

EUROPE · HISTORY · ARCHITECTURE · FOOD · CITY BREAKS · CULTURE

Belgium

Flemish masters, medieval belfries and a serious beer and chocolate culture fill a country small enough that most cities are an hour or so from Brussels by train. Day-trip to Bruges' canals, Ghent's Mystic Lamb and Antwerp's Rubens altarpieces, pay your respects at the First World War cemeteries around Ypres, then head south into the wooded valleys of the Ardennes.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Belgium and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 17 October 2026.

 CAPITAL Brussels	 CURRENCY Euro (EUR) £1 ≈ €1.19	 LANGUAGE Dutch, French German	 BEST TIME May-Sep
 DAILY BUDGET £70-£300 £££ Expensive	 PLUGS Type C, E 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 1h 10m direct ~£80-£220 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+1 standard time

Belgium is split by language: Dutch-speaking Flanders in the north holds the medieval art cities, French-speaking Wallonia in the south has the wooded Ardennes, castles and the Meuse valley, and officially bilingual Brussels sits in between. Distances are tiny, so most first trips base themselves in Brussels, Ghent or Bruges and use the trains: Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, Leuven and Mechelen are all within about an hour of the capital. Add a day at Ypres for the First World War battlefields, or hire a car for a few nights in the Ardennes, with its walking, kayaking and Trappist breweries.

Belgium is not cheap, with prices close to those in France or the Netherlands, but the trains are good value and the eating is excellent at every level, from a paper cone of frites to Michelin-starred tables. Bruges fills with day-trippers from late morning in summer, so stay the night or come in winter; Ghent and Antwerp feel more lived-in. Rain can fall in any month. Visitors are often surprised by Brussels' Art Nouveau townhouses and comic-strip murals, and by how seriously beer is taken: Belgian beer culture is on UNESCO's intangible heritage list. It suits short breaks from Britain, art lovers and anyone interested in the world wars.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

ARCHITECTURE

Bruges' medieval centre

The best-preserved medieval townscape in the Low Countries. Climb the Belfry's 366 steps above the Markt, see van Eyck and Memling in the Groeninge and Sint-Jan museums, and walk the canals early or late, when the day-trippers have gone.
- 2

ARCHITECTURE

Grand-Place, Brussels

A UNESCO-listed square ringed by gilded baroque guildhouses, rebuilt after the French bombardment of 1695, facing the Gothic town hall. Come back after dark when it is floodlit; in August of even-numbered years a vast carpet of begonias covers the cobbles.

3

CULTURE

Ghent's old centre

Van Eyck's Adoration of the Mystic Lamb (1432) is the treasure of St Bavo's Cathedral, the moated Gravensteen castle broods over the old town, and the Graslei's guildhouses line the river where students gather on summer evenings.

4

HISTORY

Ypres and Flanders Fields

The Last Post has sounded beneath the Menin Gate at 8pm every evening since 1928, bar the wartime occupation. Rebuilt Ypres houses the In Flanders Fields Museum in its Cloth Hall, and Tyne Cot, the world's largest Commonwealth war cemetery, lies nearby.

5

NATURE

Dinant and the Ardennes

Dinant squeezes between the Meuse and limestone cliffs, its citadel reached by cable car above the bulb-spired collegiate church. Kayak down the Lesse from Houyet, visit the Grottes de Han caves nearby, and note the saxophone statues: Adolphe Sax was born here.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Brussels

≈ 2.1 million people

Base yourself here for the Grand-Place, the Magritte Museum, Victor Horta's Art Nouveau houses and the Atomium, plus comic-strip murals and some of Belgium's best frites, beer cafés and restaurants.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Antwerp

≈ 1.1 million people

Belgium's port and fashion city: Rubens altarpieces in the Cathedral of Our Lady, the MAS museum above the old docks, a grand domed railway station and a strong bar and restaurant scene.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Liège

≈ 750,000 people

A gritty, likeable Walloon city on the Meuse: climb the 374 steps of the Montagne de Bueren, browse the Sunday La Batte market and admire Calatrava's Liège-Guillemins station.

