



Brussels is the capital of Belgium. It is also the capital of what is trying to become a United Europe. And it is an ideal city for the honor. The population of Belgium is made up of three different cultural groups that speak three different languages -- French, Dutch, and German. The people of Belgium are polite, tactful and neighborly. Perfect for the capital of a new Europe, and ideal for a visiting tourist.

The revolution of 1830 that produced a free and independent Belgium started here at the Brussels Opera House. The opera being performed had an aria in which a singer cried, "Far better to die than to live in slavery. Away with the foreigners!" The audience took the words to heart, got up, walked into the streets, and started the revolution that got rid of the Dutch. Opera is still very important in Brussels.



To have an opera start a revolution is surprising, but so are many things in Brussels. Brussels is the headquarters for NATO and home to more than one thousand international corporations. It is sophisticated and cosmopolitan, and at the same time, filled with historic sites, cultural attractions and helpful people, most of whom speak English and enjoy speaking it with Americans.

Belgium is easy to get to. It's right in the center of Western Europe and flights come in from major cities all around the world. If you're coming from England you can come on the Euro star train that runs through the tunnel underneath the English Channel. When you get to Belgium you will be sitting on an imaginary line. It's a line that divides the speakers of Romance languages in the southern part of Europe, like French, from speakers of Germanic languages in the northern part of Europe, like Dutch. The line runs right through the center of Belgium.

The fact that most Belgians speak two languages is constantly brought to mind. All street signs are symbolically in both French and Flemish.

THE GRAND PLACE

The most famous symbol of Brussels, however, is the Manneken Pis, a bronze fountain in the form of a naked boy. It was constructed in the early 1600s and there are a number of stories about its meaning. But all the stories make the same point: the people of Brussels are courageous, they have stood up to oppression, and the statue expresses their attitude towards the oppressors.

In 1746 a bunch of French soldiers stole the statue. The King of France was in town at the time, and he was so annoyed and embarrassed that he had the soldiers arrested and put in prison, he had the statue returned, and then he made the statue a Knight of St. Louis -- which meant all the French soldiers had to salute it.

The King also gave the statue a uniform of gold brocade. The idea of having different uniforms for the statue caught on and today there is a museum with over six hundred costumes. He dresses for special occasions: Carnival, flight training class, Dracula's Birthday, Mozart's Birthday, and Elvis's Birthday. He was always close to the king.

The museum faces out on the Grand Place, which is one of the great squares of the world. It was once the main marketplace for the city, a fact which is echoed in the names of the streets that lead into the square: Butter Street, Meat and Bread Street, Herring Street. During the 1400s the Hotel de Ville was built on the square as the center for the local government, and the food market became less significant.



On the first Thursday in July, the square is the site of the Ommegang pageant. Over two thousand costumed

participants parade past the King of Belgium. The event dates back to 1549, when it was first presented to King Charles V.

The streets surrounding the Grand Place contain dozens of shops offering Belgian Lace. By the middle of the 1500s Belgium had become the lace making capital of Europe. Brussels was the center of the business and over ten thousand people in the city, mostly young women, were employed in production.

Lace making used up so much of the available labor pool that it soon created a shortage of serving maids -- a situation that was unacceptable to the wealthy families of Belgium. And so a law was passed that said that lace could only be made by girls under twelve.

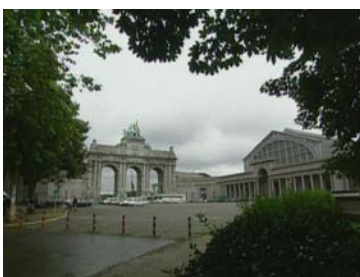
The lace makers of Brussels created handiwork that was considered to be the best; the threads were the finest and the designs the most beautiful. During the past hundred years the fashion for lace has declined, and today it is an item of special interest. Fortunately, there's still quite a bit of interesting lace in Brussels.

Brussels has some of the most elegant shopping areas in Europe. One of the most charming is just off the Grand Place. It dates back to 1847 and is known as the Royal Arcades. It consists of three shopping galleries covered with glass roofs and lined with fashionable shops.

COLLECTIONS & EXHIBITIONS

Brussels has dozens of interesting museum collections and exhibitions and three of the most interesting are right next to each other.

