

TOURISM IN BELGIUM

This brochure offers information about tourism in Belgium. It includes practical advice and legal information. We have tried to collect all the relevant information about travelling to and staying in Belgium. Please note that this is not a literal presentation of the legislation, but is rather intended as a guide.

Arrival in Belgium

Administrative formalities and border controls

- o Every EU citizen has the right to enter Belgian territory without presenting a visa; a valid national identity card or passport is sufficient. The identity card must state your nationality. A driving licence is not sufficient. Please consult the ministry for foreign affairs in your country to find out which documents are required to travel within the Schengen Area.
- o Thanks to the Schengen Agreement there are no longer any border controls between 25 European countries: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Ireland and the United Kingdom, which are part of the Schengen Area, retain border controls. Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania do not form part of the Schengen Area. Nationals of these countries are not required to present a visa to enter the Schengen Area.
- o You must however be able to show your identity card or passport at all times. If you are not able to do so, the police can arrest you to verify your identity. Airlines also require travellers to present their identity card or passport in airports.

- o A visa for a short stay (maximum three months) issued by a country forming part of the Schengen Area is valid in the entire Schengen Zone.
- o Foreign nationals who remain in a Schengen country with a valid residence permit are not required to present a visa if they wish to remain in Belgium for a maximum of three months.

Customs formalities

- o It is not necessary to declare goods bought for personal use in the European Union on arrival in Belgium. This applies only to clearly defined quantities intended for one's own use. You can find a list of permitted quantities via this link (only in French, English and German).
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/common/travellers/wit_hin_eu/index_fr.htm
- o No customs duties or taxes are payable on goods bought outside the European Union and imported into the EU, up to a value of €430 (transported by air or sea) and up to €300 (by other means of transport). However maximum quantities apply to certain goods. As long as your purchases do not exceed the maximum permitted quantities, it is assumed that they are for your own use. If you import greater quantities, you may be asked to prove that the goods are intended for your own use. The permitted quantities can be found by clicking [this link](http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/common/travellers/enter_eu/index_fr.htm).
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/common/travellers/enter_eu/index_fr.htm.
- o Travellers who enter the European Union with €10,000 or more in cash or negotiable instruments, must declare this to customs. The European Commission has published a brochure on this subject.

http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/resources/documents/customs/customs_controls/cash_controls/leaflet_original.pdf.

- o For information about importing goods governed by specific legal agreements (such as ivory, animals or goods protected by the Washington Convention), contact the Belgian Federal Public Service for Public Health, which has a brochure on the subject.
<http://fiscus.fgov.be/interfdanl/nl/citizens/files/namaak.pdf>
- o For more information you can always get in touch with national customs authorities.
- o Medicines: For non-narcotic, psychotropic medicines, the imported quantity must correspond to the duration of the treatment (with a maximum of three months). Always carry a medical certificate in case a check is carried out.
- o For narcotic or psychotropic medicines, the imported quantity must correspond to the quantity required for personal use. You must be able to demonstrate the need for and quantity of the medicine by means of a medical certificate.

Shops in Belgium

Opening hours

- o Shops are usually open from Monday to Friday from 9.00 am to 6.00 pm (8.00 pm for supermarkets).
- o Banks are open from Monday to Friday, from 9.00 am to 4.00 or 4.30 pm. Some bank branches are open longer on certain days; others are also open on Saturday mornings.

- o Post offices are usually open from Monday to Friday, from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm. Some post offices are open longer; others are also open on Saturday mornings.

VAT

- o VAT on goods and services is 21% in Belgium and is always included in the sale price. Visitors from outside the EU can ask the shopkeeper to give them a special form to fill in so that they can claim the VAT back.

Means of payment

- o Cash payments and payment with payment cards (accepted in most shops and restaurants) are the most usual means of payment in Belgium. Smaller shops and kiosks do not always accept payment cards. There is usually a list of the accepted means of payment at the entrance to the shop.

Rights of the buyer

- o Belgian law usually applies to disputes arising from a purchase made from a Belgian trader.
- o Legally, you are not entitled to return goods to the shop unless they are faulty, although some shops do allow this. The seller can determine the conditions in such cases, given that this is a commercial favour and not a legal obligation. The seller is not obliged to refund you for returned goods. He can offer you a voucher.
- o If the item you have purchased is faulty, and you were not aware of the fault when you bought it, under Belgian law you can demand a replacement or repair. If these options turn out to be impossible, the buyer is entitled to a full or partial refund (in the case of small defects).

- The consumer can choose between repair or replacement. The seller can refuse to accept this choice if he considers it to be impossible or excessive.
- If the seller offers a repair or replacement, the consumer does not have the right to demand a reduction in the sale price or cancellation of the sale.
- Problems covered by a guarantee must be solved within a reasonable time without costs for the consumer.
- The consumer enjoys a guarantee of two years. The buyer must notify the seller of any problems within a reasonable time (maximum two months). Faults that occur within six months of purchase are assumed to have been present at the time of supply. After that time, it is up to the buyer to prove that the fault existed when the product was supplied.
- If faulty goods cause damage to the buyer or a third party, the manufacturer is liable to compensate the damage. The consumer has the right of redress for all damage suffered.

