 50p per minute) or (0800) 954 5245 (brochure request line; toll free, UK only) or (020) 7531 0391 (trade enquiries only). Fax: (020) 7531 0393. E-mail: info@belgium-tourism.org  
**Website:** <http://www.belgium-tourism.net>

Tourism Flanders-Brussels  
(Toerisme Vlaanderen)  
31 Pepper Street, London E14 9RW  
**Tel:** (020) 7458 0044 (travel trade and press only) or 7458 0045 (information line) or (09001) 887 799 (brochure request line; calls cost 60p per minute). Fax: (020) 7458 0045. E-mail: office@flanders-tourism.org  
**Website:** <http://www.visitflanders.com>

British Embassy  
85 rue d'Arlon, B-1040 Brussels, Belgium  
**Tel:** (2) 287 6211. Fax: (2) 287 6360 (information department).  
**Website:** <http://www.british-embassy.be>  
**Consulate in:** Antwerp.

Embassy of the Kingdom of Belgium  
3330 Garfield Street, NW, Washington, DC 20008  
**Tel:** (202) 333 6900. Fax: (202) 333 3079.  
**E-mail:** washington@diplobel.org  
**Website:** <http://www.diplobel.org/usa>

Belgian Consulate

## 2 GENERAL

1330 Avenue of the Americas, 26th Floor, 54th Street, New York, NY 10019  
**Tel:** (212) 586 5110. Fax: (212) 582 9657.  
**E-mail:** NewYork@diplobel.org

Belgian Tourist Office  
780 Third Avenue, Suite 1501, New York, NY 10017  
**Tel:** (212) 758 8130. Fax: (212) 355 7675.  
**E-mail:** info@visitbelgium.com  
**Website:** <http://www.visitbelgium.com>.

Embassy of the United States of America  
25-27 boulevard du Régent, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium  
**Tel:** (2) 508 2111. Fax: (2) 511 2725 or 513 0409 (consular section). Website:  
<http://www.usinfo.be>

Embassy of Belgium  
4th Floor, 80 Elgin Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 1B7  
**Tel:** (613) 236 7267. Fax: (613) 236 7882. E-mail: ottawa@diplobel.org  
**Website:** <http://www.diplobel.org/canada>  
**Consulates in:** Calgary, Edmonton, Montréal, Toronto, Vancouver and Winnipeg.

Belgian Tourist Office - Brussels & Ardennes  
43 rue de Buade, Bureau 525, Québec City, Québec G1R 4A2  
**Tel:** (418) 692 4939. Fax: (418) 692 4974. E-mail: opt.walbru.quebec@videotron.net  
**Website:** <http://www.belgique-tourisme.net>

Belgian Tourist Office  
PO Box 760, Succursale N.D.G., Montréal, Québec H4A 3S2  
**Tel:** (514) 484 3594. Fax: (514) 489 8965.  
Postal enquiries only.

Canadian Embassy  
2 avenue de Tervuren, B-1040 Brussels, Belgium  
**Tel:** (2) 741 0611. Fax: (2) 741 0613 or 741 0643. E-mail: bru@dfait-maeci.gc.ca

**Country dialling code:** 32.

General

**Area:** 30,528 sq km (11,787 sq miles).

**Population:** 10,213,752 (1998).

**Population Density:** 334.6 per sq km.

**Capital:** Brussels (Bruxelles, Brussel). Population: 934,460 (1998).

**Geography:** Belgium is situated in Europe and bordered by France, Germany, Luxembourg and The Netherlands. The landscape is varied, the rivers and gorges of the Ardennes contrasting sharply with the rolling plains which make up much of the countryside. Notable features are the great forest of Ardennes near the frontier with Germany and Luxembourg and the wide, sandy beaches of the northern coast, which run for over 60km (37 miles). The countryside is rich in historic cities, castles and churches.

**Government:** Constitutional monarchy. The Kingdom of Belgium was established in 1830. In 1993, Belgium became a federal state comprising three autonomous regions. Head of State: King Albert II since 1993. Head of Government: Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt since 1999.

**Language:** The official languages are Flemish, French and German; Flemish is slightly more widely spoken than French. German is spoken by fewer than 1% of the population.

**Religion:** Mainly Roman Catholic, with small Protestant and Jewish communities.

**Time:** GMT + 1 (GMT + 2 from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

**Electricity:** 220 volts AC, 50Hz. Plugs are of the round 2-pin type.

**Communications:** Belgium is a major historical European crossroads for communications and possesses a fully integrated service for all aspects of telecommunications.

**Telephone:** Fully automatic IDD. For operator services, dial 1324. Country code: 32. Outgoing international code: 00. There are call boxes in all major towns and country districts. The cost of local calls is BFr10. Some coinless cardphones and credit card phones are also available. Telecards are available from newsagents, railway stations and post offices, price: BFr100 and 500.

**Mobile telephone:** GSM 900 and 1800 networks provide coverage all over Belgium. Local network providers include Mobistar, KPN Orange and Proximus. Handsets can be hired at Brussels airport.

**Internet/E-mail:** Cybercafés provide public access. ISPs include Skynet (<http://www.belgacom.net>).

**Post:** Airmail takes two to three days to other West European destinations. Poste Restante facilities are available in main cities. Post office hours: 0900-1600 Monday to Friday.

**Press:** Principal daily newspapers are Le Soir, La Meuse, La Lanterne (French) and Het Laatste Nieuws, De Standaard, Het Nieuwsblad, De Gentenaar (Flemish). There is an English-language magazine, The Bulletin, printed in Belgium.

**BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies:** From time to time these change.

**BBC:**  
MHz12.109.4106.1950.648

**Voice of America:** MHz15.219.7601.5480.792

### 3 PASSPORT

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
<b>British</b>	Yes	No	No
<b>Australian</b>	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Canadian</b>	Yes	No	Yes
<b>USA</b>	Yes	No	Yes
<b>OtherEU</b>	1	No	No
<b>Japanese</b>	Yes	No	Yes

**Note:** Belgium is a signatory to the 1995 Schengen Agreement. For further details about passport/visa regulations within the Schengen area see the introductory section How to Use this Guide.

**PASSPORTS:** Passport valid for at least 3 months after period of intended stay required by all except:

- (a) 1. nationals of EU countries in possession of a national ID card;
- (b) nationals of Andorra, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco, San Marino and Switzerland in possession of a national ID card.

**VISAS:** Required by all except the following for stays of up to 3 months:

- (a) nationals referred to in the chart above;
- (b) nationals of Andorra, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Korea (Rep. of), Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Poland, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Switzerland, Uruguay, Vatican City and Venezuela for a stay of up to 3 months.

**Types of visa and cost:** A uniform type of visa, the Schengen visa, is issued for tourist, business and private visits. There are three main types of Schengen visa: Short-stay (Tourist and Business), Transit and Airport transit. Prices depend on type of visa and prevalent rate of exchange but range between £8 and £30.

