

**BELGIUM TRAVEL GUIDE
GENERAL TRAVEL INFORMATION FOR VISITORS
TO BELGIUM**

**PREPARED BY PURE ADVENTURES
FOR
OUR CYCLING TOUR CLIENTS TRAVELING TO
BELGIUM**



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Belgium Travel Info



Area: 11,787 square miles
Population: 10,419,000
Population density: 1023/sq. mile
Capital: Brussels
Official Languages:
Dutch, French, German
Other important cities:



Geographical Profile

Western Europe, bordering the North Sea, between France and the Netherlands

Area: total: 30,528 sq km/ land: 30,278 sq km/ water: 250 sq km

About the size of Maryland

Land boundaries: total: 1,385 km

border countries: France 620 km, Germany 167 km, Luxembourg 148 km, Netherlands 450 km

Coastline 66.5 km

Climate: temperate; mild winters, cool summers; rainy, humid, cloudy

Terrain: flat coastal plains in northwest, central rolling hills, rugged mountains of Ardennes Forest in southeast

lowest point: North Sea 0 m

highest point: Signal de Botrange 694 m

Belgium is the crossroads of Western Europe; a majority of West European capitals within 1,000 km of Brussels, the seat of both the European Union and NATO.

Straddling the cultural boundary between Germanic and Romance Europe, Belgium is linguistically divided. It has two main languages: 59% of its population, being 6.18 million people in the north, mainly in the region Flanders, speak Dutch (while Belgians of both major languages often refer to it as Flemish); French is spoken by 40%: 3.29 million in the southern region Wallonia and an estimated 0.88 million in the officially bilingual Brussels-Capital Region or 85-90% of its residents – thus a minority there speaks Dutch, its local language till shortly before Belgium's independence. Less than 1% of the Belgians, around 70,000 live in the German-speaking Community in the east of the Walloon Region. This linguistic diversity often leads to political and cultural conflict and is reflected in Belgium's complex system of government and political history.

Belgium derives its name from the Latin name of the northernmost part of Gaul, Gallia Belgica, named after a group of mostly Celtic tribes, Belgae. Historically, Belgium has been a part of the Low Countries, which also include the Netherlands and Luxembourg and used to cover a somewhat larger region than the current Benelux group of states. From the end of the Middle Ages until the seventeenth century, it was a prosperous centre of commerce and culture. From the sixteenth century until the Belgian revolution in 1830, the area at that time called the Southern Netherlands, was the site of many battles between the European powers, and has been dubbed "the battlefield of Europe"[2] or "the cockpit of Europe"

What about the weather?



Weather and Climate

Belgium is most popular during the summer. No doubt this is the best time of the year to sit by the canals or take a bike trip through the country. Rain is spread pretty evenly over the year, so there is not much point in trying to avoid the drizzle. The climate is maritime temperate, with significant precipitation in all seasons (Köppen climate classification: Cfb; the average temperature is 3 °C (37°F) in January, and 18° C (64 °F) in July; the average precipitation is 65 millimetres (2.6 in) in January, and 78 millimetres (3.1 in) in July).

Belgium is seldom too hot or too cold. Summer temperatures average 54 F (13 C) - 72 F (21 C) and winter averages from 32 F (0 C) - 43 F (6 C).

In Brussels	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Max in F	39	45	50	57	64	72	73	72	70	59	48	43
Max in C°	4	7	10	14	18	22	23	22	21	15	9	6
Min in F	30	32	36	41	46	52	54	54	52	45	37	32
Min in C°	-1	0	2	5	8	11	12	12	11	7	3	0

Arrive early for flights

International flights require you to be at the airport 2 to 3 hours in advance of your flight. Also, for return flight, the airlines prefer that you confirm 72 hours in advance of your flight. This is not critical, but good information to ensure your preparations to meet your flight time.