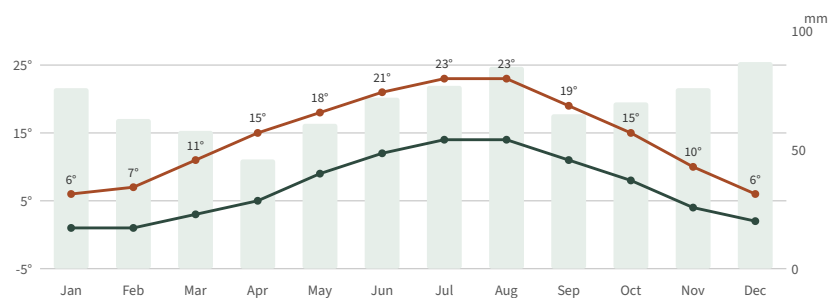
Ranked by urban area. Counted by municipality alone, Antwerp is Belgium's largest city and Ghent and Charleroi both rank ahead of Liège.

When to go to Belgium

Best time: **May-Sep.**

**Average climate in Brussels**

High °C Low °C Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb–Mar	Carnival of Binche A UNESCO-recognised carnival climaxing on Shrove Tuesday, when hundreds of Gilles in wax masks and, later, towering ostrich-feather hats dance through Binche to drums, pelting the crowd with oranges.
May	Procession of the Holy Blood On Ascension Day, Bruges parades a relic said to hold drops of Christ's blood through its streets, with biblical tableaux and costumed guilds; a medieval tradition on UNESCO's heritage list.
Jul	Gentse Feesten Ten days of free concerts, street theatre and late-night drinking that take over Ghent's old centre each July, spanning Belgium's national day on 21 July.

How much does Belgium cost?

SHOESTRING £70 per person / day ≈ €83.33 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £150 per person / day ≈ €179 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £300 per person / day ≈ €357 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Moules-frites A steaming pot of mussels cooked with white wine or beer, celery and shallots, served with double-fried frites and mayonnaise; at their plumpest in autumn and winter.	Carbonade flamande Beef braised slowly in dark Belgian beer with onions, brown sugar and a slice of bread spread with mustard; Flemish comfort food, usually served with frites.	Liège waffles Dense, chewy yeast-dough waffles studded with pearl sugar that caramelises on the iron, sold warm from street stalls; Brussels waffles are lighter, rectangular and topped with cream or fruit.
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Getting around

SNCB/NMBS trains run frequently between all the main towns, few journeys from Brussels take more than two hours, and weekend return tickets are discounted. Eurostar reaches Brussels-Midi from London in about two hours. Trams and buses are run by STIB in Brussels, De Lijn in Flanders and TEC in Wallonia. Cycling is easy in flat Flanders, but the Ardennes are best explored by car. Uber works in Brussels.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C E 230V — bring a UK-to-C/E adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Telephone: 112 (ambulance, fire, police) Download the: 112 BE app Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +32	TIME ZONE UTC+1 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Service is included in restaurant bills, so tipping is optional; rounding up or leaving a few euros for good service is appreciated. Keep small coins for toilet attendants.

ETIQUETTE

Mind the language divide: in Flanders, use English rather than French if you have no Dutch. Greet staff with 'goeiendag' or 'bonjour' when entering shops and cafés.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Brussels Airport (BRU), Brussels; Brussels South Charleroi Airport (CRL), Charleroi

Visas & entry for Belgium

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can travel without a visa to the Schengen area, which includes Belgium, for up to 90 days in any 180-day period. This applies if you travel: as a tourist; to visit family or friends; to attend business meetings, cultural or sports events; for short-term studies or training.

The requirements for working in Belgium are different.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Bat Lyssavirus

Tick-borne encephalitis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Belgium

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Sun 1 Nov 2026

All Saints' Day

Wed 11 Nov 2026	Armistice Day
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Sun 28 Mar 2027	Easter Sunday
Mon 29 Mar 2027	Easter Monday
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Thu 6 May 2027	Ascension Day
Sun 16 May 2027	Pentecost
Mon 17 May 2027	Pentecost Monday
Wed 21 Jul 2027	National Day
Sun 15 Aug 2027	Assumption Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Dutch

ENGLISH	DUTCH	SAY IT
Hello	Hallo	<i>HAA-loh</i>
Thank you	Dank u	<i>DANK ew</i>
Please	Alstublieft	<i>AHL-stew-bleeft</i>
Excuse me	Pardon	<i>par-DON</i>
How much is this?	Hoeveel kost dit?	<i>HOO-vayl kost dit</i>

Know before you go

Eurostar from London St Pancras reaches Brussels-Midi in about two hours; an 'Any Belgian Station' ticket lets you continue to Bruges, Ghent or Antwerp on the same booking.

Many museums, including most in Bruges and Ghent, close on Mondays, as do some restaurants; plan Mondays around churches, walks and markets instead.

Driving over from Britain? Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent run camera-enforced low-emission zones, so check whether your car must be registered online before you enter to avoid a fine.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.