**Note:** Spouses and children (under 18 years) of EU nationals receive their visas free of charge (enquire at Embassy for details). The original marriage certificate, the spouse's passport and the birth certificate(s) for the child/children must be produced.

**Validity:** Short-stay (single- and multiple-entry): usually valid for 6 months from date of issue for stays of maximum 90 days per entry. Transit (single- and multiple-entry): valid for a maximum of 5 days per entry, including the day of arrival. Visas cannot be extended and a new application must be made each time.

**Application to:** Consulate (or Consular Section at Embassy); see address section. Travellers visiting just one Schengen country should apply to the Consulate of that country; travellers visiting more than one Schengen country should apply to the Consulate of the country chosen as the main destination or the country they will enter first (if they have no main destination).

**Application requirements:** (a) Passport or official travel documents valid for at least 3 months after proposed stay with blank pages to affix visa stamp. (b) 3 application forms. (c) 3 passport-size photographs. (d) Evidence of sufficient funds to cover stay. (e) Proof of purpose of stay such as a letter of invitation from a host in Belgium, a return ticket or hotel booking. (f) Letter from employer or from solicitor or bank manager if self-employed. If a student, letter from school or college confirming attendance. (g) Stamped, self-addressed registered envelope. (h) Fee (payable by postal order only).

**Working days required:** 24 hours to 8 weeks, depending on nationality and resident status, and whether applying by post or in person. Certain nationals must apply in person (contact Consulate or Consular section at Embassy for further details).

**Temporary residence:** Persons wishing to take up temporary residence should make a special application to the Belgian Embassy.

## 4 MONEY

**Currency:** Belgian Franc (BFr) = 100 centimes (Flemish centiemmen). Notes are in denominations of BFr10,000, 2000, 1000, 500, 200 and 100. Coins are in denominations of BFr50, 20, 5 and 1, and 50 centimes.

**Single European currency (Euro):** The Euro is now the official currency of 12 EU member states (including Belgium), although it is currently only used as 'written money' (cheques, bank transactions, credit cards, etc). The first Euro coins and notes will be introduced in January 2002; the Belgian Franc will still be in circulation until July 1 2002, when it will be completely replaced by the Euro. 1 Euro = BFr40.3399.

**Credit cards:** MasterCard, American Express, Diners Club and Visa are accepted. Check with your credit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

**Travellers cheques:** Widely accepted. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in Pounds Sterling.

Exchange rate indicators

The following figures are included as a guide to the movements of the Belgian Franc against Sterling and the US Dollar:

Date Apr '00 Aug '00 Nov '00 Feb '01 £1.00=67.4365.3968.0964.14 \$1.00=42.2643.5847.0443.92

The following figures are included as a guide to the movements of the Euro against Sterling and the US Dollar:

Date May '00 Aug '00 Nov '00 Feb '01 1 Euro=£0.60£0.62£0.59£0.621 Euro=\$0.89\$0.93\$0.86\$0.92

**Currency restrictions:** There are no restrictions on the import and export of either local or foreign currency.

**Banking hours:** 0900-1600 Monday to Friday.

## 5 DUTY FREE

The following goods may be taken into Belgium without incurring customs duty by travellers aged over 17 years arriving from non-EU countries:

200 cigarettes or 100 cigarillos or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco; 2 litres of wine; 1 litre of spirits or 2 litres of sparkling wine or 2 litres of fortified wine; 50g of perfume and 250ml of eau de toilette; other goods up to BFr2600 (subject to change - contact the Embassy for up-to-date information); 500g of coffee; 100g of tea.

**Prohibited items:** Unpreserved meat products. Other unpreserved foodstuffs must be declared.

**Abolition of duty-free Goods within the EU:** On June 30 1999, the sale of duty-free alcohol and tobacco at airports and at sea was abolished in all 15 EU member states. Although there are now no limits imposed on importing tobacco and alcohol products from one EU country to another, (with the exceptions of Denmark, Finland and Sweden, where limits are imposed), travellers should note that they may be required to prove at customs that the goods purchased are for personal use only.

## 6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 1 2001 New Year's Day. Apr 16 Easter Monday. May 1 Labour Day. May 24 Ascension Day. Jun 4 Whit Monday. Jul 21 Independence Day. Aug 15 Assumption. Nov 1 All Saints' Day. Nov 11 Armistice Day. Dec 25 Christmas Day. Jan 1 2002 New Year's Day. Apr 1 Easter Monday. May 9 Labour Day. Jun 1 Ascension Day. Jun 12 Whit Monday. Jul 21 Independence Day. Aug 15 Assumption. Nov 1 All Saints' Day. Nov 11 Armistice Day. Dec 25 Christmas Day.

**Note:** The following additional holidays are observed by different communities: Jul 1 (Flemish community), Sep 27 (French community), Nov 15 (German community).

## 7 HEALTH

	<i>Special Precautions</i>	<i>Certificate Required</i>
<b>Yellow Fever</b>	No	No
<b>Cholera</b>	No	No
<b>Typhoid and Polio</b>	No	-
<b>Malaria</b>	No	-
<b>Food and Drink</b>	No	-

Rabies is present. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered.

Lyme disease is a risk during the summer in the Ardennes area; guard against tick bites. For further information, see the Health appendix.

**Health care:** Medical care is expensive but of a high standard. There is a reciprocal health agreement with the UK. It allows UK citizens a refund of up to 75% of medical costs. To take



advantage of the agreement, UK citizens should obtain form E111 from the post office before departure.

Travel - International

**AIR:** The national airline is Sabena (SN).

**Approximate flight times:** From Brussels to London is 50 minutes and from Antwerp is 50 minutes. From Brussels to Los Angeles is 16 hours and to New York is 7 hours.

**International airports:** Brussels Zaventem (BRU) (website: <http://www.brusselsairport.be>) is 13km (8 miles) northeast of the city (travel time - 35 minutes). The Airport City Express train connects all three main railway stations (Brussels North, Central and South) with the airport, running every 15 minutes 0600-0000 (journey time - 15-20 minutes). The airport station is located on level 1 below the terminal. Other trains also depart frequently for the city and for destinations all over Belgium. Coaches depart from the airport bus station on level 0 for major cities in Belgium, France and the Netherlands. Buses run frequently to and from the city. Taxis to the city cost approximately BFr1200. Hotel courtesy coaches go to Holiday Inn, Novotel and Sofitel. There are helicopter services to and from Antwerp, Ghent and Kortrijk. Airport facilities include car parking, car hire (Alamo, Avis, Budget, Europcar and Hertz), post office (0800-1900), banks (0700-2200), bureaux de change, bars, restaurants, incoming and outgoing duty-free shops selling a wide range of goods (including mini-computers), medical facilities, computer and fax facilities and conference and business facilities.

**Antwerp (ANR) (Deurne) (website:** <http://www.antwerpairport.be>) is 3km (2 miles) east of the city. There is a regular bus service (no. 16) to Central Station. Taxis are available. Airport facilities include an outgoing duty-free shop, car hire (Budget and Hertz), bank (0900-1200 and 1330-1900) and bar/restaurant (0700-2300). There is also a regular bus service from Antwerp to Brussels Airport, which is free to Sabena passengers.

