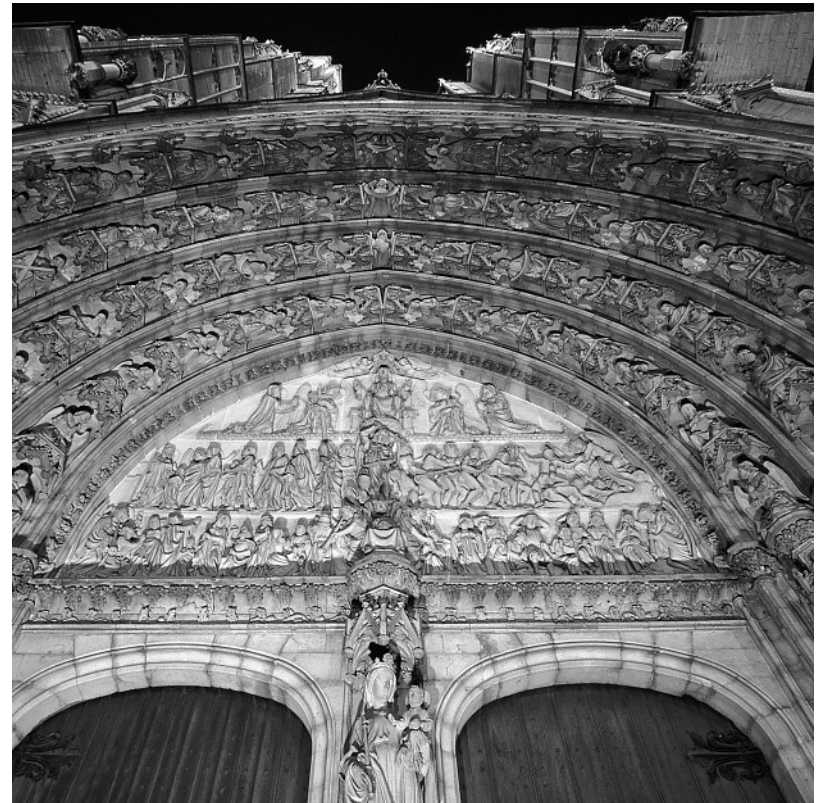


Belgium



Belgium Snapshot

At long last Belgium, it seems, has come of age. This little country recently celebrated its 175th anniversary of independence and, following several years of big, bold moves to shake off a mousy image, life is now on a pretty even keel. Sure, there are ups (tennis greats, p32) and downs (don't mention the Red Devils, p32, or national debt), but most Belgians are more than happy with their spot in the world, and wouldn't change it for quids (see p29).

On the moral freedom front, Belgium is a world leader. Much has been done recently to grant gays and lesbians equal rights to heterosexuals (see p308). Euthanasia was legalised in 2002, though recent proposals to broaden the laws to include adolescents and dementia sufferers are being fought by religious leaders.

Plenty of other subjects are hotly debated over a Duvel or two, not least the 2007 federal election, which may see Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt returned for a third term. If the results of 2006's municipal elections are any indication, however, Verhofstadt's Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (VLD) party, plagued by infighting during the last few years, should be worried. So, too, should the Green parties, whose support has plummeted recently due to the major parties incorporating environmental issues into their own platforms.

Many are also discussing the future of ultraright-wing party, Vlaams Belang (VB). VB leader Filip Dewinter failed in his bid to become Antwerp's burgomaster during the municipal elections; for more, see p32.

The vexed question of separatism – should Flanders go it alone? – forever simmers under the surface (see p31). It reignited recently when a controversial manifesto setting out why Belgium should split in two was made public. Put together and endorsed by movers and shakers in Flanders, the manifesto was quickly quashed by King Albert during his 2006 New Year's speech. But his criticism of Flemish separatism went down badly in parts, and calls for the king to be stripped of most of his powers ensued.

This state of play is relatively new to Belgium's monarchy which, for the most part, enjoys broad public approval. Disenchantment grew in 2006, however, when heir to the throne Prince Philippe led a trade mission to South Africa, after which the Flemish press criticised his so-called ineffective conduct. For more on the monarchy, see p91.

On the street, security is once again a public issue following the stabbing in early 2006 of 17-year-old Joe Van Holsbeeck, who was killed for his MP3 player during peak-hour in Brussels' Central Station. Some 80,000 people marched through Brussels in memory of the young man and to put pressure on the government to curb street violence. The march was the biggest since the White March a decade earlier, when 300,000 people took to the streets to commemorate the victims of paedophile Marc Dutroux (who is serving a life sentence for the rape and murder of several young girls).

Other challenges facing Belgium, like many Western European countries, include an ageing population, affordability of social security, integration of migrant workers, the issue of asylum seekers and sustainable development.

FAST FACTS

Population: 10.5 million

Area: 30,278 sq km

Unemployment: Flanders 10%; Wallonia 18%; Brussels 21%

Inflation: 2.8%

GDP: US\$350 billion

National debt: Belgium has one of the EU's highest debt levels – 94% of GDP in 2005

Minimum gross monthly salary: €1210

Beer consumption: 100L per head annually

Chocolate consumption: 16kg per head annually

Smoking: Banned in Belgian restaurants, but not in *cafés* (pubs/bars)

Sex: 58% of Belgians are satisfied with their sex life, up on the worldwide average of 44%

History

Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands share a tangled history. The current borders of these three nations – known earlier as the Low Countries – were only realised in the 19th century. As such their pasts reflect some of the major historical events in Western Europe, and their fortunes and misfortunes have been largely shaped by Europe's ever-changing balance of power.

EARLY SETTLEMENTS

The Romans were the first of many to invade Belgium. In fact, the country's name even harks back to these times – Julius Caesar mentioned the Belgae during his conquest of Gaul, and when the nation needed a name following independence, the word 'Belgium' was born. Caesar's armies invaded in 57 BC and held Gallia Belgica for 500 years. There's little to show of their presence, except for the town of Tongeren in the province of Limburg. Built on an important trading route, Tongeren still has part of its original Roman rampart as well as an excellent Gallo-Roman Museum (p214).

In the 5th century, with the Roman Empire collapsing, Germanic Franks took regional control. This change in power was the basis of Belgium's current language division – the northern region became German speaking while the southern portion remained Latin based. The Frankish kings, known as the Merovingians, set up their short-lived kingdom in Tournai, a former Roman settlement, and from here they eventually controlled much of northern France. Tournai's early place in history ensured its survival, and today it remains one of Wallonia's most appealing towns (see p218).

THE RISE OF FLANDERS

Parties of raiding Vikings forced the growth of feudal domains in the 9th and 10th centuries. While the kings of France and emperors of Germany had overall control, the real power was held by local counts who ruled over fiefdoms. Such was the case when Count Sigefroi built a castle on a high promontory in Luxembourg and laid the foundation stone of the Grand Duchy's present-day capital.

The counts of Flanders presided over one of the most powerful courts during feudal times. Baldwin the Iron Arm kicked it off by kidnapping and marrying the daughter of a French king and building a fortress in Ghent in AD 867. Over the next three centuries Baldwin's successors expanded the territory and influence of Flanders as far south as the Somme River in northern France.

As feudalism declined, the first towns rose. Flanders had been producing cloth since the 10th century, but its manufacture took off with the growth of cities like Ypres, Bruges and Ghent in the 12th and 13th centuries, which bloomed with the expansion of trade across northern Europe and further afield. Merchant ships from all over Europe docked in Bruges to trade Flemish cloth for cheese, wool, lead and tin; coal from England; pigs from Denmark; wine from Spain; silks and oriental spices from Venice and Genoa; and furs from as far away as Russia and Bulgaria. Cruise the canals in Bruges (p132) or Ghent (p165) to conjure up this bygone time.

This flurry of activity bred a class of rich merchants who wanted increased political power. Meanwhile, craftsmen and traders joined forces to form groups known as guilds, setting standards for their craft and establishing a local trade monopoly. But it wasn't long before the aspirations of the burghers and weavers clashed with those of the local counts. The Flemish weavers relied on a steady supply of high-quality wool from England, and for this purpose they sided with the English during conflicts between England and France. The local counts, though, were vassals of the French king. The counts quelled demands for greater power by calling in the French army. This situation came to a head in 1302 in bloody confrontations known as the Bruges Metten (see p120) and, a few months later, the Battle of the Golden Spurs (see p159).

THE BURGUNDIAN EMPIRE

By the 14th century Ghent, Bruges, Ypres, Brussels, Leuven, Mechelen and Tournai were all prosperous towns. In fact, Ghent had grown to become the largest city in Europe after Paris by 1340. The city's sinister castle, Gravensteen (p163), was raised during this time and is still one of Ghent's chief sights.

