



Sport & Leisure

Belgium is heaving with talented sportsmen and sportswomen, and nowhere more so than in tennis, where the country sits in the top ten of the International Tennis Federation (ITF) rankings. Justine Henin and Kim Clijsters are two of our legendary names in women's tennis. In football, too, the Belgian national side — the Red Devils — are among the world's top ten, with celebrated players including Eden Hazard, Kevin De Bruyne, Romelu Lukaku and Dries Mertens. While we're on sporting legends and glory, we have to mention Eddy Merckx, our greatest cyclist ever, since he is the only cyclist to this day to have worn both the leader's jersey and the King of the Mountains jersey during one and the same Tour de France. And the racetrack at Spa-Francorchamps is a particular favourite among Formula 1 drivers, especially because the track's hilly terrain in the Belgian Ardennes offers them a great deal of variety.

So, Belgium is great at sport. But in the world of fashion, too, Belgium is no slacker! Belgian designers show a unique balance in their work between realism, minimalism and creativity. They are renowned for their quality, craftsmanship and powers of imagination. Building on its rich history in textiles, Belgium

has in recent years conquered the catwalks across Europe and worldwide. The 'Antwerp Six' are designers who base their fashion designs on this port city's time-honoured customs and traditions, and who have thereby turned their home base into the vibrant fashion city it is today.

No less than this, though, Belgium is also a country of leisure destinations and international tourist activities. Along with a host of sights that are on the UNESCO World Heritage List, Belgium boasts a diversity of landscapes, such as its North Sea coastline, the green woodland in the south, and world-beating art cities like Bruges (the Venice of the North), Liège, Antwerp, Namur and Brussels.

In addition, Belgium offers tourists a cycle path network of 14,500 km, some of which will take you to the moving memorials to great battles (Bastogne War Museum, the Menin Gate at Ypres, the 1815 Memorial at Waterloo), a range of festivals such as the well-known Tomorrowland, folk carnivals and much more besides. There's plenty to do before you come to rest for a refreshing drink on the terrace of one of the country's ubiquitous cafés!



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Belgium: Uniquely phenomenal.

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Belgium — that remarkable little country that everyone loves so much. The country that makes its inhabitants so proud. In Belgium, we like to laugh at ourselves; maybe a bit too much, according to some. There's no doubting that we're hard on ourselves, but there are also so many positive things that could be said about this country.

With that in mind, the Belgian Government decided to boost Belgium's image by way of a PR campaign. This is a campaign aimed at both foreign visitors and Belgians; both tourists and investors; history buffs and foodies; creative brains and the more prosaically-minded. The idea of this welcome boost of positivity is to make the country more attractive to one and all. After all, let's be honest: Belgium is full to bursting with things worth seeing.

This campaign has managed to summarise Belgium in two words, and we do literally mean two words. It might seem a tall order, but these two words really do tell you the whole story:

Belgium. Uniquely Phenomenal.

The basic premise is that we are emphasising what makes Belgium so exciting, without forgetting to highlight the modest and particularly special character of the Belgians. Not for nothing do people talk about 'belgitude', Belgian humour, Belgian surrealism, and a 'compromis à la belge'.

Art & Culture

Belgium's landscape and the laid-back pace of life make the whole country resemble one giant film set. And, thanks to the tax incentives offered by our Tax Shelter, Belgium really is an ideal place to produce audiovisuals and cinematography. This country is rich in talent both in front of and behind the camera. The Belgian film industry is recognised across the whole world, with films such as *C'est arrivé près de chez vous* (Man Bites Dog) by Benoit Poelvoorde, *Daens* by Stijn Coninx, *Rosetta* by the Dardenne brothers, and *Rundskop* (Bullhead) by Michaël R. Roskam. There's no shortage of outstanding Belgian actors, either.

Moreover, the Belgians' idiosyncratic, surrealist view of life and their marked predilection for self-effacing mockery make them lovers of a good dose of humour in all its forms.

Something else Belgium is inextricably linked with is comics, an art form that has been dubbed 'the ninth art'. Belgium actually has more comic artists per square kilometre than any other country on the globe. Brussels' Comic Book Route takes visitors from one wall painting to another, allowing them to savour the various styles. Everyone knows Tintin and Snowy, and who hasn't heard of the Smurfs,

Spike and Suzy (Willy and Wanda), or Gaston (Gomer Goof)? You'll find them all at the Belgian Comic Book Museum, one of Brussels' big tourist draws since 1989, with an annual footfall of around 200,000 visitors. This museum, dedicated to the history of comics, is also striking in its Art Nouveau architecture, designed by the incontrovertible Belgian master of the style, Victor Horta. Belgium was at the centre of the Art Nouveau and Art Deco movements. You'll find plenty of contemporary buildings here as well, though, such as Liège-Guillemins railway station, a pearl of modern architecture designed by the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava Valls.