The Museum of Art and History is one of the most significant in Europe. It covers the entire history of art,



with outstanding examples from almost every period. The museum has a fascinating collection of church altars that were made in Brussels and Antwerp during the 15 and 1600s. At

the time, a painter got paid three times more than a sculptor. As a result, sculptors working on a church needed to supplement their earnings. One way was to make the carvings for an altar.

The Royal Army Museum and Museum of Military History has weapons and equipment covering centuries of European conflict including over 300 vintage aircraft.

And even though it's just next-door, Auto world is a trip. You can trace the history of the motorcar from 1886

to 1975. Four hundred and fifty cars from twelve different countries.

The Royal Museum of Central Africa is also fascinating. During the 1880s Belgium's King Leopold II took control of the entire Congo basin in Africa, an area half the size of Western Europe, and he ran it as his private property. He commissioned this museum to house his Congo collection. If you'd like to do some of your own collecting, there are at least a dozen excellent African art galleries in the city.

REGAL ARCHITECTURE

At the end of the 19th century, regal architecture was very fashionable in Brussels. Brouckere Square, named after a mayor of Brussels, was at the center of the city's social life. And the buildings on the surrounding streets reflected the community's interest in the majestic.



A good example is the Hotel Metropole. It opened in 1895 and was designed to express the great luxury that was available in Brussels at

the end of the 19th century. The entrance hall is a French renaissance foyer in marble, vaulted ceilings, crystal chandeliers, Oriental rugs. The reception area looks as it did over a hundred years ago— polished wood, brass trimming. Beneath the Corinthian columns of the bar are palm trees, a reminder of Belgium's expansion into Africa.

The hotel was also designed to express the coming attractions of the 20th century... the age of high technology. There's an outside terrace and a cafe that were already famous in the 1800s. Contemporary designers often feel that less is more, but the Belle Époque boys who built this room clearly believed that more is more.

FOOD LOVERS AGREE

Food lovers agree that some of the finest food in Europe is served in the homes and restaurants of this city. The major influences on Brussels' food came from the French, but you can also taste elements that came along during the years when Belgium was ruled by the Spanish and the Austrians.

Waterzooi is one of the most famous dishes. It's somewhere between a soup and a stew. Chicken is poached in a broth of aromatic vegetables and saffron and finished off with a touch of cream. Saffron came to Belgium with the Spanish.

Another Flemish classic is beef stewed in beer. Cubes of beef are browned with onions, stewed in rich Belgian beer, and then flavored with a touch of red currant jelly and red

Belgium

wine vinegar. The jelly and the vinegar give the dish a sweet and sour edge. It's served with boiled potatoes, and more of the beer that it was made with.

A specialty of the town of Liege is a warm green bean and potato salad with a bacon vinaigrette. Potatoes and green beans, still hot from cooking, are mixed together with freshly sautéed bacon, then dressed with a warm vinaigrette.



The Belgians' love of cooking with beer shows up again in chicken braised in beer with Belgian endives. This is a popular family meal, often served as soon as the first endives come to market in September. The Belgians

also make some of the world's finest chocolate, and the chefs of Brussels use it to make a classic chocolate mousse.

For a look at life at the top of the gastronomic scale, you can pay a visit to Comme Chez Soi, which means like our place. It is one of the top restaurants in the world, with almost as many chefs as patrons. The table to get, and you must ask well in advance, is the one in the kitchen. It gives you the feeling that the entire staff is devoted just to you.

These days the chefs of Belgium travel around the world and constantly modify their approach to cooking. As a result, many traditional distinctions are disappearing. But some constants remain.

Belgian seafood is always important, especially mussels. The most famous dish in Brussels is Steamed Mussels with Fried Potatoes. Brussels is famous for its Belgian Fried Potatoes. Until the



Seventies, there were Belgian Fry stands all over town. There aren't many these days, but this classic -- near the site of the 1958 World's Fair -- is still open.

The seasonal arrival of the herring run each year is announced in every menu. Belgian waffles, freshly made in storefront shops, are the most common street food.

Brussels also has a long-standing relationship with the cookie. And the best place to see it is the Dandoy shop in the old city. It has been run by the Dandoy family since 1829. Their most famous cookie is called a speculoos. They

are a type of gingerbread and traditionally given to good children on St. Nicholas Day, the 6th of December. The word speculoos is Latin and it means mirror. The cookies come out of a hand-carved wooden form that mirrors the image of St. Nicholas.