The dukes of Burgundy ruled for less than a century, but the cultural changes that took place during this time were profound. The first of the dukes was Philip the Good (r 1419–67), who presided over a vast empire that included the Burgundian region of eastern France and the area covering most of modern-day Belgium and the Netherlands. The court had a palace in Dijon (France) but Philip ruled the kingdom from Brussels, earning the title Conditor Belgii (Belgium's founder).

Philip was the richest man in Europe; his court was the height of culture and fashion. In Brussels the magnificent Grand Place (p69) was constructed, flanked by elaborately decorated guildhalls – headquarters for increasingly wealthy merchant guilds. Belgium's first university was founded in Leuven and the arts, particularly painting and tapestry making, flourished. The court's wealth was legendary and is best seen today in the works of famous artists from that time, known as the Flemish Primitives (see boxed text, p125).

HAPSBURG RULE

Charles V was born in Ghent in 1500 and, at the ripe old age of 15, became Duke of Brabant and ruler of the Low Countries. The next year he became king of Spain and later of Naples, Sardinia, Sicily and the Spanish territories in the New World (ie Mexico, Peru and the Caribbean). He was crowned king of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor in 1519, thus becoming Europe's most powerful ruler.

Charles grew up in Mechelen and, after being crowned, initially ruled from Brussels, where he was advised by the great humanist Desiderius Erasmus. He spent much of his life travelling in far-flung parts of the empire and, later, ruling from Spain. His sister, Mary of Hungary, was responsible for the region for most of his reign, during which the Low Countries once again boomed.

But it wasn't all prosperous. The great Flemish cloth towns were in decline due to competition from cloth manufacturers in England and the silting of the Zwin, which connected Bruges to the North Sea. In addition Charles favoured up-and-coming Antwerp over the old cloth towns. His choice was fuelled by frustration with the rebellious burghers of Flanders; in 1540 the townsfolk of Ghent planned an uprising against taxes imposed on them to

The science of anatomy was founded in the 16th century by Brussels-born Andreas Vesalius, who wrote the first textbook on human anatomy.

For a resource index of articles, books and subjects on Belgian history, see <http://vlib.iue.it/hist-belgium>.

TIMELINE 57 BC

The Romans arrive, kicking off Belgium and Luxembourg's tumultuous history of invasions

AD 1340

Ghent grows to become the largest city in Europe after Paris

15th century

Primitive passions flourish in the works of artists such as Jan Van Eyck and Hans Memling

17th century

Pieter Paul Rubens comes to the fore as northern Europe's greatest baroque artist

finance wars instigated by their absent leader, and Charles V personally suppressed these uprisings. In 1555, tired of continual revolts and a lifetime of war, Charles returned to Brussels and abdicated in favour of his son Philip II. By this time Antwerp had become the empire's greatest port.

RELIGIOUS REVOLT

During Charles' reign Protestantism swept much of Europe. This religious and political rethink of the world according to the Roman Catholic elite became known as the Reformation. It came about partly due to the advent of printing, which meant Bibles were no longer the treasure of the Church and the ruling classes alone. Theologians and humanists such as Martin Luther, the German leader of the Reformation, John Calvin, his French counterpart, and Erasmus offered interpretations on Scripture that were different to traditional religious thinking.

The Reformation met with severe repercussions in the Low Countries. In 1550 Charles ordered the Edict of Blood, which decreed the death penalty to those convicted of heresy. When his son Philip II came to the throne, the latter took a more zealous approach to the defence of Catholicism. Philip was born in Spain and ruled from there; he had little interest in the Low Countries and was largely unpopular. Determined to defend the Catholic faith, he quashed any resistance by implementing a string of anti-Protestant edicts and garrisoning towns in the Low Countries with Spanish mercenaries. In 1566 the Protestants revolted, running riot and ransacking churches in a wave of violence that has become known as the Iconoclastic Fury. Philip retaliated with a force of 10,000 troops led by the duke of Alva, who set up the Council of Blood, which handed out 8000 death sentences to those involved in the rioting.

In the turbulent years that followed – a period known as the Revolt of the Netherlands – the present-day borders of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands were roughly drawn. The Netherlands expelled the Spaniards, while Belgium and Luxembourg, known then as the Spanish Netherlands, stayed under southern rule.

THE SPANISH NETHERLANDS

Brussels was proclaimed capital of the Spanish Netherlands in 1585 and Protestants were forced to leave; thousands of tradespeople and anti-Spanish freethinkers moved north to the Netherlands.

In 1598 Philip II handed the Spanish Netherlands to his daughter Infanta Isabella and her husband, Archduke Albert of Austria. Their 40-year reign is most noted for its flamboyant court, which gave rise to new industries like lace making and diamond processing. In turn, this brief economic boom boosted cultural life in Brussels and Antwerp and brought to the fore great painters, such as Pieter Paul Rubens (see boxed text, p181). Rubens' studio in Antwerp can still be visited, and the city treasures many of his finest paintings.

Antwerp's time of glory was cut short by the Treaty of Westphalia, signed in 1648, which closed part of the Scheldt River to all non-Dutch ships. This act guaranteed the golden age of Amsterdam, the region's premier port, and caused Antwerp's collapse.

With many of its most skilled workers gone, much of the Spanish Netherlands sunk into poverty and life became an exercise in religious piety. During this Catholic Counter-Reformation, the newly formed Jesuit order

prospered and multiplied. Elaborate baroque churches, such as St Carolus-Borromeuskerk (p180) in Antwerp, were built. Filled with magnificent statues, huge wooden pulpits and glorified paintings of Christ's suffering executed by artists such as Rubens, the churches were symbols of the Catholic Church's power and the magical redemption that awaited the faithful.

On an everyday level, life in the Spanish Netherlands worsened in the second half of the 17th century. French plans to dominate Europe meant war after war was fought in this buffer land. France's Louis XIV sent in his military engineer Vauban to fortify strongholds – the result can be seen today in mighty citadels such as that in Namur (p231). The fighting came to a head with the War of Spanish Succession (1701–13), which saw the Spanish Netherlands handed over to the Austrians.

AUSTRIAN & FRENCH OCCUPATION

The mighty Austrian Hapsburgs ruled from 1713 to 1794 and, overall, the century was a peaceful change to what had come before. Brussels was the base for central control but the Austrians allowed the country a large degree of independence, just as the Spanish had. The Enlightenment, a philosophical movement based on reason rather than the blind following of tradition, influenced the Austrians and they relaxed censorship and encouraged development.

After yet another battle in 1794, the French reclaimed the region and the following year absorbed it into France. French laws were ushered in, the Catholic Church was repressed (many churches were ransacked and monasteries closed) and conscription was introduced. The latter was widely unpopular and a passionate peasants' revolt in 1798 was cruelly put down.

In 1815 Napoleon Bonaparte, leader of the new French state, was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo near Brussels (see boxed text, p225). This resulted in the Congress of Vienna and the creation of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, which incorporated the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.

THE UNITED KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS

The United Kingdom of the Netherlands was created largely to preserve the balance of power in Europe and to create a buffer state should France have any northward ambitions. The fact that people of different religions and customs were being forced together was of little consequence. William of Orange-Nassau, crowned King William I in Brussels, was given the throne and he divided his time equally between Brussels and the new kingdom's twin capital, The Hague. But William made enemies quickly after refusing to give southern Belgium fair political representation and trying to impose Dutch as the national language. The latter angered not only the French-speaking Walloons in the south of Belgium but also Flemish speakers in the north who regarded their language as distinct from Dutch.

The inevitable Belgian revolution began during an opera performance in Brussels on 25 August 1830 (see boxed text, p110).

BELGIAN INDEPENDENCE

At the Conference of London in January 1831, the European powers recognised Belgian independence. The country was officially declared a neutral state and several years later was ceded the western portion of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

For a rundown on Belgian royalty and a great book-list, check out www.royalty.nu.

The Dutch Revolt by Geofrey Parker documents this interesting period in Belgian history well. With Spanish rule in the 16th century nearing its end, this book looks at the fight between the southern rulers and the rebellious countries in the north.

1815

Napoleon Bonaparte is defeated at the Battle of Waterloo near Brussels; Luxembourg is designated a Grand Duchy

1830

An opera in Brussels sparks revolution and Belgium is born

1885

King Léopold II personally acquires the Congo, to the gruesome fate of 10 million Africans

1914

Belgium and Luxembourg are invaded by Germany; Ypres is wiped off the map

On 21 July 1831 Léopold of Saxe-Coburg Gotha, a dashing but melancholy 40-year-old widower and uncle of future British monarch Queen Victoria, became King Léopold I of Belgium. The country now celebrates his crowning as its annual 21 July National Day holiday. King Léopold oversaw the industrial revolution in Belgium where coal mines and iron-making factories took off in parts of Hainaut and Limburg provinces. The ensuing years saw the start of Flemish nationalism, with tension growing between Flemish and French speakers that would eventually lead to a language partition that divides the country to this day – see boxed text, (p31).

