



# Belgium INFORMATION SHEET

**Belgium is a very European vacation destination. There is something for everyone – culture, art, a sense of history, varied scenery, fantastic food, sports, and the people are warm, welcoming and friendly!**

The following is a general information sheet. It is as accurate as we can make it. However, things sometimes change unexpectedly. Please use this only as a guide.

### Expectations

While group tours are one of the most enjoyable ways to travel, they do require a certain degree of flexibility and understanding on every individual's part. We have carefully planned your itinerary and have done our best to provide you with information about what to expect. However, much of what makes travel interesting is the unexpected. Travel with an open mind and you will get the most and best out of your holiday. Please be assured that our mission is to create and provide you with the most enjoyable and memorable travel experience.

### Currency

The unit of currency is the Euro. It is available in various denominations. We recommend that you purchase 100 Euros. Major banks in the U.S. generally have an international division and can make this conversion for you. European countries used to welcome American money for small items, but that is not so anymore.

Many shops and restaurants in the cities and tourist resorts accept major credit cards (MasterCard, Visa and American Express) and offer the best exchange rates, but credit cards are less easy to use in the countryside. Check with your credit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services, which may be available. U.S. travelers' checks have fallen out of favor with travelers, and despite the fact that they are the safest way to carry money, they are not always the most economical or handy, since **banks may charge commission for cashing them, and shops and restaurants give less favorable exchange rates.** You also may be required to show your passport to cash traveler checks.

Cash is often preferred but should not be carried in large quantities. **Money can be changed at banks in all of the main tourist areas or exchange offices as well as most hotels and railroad stations.** Banking hours are usually 9:00 am to noon and 2:00 – 4:00 pm weekdays and 9:00 am to noon on Saturdays. Banks are closed on Sundays and holidays. ATMs are widely available in major cities and will give you your cash in local currency. For many, this is the most convenient way to get money abroad.

There are currency exchange kiosks in most major airports, if you are not able to get money converted prior to departure.

Here is a chart of approximate currency conversions:

***PLEASE REFER TO THE ENCLOSED CURRENCY CONVERSION CHEAT-SHEET FOR ACCURATE RATES.***

Tourists reaching the area without local currency can obtain local currency through any bank or exchange office at airports.

### Weather & Clothing

The weather is much like our own. The summers are temperate and the winters are apt to be snowy. Listed below are the average 24-hour temperatures for the seasons. Even though we have noted the usual temperatures, you may experience unusual weather conditions. For that reason, we always suggest that you pack clothes that can be layered. It is also wise to check the newspaper, the Weather Channel, or weather.com before you pack to verify the most current weather situation.

CITY	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL	WINTER
Brussels	38 – 60	69 - 73	65 – 38	60 - 45

While in Europe, you will see temperatures forecast in Celsius. To convert Celsius to Fahrenheit, multiply the Celsius number by 9, then divide your answer by 5, and add 32.

It is advisable to bring a mid-weight coat or jacket. Conservative dress is preferred. Short shorts and bathing suits should not be worn in town. Casual wear is accepted in all but the grandest hotels and restaurants, but most Europeans will dress smartly when dining out. You may wish to pack one outfit that is a little dressier for a special evening: for gentlemen, a sport coat and tie and a dress or fancy pantsuit for the ladies.

Be sure to bring comfortable soft-soled shoes or sneakers for the days you are sightseeing.

A small packable umbrella and sweaters are always handy to have with you.

It is important to remember that you may stop at churches. Shorts and short skirts are not acceptable. Please remember to wear long pants or knee-length or longer skirts on those days.

### Packing Smart

Be sure to pack any prescriptions that you will need for your vacation in your carry-on-bag. In your carry on, liquids must be in clear plastic containers, less than three ounces, and be contained in a clear plastic bag.

You may wish to bring any special soaps or accessories from home. European hotels do not always have facecloths in the room. It's a good idea to pack your own.

You may wish to pack a pocket calculator (useful in money conversion) and a small multi-language guide with basic phrases.

Wake-up calls will be available from the front desk, but you also might want to bring your own battery-operated alarm clock.

Don't forget your camera and extra film (film tends to be more expensive overseas).

The availability and quality of hairdryers and irons at hotels vary greatly. For that reason, we strongly recommend that you bring your own, if you need them.

Due to heightened security at the airports, remember to pack questionable items in your checked luggage, not your carry-on. Such items include knives, scissors, any cutting implements, as well as some sports items (golf clubs, ski poles, bats, etc.). If in doubt, put it in your checked bag. It will save you time going through security checkpoints.

### Enjoying the trip

You will probably fly with an intermediate stop where you will change planes, but your luggage will be checked all the way to your final destination. Since the airplane is dry, and you will have a long international flight, it helps to drink a lot of non-alcoholic liquids while flying. Alcohol contributes to jetlag, as does eating heavy meals onboard. Feet swell at high altitudes, so it is a good idea to remove your shoes while in flight. You will probably want to bring a small book or magazine in your carry-on luggage.

A valid U.S. passport is required. We recommend that it be **valid for at least 3-6 months past the time your tour ends.** If you are a not a U.S. citizen, you may need further identification. Contact National Passport Information at (888) 362-8668 or the Belgian Consulate for further information. No visa or vaccinations are necessary for this tour for U.S. citizens. Remember that you are responsible for having all valid documentation needed for this tour.

### Electrical Current

The standard current is 220 volts A.C. A transformer may also be necessary and can be purchased in many stores. Sockets generally have two or three round pins. Adapters are needed for U.S. plugs (for hairdryers and travel irons). Please use only hairdryers with 1250 watt setting. The hairdryer may not work when it is set on 1500 and may damage dryer even though you are using an adapter.