Jet Lag

When traveling to Belgium from North America you will arrive the day after you left, generally in the morning. You will be somewhere between 6-9 hours ahead of North America. There are several methods to overcome the change and many suggestions. None may work for you, but trying to sleep on the plane will help you. Also, plenty of rest prior to departure will help. Upon arrival in Belgium it will become difficult, as the first day goes on, to continue without sleep. If you cannot go on, take a short nap, with emphasis on short! Then go to bed early. Upon return, you will no doubt remain jet-lagged for a few days. You will arrive home (if you travel to North America) in the evening on the same day you left Belgium.

A small easy trick that helps the Pure Adventures staff: drink a lot of water. You get quickly dehydrated in airplane and dehydration causes tiredness.

Electrical Appliances

The voltage in Belgium is 220 volts. Hotels may have a 110-volt or 120-volt outlet for shavers, but travelers are advised to bring a power converter and an adapter for two-prong, round-prong plugs with side grounding contacts.



Did you know...??

Spa is a city in Belgium where all other spas get their name from. Luxury spas are located throughout Belgium where you will surely get the royal Spa treatment.

There are over 400 different types of **beer** in Belgium running the gamut from white to raspberry beer. Most beers have their own glass in which only that beer may be served.

Insurance

Though not mandatory, insurance is strongly suggested when traveling. Check with your own insurance company for best deal or Pure Adventures recommends [CSA Travel Protection Company](http://www.csatravelprotection.com) they can insure all different aspects of your trip: www.csatravelprotection.com. Credit cards can be useful insurance alternatives for rental cars. Also, double-check each insurance policy for lost or stolen luggage, airplane cancellation by airline, car rental (car rental companies offer their own insurance for an extra cost, though it is rarely the best

Earplugs

Earplugs can be very useful, both on the plane and in a hotel at night. They are light and easy to carry. Every traveler should have some.



Time

In terms of standard time zones, Belgium is six hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time in the USA and Canada. Daylight saving time in Belgium goes into effect each year usually from the end of March to the middle of October.

Pure Adventure Tips

#1. It is strongly recommended that you make 2 photocopies of your passport and other important documentation, including the list of phone numbers that Pure Adventures provides to you in your pre-departure package, before leaving home. Leave 1 copy at home with family or friends, and keep another with you, but separate from the actual documents.

#2. It is suggested, though not required, that passengers hold return or onward tickets and proof of financial means.

Documentation

U.S. citizens only need a valid passport to travel to Belgium as long as their stay does not exceed 3 months. You are required to carry identification with you at all times when traveling in Belgium. If you lose your passport, contact:

Embassy of the United States of America
Regentlaan 27 Boulevard du Régent, B-1000 Brussels
Phone: (32-2) 508-2111
Fax: (32-2) 511-2725
Hours: Monday through Friday 9:00 to 6:00 p.m

Canadian Embassy
Avenue de Tervueren 2
1040 Brussels
Belgium

For other country residents, ask your government for information before departure.

Visas

Required by all except nationals who do not require a visa to visit a country, which is a signatory to the Schengen Agreement: includes USA, Canada, all EU countries, among many others, check with your government.

Vaccination Certificate

No vaccinations are required to enter Belgium or to reenter the U.S. and Canada.

U.S. Regulations on Purchases Abroad

Each U.S. tourist may bring back to the U.S. duty-free \$400 worth of goods purchased abroad. The goods must accompany the traveler. A flat rate of 10% is assessed on the next \$1,000 worth of goods purchased. Parcels containing gifts may be sent from abroad to the U.S. duty-free, providing the total value of such parcels received by one person, one day does not exceed \$50. Each package should be marked "Unsolicited Gift". The amount paid and the contents of the package should be declared.

Duty Free

Travelers over 17 years arriving from non-EU countries do not have to pay duty on 200 cigarettes or 100 cigars or 50 cigars or 250g smoking tobacco; 1 liter spirits with alcohol volume higher than 22%, or 2 liters spirits or aperitifs made of wine or similar beverages less than 22%, or 2 liters of sparkling wines, liquor wines, or still wine; perfume up to 50g or 250 ml. eau de toilette; 500g of coffee; 100g tea.

Passport Regulations

United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand passport holders do not require a visa for travel to Belgium, but proof of sufficient funds is needed. Visas are valid for a maximum of 90 days in a half-year period. Passports must be valid for three months after the intended length of stay.