Léopold II (r 1865–1909) came to the throne on his father's death. He was committed to transforming the tiny country into a strong nation, both through colonial conquests and national development. He put great effort into bolstering Brussels, commissioning the construction of monumental buildings such as the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts (p83), home today to Belgium's finest art collection, and the daunting Palais de Justice (p85).

However, Léopold II had wider aspirations. In 1885, mainly through a series of dubious treaties and contracts, Léopold personally acquired a huge slice of central Africa – an area 70 times larger than Belgium. Over the next 25 years millions of Congolese died due to Léopold's rule, and in 1908 the king was stripped of his possession. Today his reputation is in tatters. For more on this dark chapter in Belgium's past, see Bizarre Brussels (p94). In 1909 Léopold II died and his death marked the end of the country's aspirations to grandeur. The Belgian state held on to the Congo until 1960.

WWI & WWII

Léopold II was succeeded by his 21-year-old nephew Albert I (r 1909–34), nicknamed the 'Soldier King' due to his popular actions during WWI. When war broke out in 1914, Germany violated Belgian neutrality and occupied the country. Albert moved his administration to the seaside town of De Panne, part of a small triangle of land that remained unoccupied throughout the war. From here he led the Belgian army's efforts to man the northern end of the frontline, which separated the Allies and the strategic French coastal towns around Calais from the advancing German army. The former cloth town of Ypres (Ieper in Flemish) was reduced to rubble during the war, but was courageously rebuilt. The Ypres Salient (p153) holds many wartime reminders.

After the war the Treaty of Versailles abolished Belgium's neutral status and the country was given reparations from Germany, which included a chunk of land known today as the Eastern Cantons (see boxed text, p262), and the colonies of Burundi and Rwanda in central Africa. In 1934 Albert I died in a rock-climbing accident and was succeeded by his son, Léopold III (r 1934–51).

On 10 May 1940 the Germans launched a surprise air attack on the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg and within eight days Belgium was occupied. Unlike his father, Léopold III put up little resistance and quickly surrendered to the Germans, leaving the Allies in a precarious state. The Belgian government opposed the king's decision and fled to London where it operated in exile throughout WWII. A strong resistance movement developed during Nazi occupation, but there was also collaboration from fascist elements of Belgian society and from within the Flemish movement. Belgium's Jewish population fared terribly during the war and the country's small Roma (gypsy) minority was all but wiped out (see boxed text, p203). Belgium and Luxembourg were

MAKING HISTORY

Belgium is a constitutional hereditary monarchy, led by a king or queen (succession was only opened to women in 1991) and a parliament. The parliament consists of the Senate and a Chamber of Representatives, which have responsibility for policies that affect the country as a whole, such as finance, defence and foreign affairs. In one famous example of how a monarch's personal convictions don't always complement parliamentary progress, King Baudouin abdicated for two days in 1990 to avoid giving his approval to a bill legalising abortion – during the 48 hours that he relinquished the throne, the Belgian parliament passed the bill. While this was seen by some Belgians as the admirable stance of a principled man, others saw it as a refusal by Baudouin to put the public's desire for change above his own conservative views.

liberated in September 1944, though many were still to lose their lives during the Battle of the Ardennes (see boxed text, p245).

POSTWAR BELGIUM

After WWII the country was caught up in a constitutional crisis over Léopold III's wartime actions. While some accused him of collaborating with the Germans, others said the early surrender saved the country. In 1951, under pressure from Walloon socialists, he abdicated in favour of his son Baudouin I (r 1951–93).

Although only 21 when he took the throne, Baudouin succeeded in bringing the nation together. His fair treatment of the Flemish and Walloons earned him respect from both sides, and many admired his famous stance on abortion (see boxed text, above). Proof came when he died suddenly in 1993 and the entire nation mourned. Childless, Baudouin was succeeded by his younger brother, the present King Albert II. Although initially reluctant to accept the throne, Albert's jovial disposition has made him a national success.

Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, Belgium emerged as a key player in international politics after WWII. In 1958 Brussels became the provisional seat of the European Commission and the Council of Ministers, the executive and decision-making bodies of today's EU (see boxed text, p87). In 1967 the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) moved to Brussels from France a year after the French withdrew from NATO's military wing. A new NATO headquarters, being built on the northeastern outskirts of the capital, is expected to be finished in 2009.

While Brussels has been reborn as an important player in European affairs, the rest of the country's fortunes have been divided. The economy as a whole struggles with a huge public debt and high unemployment. Wallonia's economy rode on the back of the steel and iron-ore industries until their slump in the 1970s left this region floundering. Flanders, on the other hand, has surged ahead.

INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

Belgium kept a low profile on the international arena until the end of the 20th century, when it became best known for poisoned chickens and paedophiles (see p21). Sick of mismanagement and neglect, the nation turned to radical political reform and, in 1999, booted out the Christian Democrat party after 40 years in power.

The King Incorporated by British journalist Neal Ascherson deals with Belgium's heart of darkness: the appalling cruelty and savage exploitation of the Congo under the reign of Léopold II. It was written in 1963 but re-released in 1999.

For a hyperlinked indepth profile of Belgium, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgium>.

1919

Jules Bordet, developer of the whooping cough vaccine, wins the Nobel Prize for Medicine for research into blood serum

1940

Germany again invades both countries and they remain occupied throughout WWII

1962

The linguistic divide is drawn across Belgium, separating northern Flemish speakers and southern French-speaking Walloons

1967

NATO moves to Brussels from France

For an overview of Belgium's political scene, including profiles of its prime ministers, check out www.premier.fgov.be (in Flemish and French).

In came Liberal Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt, who quickly sought to raise public morale by reinventing Belgium with robust foreign policies and new moral freedoms (see opposite). The country vocally sided with France and Germany against the US-led war in Iraq in 2003. Around the same time came a flood of lawsuits for war crimes against world leaders, including Israel's Ariel Sharon and former US president George Bush. They were made under Belgium's controversial universal competence law, which allows the judging of crimes against humanity no matter where they took place. Faced with potentially embarrassing diplomatic situations, the law was changed so that those charged had to live in Belgium. In 2005 a Brussels court sentenced two Rwandan half-brothers to prison under this law for their part in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

Verhofstadt still leads the coalition government, which in 1999 saw a rather unusual grouping of Liberals, Socialists and Greens join forces to block the progress of the ultraright-wing Vlaams Blok (VB) and to stem rising racism (see p32). The Liberals and Socialists renewed their coalition in the national elections of 2003, though forecasts for the 2007 poll suggest the Liberals will have a tough time securing a third term.

1993

Death of King Baudouin and succession to the throne of his younger brother, the present King Albert II

2005

Belgium celebrates 175 years of independence

The Culture

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

Outsiders looking in often consider Belgians somewhat bizarre. A pissing boy and a bowler hat are national symbols. Maybe too much surrealist art as kids is responsible – certainly their sense of humour can be odd. Liberalism and moral freedoms are big, as is a widespread fascination with the monarchy, and a love of both the traditional and the quirky. The latter two are best exemplified by folklore. Folkloric traditions are very strong here – see for yourself at one of the amazing array of weird and wonderful festivals that take place throughout the year.

In general Belgians are unrelentingly friendly, extremely polite and helpful, and pride themselves on their open intolerance of rudeness and other forms of nastiness. ‘National’ character, however, is elusive: Belgians think of themselves as Flemish or Walloon first, and Belgian second. The Flemish are considered arrogant by their southern counterparts; the Walloons are called feckless. And when talk of separation surfaces, it’s always propelled from the Flemish side. It’s true that Flanders is roaring along as the country’s economic and artistic bastion, and many resent that this part of the country is financially propping up its poorer counterpart. Flemish nationalism is rising too, taking the already high level of casual racism up with it. Snob-value is minimal, except in arrogant Antwerp. Fab food, sublime chocolates and the best beers are accepted as part of daily life. Even so, Belgians complain a lot. About what? The weather, understandably so. Taxes, justifiable in one of Europe’s most highly taxed nations. And dog mess on the streets. This, according to a 2005 poll, irritates Belgians more than anything else. So do all these woes add up to a desire for greener pastures? No way. Eight out of 10 Belgians are proud of their country and most have no wish to live anywhere else.

LIFESTYLE

If there’s one thing that unites Belgian households, it’s an obsession with neat and tidy. Life on the street may not be so manicured or presentable, but inside any home you can be sure there’s a cupboard brimming with cleaning products and windows that sheen. Cleanliness comes second only to family life. Ties remain incredibly strong – it must be that brick in the stomach they’re supposedly born with (according to this local saying, the Belgian desire to own their own home and stay close to kith and kin is so strong that they enter the world carrying their future home’s first brick). After that, disparity rules. From royalty and aristocrats, to large sections of migrant communities living below poverty lines (see p33), household scenarios range widely. According to a UN index, Belgium is one of the world’s most affluent countries, and is among the top 10 in living standards. You’ll be hard pressed to believe that, however, when travelling through some regions and neighbourhoods.