**Ostend (OST) (website:** <http://www.ostendairport.be>), 5km (3 miles) from the city, has car parking facilities, car hire, exchange bureau de change, a restaurant, a bar and a duty-free shop.

**Charleroi (CRL) (Brussels South Charleroi) (website:** <http://www.charleroi-airport.com>) is 5km (3 miles) from Charleroi and 50km (31 miles) from Brussels. Airlines serving the airport include Ryanair, which operates cheap flights to several European destinations from Charleroi. Buses depart every hour to Charleroi (journey time - 15 minutes). There are regular buses to Brussels (journey time - 45 minutes). Facilities include automatic money changer, business lounge and duty-free shop.

Liège (LGG). There are taxis and a regular bus service to the centre, 8km (5 miles) away.

**Departure tax:** None.

**SEA:** Antwerp is one of Europe's busiest commercial ports, but passenger services generally operate out of Ostend or Zeebrugge. Hoverspeed (tel: (0990) 795 141; e-mail: [info@hoverspeed.com](mailto:info@hoverspeed.com); website: <http://www.hoverspeed.com>) operates catamarans between Dover and Ostend (travel time - 2 hours). P&O North Sea Ferries (tel: (01482) 377 177; e-mail: [info.uk@ponsf.com](mailto:info.uk@ponsf.com); website: <http://www.ponsf.com>) operates between Hull and Zeebrugge (travel time - 14 hours).

**RAIL:** The Belgium national railway, Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Belges (SNCB) (website: <http://www.sncb.be>), operates frequent day and night trains to destinations in Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Poland and Switzerland. High-speed trains - Trains à Grande Vitesse or TGV - operate between Belgium and France, connecting Brussels with destinations in Brittany, on the French Atlantic coast, the Côte d'Azur and the French Alps. Cities that can be reached from Brussels by TGV

include Rennes, Bordeaux, Lyon, Valence, Perpignan, Marseille, Cannes, Nice and Chambéry. TGV trains depart from Brussels and need to be booked in advance. Further high-speed trains are operated by Thalys (website: <http://www.thalys.com>), a service jointly run by the the Belgium, French, German and Dutch national railways. The main international Thalys trains link Brussels to Amsterdam (The Netherlands), Cologne (Germany) and Paris (France).

**Rail passes:** International rail passes include the Domino pass, valid for unlimited travel in most European countries for a period of three to eight days in any calendar month; the Eurail and Euro passes, available to non-UK residents and permitting unlimited travel in most European countries for a period of one or two months; and the Interrail pass, permitting unlimited travel in Europe to people aged under 26 years. The Benelux 5-day Tourrail ticket offers five days of unlimited travel within a period of 30 days by rail in Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg. The Rail Plus Senior card is available to people aged over 60 and entitles the buyer to reductions of up to 25% on international tickets in 19 European countries. For further information, contact Rail Europe (tel: (09702 ) 848 848) or Belgian National Railways (tel: (020) 7593 2332; fax: (020) 7593 2333; e-mail: [belrail@aol.com](mailto:belrail@aol.com)).

**Channel tunnel:** Eurostar, a service provided by the railways of Belgium, the UK and France, operates over ten daily high-speed trains from London Waterloo via the Channel Tunnel to Brussels. The travel time from London to Brussels is 2 hours and 40 minutes. For further information and reservations contact Eurostar (tel: (01233) 617 599 (travel agents) or (0990) 186 186 (public; within the UK) or (01233) 617 575 (public; outside the UK only); website: <http://www.eurostar.com>); or Rail Europe (tel: (08705) 848 848). Travel agents can obtain refunds for unused tickets from Eurostar Trade Refunds, 2nd Floor, Kent House, 81 Station Road, Ashford, Kent TN23 1PD. Complaints and comments may be sent to Eurostar Customer Relations, Eurostar House, Waterloo Station, London SE1 8SE. General enquiries and information requests must be made by telephone.

**ROAD:** There are numerous and excellent road links with all neighbouring countries. For information on traffic regulations and required documentation, see the Travel-Internal section. The channel tunnel: Travelling from and to the UK, all road vehicles can be carried through the channel tunnel in Le Shuttle trains running between Folkestone in Kent and Calais in France. Each shuttle is made up of 12 single- and 12 double-deck carriages. All vehicles, from motorcycles to campers, can be accommodated. Passengers generally travel with their vehicles. Heavy goods vehicles are carried on special wagons with a separate passenger coach for the drivers. Terminals and shuttles are well-equipped for disabled passengers. Passenger Terminal buildings contain restaurants, bureaux de change and other amenities. The journey through the tunnel takes approximately 35 minutes. Services run every day of the year. Motorists pass through customs and immigration before they board, with no further checks on arrival. Fares are charged according to length of stay and time of year. Lower rates apply to motorcycles. There are also many promotional deals available, especially outside the peak holiday seasons. Tickets may be purchased in advance from travel agents, or from Eurotunnel Customer Services in France or the UK with a credit card. For further information, brochures and reservations, contact Eurotunnel Customer Services in the UK (tel: (08705) 353 535).

#### Travel - Internal

**AIR:** Helicopter services operate from Brussels airport to Antwerp, Ghent and Kortrijk. (These are aimed at commuters and operate mainly during peak hours.) Sabena provides non-stop buses from Brussels Airport to Antwerp for its passengers.

**RAIL:** Belgium has a dense railway network with hourly trains on most lines. On the main lines there are more frequent trains. Fares: First- and second-class, single and return tickets are available. However, a return ticket is double the single fare and is only valid on the day of issue. Children from 6-11 years pay half price.

**Discount travel:** Weekend return fares are available from Friday (after 1900) to Sunday for the outward journey and on Saturday and Sunday for the return journey (on long holiday weekends these periods are extended). A 50% reduction card, valid for one month, is for sale. It entitles the holder to buy an unlimited number of half-price single tickets.

Go Pass offers 10 second-class trips for persons aged between 6 and 25 and Multi Pass (valid for one day) offers one return or two single trips for a minimum of two people and a maximum of five. The Rail Pass offers two people 10 single trips within one year. The Golden Rail Pass offer 6 **single journeys to people aged 60 and over. Enquire at Rail Europe (tel: (08702) 848 848)** for further information. For information on timetables, routes and special passes contact Belgian National Railways (tel: (020) 7593 2332; fax: (020) 7593 2333).

**Runabout tickets:** The 5-day B-Tourrail ticket permits five days of unlimited travel within a period of 30 days on Belgian Rail. Principal stations in Belgium (and throughout Europe) are able to issue single and return tickets valid from the border to principal foreign stations (in conjunction with a Tourrail ticket). For details of Benelux Tourrail tickets, see the Travel - International section.