Medical

Healthcare and Medical Assistance

Tourists requiring urgent medical care should go to the nearest hospital emergency room (airports and many train stations also have medical teams and first aid facilities). Those with serious illnesses or allergies should always carry a special note from their physicians certifying in detail the treatments in progress or that may be necessary. Pharmacies generally follow shops times. Regular business hours are Monday to Friday between 8/9 am and 5:30/6 pm. On nights and weekends, pharmacies are open on a rotation schedule. Before departure, it is advisable to procure a document certifying coverage by the national health-care service.

Emergency Telephone Number

- * Police, fire brigade, ambulance: 112
- * fire and medical 100; police 101;

All these numbers can be dialed throughout the EU from ordinary phones and from standard GSM cell phones.

Health Services and Insurance Policy

Belgium has no medical program covering U.S. and Canada citizens. Therefore, U.S. and Canadian tourists are advised to take out an insurance policy before traveling. Medicine can be obtained only from the pharmacy, whether they are on prescription or over the counter.

Money

Tax refund for purchases made in Belgium by non-resident visitors

Non-EU residents that have purchased goods in Europe and are entitled to a VAT refund, can have their VAT paid out in cash at the airport upon departure. Tax refund available for a minimum purchase of 125.01 Euro per invoice for non European residents. You can also purchase goods from shops participating in the Europe Tax-free Shopping program - look out for the Tax-free Shopping logo displayed in the window. Simply show your passport when you make a purchase and you will be given a Tax-free Shopping check showing the refund you are owed. As you leave the country, customs officials will stamp your checks. You can claim your refund from the Europe Tax-free Shopping desk or have it sent on to you.

Tax Back International: <http://www.eventrefunds.com/>
For Meeting Planners: Get your VAT back for meetings in Belgium.

Shop Tax Free: <http://www.globalrefund.com/>
Global Refund is a world leader company specialized in VAT refunds.

Can I use my Credit Card/Debit Card in Belgium?

Yes. Most reputable establishments will accept major credit cards (Visa, MasterCard, American Express). Those establishments accepting credit cards will post the logos in their front windows, just as they do in the USA and Canada.

Travelers Checks

Will shops in Belgium accept traveler's checks? In major cities and tourist areas traveler checks are widely accepted . The rate of exchange is calculated on the daily rate of exchange shown on the newspapers.

Are there ATMs in Belgium? Will I need to know a language to use the ATMs?

If you have a foreign bank pass with a Cirrus logo you can get money from an Automatic Teller Machine (ATM). Also check your pass and the ATM for EDC, EC and Maestro logos. Of course, you can also use most credit cards to obtain money from an ATM. The many ATMs are usually open 24 hours per day.

Of course, in Belgium the money will be dispensed in Euros, but when you return home, your bank will have converted the Euros into dollars using the most beneficial exchange rate possible. Be careful though when using credit cards, as many banks are now charging foreign transaction fees, and large fees of 2.5% to 4% for cash advances which negate any advantage of using the ATM in the first place. One's best bet is to use your regular ATM card and simply withdraw money from your account just as you would do at your local bank.



Money/The Euro

The new monetary currency is the Euro which is divided as follows: bills of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500; coins of 1, 2, 5, 10 Euros, 20 and 50 cents. Once in Belgium, how do I convert my dollars in euros? Tourists reaching Belgium without foreign currency can obtain Euros through any bank, ATM machines, or exchange office at airports, seaports and railway stations in the main cities. It is advisable to keep receipts of currency exchanged in case it is necessary to reconvert euros back into dollars before leaving the country.



Banking Hours.

Banks are open Monday through Friday, 9:00am - 4:00pm and are closed on Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays. Some banks close for an hour during lunch.

Money Belt

Crowded tourist sites all over the world are at pickpocket and gipsy risk and Belgium is no exception. One should always be on alert for these petty thieves, but a good offense is the best defense. Keep your money hidden preferably in an inside pocket or money belt.