Despite its strong Catholic past, civil liberties are now being championed. Belgium is a world leader in rights for gays (see p308), and in 2002 it became the second country (following the Netherlands) to legalise euthanasia. Recent proposals to extend this ruling are being contested (see p21).

Another social reform has also caused dissent. The government’s proposal to limit access to early retirement and bring the earliest possible retirement age up from 57 to 60 by 2009 saw 100,000 workers take to the streets in protest in late 2005. Despite the demonstration, the government passed the reforms a month later, saying the measures were introduced to counteract the economic spectre of Belgium’s ageing population.

Belgium is the second European country after the Netherlands to legally recognise same-sex unions. The first gay wedding took place in June 2003.

POPULATION

Belgium's population is basically split in two: the Flemish and the Walloons (see boxed text, opposite). Language is the dividing factor, made official in 1962 when an invisible line – or linguistic divide as it's called – was drawn across the country, cutting it almost equally in half.

To the north of the divide lies Flanders (Vlaanderen), whose Flemish speakers make up 60% of Belgium's population of 10.5 million. This is one of the most densely populated corners of Europe, with 400 people per square kilometre (compared with 240 in Britain and just 100 in France). It's heavily urbanised, with major cities sitting almost side by side in some areas.

South of the divide sits Wallonia (La Wallonie), where French-speaking Walloons make up most – but not all – of the remainder of the population. The remainder is a tiny German-speaking enclave in the far east in an area known as the Eastern Cantons (Ostkantons). Officially part of Wallonia, the Eastern Cantons flank the border with Germany around the towns of Eupen and St Vith and are home to 70,000 people (for more details, see p262). Wallonia is more rural than Flanders, though it too has large cities and plenty of heavy industry.

And then there's Brussels. Officially bilingual but predominantly French-speaking, it lies within Flanders but is governed separately. Brussels' population includes about 100 different nationalities among the foreign-born residents, and while many Belgian cities have large immigrant communities none are as multicultural as the capital. The mix includes many European nationalities as well as Moroccans, Turks and Africans. The African population is largely made up of immigrants from the former Belgian colony of Congo.

SPORT

Cycling

Cycling is the only sport in which the Belgians have sprouted a truly international hero, until the rise of tennis greats Kim and Justine that is (see boxed text, p32). Grocer's son Eddy Merckx is revered as one of the greatest natural cyclists ever, winning almost every classic cycling event, not to mention the Tour de France five times, during his domination of the sport from 1968 to 1975. Only in 2004 was Merckx's Tour de France record finally broken when Texan Lance Armstrong took out his sixth title. But even that hasn't detracted from Merckx's status as one of the best.

Unlike Armstrong, Merckx won almost everything that was going, including the Giro and hour-records, in an era before aerodynamic bikes and helmets. He was known as the Cannibal (Kannibaal in Flemish), a nickname inadvertently started by the daughter of French cyclist Christian Raymond. One day in 1969, bemoaning the impossibility of ever beating Merckx, Raymond said: 'He's eating us all for breakfast.' 'Like a cannibal, Daddy?' his daughter replied. And so the name stuck. Merckx turned 60 in 2005, and these days busies himself making top-notch bicycles for the international arena.

Until recently, Belgium's days of cycling glory were long past but in 2005 Flemish cyclist Tom Boonen went some way to reviving the country's fortunes, winning not only the World Championship in Madrid but also, in the same season, Paris–Roubaix and the Tour of Flanders (or Ronde van Vlaanderen in Flemish). Other contemporary cyclists to watch out for include Leif Hoste and Rik Verbrugghe.

The domestic cycling season starts in full with the Ronde van Vlaanderen in early April, immediately followed by the equally demanding La Flèche Wallonne and Liège–Bastogne–Liège. The Grand Prix Eddy Merckx, held in Brussels in May, is the top event.

Bike helmets are not a legal requirement for cyclists and are generally ignored by adults.

THE LINGUISTIC DIVIDE

A television station organises a prank broadcast announcing independence for Flanders, newspaper polls question the likelihood of a split, the king calls for regional harmony... Four decades after the linguistic divide was made – cutting Belgium almost equally in half between the Flemish and Walloon populations – this little country is still a divided land.

As a visitor, much of the tension created by this division will go unnoticed. The only peculiarity you're likely to encounter is on the road, when the sign you were following to 'Doornik', for example, suddenly disappears to be replaced by its French name, 'Tournai' (for details, see p320). In Flanders, people will readily communicate in whatever language is needed, be it English, French or Flemish. In Wallonia the story is slightly different, as the Walloons are less ready with Flemish or English.

The roots of Belgium's divisive language issue can be traced back to Roman times; however, it was the formation of the Belgian state in 1831 that crystallised it. The nation's first constitution was drawn up in French – the official language of the country at that time – by the ruling elite. A campaign for the Flemish language started, but it wasn't until 1898 that Flemish was recognised as a second language. Even then, it was another 30 years before it was used in schools and only in 1967 was the constitution finally published in Flemish.

In the 1950s and '60s, Flemish assertiveness grew as Flanders became the country's modern-day economic powerhouse. Soon after, Wallonia's steel and mining industries declined, leaving French-speaking Belgians in an impoverished region. Historical and economic tensions grew until, in 1962, it was decided to cut the country in half with an invisible line known as the linguistic divide. This division created the regions of Flanders, Wallonia and bilingual Brussels. Each region has its own government and autonomy, thanks to decentralisation of the national government during the 1980s and early '90s.

The establishment of regional governments was designed to appease the language communities and to a certain degree it has, but it has not thwarted the intercommunity squabbles or the 'them and us' mentality, particularly in some areas immediately around Brussels. The massive increase in bureaucracy generated by the additional tier of government is a burden for taxpayers, and many in Flanders resent the fact that their financially successful region is counterbalancing the country's less affluent south.

So what is the nation's future? Some parts of Flemish society call for independence but it is questionable whether the majority of Belgians would back such a move were it to be put to a vote. Those who think Belgium will stick together attribute this to the country's huge public debt, the question of what to do with Brussels, and the monarchy. The royal family, with its foreign origin, is linked to neither language community and is therefore a unifying force. In his 2006 New Year speech, King Albert II acknowledged the cultural and economic tensions between Belgium's regions but said separatism was an expensive and dangerous path.

The latest episode in the drama was played out in December 2006 when Francophone public broadcaster RTBF interrupted its normal programming with news that Flanders had declared independence. The fake news bulletin included footage of a reporter standing outside the Royal Palace in Brussels, claiming that King Albert had left the country. Only after half an hour did the programme makers admit that it was all a hoax. Although many in Belgium were displeased by this event, RTBF defended its actions, stating it intended to show the importance of the ongoing political debate on the future of Belgium.

Stay tuned!



BELGIAN TENNIS DIVAS

If it wasn't for Justine Henin-Hardenne and Kim Clijsters, there'd be little to write of in the way of contemporary Belgian sporting icons. But in 2003 Belgium's tennis aces became the world's top two women's tennis players. Since then, the pair has continued to be highly competitive, despite a series of injuries and the rise of a host of Russian players.

It's odd that Belgium, a tiny country with just over 10 million people, could rear two outstanding female tennis players from different sides of the linguistic divide at the same time. Henin-Hardenne (b 1982) from Wallonia and Clijsters (b 1983) from Flanders climbed the ranks through separate tennis federations – one French-speaking, the other Flemish. They had different coaches and contrasting styles. But their rise was strangely parallel, both winning their first World Tennis Association (WTA) title in 1999 and entering the top ten in the same month.

Despite the similarities, there are plenty of contrasts. Henin-Hardenne's slight frame hides a cautious and at times withdrawn personality. She performs best on clay, and what she lacks in height and natural power, she makes up for with speed and accuracy. Clijsters, on the other hand, has a hefty physique and jovial nature, prefers hard-court tournaments and is quite at home in the public eye.

At the start of their rise, there were hopes that Belgium's tennis queens would somehow help unite this divided land. This hasn't happened of course. Instead the two have frequently stood in each other's way when it comes to winning a title (which may be a thing of the past if Clijsters retires in 2007, as announced). Despite that, however, they are two of the country's best-known names and in 2004 were awarded the Grand Cross Order of the Crown from King Albert, becoming the youngest recipients of the nation's top civil honour.