**ROAD:** There are many different brands of petrol available, and prices vary. Traffic drives on the right. Main towns (except in the Ardennes) are connected by toll-free motorways. It is compulsory for seat belts to be worn in the front and back of vehicles. Children under 12 are not permitted to travel in the front seat of a car when there is space in the back. A warning triangle must be displayed at the scene of a breakdown or accident. The speed limit on motorways and dual carriageways is 120kph (74mph), on single carriageways outside built-up areas is 90kph (56mph), and in built-up areas is 50kph (31mph). Bus: Extensive regional bus services are operated by the bus companies which publish regional timetables. There are long-distance stopping services between towns, but no express coach services apart from the Sabena airport services between Antwerp and Brussels. Taxi: Plentiful in all towns. The tip is included in the final meter price. Car hire: Both self-drive and chauffeur-driven cars are available. Documentation: A national driving licence is acceptable. EU nationals taking their own cars to Belgium are strongly advised to obtain a Green Card. Without it, insurance cover is limited to the minimum legal cover in Belgium (third party cover is compulsory). The Green Card tops this up to the level of cover provided by the car owner's domestic policy.

**URBAN:** There is a good public transport system in all the major towns and cities, with underground, tram and bus services in Brussels and Antwerp, bus and tramways in Charleroi, Ghent and Ostend and bus systems elsewhere. There is a standard flat-fare system, with discounts for 5- and 10-journey multi-ride tickets. One-day tickets and multi-mode tourist travelcards are also available.

**JOURNEY TIMES:** The following chart gives approximate journey times from Brussels (in hours and minutes) to other major cities/towns in Belgium and neighbouring countries.

AirRoadRail  
Paris0.50-1.20  
Amsterdam0.40-3.00  
Rome2.00-20.00  
Cologne--3.00  
London0.55-3.18  
Arlon-3.002.20  
Antwerp-0.400.41  
Bruges-1.000.53  
Ghent-0.500.28

Liège-1.101.22  
Ostend-1.201.10  
Namur-1.000.56

## 8 ACCOMMODATION

**HOTELS:** Belgium has a large range of hotels from luxury to small family pensions and inns. The best international-class hotels are found in the cities. Grading: The Belgian Tourist Board issues a shield to all approved hotels by which they can be recognised. This must be affixed to the front of the hotel in a conspicuous position. Hotels which display this sign conform to the official standards set by Belgian law which protects the tourist and guarantees certain standards of quality. Some hotels are also graded according to the Benelux system in which standard is indicated by a row of 3-pointed stars from the highest (5-star) to the minimum (1-star). However, membership of this scheme is voluntary, and there may be first-class hotels which are not classified in this way. If an establishment providing accommodation facilities is classified under category H or above (1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 stars), it may call itself hotel, hostelry, inn, guest-house, motel or other similar names. Benelux star ratings comply with the following criteria:

**5-star:** Luxury hotel, meeting the highest standards of comfort, amenities and service, 24-hour room service, à la carte restaurant, gift shop, parking and baggage service, travel and theatre booking service.

**4-star:** First-class hotel, with lift, facilities for breakfast in the room, day and night reception, telephone in every room, radio, bar.

**3-star:** Very good hotel, with lift (if more than 2 floors), day reception, guest wing (food and drink optional).

**2-star:** Average-class hotel, with private bath and WC in at least 25% of rooms, baggage handling facilities, food and drink available.

**1-star:** Plain hotel, washstand with hot and cold water in every room, breakfast facilities available.

**Cat H:** Very plain hotel, meets all the fire safety requirements and provides moderate standards of comfort, at least one bathroom for every 10 rooms and accessible to guests at night.

For more information on hotels in Belgium, contact Belgian Tourist Office - Brussels & Ardennes or Tourism Flanders-Brussels (see address section) or one of the three regional hotel

**associations:** Brussels-Ardennes: Horeca Wallonie, 83 Chaussée de Charleroi, 5000 Namur (tel: (81) 721 888; fax: (81) 737 689; e-mail: info@horecawallonie.be); Flanders-Brussels: Horeca Vlaanderen, Anspachlaan 111, BP 4, 1000 Brussels (tel: (2) 513 6484; fax: (2) 513 8954; e-mail: fed.vlaanderen@horeca.be); Brussels: Horeca Brussels, BP 4, 111 boulevard Anspach, 1000 Brussels (tel: (2) 513 6484; fax: (2) 513 8954; e-mail: fed.bruxelles@horeca.be).

**FARM HOLIDAYS:** In some regions of the country, farm holidays are now available. In the Polders and the Ardennes visitors can (for a small cost) participate in the daily work of the farm. Further information can be obtained either from the Flemish Federation for Farmhouse and Rural Tourism, Minderbroedersstraat 8, B-3000 Leuven (tel: (16) 24 21 58; fax: (16) 242 187; e-mail: hoeveroerisme@boerenbond.be; website: <http://www.plattelandstoerisme.be> or <http://www.hoeveroerisme.be>) or Belsud, 61 rue du Marché-aux-Herbes, 1000 Brussels (tel: (2)

504 0280; fax: (2) 514 5335; e-mail: [belsud@opt.be](mailto:belsud@opt.be); website: <http://www.belgium-tourism.net>). Belsud also provides information on bed and breakfast and self-catering accommodation.

**SELF-CATERING:** There are ample opportunities to rent furnished villas, flats, rooms, or bungalows for a holiday period. There is a particularly wide choice in the Ardennes and on the coast. These holiday houses and flats are comfortable and well-equipped. Rentals are determined by the number of bedrooms, the amenities, the location and the season. On the coast, many apartments, studios, villas and bungalows are classified into five categories according to the standard of comfort they offer. Estate agents will supply full details. For the Ardennes region, enquiries should be made to the local tourist office or to Belsud (for contact details, see above under Farm Holidays). Addresses of local tourist offices and lists of coastal estate agents can be obtained from Tourism Brussels-Ardennes/Tourism Flanders-Brussels.

**YOUTH HOSTELS:** There are two youth hostel associations: the Vlaamse Jeugdherbergcentrale (VJHC) (website: <http://www.vjh.be>) which operates in Flanders, and the Centrale Wallonne (CWAJ) (website: <http://www.laj.be>) operating in the French-speaking area. The hostels of the former are large, highly organised and much frequented by schools and youth groups; the hostels of the CWAJ are smaller and more informal, similar in some ways to those in France. A complete list of youth hostels and other holiday homes for young people can be obtained from Belgian Tourist Office - Brussels & Ardennes or Tourism Flanders-Brussels (see address section).

**CAMPING/CARAVANNING:** The majority of campsites are in the Ardennes and on the coast; many of these are excellent. A list of addresses, rates and other information can be obtained from the Belgian Tourist Office - Brussels & Ardennes or Tourism Flanders-Brussels (see address section). The local Verblijftaks or Taxe de Séjour is a tax usually included in the rates charged. On the coast during the summer season a supplement of about 25% is charged on the majority of tariffs. Camping out in places other than the recognised sites is permitted, provided the agreement of the landowner or tenant has been obtained.