Safety tips

- * Use a secure method of transporting your money and documents. A money belt works great, you could also keep the paper money in "Ziploc bags" inside your money belt to avoid any damage by rain for example.
- * If the belt does not appeal to you, try to use bags that can't be pulled easily from your shoulder – try a backpack for example. Nowadays, backpacks come in so many shapes, sizes and colors you will surely find one to your liking.
- * Secure in the safe box of your hotel or in your suitcase locked: your passport, airplane tickets, train tickets, part of your money / traveler checks, etc...
- * Only take with you what you need for the day: keep only a photocopy of your passport on you, 1 credit card, some traveler checks and some cash.
- * Try to get used to the currency in a safe place like your hotel room and don't show a lot of cash in the street.
- * Be prudent when you withdraw cash at ATM machines, do not let anybody you don't know distract you.

Tipping

In Belgium, Value Added Tax and service charges are included in your check in hotels, shops and taxis. Unlike in the US, this is even the case for your restaurant check. Tips for extra service are always appreciated but not necessary. Service charges and VAT are always included in prices. If exceptional service is given, tip at your discretion. Suggested tip for portage is 1 Euro per piece; for coatroom attendants 1.25 to 2.50 Euro per coat; for bathroom attendants 0.25 to 0.50 Euro.

Phone / Post / Holidays

Cell Phones

Cellular coverage in Belgium is excellent. In Belgium, as in most countries in the world, the cell phone standard used is the GSM standard. If your current cell phone does not have this capability, you will need to either rent or purchase a cell phone that will work on the overseas networks. Your current cellular provider can give you what is known as a SIM card, which is the brain of the phone and you can easily slip into the GSM phone. This way, you will be able to retain your current phone number in the US or Canada. If your phone isn't equipped to work in Europe, you might want to rent a phone. We recommend Phone Rental or Cell Hire, who makes it convenient since they deliver the phone to your home before your departure: <http://www.phonerentalusa.com/discover/services.htm#>

Telephone system

To call Belgium you dial your international dialing code, Country Code 32 + City Code:

Antwerp	3	Bruges	50	Ghent	9	Namur	81
Arlon	63	Brussels	2	Leuven	16	Mechelen	15
Bastogne	61	Dinant	82	Liege	4	Oostende	59
Bouillon	61	Durbuy	86	Mons	65	Tournai	69

CALLING WITHIN BELGIUM

When calling a Belgian number within Belgium always dial (0) + city code + number.

For international information call 1304.

Pre-paid Calling Cards: The Belgacom Phone Pass™ can be used with private phones, pay phones and cellular phones. Belgacom Phone Pass™ as well as other calling cards are available in post offices, train stations, book stores, newspaper stands, supermarkets, convenience stores and Belgacom Teleboutiques.

Public Phones: Take both coins and phone cards. Public phone that display stickers showing flags of different countries can be used to make international calls with operator assistance.

Shops

Store hours: Monday - Saturday, 10:00am - 6:00pm. Stores are closed on Sundays except in Brussels at the Gallerie St Hubert and gift shops near the Grand Place.

Antique and flea markets are generally open on Saturdays and Sundays.

Tax is always included in price.

Postal Service

Post Office Hours are M-F from 9:00am - 12:00pm and 2:00pm - 5:00pm.

Brussels Post Office (Avenue Fonsny Office at Brussels Midi Station) is open from 7:00am to 10:00pm Monday to Saturday and from 11:00am to 10:00pm Sundays all year long.

Stamp for standard postcard or letter from Belgium to the USA = Euro 0.80.

Stamps may be purchased at news stands and souvenir shops. Post boxes are red and marked "Poste".

Here is the list of National Statutory Holidays:

New Year's Day:	Jan 1	Ascension Day:	May
Good Friday:	varies	Whit Sunday:	May (Pentecost)
Easter Sunday:	varies	Whit Monday:	May (Pentecost)
Easter Monday:	varis	Christmas Day:	25 December
Labor Day:	1 May	Assumption:	15 August
National Day:	21 July	All Saints Day:	1 November

Transportation

Air

Brussels Airport: <http://www.brusselsairport.be/en/>

The airport train station is located below the terminal (basement level-1). Up to 4 trains an hour connect the airport to Brussels North, Brussels Central and Brussels Midi stations. Moreover there are direct train services to the East, South and West of Belgium. Information on the schedules of all Belgian and international train services can be found on the Belgian Railways website. Enter BRUXELLES NAT AIRPORT as departure station or destination.