Football

Belgian football is going through one of its most humiliating periods in decades. The national team, the Red Devils, failed to even qualify for the 2006 World Cup in Germany – it was the first time since 1978 that Belgium didn't take part in football's biggest event, and fans countrywide mourned. This sad state of affairs came two years after Belgium failed to qualify for the 2004 European Championships in Portugal, and many felt it marked a nadir in the national side's fortunes. The fallout of all this has been the sacking of Red Devils former coach, Aimé Anthuenis, and the appointment of new coach René Vandereycken, whom many hope can restore fortunes.

Belgium is probably best remembered in football terms for the tragedy at Heysel stadium during the European Cup final in Brussels in 1985. Thirty-nine people were killed (including 35 Juventus supporters) when Liverpool and Juventus fans clashed. English clubs were banned from European competitions for six years following that disaster and Heysel – the country's premier stadium – was in ruins. Ten years later it reopened under the new name Roi Baudouin (p111). These days it's the place to see the Red Devils' home games as well as a memorial, belatedly erected, to those who died at the Heysel disaster.

It's easy enough to get a ticket at the stadiums for any local football event – the country's best-known team on the domestic-league ladder is RSC Anderlecht (see p111).

MULTICULTURALISM

Belgium's main immigrant communities are Moroccan, Turkish and Congolese, although Brussels' multicultural population also includes many other European nationalities. The communes of Schaerbeek and St Josse in the capital are almost completely Turkish and North African in character. The relationship between these communities and the Bruxellois ranges from fearful distrust to cheerful cohabitation.

Economically, the picture for Belgium's migrant communities is quite grim. A 2006 study by universities in Antwerp and Liège found one in three people of Turkish or Moroccan descent were living in poverty in Belgium. And compared with European poverty standards, the findings were worse, with 60% of people of Turkish descent and 55% of Moroccan living below the €777 monthly threshold. This compares with 10% for native Belgians.

Many immigrants arrived in the 1960s to work in the mines. But four decades later, these communities have failed to integrate, and a high level of casual racism among Belgians towards immigrant families remains. Even second-generation immigrants with Belgian citizenship often don't feel at home in society here.

Up until early this decade, Belgians had not witnessed racist-related murders on their streets. But the killing of a Moroccan couple in Schaerbeek in 2002, followed six months later by the gunning down of a Moroccan school teacher in Antwerp, changed all that, sparking national debate about race, religion and culture. The issue resurfaced in 2006 following an apparently racist shooting in the heart of Antwerp in which a Malian nanny and a two-year-old white girl in her care were killed, and a woman of Turkish descent was seriously injured. A week later, Amnesty International released its annual report severely criticising Belgium on a number of points, particularly racism and discrimination. The report came just days before Antwerp's so-called White March, in which 18,000 people, clad in white, walked against racism. Peaceful demonstrations like this – usually to highlight justice or freedom issues – have found a place in Belgium ever since the first was held in the mid-1990s following the Dutroux paedophile scandal (see p21).

Most of the racial tension in recent times has surrounded Antwerp, which has 50,000 foreign residents (including 13,000 Moroccans), but this number doubles when second-generation immigrants are added. The suburb of Borgerhout in Antwerp is essentially Moroccan, with unemployment hovering at 35%.

Antwerp is the power base of Vlaams Belang, an ultraright-wing party with a blatantly anti-immigrant platform. Formerly Vlaams Blok, it changed its name and relaunched itself in 2004 after a court banned the party on the grounds of permanent incitement to segregation and racism. The party gained 30% of votes in local elections in 2000 but has since failed to make much further headway in Antwerp itself, though its support base in country areas is rising. At the 2006 municipal elections, Antwerp's Socialists overtook Vlaams Belang, powering ahead with a 16% swing to take 35% of the vote ahead of Vlaams Belang's 33%. Mayor Patrick Janssens was thrilled that he'd stopped Vlaams Belang leader Filip Dewinter from securing a majority in the city council.

Just before the elections, influential contemporary artist, Antwerp-born Luc Tuymans, joined forces with one of the country's best-known bands, Antwerp-based dEUS, to organise a festival to show that Antwerp is not synonymous with support for Vlaams Belang.

MEDIA

No big-name media barons or government domination here. Belgium's print media divides pretty evenly in content between the serious and the superficial and, on the political spectrum, between left and right. None make the sensationalist grade of tabloid journalism as seen in England. Due to the country's linguistic make-up, Belgium has several daily newspapers – *De Standaard* (Flemish), *Le Soir* (French) and *Grenzecho* (German) are the pick of the crop.

Until very recently, Belgium was far ahead of everyone in the TV stakes, thanks to the introduction of cheap access to analogue cable in the 1960s. About 95% of homes are hooked to this system, and can access 40-plus TV channels. This satisfaction with the status quo explains why Belgians are

The world's first newspaper, *Nieuwe Tydinghen*, was invented in Antwerp by Abraham Verhoeven in 1606.

not embracing the digital TV revolution. In 2005 only 3% of households subscribed digitally, compared to the European average of 25%, and nearly 50% in the US.

For more on Belgium's media, see boxed text, p298.

RELIGION

Christianity was established early in Belgium and today Catholicism reigns supreme. Roughly 75% of Belgium's population is Roman Catholic. Despite church attendance plummeting since the 1970s and '80s (only 3% of the Flemish population go to church weekly), traditions remain strong and religion influences many aspects of daily life, including politics and education.

Protestant, Jewish and Muslim communities also exist in Belgium. Antwerp is home to the country's largest Jewish community, based around the city's diamond district, a tight grid of streets immediately south of the main train station. Orthodox Jews from Eastern Europe arrived here in the late 19th century and immediately took control of the burgeoning diamond industry. It's still common in this quarter to see Orthodox Jewish men clad in black coats and fluffy hats and the whole district closes down on Saturday for Sabbath, the Jewish holy day.

Brussels and Antwerp also have sizable Muslim populations. Belgian Muslims number about 450,000, and come from various countries including Morocco, Turkey, Algeria and Pakistan. Some 380 mosques dot the country. For more information, see p32).

Belgium has many Christian-based festivals that date back centuries. It's well worth timing a visit to coincide with one of these events. Such festivals are a fabulous way of getting under the Belgian skin – you really see what makes these people tick and what they get excited about, and you'll probably come away with some odd sort of admiration for a country which has refused to lay down its love of folklore and religious tradition. These festivals tend to be extraordinarily lavish affairs in which the Belgians get right into some pretty odd behaviour (for examples see boxed text, p223).

Belgium also has an important place of pilgrimage, Scherpenheuvel (p210), near the Flemish town of Diest.

ARTS

Fab artworks, architectural grandeur, dynamic dance, crazy comics... Belgium's art world is remarkably huge for such a small country. Enter Brussels' Grand Place or the stunning Galleries St Hubert and swoon under architectural beauties that have transcended time. One of the world's earliest-known oil paintings – a piece so rich it still feeds the senses – is holed up in Ghent. Comic characters enliven daily life, and dance demons take centre stage.

With a roll call like that, it's surprising that the Belgian state doesn't have a good reputation when it comes to preserving its artistic heritage. Sure, the big guns – works by Rubens, Breugel and Van Eyck – hold pride of place in top museums around the country. But as for cherishing later art forms and artists – such as Art Nouveau buildings and the homes and studios of artists such as Magritte and Ensor – the nation has definitely fallen short. Victor Horta's Maison du Peuple was demolished in 1965, Ensor's birthplace in Ostend has been torn down and Magritte's last home, inherited by the Belgian state in 1986, was immediately put up for public sale, contents included.

Visual Arts

Belgium's art heritage began in Bruges in the late Middle Ages with painters known as the Flemish Primitives. For more on these important artists, see p125.

Towards the end of the 15th century, Flemish art proceeded along two lines: some painters were influenced by Italian art while others developed an independent Flemish style. The port city of Antwerp was the region's art hub.

One Dutch painter worth mentioning at this time is Hieronymus Bosch (c 1450–1516). He worked mainly in the Netherlands but his style influenced Flemish artists and his works are prominent in museums in Flanders. In any case, the distinction between Dutch and Flemish painting actually dates from the late 16th century – prior to that Belgium and the Netherlands were simply known as the Low Countries and artists moved from one royal court or town to another. Bosch' paintings are nightmarish – scenes filled with gruesome beasts and devilish creatures devouring agonised humans and other such treats. It's easy to think Bosch suffered bad karma, but his paintings are generally thought to illustrate parables told in those days.

The greatest 16th-century Flemish painter was Pieter Breugel the Elder, who lived and worked in Brussels. The Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts in the capital exhibits an excellent range of his works. For details on Breugel and his two painter sons, see boxed text, (p84).

Antwerp held its cultural high ground during the 17th century, mainly because of Flemish baroque painter Pieter Paul Rubens. The most famous of his altarpieces were painted for Onze Lieve Vrouwekathedraal (p179), Antwerp's delightful cathedral, and can still be seen there. For more on this prolific artist, see boxed text, p181.