Nowhere else will you find such a huge variety of fine arts, architecture and design in such a compact territory as you will in Belgium. Some of the most renowned works exhibited in Belgium are among the world's greatest masterpieces: the *Agnus Dei* by the Hubert brothers and Jan van Eyck; *Dull Gret* (Mad Meg) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder; Michelangelo's *Madonna of Bruges*; the *Son of Man* by René Magritte; and *Heaven of Delight* by Jan Fabre.



Business & Investment

Belgium has 11 million inhabitants, spread across three regions — Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels Capital Region — which very much each have their own identity, strengths and unique selling points. Together, they constitute a tightly-connected, modern network of transport and communications. As the melting-pot of the Anglo-Saxon, Germanic and Latin cultures, Belgium has many airports (for both passengers and cargo) and an extensive infrastructure of roads, railways and shipping lanes to facilitate international trade. The Port of Antwerp, with a particular strength in the chemical industry, is Europe's second largest port. We shouldn't forget, though, that there is also a coastal port at Zeebrugge and inland waterway ports at Ghent, Brussels and Liège.

Brussels, being a place where international decisions are made, diplomats rendezvous and international journalists and lobbyists have their base, is the capital of Europe: an affordable, multicultural, friendly city with a human face, where expat life is highly pleasant. Brussels is also one of the world's leading conference-hosting cities, thanks largely to its proximity to other major European cities.

Anyone in Belgium is not just at the heart of Europe and its institutions but is also at the centre of a market of more than half a billion consumers! Being a veritable economic hub, this country boasts numerous internationally-renowned research centres, famous universities, industrial estates and science parks.

Belgium is pulling out all the stops to attract investors and to understand their needs and priorities. Those investing here can profit from a wide range of financial subsidies and tax breaks. In addition, Belgium is the ideal testing market for major European companies. The low cost of life here, and the competitive real estate market and affordable house prices, will convince many an investor that Belgium is where it's at.

To top it all, we have the characteristic hospitality of the Belgians, their openness to the world, and their multilingual skills. Belgium has a rich cultural heritage but it also offers healthcare second to none and has one of the very best social security systems in the world.

Gastronomy & Pleasure

Belgians are bon viveurs: they love food and drink. Belgian cuisine is about far more, though, than the traditional *moules-frites* (mussels and fries) or its world-famous chocolates. The Belgian taste palette is wide and varied, from sweet to savoury. You could breakfast on a wonderful slice of *cramique* (raisin loaf) or *craquelin* (loaf with nibbed sugar). Those who love tradition could order a pain à la grecque, which despite its name is not Greek at all but a 100% Brussels speciality!

Later on in the day, a Belgian of course looks forward to an aperitif with a decent glass of beer. Whether you're ordering a lager or a dark beer, an amber beer, a white beer or a fruity beer, this is the beverage that is king in Belgium. You'll certainly taste that for yourself if you take a draught of one of our six Trappist beers, brewed in abbeys where monks either produce the beer themselves or oversee the process. What's more, Belgian beer — 60% of which is exported — is now also on the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage. Belgium was given this 'uniquely phenomenal' certification on 19 May 2017.

A highly prized starter here is Flemish-style asparagus: who can resist this smashing combination of white asparagus drenched in

melted butter, with finely-chopped hard-boiled egg, parsley and lemon? If you're near the coast, definitely order prawn croquettes or *tomaat-garnaal* (tomato and prawns). In the south, a wonderful dish to try is a Liège salad with beans, bacon and potatoes, or Liège meatballs with a sauce of Liège syrup and brown sugar.

As for Brussels, there's more than just the sprouts on offer! The Bruxellois love whelks — marine snails that you devour at food carts on the street — and *stoemp*, mashed potato with vegetables.

Traditional Belgian cooking is hearty: rabbit cooked in gueuze beer, Flemish stews, *waterzooi* soup of chicken or fish, eel with herbs ('in the green'), *blinde vinken* (meat roulades), oven-baked chicory, *américain* (ground steak) with fries ... All of these are dishes to die for, some of them with strange names, perhaps, but well worth discovering and sampling.

You can also treat yourself to dinner in one of Belgium's many Michelin-starred restaurants. Belgian chefs are well represented in quality restaurant guides, and their culinary reputation reaches far beyond Belgium's borders.

To round off a good meal, try one of Belgium's many cheeses. You'll be amazed at the quality and variety. After that, it's time for dessert: definitely try a waffle, of which we have two kinds: Liège and Brussels. Liège waffles contain crunchy nibbed sugar, which is delightful; Brussels waffles are airy and perfectly rectangular. You might be tempted instead, though, by Belgium's renowned pralines, *cuberçons*, *speculoos* biscuits or *babelutte* honeyed toffee, a coastal speciality.

A glass of *jenever* always aids the digestion ...

Bon appétit!