BEER: THE NATIONAL CHOICE

We know that for at least eight thousand years, people have been making beer. There are paintings on the walls of ancient Egyptian tombs and artifacts in Babylonia that illustrate the process.

Over the centuries, the techniques passed from the Middle East to Europe. At the time, northern Europe was too cold to grow the grapes that made good wine, so beer became the drink of choice in Great Britain, Germany, Holland and Belgium.

The first process in making beer is called malting. Water is mixed with a grain like barley and the barley begins to germinate.



When the malt has reached the desired point, the germination process is stopped by drying and heating the malt in a kiln. If you heat it at a low temperature you get a pale malt, leading to a paler brew. At high temperatures the malt browns and develops different flavors that range from toasty and caramelized to sharp and smoky.

The cracked barley is mixed with hot water. Naturally occurring acids in the malt convert the starch into sugar. You end up with a sweet brown liquid called the wort.

Hops, which are the female flowers of a vine, are added to the wort and the mixture is boiled for up to 90 minutes. The hops add bitterness and various aromas to the brew and they also act as a natural preservative.

Then the wort is cooled and yeasts are added. In some breweries the yeast is in the air and no additional yeast is added. The yeast turns the sugar in the wort into alcohol. The process is called fermentation and there are two types of fermentation.

One takes place quickly at a high temperature -- about 68 degrees Fahrenheit -- and the most active yeasts remains near the surface of the liquid.

It's called top fermentation, it takes only a few days and the beer that results is soon ready to drink. Top fermentation usually produces a beer that's fruity and yeasty. It's the oldest way of making beer and the result is known as ale.

The second method was developed in the early 1400s in Bavaria. The beer was fermented in cool Alpine caves and they used a special yeast that thrived at cooler temperatures. Then the beer was stored for several months. The result was a sparkling beer with a cleaner flavor. It became known as a lager from the German word *lagern* which means to store. It's the brewing method used for most modern beers.



Belgium and the United Kingdom are the only places that still brew most of their beer with the original technique --- warm temperature and top-fermenting yeasts.

St. Arnold, the patron saint of brewers is credited with spreading the brewers' skill throughout Belgium. He was curious as to why the rich seemed to live longer than the poor. And he finally decided it was because they drank beer instead of water. And he was absolutely right. For centuries the safest thing to drink was beer.

Today, Belgium produces over six hundred different beers and beer experts have chosen some of them as best of class, worldwide. The beer brewers of Belgium are the great artists in the business. And one of the oldest brewers is Lindemans. It's been in the same family for over 200 years.



Their most unusual beers are called lambics, lambics are fermented by natural yeasts in the air and the fermentation process takes place over many months in wooden barrels and tanks. Lambic is the meeting point between a beer and a wine. It is made from wild yeast in a process that's very similar to that used for making sherry. And like a sherry it's aged for years in wooden casks.

Some *lambics* are blended together and aged to make a gueuze which has a wine-like flavor and complexity. Lambic brewers never want to make the slightest physical change to their brewery buildings because it might disturb the yeast.

Belgian beers are also fermented with cherries to produce a drink called *kriek* or with raspberries to make a brew called framboise. Kriek is the Flemish word for black cherry. Lindemans adds cherries to their lambic and the fresh pure fruit flavor makes a great pairing with the tart complexity of the lambic.

ANTWERP

Most visitors to Belgium, either for business or holiday, end up passing all of their time in Brussels, which is okay. But the distances between Belgian cities



are extremely short and a train ride of less than an hour will bring you an additional perspective on the country. Take Antwerp, for example it's only forty-five minutes from Brussels. Antwerp was built on the Skelde River, which runs out to the Atlantic Ocean. For more than two thousand years Antwerp has been a major port.

In the middle of Antwerp's central marketplace is the statue of Silvius Brabo, and it comes with a legend.

There was a giant who lived near Antwerp, right on the river. And he would charge an excessive toll to any ship that passed by his castle. As an added inducement to make the payment he would chop off the hand of anyone who tried to avoid the toll. He had an economic stranglehold on the city. Silvius was a Roman soldier who had the courage to kill the giant and as a final act of victory he chopped off the giant's hand and threw it in the river.

Free from the giant's control, the city prospered. The textile industry made many people rich. They built one of the largest cathedrals in the world. Antwerp became a center for book publishing and diamond cutting. Great artists worked here. And everybody who could afford it became interested in good food.