Rubens' studio nurtured artists such as Antoon Van Dyck (1599–1641), who focused on religious and mythical subjects, as well as portraits of European aristocrats. In 1632 he was appointed court painter by Charles I of England and knighted. His contemporary Jacob Jordaens (1593–1678) was one of the few artists who did not go to Italy; he specialised in everyday Flemish life and merrymaking. Antwerp's Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (p182) is the best place to catch works by both these artists.

The two big Belgian names in the 19th century were Constantin Meunier (p87), Belgium's most famous sculptor, and James Ensor (p142), a pioneer of expressionism.

Mechelen-born Rik Wouters (1882–1916) was one of the prime figures of Brabant Fauvism. His sun-drenched landscapes, light interiors and still-life canvases were a search for the vibration of light in pure colours.

One of the country's most pure expressionists was Frits Van den Berghe (1883–1939), who used primitive cubism and colours full of contrast and subtle tonal gradings. From 1904 two groups of painters, first symbolists and then expressionists, set up in the village of St-Martens-Latem near Ghent. Of the first group, Albert Servaes (1883–1952) was the best known; later came Gustave De Smet (1877–1943) and Constant Permeke (1886–1952). Permeke, the best known of the group, put out bold portraits of rural Flemish life that blended cubism, expressionism and social realism.

Surrealism, a movement that developed in Paris in the 1920s, used images from the subconscious to revolt against rationalism and to define a new way of perceiving reality. It found fertile ground in Belgium, where the perverse and bizarre often go hand in hand and where artists had grown up with the likes of Bosch and Breugel. Belgium's best-known surrealists were René Magritte (p90) and Paul Delvaux (p148).

Immediately following WWII, a group of artists that called itself La Jeune Peinture Belge (1945–48) produced mainly abstract work. Among the most prominent artists were Victor Sevrancx, Anne Bonnet and Louis Van Lint.

In 1948 an international group called CoBrA (an acronym standing for Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam) was formed as a reaction against formalism in art and out of an interest in the iconography of children's painting

Belgium's most bizarre carnival celebration takes place on Shrove Tuesday in Binche and involves masked men throwing oranges at the crowd. It's actually a serious affair, with rituals dating back hundreds of years, and recently received World Heritage listing.

Introduced by Phillippe Robert-Jones, *History of Painting in Belgium* details the country's rich artistic heritage from the 14th century to contemporary works.

Michael Palmer's *From Ensor to Magritte: Belgian Art 1880–1940* is a large, soft-cover book with full-page colour reproductions of works by the major figures during this time. It covers some of the overlooked artists of that era.

and the primitive world of the mentally ill. The group sought to promote free artistic expression of the unconscious and used intense, expressive colours. Belgium's most famous member is Pierre Alechinsky (1927–), who has gained international prominence for his works (mainly in inks).

One of Belgium's best-known contemporary artists is Antwerp's avant-garde Panamarenko (1940–). Obsessed with space and flight, his bizarre sculptures fuse authentic and imaginary flying contraptions, and even his pseudonym – a bastardised abbreviation of 'Pan American Airlines Company' – harks to this theme. His works, including the enormous Aeromodeler, made in 1969, can be seen at Ghent's SMAK (p163), as well as at Ostend's PMMK (p142). Panamarenko retired in 2006.

Another name to catch is Jan Fabre (1958–), who made waves in international artistic circles recently by being the first contemporary artist chosen to have a solo exhibition at Paris' Louvre museum. He'll be showing there in 2008. Back in Belgium, you may also be able to see his work at Antwerp's Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (p182).

Also worth tracking down are paintings by Antwerp-born Luc Tuymans (1958–), considered Belgium's most prominent living artist. His subjects range from major historical events, such as the Holocaust or the politics of the Belgian Congo, to the inconsequential and banal. He has the honour of being the first living Belgian artist to have works hung in London's Tate Modern.

Architecture

Belgium is endowed with a fine legacy of architectural delights. Many of the country's earliest buildings, though largely restored in later centuries, are on Unesco's World Heritage List. These include mighty belfries such as the one in Bruges (p124), many Flemish *begijnhoven* (clusters of cottages around a central garden; p129) and, of course, Brussels' famous Grand Place (p69). For more, see the World Heritage Sites Tour, p18.

On the flip side, exciting modern architecture is only just starting to get a look in. The old art cities of Antwerp and Bruges recently realised that modern can sit alongside ancient, and have embraced projects like the Concertgebouw (p137) in Bruges and, in Antwerp, the new Justitiepaleis (law courts; p184) and bOb Van Reeth's Zuiderterras (p193).

In recent times Brussels expertly brought new life to some of its landmark old buildings, such as the Old England building (p83) and the former Belgian radio and TV building, Flagey (on Place Flagey). But swathes of the city have also gone under the demolition ball to make way for the boring glass buildings that typify the EU quarter.

Churches are the lifeblood of Middle Ages architecture, and the ornate towers that dominate the skylines of many Belgian cities are this period's most enduring showpieces, built first in Romanesque style and then Gothic. Romanesque is characterised by columns and semicircular arches – a good example is the Collégiale Ste Gertrude (p223) in Nivelles, just south of Brussels. Gothic features the pointed arch, and the style is at its most impressive in Antwerp's monumental Cathedral of Our Lady (p179). During the 15th century, secular buildings were also built in the increasingly flamboyant Gothic style, such as Brussels' Hôtel de Ville (p79). Belgium's most stunning tribute to secular Gothic architecture is Leuven's town hall (p205).

Baroque was an artistic and architectural movement of the Counter-Reformation in the 16th and early 17th centuries, characterised by ornate and exuberant decoration. Flemish artists and architects of that time altered and made additions to baroque to come up with a homegrown style called Flemish Renaissance or Flemish baroque. Although it has Italian influences, it's a style unique to Flanders and is much flaunted in Antwerp. Indeed, the

ART NOUVEAU IN BELGIUM

In the early 1890s, Brussels was at the forefront of a European wave that went under various names including Jugendstil in Germany and Art Nouveau in Belgium. Art Nouveau is characterised by its use of sinuous lines – organic tendrils, feminine curves and floral motifs – and favoured the use of wrought iron, glass, exotic timbers and marble. Intricate wrought-iron balconies (one of the best examples is Brussels' Old England building, see p83), round windows, frescoes and sgraffito (an incised mural or ceramic decoration that is beautifully displayed, for instance, on the façade of Maison Cauchie, see p93) were employed to give buildings a hallucinogenic look. One Art Nouveau *café* (pub/bar) in Brussels is even named De Ultieme Hallucinatie (The Ultimate Hallucination, p107). But it wasn't only about façades. Some of the buildings from this era are plain from the outside but overwhelmingly ornate within – to visit these you'll need to book a guided tour with Atelier de Recherche et d'Action Urbaine (ARAU; p95), a heritage conservation group.

Art Nouveau blended architecture – its most visible form – with daily aspects of life. Everything from banisters to beds and cupboards to cutlery were moulded to bring elegance into the lives of those who could afford it. The movement sought to break free from the restrictive classical styles that dominated much of 19th-century art and design, and flourished in Belgium until WWI, fed by ballooning populations in Brussels and Antwerp.

Art Nouveau architecture made its first appearance in Brussels in 1893 when Victor Horta designed the Hôtel Tassel (*hôtel* here referring to a townhouse) for a Belgian industrialist, and Paul Hankar built a unique house for his own use a few blocks away. For more on Horta and lesser-known figures, see p87 and p92.

Another of the movement's leading figures was Henri Van de Velde (1863–1957). Van de Velde didn't have Horta's flair but he was innovative and influential abroad, and designed the Netherlands' famous Kröller-Müller Museum. Not much of his work is on display in Belgium – excluding the Belgian Railways logo that is seen everywhere.

Until recently, Horta and his contemporaries were virtually ignored in Brussels, and in the 1960s and '70s some of their finest buildings were torn down. The destruction of Horta's Maison du Peuple in 1965, in the face of worldwide protest, helped bring about laws protecting the city's heritage. ARAU was formed to save and renovate city treasures.

Antwerp also has some excellent Art Nouveau buildings, found mainly on Cogels-Osylei (p184) and in 't Zuid (p184).

city is extremely proud of this heavy, distinct architecture; excellent examples are Rubens' house (p181) and St Carolus-Borroomeuskerk (p180).

After the 1695 bombardment (p69) of Brussels, the guild houses on the Grand Place were rebuilt in Flemish baroque, though many retained Gothic features. Nearby is arguably the country's finest Flemish baroque church, Église St Jean Baptiste au Béguinage (p82). Incidentally, Brussels' famous little pisser, Manneken Pis (p80), also dates from this period.