### **Food, Drink & Entertainment**

Since water away from home can often be upsetting to the digestive tract, we recommend that you drink bottled water, which is not usually complimentary. This will usually be offered in restaurants. If in doubt, ask the locals. Water supplies marked “non potable” should not be used for drinking or brushing your teeth.

If you have special dietary requests, either let your tour escort or the dining room staff know and they will try to accommodate your needs. If you have a very limited diet, we suggest that you bring what you might need.

Since European coffee can be stronger than American coffee, you may wish to bring tea bags or instant coffee.

Breakfast at most hotels is a continental buffet, though cereal is not always provided, so you may wish to bring your own.

Europeans generally dine later than is customary in the United States.

### **Optional Side Trips**

At most destinations, optional side trips to nearby attractions are available. The tour host at your destination can help you arrange these trips during your free time. A few operators on these side trips will not take credit cards. You may want to carry more in traveler’s checks if you think that you may be interested in taking these trips. The prices on the excursions vary greatly depending on the length of the tour and the places visited.

### **Safety and Health Services**

We recommend that you leave a copy of your itinerary with friends or family, in case of emergencies.

In order to have a trouble-free holiday as a traveler, you should avoid flaunting jewelry, and wear your handbag securely strapped across your chest. Many stores (as well as Durgan Travel) also sell security wallets that are worn inside your clothing. They are large enough to hold your passport, money, etc., and offer a secure option if you prefer to carry them with you.

You should keep a record of your credit card and Traveler’s check numbers separate from your purse or wallet. It is also a good idea to carry a photocopy of the picture page of your passport and leave your passport (remember that you may need to have your passport with you to cash traveler’s checks), and any valuables locked in the hotel safe, unless you have a security wallet. Losing your passport can be very expensive and inconvenient. Avoid going off on your own, unless you are familiar with the area. Be alert for suspicious people or circumstances.

**Most countries have NO medical program covering U.S. citizens.** Medical services are very expensive in Belgium. If you have health issues, be sure to check with your healthcare provider before leaving home to verify what procedures they want you to follow, should the need arise. Should an injury or accident occur, you will be responsible for any costs involved, medical and/or travel related. For this reason, we **strongly urge** you to take out some form of traveler’s insurance before your departure.

### **Accommodations**

Hotel rooms in Europe are most always smaller than those in the United States, and it is not unusual for one room to differ from the next. Hotel rooms in major cities tend to be smaller than hotel rooms throughout the rest of the country – but what you don’t get in spacious accommodations is more than compensated by the wealth of attractions surrounding you.

The European custom for a twin room is two single beds made up separately and placed side by side. A double room will usually have one double bed. A single room will have one twin-size bed. A triple is generally a twin room with a cot or small bed added. Also, please be aware that single rooms in Europe are almost always smaller than twin rooms.

**Unfortunately, we can only request room types and locations. Room assignments are made at the discretion of the hotel.**

### **Telephones**

To call Belgium from the U.S. dial 011 and the country code (32) followed by the city code and then the phone number. It is very expensive to call the United States from your hotel room. We suggest that you use a phone card from a public phone booth. Coins are often not accepted in public phones, but phone cards can be purchased at many newspaper stands and pharmacies. If you are using your own telephone credit card, you can secure the access codes to call the United States from your long distance telephone service provider. To call the U.S. from abroad, once you get a local line, dial your access code, followed by the area code and number. No need to dial “1”.

### **Transportation & Shopping**

Taxis are available from the hotel. Ask the front desk for help in summoning a taxi. Secure a fixed price from the driver before you depart. Bus and train service is available in many cities.

Most shops open from 9 - 6 Monday through Saturday. Friday night most shops stay open until 9:00 pm. With the exception of tourist areas, most shops are closed on Sundays.

The best buys in Belgium are diamonds, ceramics, lace, chocolate and crystal. A value-added tax (VAT) is usually added to most purchases. If the purchase is over a certain amount, you can get it partially refunded. Ask for a form where you purchase the item or at the airport. before departure. Drop off the form at the airport before departure. Your refund will be mailed to you. For more information call (800) 566-9828.

### **Time**

Belgium is 6 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time and practices Daylight Savings Time from the end of March to late September.

### **Gratuities**

Tipping is a way of life in Europe and generally expected; we hope the following information will be of assistance. **Gratuities to your tour director, driver, local guides, dining room staff, and chambermaids are not included in the tour price.** While the amount of these gratuities will depend upon your degree of satisfaction for services received, many of our clients have asked us for general tipping guidelines. **For a good job, we suggest 4 Euros per person per day for your tour director for a full day tour, 1.00 Euro per person for your tour director for a half day tour, and 2.00 Euros per person per day for your driver.** For restaurants a 15% service charge is already included in the check but it is customary to leave a tip to show appreciation. Guidelines: in a café, 5 Euro cents for a drink, 20 Euro cents for a snack; in a restaurant, 1-2 Euro per person; in a taxi, round up the fare by 1 Euro for a city ride.

### **Custom Regulations**

Luggage may be examined upon entering and leaving countries. U.S. citizens can bring home up to \$400 worth of foreign goods. Each member of the family is entitled to the same exemption and the exemption can be pooled. Included for travelers 21 and older are one liter of alcohol, 100 cigars (non-Cuban) and 200 cigarettes. You cannot bring back fresh fruit, meat, cheeses or plants.

### **Language & Customs**

The official language is Flemish, but French is widely spoken. English is spoken at many hotels and shops and aboard most planes, trains, and tour buses. However, locals are pleased when a foreigner attempts to speak their language. Even if only a few words are exchanged, an instant feeling of friendship is created when two strangers can converse in the same language. For this reason, you might consider bringing a multi-language pocket phrase book.