Antwerp was the hometown of Peter Paul Rubens, the great 17th century painter, and his home and studios are open to visitors. If you enjoy the art of the 15, 16, and 1700s, stop into the Royal Museum of Fine Arts. It houses over a thousand works by the old masters.

In the center of town is the Cathedral of Our Lady. It is the largest and most beautiful Gothic church in Belgium. A number of Rubens masterpieces hang along the walls. And when you come out of the cathedral you can pop across the street to a pub filled with religious statues. It's called The Eleventh Commandment, which they claim is Thou shalt enjoy thyself.



It's easy to fall in love with the city of Antwerp, but if you fall in love on a more personal level, then Antwerp is the town to commemorate that love in a most traditional way.

Antwerp is the world center for diamonds. The business



came here in the 1200s. Today the city has two thousand diamond companies, with over thirty thousand employees. More than seventy percent of the world's annual diamond business passes through Antwerp, at a value of more than thirteen billion dollars. They even have a diamond museum that will teach you everything you want to know about these glittering stones.

Diamonds appear to have been mined first in India and until the 1700s that was the only source. The criteria for evaluation has been the same for thousands of years.

The quality of a diamond is measured by the four Cs: cut, color, clarity and carat.

The carat is a measurement of weight with a food reference, but probably not the reference that comes to mind. The word carat comes from an ancient Greek word and refers to the bean of the carob plant. Carob beans have a tendency to uniform weight at two-tenths of a gram, and in ancient times they were used to measure the weight of pearls, precious stones, and diamonds.

In terms of gastronomy, there were three shops in Antwerp that attracted my attention.

Goossen's Bakery is very famous for their wonderful breakfast breads, and there's always a line. What I love is a very traditional breakfast bread; with a little bit of whole grain in it and lots of raisins. Also excellent is yeast-based bread. It has some egg yolk in it, raisins, and then it's coated with powdered sugar. Slice them up and toast them and they are fabulous for breakfast.



Down the street is Phillips Biscuits. In addition to its other baked goods, Phillips Biscuits produces a sweet cookie in the shape of the hand that Silvius took from the giant.

Also in the neighborhood is Burie Chocolates, which has a monthly theme, to celebrate various edible forms. Burie also has come up with a technique for putting a picture on a chocolate bar. Give them a photo and they will print it in white chocolate on a dark chocolate bar.

As you walk around town you may notice that above the streetlights there are statues of the Virgin Mary. But the reason behind this is less pious than you might

expect. The owners of the building on which the streetlights hung were taxed. But if a statue of the Virgin Mary was placed above the light, the tax was suspended. I could not find a single lamp without a statue.

TO LEARN MORE...

COMME CHEZ SOI

23 PLACE ROUPPE
B-1000 BRUSSELS, BELGIUM
TEL: +32.2.512.29.21
[HTTPS://WWW.COMMECHEZSOI.BE/](https://www.commechezsoi.be/)

GOOSSENS BAKERY

KORTE GASTHUISSTRAAT 31
OUDE STAD, ANTWERP, BELGIUM
TEL: +32.3.266.0792
[HTTP://GOOSSENS-CHOCOLATIER.BE/](http://goossens-chocolatier.be/)

BURIE CHOCOLATES

KORTE GASTHUISSTRAAT 3
OUDE STAD, ANTWERP, BELGIUM
TEL: +32.3.232.3688

LINDEMANS BREWERY

LENNIKSEBAAN 1479
1602 VLEZENBEEK, BELGIUM
TEL: +32.2.569.03.90
[WWW.MERCHANTDUVIN.COM](http://www.merchantduvin.com)
[WWW.LINDEMANS.BE/START/HOME/EN/](http://www.lindemans.be/start/home/en/)

HOTEL METROPOLE

31, PLACE DE BROUCKÈRE
B-1000 BRUSSELS, BELGIUM
TEL: +32.2.217.23.00
[WWW.METROPOLEHOTEL.COM](http://www.metropolehotel.com)

TOURIST OFFICE OF FLANDERS, BELGIUM

NEW YORK TIMES BUILDING
620 EIGHTH AVENUE, 44TH FLOOR
NEW YORK, NY 10018
TEL: 1.212.584.2336
[WWW.VISITFLANDERS.US](http://www.visitflanders.us)