## 9 RESORTS & EXCURSIONS

The two main tourist regions in Belgium are the coast and the Ardennes. The historic cities of Antwerp, Bruges, Brussels and Ghent with their famous museums, art collections and galleries, are the most visited destinations.

**Historic Cities:** Historic Cities: Some of the more popular historic cities in the country are as follows:

**Brussels:** Brussels: The capital of Belgium and the centre of the European Union and NATO. The main sights in Brussels include St Michael and St Gudule's Cathedral (13th-16th century) and the famous Grand-Place in the heart of the city. It is here that the early 15th-century Gothic-style Town Hall and the Maison du Roi, containing the Municipal Museum, are located. Other attractions include Mont des Arts, the park which links the upper and lower parts of the city; the elegant Place Royale built between 1774 and 1780 in the style of Louis XVI; the Manneken-Pis statue which dates from 1619 and symbolises the irreverence of the 'Bruxellois'; and dozens of museums of interest, including the Museum of Ancient Art and the Museum of Modern Art. The Museum of Musical Instruments opened in 2000 in one of Brussels' most unusual art nouveau buildings. Among other areas worth exploring are the Ilot Sacré, the picturesque area of narrow streets to the northeast of the Grand-Place; the fashionable boulevard de Waterloo; the administrative quarter, a completely symmetrical park area commanding a splendid view of the surrounding streets; the Grand Sablon, the area containing both the flamboyant Gothic structure

of the Church of Our Lady of Sablon and the Sunday antique market and lastly the Petit Sablon, a square surrounded by Gothic columns, which support 48 small bronze statues commemorating medieval Brussels guilds. The elegant, 19th-century houses in the Saint-Gilles area, designed by architect Victor Horta, are masterpieces of the Belgian art nouveau style.

Attractions on the outskirts of the city include the Atomium, the futuristic, atom-shaped aluminium tower built for the 1958 World Fair; the Royal Castle at Laeken, the town residence of the Royal Family; the State Botanical Gardens; the site of the Battle of Waterloo, 18km (11 miles) to the south of Brussels; the Forest of Soignes and the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren which houses a large collection of Central African art.

**Bruges:** Bruges: Like Antwerp, this is a city whose fortunes in the Middle Ages were built on the cloth trade. Best visited on foot, Bruges, with its cobbled streets and canals, is sometimes described as the Venice of the North. It offers a variety of attractions including boat trips and walks along the canals and the Lake of Love, which in the Middle Ages was the city's internal port; the 14th-century Town Hall featuring a façade decorated with bas-reliefs and statues of a Biblical nature; the Cathedral of the Holy Saviour, a fine example of 13th-century Gothic architecture and home to many treasures; and the Grote Markt which was formerly the commercial hub of the city, overlooked by the 83m (272ft) octagonal Belfry with its carillon. Bruges' several museums include the Groeninge Museum which houses a comprehensive and fascinating collection of six centuries of Flemish paintings, from Jan van Eyck to Marcel Broodthaers. The museum's many highlights include the world famous collection of Flemish Primitive art and a wide range of Renaissance and Baroque masters. The Memling Museum, housed in the medieval Saint John's Hospital, is dedicated to the painter Hans Memling. The city is close to some excellent beaches and the fertile Polder region, dotted with abbeys and parks.

**Antwerp:** Antwerp: A busy city on the banks of the River Scheldt and once one of the most powerful urban centres in Europe. Today Antwerp is characterised by its thriving diamond industry and its successes in the field of petrochemicals. The inhabitants, or Sinjooors as they are known, like to perpetuate the city's Baroque image, largely created by the wealth of buildings from the time of Rubens. Well worth a visit is the Cathedral of Our Lady (14th-16th century), both for its architecture - in the Brabant Gothic style - and for the Rubens masterpieces which it houses. Other attractions include the Grote Markt, or Main Square, containing the Town Hall built by Cornelius de Vriendt in the 1560s and the Brabo fountain commemorating the legend of the city's origin; the Steen, a 12th-century fortress now housing the National Maritime Museum; the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, home to what is arguably the world's finest collection of works by Peter Paul Rubens, as well as 1000 works by other old masters and 1500 more recent works; the Plantin-Moretus Museum, where Plantin's printing works were founded in the 16th century, with one of the few remaining copies of the Gutenberg Bible; Rubens' House, the magnificent 17th-century house where the painter lived and worked, containing works by the painter and his associates; and many other museums and churches.

**Ghent:** Ghent: This former cloth town was once the capital of the Counts of Flanders and was the birthplace of the Emperor Charles V. Although an industrial city, Ghent boasts many historic buildings, including three abbeys. Attractions include St Bavo's Cathedral, place of Charles V's baptism and home to The Adoration of the Mystical Lamb, the Van Eyck brothers' masterpiece; the Town Hall, where the Treaty of Ghent was signed in 1576; the Castle of the Counts, a medieval castle surrounded by the Lieve canal; the 15th-century Cloth Hall; the medieval town centre with its old guild houses; the Museum of Fine Arts, and the newly renovated Museum of Industrial Archaeology. The Sunday morning Flower Market is worth a visit.

**Liège:** Liège: A major city, situated on the banks of the Meuse, with many reminders of a colourful and affluent past. Liège was independent for much for much of its history, ruled over by prince-bishops for 800 years. Attractions include the Church of St James, an old abbey church of

mixed architecture, including an example of the Meuse Romanesque style, with fine Renaissance stained glass; the Cathedral of St Paul, founded in the 10th century and boasting a priceless treasury; the 18th-century Town Hall; the Curtius Museum housing a large collection of coins, Liège furniture and porcelain; St Lambert Square, with the Perron fountain of the city's symbol; the Museum of Modern Art, displaying the works of Corot, Monet, Picasso, Gauguin and Chagall to name but a few; and the Romanesque Church of St Bartholemew, particularly notable for its copper baptismal fonts. The creator of fictional detective Maigret, Georges Simenon, came from Liège.

**Tournai:** Tournai: One of the oldest cities in Belgium, the city dates back to the Gallo-Roman era. In common with many other Belgian cities, much was destroyed during the two World Wars, although several important buildings have survived while others have been restored. Attractions include the Cathedral of Our Lady (12th century); the Belfry, which is the oldest in Belgium; the Bridge of Holes, a relic of the old fortified rampart which spanned the Scheldt; the Museum of Fine Arts, with works by Rubens and Bruegel; the imposing castle of Antoing, parts of which date back to the 5th century; and most recently, Minibel, 28km (17 miles) outside the city at the Château of Beloeil, a display of scaled-down reproductions of many of Belgium's most interesting treasures and curiosities (including the Brussels Town Hall and Grand Palace, the Bruges Belfry, the Castle of Counts and the Coo Falls).

For more information on these and other cities of historic and cultural interest, consult the Flanders Travel Guide and the Ardennes brochure available from the Tourism Brussels-Ardennes/Tourism Flanders-Brussels.

