

WHERE IN THE WORLD?



YFU Information

Quick Facts:

Area: 30,510 sq km

Population:

10,274,795

(July 2002 est.)

Capital: Brussels

Languages: Dutch 58%,
French 32%, and German 10%, (legally bilingual)

Religion: Roman Catholic 75%, Protestant or
other 25%

Currency: Euro

YFU Belgium web site: www.yfu.be



Introduction

Brussels is the capital of Belgium and the capital of Europe, the seat of the European Union, NATO, and headquarters to more than 1000 international organizations. Belgium has changed hands more than any other country in Europe. It has come under the rule, at one time or another, of the Visigoths, Vandals, Austrians, Spaniards, French, Dutch and Germans. Everyone has passed through, from English wool merchants to spice dealers from Venice, and lace and tapestry buyers from France. Charles the great was born here, Napoleon fought his last battle at Waterloo, Spanish Inquisitors, raging Calvinists, Erasmus's Humanists, Habsburg Emperors, Dukes of Burgundy, Henry VIII, banished poets and artists from everywhere came here. All these comings and goings left the Belgians with a warm tolerance for foreigners and an appreciation for culture and refinement, which are prominent ideals in Belgian life. The Belgian public transportation system is among the most complete in the world: a railroad system, buses and streetcars bring every historical spot, artistic event, folk festival, and architectural monument within the reach of every "non car driver." Paleolithic and Neolithic ages and works of art dating back to the Roman conquest of Gaul are carefully preserved in many Belgian museums. The

Romanesque period, the Gothic period, the Renaissance, and the Baroque style are represented all over the country.

Short Facts

Area: 30,510 km² - about the same size as Panama or the U.S. state of Maryland. Belgium is generally flat, with increasingly hilly terrain towards the southeast.

Climate: Belgium has a maritime climate, characterized by moderate temperatures, cloudy skies and regular abundant rainfall. Generally its climate is described as variable.

Population: Over 10 million, the second most densely populated country in Europe.

Language: There are three official languages: Dutch, French and German. French-speaking Belgians (31% of the population) live in the southern half of the country (Wallonia). Another 57% are Dutch-speaking Flemings living in the north (Flanders). A small minority of German-speaking Belgians (1%) also has cultural autonomy. The remaining 11% are of mixed cultural backgrounds.

Religion: Belgium is traditionally a Roman Catholic country (75%) where most people have strong opinions about religion but only a minority are active participants. Catholicism is most faithfully practiced in Flanders.

Government: According to its old constitution (dated 1831) Belgium is a Constitutional Monarchy. In contemporary terms it is called a Parliamentary

democracy: the King reigns, but does not govern.

History: Belgium has been a nation since 1830. It has been a microcosm of European history. The French-Dutch linguistic line today is roughly the boundary between the Roman empire in the south and the territory dominated by the German Franks in the north. In the Middle Ages, the area produced some of the wealthiest trading cities in the world, developing high cultural achievements. Subsequently, Belgium came under Burgundian, Spanish, Austrian and Dutch authority before becoming independent. Belgium was overrun by German armies both in 1914 and 1940.

Economy: Belgium is an industrial nation with an economy based chiefly on processing and services. It depends on exports of industrial products, roughly 40% of Belgium industrial output. Mechanical engineering, the glass industry, and the diamond industry are highly specialized sectors. The national agricultural industry meets 80% of the country's total requirements due to intensive cultivation methods used by small and medium-sized farms, which produce both crops and cattle. Horticulture and market gardening are expanding and provide employment for 2,9% of the working population. Belgium is experiencing 14% unemployment. Nevertheless, work is a basic part of the Belgian way of life.

Education: The structure of the educational system consists of pre-



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school (3-6 years); six years of primary school and six years of secondary school.

Belgium has two systems of education: the state system and the private (mostly Catholic) system. Education is free in both of these systems, and the curriculum is the same.

There are four types of education:

•General Secondary Education (ASO): general education; mostly theoretical that prepares students for higher education.

•Art Secondary Education (KSO): Along with general subjects, students take visual arts, music, dance, drama, etc. A previous knowledge of the subject is required.

•Professional Secondary Education (BSO): in this category students may choose from a selection of courses such as hairdressing, car mechanics, and sewing, among others.

Students completing the 12th year level receive a certificate of higher secondary education. This diploma is sufficient for higher specialized study: interpreting, architecture, technical engineering, pedagogy, etc. Only 16-17% of Belgian students graduate at this level.

Education is considered very important in Belgium. Therefore standards are high and students take school very seriously.

At Christmas and Easter schools are closed for two weeks. Carnaval and All Saints Day (Nov. 1) bring short breaks of a week each. Summer holidays (vacation) last from June 30 to September 1.

Family Life: The Belgian family has remained very close-knit despite great changes in society due to industrialization. Most children have a strong sense of loyalty not only to their parents, but also to grandparents, siblings and cousins. The extended family has remained relatively close. It is not unusual for a family to live in the same neighborhood or even the same house throughout a lifetime. The average Belgian family size is 2.9 people.

Belgium is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Many families live in apartments or town-houses and children frequently share bedrooms. The home of a Belgian family is a very private place. One should realize that although not all families emphasize privacy in the same way, it nevertheless represents a great honor to be invited into a Belgian home as a guest.

Meals: Meals are time for relaxation and the exchange of ideas and daily experiences. In the mornings Belgians usually eat bread with butter, jam or cheese and coffee. Either lunch or dinner is the main meal. Manners at the table are rather formal.

Belgians take pride in their cuisine, some of which they have borrowed and "improved" upon from neighboring cultures.

Recreation: Belgians are intensely proud of their rich cultural heritage, especially in art and architecture. Families often spend holidays and Sundays taking excursions to famous spots. Visiting with relatives is another weekend activity.

At an early age, children are taken along to cultural events in order to spark their interest. As a result of growing up in this environment, teenagers frequently take the initiative to go to the theatre and the cinema.

Football (soccer) and bicycle racing are the most popular sports. Basketball and volleyball are also popular. The cinema (movies) and television are favorite leisure-time attractions. In summer, most Belgians take an annual vacation of up to one month.

YFU in Belgium

YFU in Belgium operates under the umbrella of YFU Benelux, which was founded in 1958 and has its main office in the Netherlands. There are two regional offices operating YFU programs in Belgium: YFU Flanders (Dutch speaking), located in Leuven and YFU Bruxelles-Wallonie (French speaking), located in Liège.

Common Phrases

English	Flemish/French
Good Morning...	Goedemorgen/Bonjour
Good Evening...	Goedenavond/Bonsoir
How are you?...	Hoe gaat het met u?/ comment allez-vous?
My name is _____	Mijn naam is ___/ Je m'appelle ____
What is your name?...Hoe heet u?/ Comment vous appelez-vous?	
Please...	Alstublieft/ S'il vous plaît
Thank you...	Dank u/Merci
Excuse me/Sorry...	Pardon/Pardon
Goodbye...	Tot ziens/ Au revoir
Yes...	Ja/Oui
No...	Nee/Non

Exchanges with: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, Uruguay, the USA and Venezuela.

Exchange activities for Inbound students: Students coming to Flanders will receive a basic Dutch language course during a five-day arrival orientation. Students coming to Wallonia are expected to have prior knowledge of the French language and will not receive a language course provided by YFU. In the course of the year, several meetings are held, organized on a national or regional level by YFU volunteers. In February, there will be a cultural trip to the capital of another European country. Towards the end of the program, the evaluation / Re-entry weekend helps prepare students for their return home.

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