For most of the 18th century, while Belgium was under Austrian rule, architecture took on a cold, rational, neoclassical style. It is best reflected in the cluster of stark white buildings surrounding Brussels' Place Royale (p82). The sombre Place des Martyrs (p81) is another good example. After Belgian independence in 1831, a number of extravagant buildings were constructed to enable Brussels to compete with the likes of Paris and London. One of the first buildings to be built was the gorgeous Galeries St Hubert (see boxed text, p112).

Throughout his reign, Léopold II (r 1865–1909) focused on urban development, realising that making Brussels more aesthetically appealing would boost its economic potential. He used the vast riches gained through scandalous exploitation of the Congo (see p96) to fund the construction of gigantic public buildings and elaborate town-planning schemes. Almost everything that's big or ruler-straight in Brussels is due to him, but it's an

unloved style these days. His pride and glory was the Palais de Justice, Brussels' law courts (see p85).

An industrial boom in the late 19th century resulted in the construction of several glass and iron buildings in Brussels. Notable examples include the Halles de Schaerbeek (p88) built in 1901, and the massive, newly renovated complex known as Tour & Taxis (p89).

At the end of the 19th century, Art Nouveau hit Belgium. For details on this lavish style, see boxed text, p37.

The impassioned style of Art Nouveau cooled off with Art Deco, a movement that originated in the 1920s and developed into a major style in Western Europe and the USA in the 1930s. Victor Horta, the master of Belgium's Art Nouveau scene, abandoned curls and frills for the cleaner lines of Art Deco in his later works, which include Bozar (p110). The style's most intimate example is the Musée David et Alice Van Buuren (p88), one of Brussels' little gems.

Belgium's most unique post-WWII architectural structure is the newly revamped Atomium (p89), menacingly visible from the city centre on clear days. The EU's ill-fated but now reopened Berlaymont (see boxed text, p87) is another famous edifice.

Literature

Belgium's most famous and prolific novelist was Liège writer Georges Simenon (1903–89). For more on Simenon and his detective character Inspector Maigret, see boxed text, p253.

Hugo Claus is one of the few Flemish writers to succeed abroad. His best-known novel is *Het Verdriet van België* (The Sorrow of Belgium), published in 1983. It weaves a story of wartime Belgium seen through the eyes of a Flemish adolescent, though the underlying theme is Nazi collaboration during WWII.

Amélie Nothomb is one of few modern Belgian writers to have works translated into English. Her novels *The Stranger Next Door*, about strange events in the Belgian countryside, *Loving Sabotage*, set in 1970s Beijing, and *The Book of Proper Names*, which details a girl trying to emulate her mother, are easy to find.

Belgium's Francois Weyergans recently won France's prestigious Goncourt prize with his new work, *Trois Jours Chez Ma Mère* (Three Days at My Mother's). The story explores a mother-son relationship challenged by mental and physical problems.

Cinema

Belgium is almost too small to have a cinema industry. The scene is generally devoted to black humour and down-to-earth realism and, while well received in art-house circles, it's almost starving (Belgium is one of the least generous countries in Europe when it comes to film subsidies).

The biggest local names are brothers Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne who in 2005 won their second Golden Palm at Cannes, thereby joining a very select group of directors to have this double honour. Their most recent win was with *L'Enfant*, a harsh yet upbeat story about a petty crook coming to grips with fatherhood. This followed their 1999 win with *Rosetta*, another stark story, this time about a girl in search of a job and meaning to her life. For more on these films, see boxed text, p251.

The country's biggest export to Hollywood is the 'Muscles from Brussels', actor Jean-Claude Van Damme. Van Damme's career took off in the late 1980s after he put on an impromptu martial arts display outside a posh restaurant for the head of a Hollywood studio. He has since earned millions from hit action movies such as *Universal Soldier* and *Timecop*.

Belgian poet and author Marguerite Yourcenar was the first woman elected (in 1980) to the male-dominated Académie Française.

Screen star Audrey Hepburn, known from *My Fair Lady*, was born in Brussels in 1929.

THE 9TH ART

Belgium's so-called 9th art is the comic strip (*beeldverhalen* in Flemish, *bandes dessinées* in French). With colourful comic murals dotting the capital, specialist shops devoted exclusively to comics and their merchandising, and even a national centre in Brussels devoted to this art form, Belgium is proof that comics aren't just for kids.

It was Hergé (1907–83), the creator of Tintin, who set the ball rolling here. Hergé's real name was Georges Remi – his pseudonym comes from his reversed initials (RG) pronounced in French. In 1929 the first adventure, *Tintin au Pays des Soviets* (Tintin in the Land of the Soviets), was published. A further 22 books followed, all including the sanctimonious asexual roving reporter and his dog, Snowy, a pragmatic smart aleck with a penchant for booze. The series is still Belgium's top international seller, with close to 120 million copies sold in French and 90 million in other languages. Visitors arriving at Brussels' Gare du Midi in 2007 will come face to face with a large Tintin fresco especially created to celebrate Hergé's centennial, and the Belgian postal service will also issue commemorative stamps to celebrate the event.

The end of WWII saw a host of comic-strip authors emerge, including Antwerp artist Willy Vandersteen, who created the delightful Suske and Wiske (Bob and Bobette in English) in 1945. This is one of the nation's longest-running comic-book series and is the biggest domestic seller.

In 1946 Maurice De Bevere, better known as Morris, came up with Lucky Luke, a classic Western parody, and Edgar P Jacobs brought out the sci-fi exploits of Blake and Mortimer. The following year Marc Sleen invented Nero and in 1948 Pierre Culliford (aka Peyo) created the little blue characters known as the Smurfs (*Les Schtroumpf*).

The next decade saw Belgium's comic authors move into the adult realm and this genre lives today. Well known are the works of Brussels artist François Schuiten and author Benoit Peeters, who teamed up to produce the highly regarded *Les Cités Obscures*. The best-known title from this intellectual series is *Brüsel*, the exaggerated story of an old city destroyed by the new (a thin disguise of Brussels and the EU). *De Kat* (The Cat) by Philippe Geluck is long-running and still going strong.

This bevy of comic-strip talent is easily admired in Brussels, where the Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée (p81) showcases the nation's best, and where you can follow the Comic Strip Route – see boxed text, p82.

Festivals to catch include Anima or the International Festival of Fantastic Film, both in Brussels (p95), as well as Bruges' Cinema Novo Film Festival (p132) and Ghents' Filmfestival (p165).

Music

Jazz is right at home in Belgium. Adolphe Sax invented the saxophone and octogenarian Toots Thielemans still enthral audiences with his legendary harmonica playing. To get right among the jazz scene don't miss Brussels' Jazz Marathon (p96).

In the 1950s Jacques Brel took the French-speaking world by storm and is still much-loved in his homeland (see p80).

Arno Hintjens is the godfather of Belgian rock. From early days as a bluesman, he created TC Matic in 1980 and went solo a few years later. He now weaves chanson, blues and funk. Love or loathe him, Helmut Lotti is also Belgian, not German, and pumps out crooners and the classics.

Belgium as a whole doesn't have a contemporary music scene, but Flanders does. The only groups to make it internationally come from the north and include the well-established K's Choice, the Antwerp-based dEUS, and Axelle Red, who plies her trade in French despite Flemish roots. Hooverphonic from St Niklaas near Ghent do trip-hop, while Praga Khan is heavy techno. Brothers David and Stephen Dewaele, also known as 2ManyDJs, are known internationally for their mixing skills, as well as being members of rock group Soulwax.

www.tickets.com has online ticket bookings plus interesting links to venues.

In the classical arena, opera has always been important – a performance in 1830 sparked Belgium’s revolution (see boxed text, p110).

Theatre & Dance

Belgium’s dynamic contemporary dance scene centres on two companies – Rosas (p109) in Brussels and Charleroi/Danses (p226) in Charleroi. The country’s drama scene is also inspiring. To combine the two, investigate Brussels’ KunstenFESTIVALdesArts (p96). Most theatre and dance companies take a break during July and August. Antwerp is the realm of classical ballet – see the Koninklijk Ballet van Vlaanderen (p195).

The international site www.whatsonwhen.com gives good coverage of Belgium; it links every venue and event.

Environment

There's no point beating around the bush – Belgium's environmental picture is not pretty. In a densely populated, tiny country that has been at the heart of European development and destruction for centuries, it's no wonder the environment is now highly degraded.

On top of that, national passions just don't include the environment. This is possibly understandable when you consider that today's Belgians were born into a country already chock-full of cities and towns, a country that's heavily industrialised, stripped of native vegetation and fast becoming an ecological desert. Unfortunately, Belgians are used to turning on the TV news or picking up the morning newspaper and coming face to face with headlines proclaiming the country to be the worst in Europe or the world in various environmental matters. When many Belgians think of nature, they look to France or Italy or, when allowed to throw the net wider, they dream of vast open spaces in places like Australia and parts of America; they don't associate nature and strong environmental policies with Belgium.