#### The Coast and West Flanders

The north coast of Belgium stretches for 69km (43 miles) from Knokke near the Dutch border to De Panne on the French border with an unbroken chain of resorts and sandy beaches. Beach cabins and windbreaks have been installed by hotels, agencies and private owners and in some resorts the beach huts are open to the public. Bathing in the sea is free on all beaches and there are facilities for sailing, sand yachting, riding, fishing, rowing, golf and tennis. The promenade is closed to all traffic and the beaches shelve gently and are safe for children.

**Resorts:** De Panne, Koksijde and Sint Idesbald, Oostduinkerke, Nieuwpoort, Westende and Lombardsijde, Middelkerke, Ostend, Bredene, De Haan, Wenduine, Blankenberge, Zeebrugge and Knokke-Heist.

**For nightlife:** Ostend, Knokke, Blankenberge and Middelkerke.

**For quieter beaches:** Zeebrugge, Nieuwpoort, Oostduinkerke, Westende and Lombardsijde and Wenduine.

**Places of historical interest:** These include Damme and Veurne. The World War I battlefield and cemeteries of Ypres can also be visited.

#### The Ardennes

This area is famous for its cuisine, forests, lakes, streams and grottoes. The River Meuse makes its way through many important tourist centres. The town of Dinant, in the Meuse valley, boasts a medieval castle, while its most famous landmark is the Gothic church of Notre-Dame. Annevoie has a castle and some beautiful water gardens, while Yvoir Godinne and Profondeville are well known for watersports. The old university town of Namur, with cobbled streets in its centre, has a cathedral, castle and many museums. Houyet offering kayaking and other assorted outdoor activities. The River Semois passes through Arlon and Florenville; nearby are the ruins of Orval Abbey, Bouillon and its castle, Botassart, Rochehaut and Bohan. The Amblève Valley is one of the wildest in the Ardennes and the grottoes in the Fond de Quarreux are one of the great attractions of the region. Among these is the Merveilleuse grotto at Dinant and the cavern at Remouchamps.

There are prehistoric caverns at Spy, Rochefort, Hotton and Han-sur-Lesse (with an underground lake).

## 10 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

**Cycling:** Cycling: A new network of cycling paths has been developed in the Ardennes region. Known as RAVeL (Réseau Autonome des Voies Lentes or 'independent network of slow paths'), the system is made up of disused railway lines and old canal towpaths, now reserved and adapted for the exclusive use of pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchair users. It will eventually consist of 2000km (1240 miles) of paths, which will be linked to similar paths in neighbouring countries. For further information, contact the Direction Générale de l'Aménagement du Territoire, du Logement et du Patrimoine, Cellule RAVeL, 1 rue de Brigades d'Irlande, 5100 Namur (tel: (81) 332 564; fax: (81) 332 273; e-mail: ravel@mrw.wallonie.be; website: <http://www.ravel.wallonie.be>). Flanders, the more northerly and flatter part of the country is just as well equipped for cyclists. There are many kilometres of signposted cycling routes. Bicycles can be hired at larger railway stations and can be reserved in advance. They can very often be carried on trains at no extra expense. Many hotels will make arrangements for luggage to be taken to the next destination during cycling tours. Contact the tourist boards for further information (see address section).

**Outdoor activities:** Outdoor activities: Although a highly developed country, Belgium has some beautiful countryside. The hilly country in the Ardennes region features forests, lakes and caves. Flanders offers opportunities for coastal and forest walks. For further information about marked trails, contact the tourist boards (see address section). Numerous other activities can be practised, including canoeing, kayaking, horseriding, caving, climbing and fishing. A range of watersports is also available on the coast.

**Brewery tours:** Brewery tours: Belgium is renowned for its hundreds of varieties of high quality beer. There are beers of all colours and types, brewed using different methods and ingredients - wheat beers, fruit beers, red beers, amber ales and 'spontaneously fermented beers', to mention but a few. Each beer has its own distinctive glass and label. Six kinds of trappist beer, brewed by monks to ancient recipes, are made in Belgium. Some breweries are open to the public. Trappist breweries open to the public include the Bières de Chimay brewery at Bailleux (tel: (60) 21 03 11) and the Rochefortoise brewery at Eprave (tel: (84) 37 80 84; fax: (84) 37 84 45). Visits to the Rochefortoise brewery must be booked by fax and confirmed two days in advance. These beers can all be sampled in Belgium's many cafes, pubs and restaurants.

**Gastronomy:** Gastronomy: Belgium's large number of excellent restaurants testifies to the high esteem in which the Belgians place good food. The country has the highest number of Michelin stars per head of the population, and is the only country in the world where American fast food chains have been consistently losing money. The visitor has an array of fine restaurants, sophisticated cafes, and pubs to choose from. Specialist tour operators offer gastronomy trips where visitors can learn how to cook Flemish dishes using local produce and beers.

**Festival of flavours 2001:** Tourisme Wallonie-Bruxelles is organising an extensive programme of events connected with Belgian food. These include visits to farms and breweries, guided walks, dinners, tastings and tours. Events are being held all over Brussels and the Ardennes region. For further information, contact Tourisme Wallonie-Bruxelles (see address section) or consult their web page (<http://www.opt.be/langue/en/foodfestival.htm>).

**Chocolate:** Chocolate: Belgian chocolate has an excellent reputation. Some chocolate factories are open to the public, though it is often necessary to book in advance. The Chocolate and Cocoa



Museum on the Grand-Place in Brussels is open from Tuesday to Sunday. The Chocolaterie Jacques in Eupen near Liège (tel: (87) 592 967; fax: (87) 592 929) is open to the public from Monday to Saturday. Groups of more than 10 people need to book in advance.

**World Wars I and II:** World Wars I and II: Flanders contains Passendale, Ypres and the Somme. These battlefields can be visited, and there are many museums commemorating the war dead and informing the visitor about the terrible events. In Ypres at 2000 each day, the Last Post is sounded under the Menin Gate. A number of commemorative events are organised by the regional tourist boards.

## 11 SOCIAL PROFILE

**Food & Drink:** Belgian cuisine is similar to French, based on game and seafood. Each region in Belgium has its own special dish. Butter, cream, beer and wine are generously used in cooking. Belgian chocolate, waffles and chips, preferably served with mayonnaise, are famous. Ardennes sausages and ham are renowned. Most restaurants have waiter service, although self-service cafés are becoming quite numerous. Restaurant bills always include drinks, unless they have been taken at the bar separately. In the latter case this is settled over the counter. Drink: Local beers are very good. Two of the most popular are Lambic, made from wheat and barley, and Trappist. Fruit beers, such as Kriek cherry beer, as a speciality. Under a new law, the majority of cafés now have licences to serve spirits. Beers and wines are freely obtainable everywhere and there are no licensing hours.