Taxi

Taxis with a taximeter are permanently available in front of the arrivals hall. The fare from the airport to the city centre of Brussels is normally around €30. Licensed taxis can be recognized by the blue and yellow emblem. Travelers are advised to avoid unlicensed taxis!

Limousine

Limousines can be hired through Airport Forum.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: YOU ARE STRONGLY ADVISED TO USE ONLY OFFICIAL TAXIS WHICH ARE EASILY IDENTIFIABLE. IGNORE OFFERS FROM DRIVERS OF PRIVATE CARS WHO OFTEN LOITER AROUND AIRPORTS AND RAILWAY STATIONS.

Airport Hotels

Most hotels in the vicinity of the airport provide free shuttle buses. These buses pick you up or drop you off on the coach park on level 0. Please contact your hotel for further details on the shuttle bus schedule.

Bus

The bus station is located on level 0 - one floor down from the arrivals hall - and can be easily reached by using the escalators or elevators.

Centrally located on the bus station there are three platforms each with its specific use.

De Lijn

All De Lijn services that run via Brucargo depart from platform B; the other De Lijn services depart from platform A.

The use of the De Lijn buses between bus stops located within the airport perimeter is free for all. Tel. +32 70 22 02 00

Highways and Roads: Maps, Routes and Tolls

The road system is easily accessible and extremely well-maintained. Roadways include high speed express ways, limited access motorways, dual highways and secondary roads. All roads are well signposted. Don't be afraid to take the backroads: this is where you'll encounter some of the nicest surprises! Belgium's infrastructure is quite good. All places are easily accessible by both private car and public transportation. All major roads have crash barriers. Many highways are treated with a special material which makes it very safe to drive, even in inclement weather.

A US driver's license is accepted if staying less than 90 days in the country. Driving is done on the right-hand side of the road. Speed limits: 31mph (50km/h) in the city, 56mph (90km/h) outside the city, and 75mph (120km/h) on 4-lane highways. There are no tolls on Belgian highways. Front and rear seat belts must be worn at all times. Children under 12 years of age are prohibited from sitting in the front seat. Maximum blood alcohol level = 0.5g/l (1 glass of wine)

Gasoline

Gas stations are located in all main cities in Belgium and in most smaller towns. In addition, petrol stations are situated along the highways at approximately every 60 kilometers.

Fuel prices can vary a bit. The exact price is shown on a notice board outside the gas stations. In general, fuel prices in Belgium are quite stable. The difference is EUR 0.02 or EUR 0.03 at the most.

The price of Diesel is approximately EUR 1.05 per liter and unleaded gas about EUR 1.40 per liter.

✳ **Languages:**

There are three officially recognized languages: French and Dutch are the main languages; German is spoken by a small segment of the population and English is widely spoken.

Major Belgian City names in English, in French and in Dutch

English	French	Dutch	English	French	Dutch
Antwerp	Anvers	Antwerpen	Namur	Namur	Namen
Bruges	Bruges	Brugge	Bastogne	Bastogne	Bastenaken
Brussels	Bruxelles		Brussel	Arlon	Arlon Aarlen
Tournai	Tournai	Doornik	Yeper	Ypres	Ieper
Ghent	Gand	Gent	Kortrijk	Courtrai	Kortrijk
Leuven	Louvain	Leuven	Aalst	Alost	Aalst
Liege	Liege	Luik	Tongeren	Tongres	Tongeren
Mechelen	Malines	Mechelen	Wavre	Wavre	Waver
Mons	Mons	Bergen	Soignies	Soignies	Zinnik
Ostend	Ostende	Oostende			

Use of Cell phones in cars

It is prohibited by law for drivers/riders of motorized vehicles, mopeds and vehicles for people with disabilities to use cell phones in their cars without an aid, such as a headset or car kit. You may not even hold your cell phone in your hand.