Bargains - tips for bargain hunters

- In Belgium the winter sales start on 3 January and end on 31 January. The summer sales run from 1 July to 31 July.
- Goods bought during the sales period are protected by the same guarantees as goods bought outside it (see above). The seller is therefore obliged to repair or replace faulty goods. The notice 'these goods cannot be exchanged or refunded' can only be applied to goods that do not display a fault and to goods where a fault was visible at the time of purchase.
- The difference between the original price and the reduced price must be clearly displayed in the shop, otherwise this constitutes dishonest advertising. If the same price or price

reduction applies to all items in, for example, the same section, a general price indication is sufficient. For example: - 10% on all ladies' coats.

- The following must be clearly stated on the label:
 - the original selling price, crossed out
 - the new reduced price
 - the discount.

Smoking and drinking

- Smoking is banned in all restaurants and establishments selling drinks in Belgium, unless there is an enclosed smoking area. The smoking area must not be larger than one-quarter of the total area of the restaurant or drinking establishment. There is also an exception for places that sell French fries (maximum 16 persons standing or sitting) and for drinking establishments. Such establishments may only offer light meals, or meals where the purchase price does not exceed one-third of the total purchase price of the drink and foodstuffs.
- The sale of alcoholic drinks to minors under the age of 16 is prohibited. The seller may ask the buyer to show his or her identity card.

Taxis

- Taxis can be found at taxi stands, indicated with a sign. Rates vary between one municipality and another, but the price always depends on the distance and the time of hiring. Prices must be clearly displayed and taxi drivers must give customers a receipt.

Postal services and telephony

Telephony

- The international prefix for Belgium is 32. You do not need to dial the prefix for telephone calls within Belgium.
- In most telephone kiosks you can pay with coins or telephone cards. These are available from the post office and newspaper shops, among other places. Because fewer people are using telephone boxes, there are fewer of them.
- Your mobile telephone will detect local operators when you arrive in another country. Remember that using your mobile telephone abroad costs more than at home (roaming charges). Ask your provider about the cheapest Belgian mobile phone operator before you leave.

Postal services

- **Post boxes:** Post boxes in Belgium are red in colour and are located near post offices, stations, supermarkets and shopping centres. For postal services either go to post offices or to 'PostPunten' (small post offices in department stores, council offices etc.)
- **Postage stamps:** You can buy postage stamps in all post offices and PostPunten. There are automatic stamp dispensers in some post offices. Sending a standard letter abroad costs at least €0.80. Click on this link <http://www.post.be/site/nl/applications/priceCalculator/letterInternational.html> to calculate the price of international postage.

Internet

There are internet cafés in most towns. They usually charge by the hour.

Travelling with animals

If you want to bring a pet into Belgium, it must be identifiable (by a tattoo or implanted microchip) and it must have a European animal passport, completed by an approved veterinary surgeon. The passport must state the following:

- date of birth/age of the animal
- location, number and date the microchip was inserted
- vaccination date (mainly vaccination against rabies)
- name of the vaccination
- lot number of the vaccination
- next vaccination date (calculated depending on the maker's vaccination schedule).

Certain types of dangerous dogs are prohibited in certain Belgian municipalities.

Useful telephone numbers

European emergency number	112
Fire service and ambulance	100
Police	101
Child Focus	110
Suicide Prevention	117
Anti-poisons centre	070 245 245
On-duty pharmacy	0900 10 500
Cardstop	070 344 344

What to do if your property is lost or stolen?

- o **Identity papers:** Lodge a report with the nearest police station. You will be given a certificate. Then contact the embassy or consulate of your country.
- o **Keys or other items:** Ask the police for the telephone number of the municipal lost property service for the place where you lost your items. If you have left something behind on a train, bus or boat, contact the transport company as soon as possible.
- o **Your car:** Contact the local police, who will register your complaint. Contact your insurance company as soon as possible as well.
- o **Your credit card:** Cancel your credit card as soon as possible, then notify the police. Notify the loss to your bank or your card issuer as well.

American Express	Tel + 32 (0)2 676 21 21 24h/24: Tel (0)2 676 26 26
Mastercard	Tel + 32 (0)2 205 85 85 24h/24: Tel (070) 344 344
Visa	Tel (0)2 205 85 85 24h/24: Tel (070) 344 344
Diners Club	Tel + 32 (0)2 626 50 24 24h/24: Tel (0)2 626 50 04
Japanese Credit card	Call: Visa International Tel 0800/18756

- o **An animal:** Contact the local animal protection society.

The European Consumer Centres Network

If as a foreigner you have problems with a Belgian seller, you can always contact a European Consumer Centre (ECC). The ECC network will try to find an amicable solution.

It is best to contact the ECC in your own country first. If you are on holiday in Belgium, you can also approach the Belgian ECC, who will help you in Dutch, French or English.

You can find the details of all the ECCs via this link.

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/redress_cons/docs/ecc_network_centers.pdf

Details of the **ECC in Belgium**

European Consumer Centre Hollandstraat 13 1060 Brussel Tel: +32 2 542 33 46 Fax: +32 2 542 32 43 E-mail: info@eccbelgie.be Website: www.eccbelgie.be