**Nightlife:** As well as being one of the best cities in the world for eating out (both for its high quality and range), Brussels has a very active and varied nightlife. It has ten theatres producing plays in both Flemish and French. These include the Théâtre National and the Théâtre Royal des Galeries. The more avant-garde theatres include the Théâtre Cinq-Quarante and the Théâtre de Poche. Brussels' 35 cinemas, numerous discotheques and many night-time cafés are centred on two main areas: the uptown Porte Louise area and the downtown area between Place Roger and Place de la Bourse. Nightclubs include the famous Le Crazy, Chez Paul, Maxim and Le Grand Escalier; jazz clubs include The Brussels Jazz Club and Bloomdido Jazz Café. Programmes and weekly listings of events can be found in the BBB Agenda on sale at tourist offices. This also covers information on the many festivals that take place in Brussels itself. Tourism Brussels-Ardennes/Tourism Flanders-Brussels should be consulted about folk music or drama festivals elsewhere in Belgium - the most famous of which is the Festival of Flanders for classical music concerts. The other large cities of Belgium, such as Antwerp, Leuven, Liège, Mons, Ghent, Kortrijk and Namur, all have similar (though less extensive) nightlife facilities.

**Shopping:** Special purchases include ceramics and hand-beaten copperware from Dinant; Belgian chocolates; crystal from Val Saint Lambert; diamonds; jewellery from Antwerp; lace from Bruges, Brussels and Mechelen (Malines), woodcarvings from Spa and bandes dessinées (comic-strip books) by a number of talented Belgian cartoon artists from Brussels. Main shopping centres are: Brussels, Antwerp, Bruges, Ostend, Namur, Mons, Liège, Ghent and Mechelen. Shopping hours: 0900-1800/1900 Monday to Saturday. Department stores often remain open longer, up to 2100 on Friday. Outside main areas, some shops may close at lunchtime.

**Special Events:** The following is a selection of the major festivals and other special events celebrated in Belgium in 2001. Full calendars of events are available from Tourism Brussels-Ardennes and Tourism Flanders-Brussels (see address section).  
Feb 16-23 2001 International Festival of Love Films, Mons. Feb 24-27 Carnaval de la Grosse Biesse (mardi gras carnival), Marche-en-Famenne. Feb 25-27 Carnival of the Gilles, Binche. Mar

3-Jun 10 International Tapestry Exhibition, Tournai. Mar 7 Grands Feux (bonfire and firework display), Bouge. Mar-Nov Electralis 2001 (Exhibition of new technology), Liège. Apr 8 Artisans' Chocolate Market, Durbury. Apr 13 Flower Procession, Tournai. May 5-6 11th International Jazz Festival, Liège. May 20 Procession of Our Lady, Mechelen. May 20-27 International Festival of Comedy, Rochefort. May 24 Procession of the Holy Blood (including traditional pageant and music), Bruges. May 26-27 Portival 2002 (fireworks, exhibitions and regattas around the port), Antwerp. Jun 2-4 Eel Festival (event celebrating eel cuisine), Bornem. Jun 9-10 Day of the Four Processions, Tournai. Jun 10 Procession of the Golden Carriage (including re-enactment of the battle between St George and the dragon). Jun 16-17 Re-enactment of the Battle of Waterloo. Jun 20-Sep 30 The Engraving of Edvard Munch (1863-1944) (exhibition), Brussels Town Hall. Jun 30 Witches' Festival, Ellezelles. Jun-Oct Festival of Wallonia, Brussels and Ardennes region. Jul 3-5 Ommegang (historical pageant), Brussels. Jul 15-24 Ghent Festivities (10-day folk festival). Jul 21 National Festival. Jul-Aug City Summer Festival, Brussels. Jul-Sep Messe Valley Summer Festival (20 classical concerts in abbeys, castles and churches). Aug 15 International Bathtub Regatta (race for weird-looking boats), Dinant; 15th of August in Outremeuse, Liège; Rubens Market (festive market; stallholders wear clothes from the days of Rubens), Antwerp. Aug 16-19 42nd International Festival of Folklore, Jambes. Aug 17-25 International Fireworks, Festival Knokke-Heist. Sep 2 Belgian Formula One Grand Prix, Spa Francorch. Sep 2-4 Golden River Jazz Festival, Kortrijk. Sep 7-9 Brussels Beer Festival. Sep 9 Great Historical Procession of Notre-Dame des Malades, Tournai. Sep-Nov International Festival of Flanders, Brussels. Nov-Dec Christmas Markets. Dec 16-31 Ice Rink in the Grand Place, Brussels. Jan-Feb 2002 International Film Festival, Brussels. Feb-Mar Cartoon Festival, Brussels.

**Festival of flavours 2001:** Tourisme Wallonie-Bruxelles is organising an extensive programme of events connected with Belgian food. These include visits to farms and breweries, dinners, tastings and tours. Events are being held all over Brussels and the Ardennes region. For further information, contact Tourism Brussels-Ardennes (see address section) or visit their web page (<http://www.opt.be/en/foodfestival.htm>).

**Social Conventions:** Flemings will often prefer to answer visitors in English rather than French, even if the visitor's French is good. It is customary to bring flowers or a small present for the hostess, especially if invited for a meal. Dress is similar to other Western nations, depending on the formality of the occasion. If black tie/evening dress is to be worn, this is always mentioned on the invitation. Smoking is generally unrestricted. Tipping: A service charge of 16% is usually included in hotel or restaurant bills. Cloakroom attendants expect BFr50-100, porters approximately BFr30 per piece of luggage. A tip is generally included in taxi fares.

## 12 BUSINESS PROFILE

**Economy:** The economies of Belgium and Luxembourg have been unified since 1921 when the two governments signed a Convention of Economic Union; this is distinct from the Benelux Union (which includes the Netherlands) and the EU (Belgium being a founder member of both). The country's traditional industries of steel, motor vehicles and textiles suffered from the recession of the 1980s and, while important, no longer play the central economic role of the past. Coal mining ceased to exist when the last mine was closed in 1992. Nuclear power accounts for almost two-thirds of Belgium's energy consumption; the remainder is generated from imported fuel products. Manufactured goods and machinery are the largest export sectors, with the major markets inside the European Union, including France, Germany, The Netherlands and the UK. These are also Belgium's main source of imported goods. Belgium relies particularly heavily on export earnings - 70% of GDP is exported, one of the highest proportions in the world. Successive Belgian governments have been keen proponents of the process of European integration, including the introduction of a single European currency. The Government's efforts to meet the criteria

concentrated on loss-making elements of the public sector. The subsequent job losses have contributed to the high unemployment problem faced by the Belgian economy. At 12%, this is among the worst in the EU.

**Business:** Suits should always be worn and business is conducted on a formal basis, with punctuality valued and business cards exchanged. Transactions are usually made in French or English. Office hours: 0830-1730 Monday to Friday.