This ban does not only apply only to actual driving, but also while moving in a traffic jam. It is allowed to use a cell phone while being parked or standing.

Violation of this prohibition carries a EUR 140 fine (minimum). In addition, your cell phone may be confiscated.



Languages—Useful Phrases:

English	French	Dutch
Good morning	bonjour	goedemorgen
Good afternoon	bonne apres-midi	goedemiddag
Good evening	bonsoir	goeden avond
Excuse me	excusez-moi	sorry
Goodbye	au revoir	tot ziens
Please	s'il vous plait	alstublieft
Thank you	merci	dank u wel
Where is ...?	ou est ...?	waar is... ?
Yes	oui	qja
No	non	neen
How much ?	combien ?	hoeveel ?
My name is ...	mon nom est ...	mijn naam is ..

Distances to Belgian cities from Brussels:

Antwerp = 29 miles	
Arlon = 116 miles	
Bruges = 60 miles	
Bastogne = 93 miles	
Bouillon = 97 miles	
Dinant = 58 miles	
Ghent = 35 miles	
Hasselt= 48 miles	Leuven = 16 miles
Liege = 61 miles	
Mechelen = 16 miles	
Mons = 35 miles	
Namur = 39 miles	
Oostende = 71 miles	
Spa = 86 miles	
Tournai = 52 miles	Amsterdam = 123 miles
Koln = 126 miles	
London = 219 miles	
Luxembourg = 134 miles	
Paris = 184 miles	

BRUGES

Over the years the medieval canal city of Bruges has gone by many names: City of Romance, Venice of the North, the City That Time Forgot, and Cultural Capital of Europe back in 2002. However, none of these monikers accurately capture the enchanting city of Bruges.

With the city center closed off to cars, all the stunning beauty and culture of this unforgettable city can be easily explored on foot, by boat ride along quiet canals, or by horse-drawn carriage among cobblestone streets. Although Bruges is a small city it will take more than one day to explore all the architectural and artistic treasures, folklore, chocolate shops, lace boutiques, and ambient restaurants on offer.

✱ The historic center of Bruges is on the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites and is teeming with places of interest.

✱ For some walking tours of Bruges, check out <http://www.brugge.be/internet/en/toerisme/sightseeing/wandelroutes/index.htm>
The fortunes of Bruges rose and fell with the strength of the Zwin, the river on which the city is built. Although there is evidence that the area was inhabited as far back as Neolithic times, the beginning of Bruges' history, as a pre-eminent commercial and cultural center, is marked by the great Dunkerque Floods of the twelfth century. The wash of the flood waters made the Zwin into an ideal trade river, and Bruges soon prospered. Between the 13th and 15th centuries, the city became one of the richest in the world, its trade supplemented by fine cloth manufacturers and excellent banking services.

Its population soared, its port welcomed ships from all over the world, its artisans produced tapestries, sculpture, paintings and lace of unparalleled splendor, and its wealthy citizens patronized the finest artists of the age.

By the middle of the 16th century, all this had changed. The Zwin had begun to silt up, discouraging the passage of commercial shipping. Trade routes shifted and the cloth industry declined. After suffering a series of sieges and attacks over the next few centuries, Bruges had by the 18th century become a ghost of its former self.

✱ At its city center, Bruges remains a medieval city of stunning beauty and charm. It is rich in architectural and artistic treasures, graced by quiet canals and waterways and a favorite to visitors.

Museums in Bruges



Memling Museum

This museum is one of the oldest surviving medieval hospitals in Europe, evoking everyday life at the hospital in former times. The chapel, with its brilliant 15th-century panels by Hans Memling and the world-famous St Ursula shrine, is the treasure-house of the complex. The old hospital pharmacy with its physic garden is also worth a visit.

Gruuthuse Museum

The excellently preserved 15th-century town palace of the Lords of Gruuthuse contains a remarkable collection of applied art, featuring furniture, tapestries, musical instruments, paintings, silverware, tin, pottery and weapons from the 13th to the 19th centuries.

Groeninge Museum

This museum offers a rich and fascinating survey into the world-famous collection of 'Flemish Primitive' art, works by a wide range of Renaissance and Baroque masters, a selection of paintings from the 18th and 19th-century Neo-classical and Realist periods, milestones of Symbolism and Modernism, masterpieces of Flemish Expressionism and a rotating selection from the city's collection of post-war modern art.

Diamond Museum

The Diamond museum in Bruges is one of only 5 diamond museums in the world. Bruges is the city where the art of diamond polishing was invented in the 15th century by local goldsmith Lodewijk van Berquem. Every day at 12.15, a polishing demonstration is carried out by a diamond polisher in the museum's extraordinary diamond polishing workshop, established in the restored basement which dates from the Middle Ages.

Belgian Traditions

Belgium is famous for certain food fare and drink—especially the drink!

CHOCOLATES

Belgian chocolate has been the food of champions, a lure for lovers, the indulgence of the rich and later, the favorite of the masses.

Belgium produces 172,000 tons of chocolate per year with more than 2,000 chocolate shops throughout the country.

Pralines in Belgium are sublime chocolate confections. A beautifully sculpted chocolate shell conceals a center of filling which explodes with a surprising texture and flavor in your mouth. Many chocolatiers still make their pralines by hand. Every town and even small villages have chocolate stores with luxurious pralines.

CHOCOLATE—Names to Know

COUNTRY WIDE:

Leonidas
Neuhaus
Marcolini
Godiva
Galler

FLANDERS AREA:

Chocolatier Pralinette - Bruges
G. Bastin - Antwerp
P J Chocolate - Adinkerke
Sukerbuyc - Bruges
Daskalides - Ghent
De Grootte - Ieper
Hans Burie - Antwerp



TRADITIONAL FOODS

Anguille au Vert -Eel in a delicious green herb sauce.

Asparagus "a la Flamande" - White asparagus served with a creamy sauce and eggs.

Belgian Fries—They are not "French" but Belgian !

Boudin Blanc & Boudin Noir -- Blood Sausages you have to try; made by artisans.

Carbonnades—A beef stew cooked in Belgian brown beer.

Endive—All endives sold in the US are imported from Belgium.

Waffles - From a street vendor or in a gourmet restaurant - don't leave Belgium without trying one!

WAFFLES

In Belgium there are two types of waffles (or gauffres as we like to call them): the Brussels and the Liege waffle. The Brussels is rectangular in shape with a golden-brown exterior, deep divots and is usually eaten with a knife and fork. Brussels waffles are served with a variety of toppings such as powdered sugar, whipped cream, ice cream, strawberries and chocolate. The Liege waffle is golden-yellow, more dense in texture and has a burned sugar coating on the outside giving it a lightly sweet flavor. This hand-held waffle is sold by street vendors all over Belgium.

Chocolate Museums

Choco-Story (Bruges)

The history of chocolate won't be a mystery after your visit - from the spicy Maya drink to the sweet chocolate milk of today - with demonstrations and tastings too! <http://www.choco-story.be/>

Roose's Chocolate World (Bruges): Group visits, only on request.
<http://www.chocolate-world.be/>



CHOCOLATE FESTIVAL—BRUGES

The 2nd annual Choco-late Festival in Bruges will take place April 6 - 10, 2007. Visitors to the festival will have the privilege of tasting, experiencing and appreciating chocolate in all its forms & facets. Craft chocolate makers and major international brands exhibit side by side and offer the very best in chocolate today.



BELGIAN BEER

BELGIAN BEER "Beauty lies in the hands of the beer holder." - Anonymous

Nowhere is this more true than in Belgium with over 450 different varieties of beer, many with personalized beer glasses in which that beer, and only that beer, may be served. The shape of each glass is made to enhance the flavor of the beer it is designed for. This strict beer separatism may seem like behavior usually reserved for wine snobbery, but Belgians do take their beer seriously - and with good reason. Belgium has enjoyed an unparalleled reputation for its specialty beers since the Middle Ages. Connoisseurs favor Belgian beers for their variety, real flavor and character.