**Commercial Information:** The following organisations can offer advice: Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Bruxelles, 500 avenue Louise, 1050 Brussels (tel: (2) 648 5002; fax: (2) 640 9328; e-mail: inscription@ccib.irisnet.be; website: <http://www.ccib.be>); or Kamer van Koophandel en Nijverheid van Antwerpen (Antwerp Chamber of Commerce and Industry), Markgrvestraat 12, 2000 Antwerp (tel: (3) 232 2219; fax: (3) 233 6442; e-mail: info@kkna.be; website: <http://www.kkna.be>); or Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce, Berkeley House, 73 Richmond Road, Putney, London SW15 2SZ (tel: (020) 8877 9263; fax: (020) 8877 3961; e-mail: info@blcc.co.uk; website: <http://www.blcc.co.uk>) or Belgian Foreign Trade Board, 30 Boulevard du Roi Albert II, Boîte 36, 1000 Brussels (tel: (2) 206 3511; fax (2) 203 1812; e-mail: info@obcebdbh.be; website: <http://www.obcebdbh.be>).

**Conferences/Conventions:** There is an extensive range of meeting venues throughout the country. In 1994 Belgium was the seventh most popular conference destination, whilst Brussels was the third most popular city. For more information or assistance in organising a conference or convention in Belgium, contact the Flanders-Brussels Convention Bureau, Grasmart 61, 1000 Brussels (tel: (2) 504 0435; fax: (2) 513 0588; e-mail: congres@toerismevlaanderen.be; website: <http://www.meetingpoint.be>) or Meetings and Incentives Department, Office de Promotion du Tourisme Wallonie-Bruxelles, rue du Marché-aux-Herbes, 1000 Brussels (tel: (2) 504 0260; fax: (2) 513 6950; e-mail: meeting.incentive@opt.be; website: <http://meeting.opt.be>).

## 13 CLIMATE

Seasonal and similar to neighbouring countries, with warm weather from May to September and snow likely during winter months.

**Required clothing:** Waterproofs are advisable at all times of the year.

## 14 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

**History:** The area which is now Belgium was part of Charlemagne's empire in the 8th and 9th centuries, but by the 10th century had achieved independence. The Flemish cloth towns enjoyed great financial and political power, but after 1322 the area fell again under French control. A period of instability ended with the accession of Philip of Burgundy (1419), but on the death of his son Charles the Bold (1477), the Low Countries passed to the Habsburgs. The Protestant northern part rebelled against Philip II of Spain in the 1560s, and soon the division between the southern provinces (under Spanish control) and the northern United Provinces (the basis of the modern-day Netherlands) became established. The Peace of Westphalia (1648) confirmed this position. The region suffered badly as a result of Franco-Spanish conflicts in the subsequent decades, most notably the War of the Spanish Succession (1700-13) which resulted in the Spanish Netherlands passing to the Austrian Habsburgs until 1794, apart from a short French occupation (1744-48). In 1790, inspired by the events in France, a local rebellion led to the brief

establishment of the United States of Belgium, but the country was invaded by France in 1794 and remained annexed until the fall of Napoleon in 1814. The allies subsequently attempted to unite the two Netherlands, but a rebellion in 1830 resulted in the London Conference establishing the Kingdom of Belgium. The late 19th and early 20th century was a period of social and political upheaval, but these problems were overshadowed by the outbreak of World War I (August 1914), in which Belgium suffered heavily, despite the heroic stand made by King Albert and his army in the first weeks of the war. 1918-39 witnessed the forging of the links between Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg and the emergence of the divisive Walloon/Flemish problem. The country was invaded by the Nazis in 1940 and remained occupied for the rest of the war. King Leopold, hounded by accusations of collaboration, remained in Switzerland after 1945; his nephew Baudouin succeeded in 1951. Belgium was a founder member of the Benelux Union and the EU, and Brussels is the headquarters of both NATO and the EU. Successive Belgian governments have given strong support to the Union and have generally favoured the integrationist policies laid down by the Maastricht Treaty. Belgium also has a relatively small but important colonial legacy in central Africa: the Democratic Republic of Congo (previously Zaire and before that Belgian Congo), Rwanda and Burundi. The nature of Belgian involvement - Belgian Congo was originally established as the personal fiefdom of King Leopold - and their precipitate withdrawal from their African territories at the turn of the 1960s, did not augur well for the future of the newly independent countries. And so it has proved. Zaire, despite enormous mineral wealth, has been ruined by the massively corrupt Mobutu regime which received consistent support from successive Belgian governments. Rwanda and Burundi, meanwhile, have been repeatedly engulfed by ethnic conflict, most recently and tragically in 1994. Belgian intervention was confined to the evacuation of its own nationals. In general, Belgium epitomises a stable, cautiously progressive Western European liberal democracy. The principal domestic problem is the continuing tension between the Flemish-speaking north and the French-speaking south of the country, whose inhabitants are known as Walloons. Electoral politics have been dominated by coalitions as none of the four major parties - the Socialists (PS), Christian Social (CVP), Flemish Liberal Democrats (VLD) and Liberal parties (PRL) - have been able to attract sufficient support to establish a government on their own. In addition, there are several smaller parties which have a significant influence over the outcome of elections: the ecological party 'Ecolo' and the Vlaams Blok established by extreme right-wing Flemish separatists. Coalitions of four or five parties have governed Belgium throughout the 1990s. In 1992, Belgium lost its popular and long-serving head of state when King Baudouin died; his brother, Prince Albert, then succeeded to the Belgian crown. In 1993, a new constitutional arrangement came into effect under which Belgium became a federal state: now comprising the largely autonomous region of Flanders, Wallonia and the bilingual Brussels district. A complicated 3-tier system of local government (regional, provincial and communal) now prevails. During the last few years, a series of political scandals have gradually undermined popular confidence in the governing class. Then, in 1998, a criminal case involving the brutal paedophile murders of several children revealed corruption in the police and judicial systems. The integrity of the Belgian state among the people is now at an all-time low. The most recent general election held in June 1999 rejected the ruling coalition and returned the VLD as the largest party followed (in order) by the CVP, PS, PRL and the Vlaams Blok. The new government, led by VLD leader Guy Verhofstadt, is a six-party coalition including socialists and ecologists.

**Government:** The country is a hereditary constitutional monarchy (see above) with a bicameral parliament comprising the 150-member directly elected Chamber of Representatives and the 71-member senate. Both chambers are elected for a 4-year term.

## 15 OVERVIEW

**Country Overview:** Belgium is situated in Europe and bordered by France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The rivers and gorges of the Ardennes contrast sharply with the rolling plains that make up much of a countryside rich in historic cities, castles and churches. The north coast of Belgium stretches for 69km (43 miles) from Knokke near the Dutch border to De Panne on the French border with an unbroken chain of resorts and sandy beaches. The Ardennes area is famous for its cuisine, forests, lakes, streams and grottoes.

Bruges, the city whose fortunes in the Middle Ages were built on the cloth trade, is definitely worth visiting. A variety of attractions are on offer including boat trips or walks along the canals.

Brussels, the capital of Belgium and the centre of the European Union and NATO, features many sights including St Michael and St Gudule's Cathedral (13th-16th century) and the famous Grand-Place.

Belgian cuisine is similar to French, based on game and seafood but it is their beer that demands close attention. Two of the most popular are Lambic, made from wheat and barley, and Trappist.

Brussels has a very active and varied nightlife with a heavy accent on theatre.

More countries : <http://www.umzugs.com>