There are almost as many beer styles as there are breweries in the small kingdom of Belgium. The choices are endless when you consider raspberry beer, white beer, chocolate beer, geuze beer, cherry beer, brown beer Trappist beer and of course the beer that Belgium is most famous for - the lambic beer. Lambic beer is made with an ancient style of brewing, depending on spontaneous fermentation to produce a bone-dry, profoundly tart, and naturally effervescent drink that improves with years in the bottle - much like wine. By European Union regulation, it can be produced only in a small area in Belgium.

Blanche or White Beers Sometimes called a wheat beer - it is light, cloudy, and with a hint of citrus. Example: Hoegaarden.

Lambic A non-malted wheat beer naturally fermented by wild, airborne yeasts. A draft beer specific to the Brussels area.

Gueuze A blend of two or more Lambic beers to create a secondary fermentation and a Champagne-like sparkle.

Faro Lambic light, if you will. A sweetened variety with some of the flavor but less intensity of other Lambics.

Kriek A Lambic beer in which further fermentation is brought about with the addition of cherries or raspberries - refreshing in summer!

Brown Beers These beers interplay caramel-like malty sweetness and a sourness gained from several months of maturation. Example: Goudenband

Red Beers Produced from red barley, these beers are aged in oak. Fruity, sweet & sour, very thirst-quenching! Example: Rodenbach.

Golden Beers These beers are similar to Pilsner lagers using very pale malts and hops, while retaining ale yeasts. Ex: Duvel.

Flemish Beef Stew Cooked in Beer (Serves 6 to 8)

(Vlaamse Stoverij or Les Carbonades Flamandes)

Beef stew cooked in beer has long been part of the culinary heritage of Belgium, and it is still one of the most popular stews in Flanders. Through the ages, the recipe has varied, and every mother passes on her "secret" to her children. These spicy and sweet flavorings have been an integral part of the Belgian palate and cuisine since the Middle Ages. The following version is a basic one. Like many other stews it is best made a day or two ahead since it improves in flavor. The success of the dish depends greatly on the quality of the beer you use. Look for a rich, dark, and slightly bitter beer, such as Rodenbach or a dark Abbey beer. Serve this stew with French fries or boiled potatoes, applesauce, and plenty of "golden ambrosia," the name the old Belgians gave to their beloved beer.

4 pounds boneless stew meat, such as chuck, cut into 2-inch cubes

1 teaspoon salt ; 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper ; 2 to 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour

4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter ; 3 large onions (about 2 pounds), thinly sliced ; 2 bottles (12 ounces each) Belgian beer

2 or 3 sprigs fresh thyme or 1 teaspoon dried thyme; 2 bay leaves ; 1/2 tablespoons red currant jelly (or brown sugar)

1 tablespoon cider or red wine vinegar

1. Season the beef cubes with the salt and pepper and dredge with the flour. Shake off any excess.
2. Melt 2 tablespoons of the butter in a large heavy skillet over high heat until hot but not smoking. Add the beef cubes and sauté until nicely browned on all sides. Work in batches so as not to crowd the beef cubes, or they will steam instead of sauté. Add 1 tablespoon of butter, if necessary. Transfer the beef cubes to a heavy Dutch oven.
3. Add the remaining 1 tablespoon butter to the skillet and melt over medium heat. Add the onions and cook stirring occasionally, until browned, about 15 minutes. If necessary, raise the heat toward the end of the cooking time. It is important to brown the meat and the onions evenly to give the stew its deep brown color. The trick is to stir the onions just enough to avoid burning the but not so often as to interrupt the browning process. Combine the onions with the meat in the Dutch oven.
4. Deglaze the skillet with the beer, scraping with a wooden spoon to loosen any brown bits, and bring to a boil. Pour the beer over the meat. Add the thyme and bay leaves.
5. Simmer, covered, over low heat until the meat is very tender, 1-1/2 to 2 hours. Before serving, stir in the red currant jelly and vinegar; simmer for 5 minutes. This sweet-and-sour combination will give this hearty stew its sprigs and bay leaves. Taste and adjust the seasoning and serve.