This dearth of grass-roots environmental consciousness means the already pitiful situation has improved little in recent decades. Way back in 1993 Belgium was dubbed the 'dirty child of Europe' by Greenpeace and, if recent reports are anything to go by, since then the country has not done anywhere near enough to clean itself up.

THE LAND

Belgium is one of Europe's little countries. It's bordered by the Netherlands to the north, Germany and Luxembourg to the east, France to the south and a 66km North Sea coastline to the west. It's 240km at its widest from east to west and 193km from north to south. People have missed Belgium by dozing off in the car – when there are no traffic jams, you can cross it in 2½ hours.

The flat landscape of Flanders comprises the north of Belgium. It's topographically uninteresting; the only lumps or bumps to break the monotony of the horizon are grazing cattle and the slender steeples of village churches.

In stark contrast is the wonderfully hilly countryside of Wallonia's Ardennes region in Belgium's southeast corner. This area of rivers, wooded valleys, high plateaus and ancient caves is Belgium's most scenic region. Near the border with Germany, the Ardennes gives way to the Hautes Fagnes, a wild and untamed plateau of bogs and swamps that holds Belgium's highest point (694m).

Belgium's North Sea coastline is monopolised by largely unattractive resort towns between which a few patches of windswept – and now highly prized – dunes have been spared from the developer's bulldozer. A few of these areas, such as Het Zwin and Zwin-Polder, both near Knokke-Heist, are now protected nature reserves, used each year by thousands of birds to breed and refuel while journeying between Europe and Africa.

The country is riddled with rivers, many of which have supported villages and towns for centuries. The largest is the Scheldt (Schelde in Flemish, Escaut in French), which enters Belgium from northern France and gradually widens as it passes through Flanders. By the time it gets to Antwerp it's a river to be reckoned with, and provides the city with its economic lifeline to the North Sea.

The Meuse River (Maas in Flemish) is the country's other great waterway. It originates near the northern French town of Charleville-Mézières and

Greenpeace's Belgian site, www.greenpeace.be (in Flemish & French), has full international links.

Check out the highs and lows of Belgium's weather at www.meteo.be, the website of the Royal Meteorological Institute.

gently winds to Namur, where it's joined by the Sambre River. From here it flows east to Liège, Europe's third-largest inland port, en route becoming a heavily used waterway. When it crosses into the Netherlands just north of Liège, it's flanked by decaying industrial estates.

WILDLIFE Animals

Before the last Ice Age, Belgium was home to mammoth and later to bears and bison; however, hunting and the destruction of habitat has meant that the only wild critters left today are deer, wild boars, foxes, badgers, squirrels and rabbits, and sightings of any (except rabbits) are rare. Hunting is still a beloved pastime among some Belgians and is largely based around the town of St Hubert in Wallonia. The season runs from 15 October to 15 January.

Birdlife has been similarly hammered by the destruction of habitat. Researchers of a bird atlas published in 2005 cited numbers of even common species such as sparrows, larks and partridges having fallen by almost 90% since the 1970s. Cuckoos, turtle doves and golden orioles have all but disappeared from the Forêt de Soignes (Zoniënwood in Flemish; see Forêt de Soignes, p117) near Brussels, though it's still home to one of Europe's largest populations of sparrowhawks. For more on birdlife, see National Parks, below.

Storks are being successfully bred in Het Zwin reserve on the coast. The critically endangered black grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*) has found its last refuge in the Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve, which has adopted it as the park's emblem. Protected in Belgium, these birds live in moorland habitats and, if you're lucky, can be spotted in bare branches of trees. The males are black and have a noticeable red bonnet.

Plants

The native forests that once covered much of Belgium have been destroyed by centuries of clearing, with the cleared land used for agriculture and pasturage. Today's forests – concentrated in the Ardennes – are largely coniferous monocultures used for logging and are unable to sustain the diversity of plant and animal species that once lived in this region. Other isolated patches of forest, mainly beech, birch and oak, are dotted around the countryside, such as the Forêt de Soignes, close to Brussels.

Belgium's National Botanic Garden (see Nationale Plantentuin van België, p117) boasts one of the largest collections of plants in Europe, including many indigenous plants.

NATIONAL PARKS

Only two nationally protected areas exist – the Hautes Fagnes Nature Reserve (see boxed text, p260) east of Liège and the Nationaal Park Hoge Kempen (www.nationaalpark.be) in Limburg.

The Nationaal Park Hoge Kempen occupies 5700 hectares between the Limburg towns of Genk and Maasmechelen. It's Flanders' biggest uninterrupted area of forest and nature, consisting of heather fields, pine forest, lakes and hills that host rare plants and animals such as hawks, snakes, frogs and toads, insects and butterflies. A handful of walking trails crisscross the park, and there's also a recreation area known as Kattevennen near Genk.

The nature reserves of Het Zwin and the nearby Zwin-Polder, on the coast northeast of Bruges, protect a wetland ecosystem maintained by North Sea flooding. The area silted in the 16th century, transforming Bruges from a busy medieval port into a small provincial city. The reserves mix salt marshes, coastal dunes and freshwater wetlands, and provide sanctuary for numbers

of bird and rare flora species, such as glasswort and seablite, which thrive on salty soil. For more on both reserves, see p146.

At the opposite end of the Belgian coast, abutting the border with France, is De Westhoek Vlaams Natuurreservaat (p148), a 340-hectare nature reserve and popular winter haven for migratory birds. Warblers, nightingales, the endangered crested lark and little ringed plover all live here, as do rare species of spiders and insects, toads and newts. The reserve is home to about a third of the wildflowers found in Flanders.

The Kalmthoutse Heide Nature Reserve, north of Antwerp on the Belgian–Dutch border, features important remnants of the area's original heath and dune landscape; its vegetation includes wet and dry heath as well as active and inactive sand dunes. Over 90% of the dragonfly species found in Belgium live here.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Water and noise pollution, urbanisation and waste management are some of the most pressing environmental issues. Also on the agenda now is whether Belgium will continue with its nuclear phase-out plan (the country's seven reactors are due to be decommissioned between 2015 and 2025). Nuclear power provides two-thirds of the country's energy (Belgium is the lowest ranked country in Europe for use of renewable energy sources) and, despite the country struggling to meet its Kyoto Protocol targets, calls have been made to scrap the plan.

Belgium's high population density and its good standard of living have resulted in high energy consumption, the production of large quantities of waste, and intensive use of land for agriculture. About 25% of the country's surface area is cultivated; forest and pasture-land each make up an additional 20%. The remainder includes industry and urban living space, and a small area of wetlands.

A controversial UN report on water quality published back in 2003 firmly put Belgium last among 122 countries in terms of waste treatment, pollution control and quality of fresh water. Two more recent studies have not brightened the picture. A report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) released in late 2006 said Belgium had the worst water in the industrialised world, with the highest concentrations of nitrates and pesticides. The OECD report stated that while Belgium had made an effort towards improving air and water quality, much still needed to be done, as the situation was worse now than a decade ago. Earlier in the same year, an American study by Yale and Columbia Universities ranked Belgium as Europe's biggest polluter, in 39th position worldwide. The study's report stated that things were also not looking good for flora and fauna biodiversity, with Belgium almost last in the rankings. Not only was there a lack of nature reserves, it said, but those that existed were too small and fragmented.

Belgium's largest rivers, the Scheldt and Meuse, are heavily polluted. In Brussels, untreated sewage went straight into the Senne River, just as it had done for centuries, right up until 2006 when new waste treatment plants finally came on line. Water taken from these rivers is treated, and tap water is drinkable, but there must be a reason why Belgians arrive at the supermarket cashier each week with trolleys brimming with bottled mineral water.

Belgium was a late-starter in recycling, beginning with selective household rubbish collection (paper, glass and compostable matter, each picked up individually) as late as 1998. Recycling and/or composting of household waste is in full swing.

Environmental groups have been around since the 1970s but the movement only gained recognition in the 1980s due to the rising power of the

Although not your typical field guide, *Where to Watch Birds in Holland, Belgium & Northern France* by Arnoud Van Den Berg describes the best places in Flanders and Wallonia for watching and twitching.

About 400 species of flora exist in Belgium, and one in five is threatened.

The World Directory of Environmental Organizations, www.environment.org, is a megadatabase that tells you who's doing what to protect the earth, the world over.

Belgium has some of the smelliest farm fields in Europe. Liquid manures are commonly sprayed around Flanders' fields, and the region is constantly criticised for having the highest levels of ground-water nitrate pollution in the EU.

TRAVEL WIDELY, TREAD LIGHTLY, GIVE SUSTAINABLY – THE LONELY PLANET FOUNDATION

The Lonely Planet Foundation proudly supports nimble nonprofit institutions working for change in the world. Each year the foundation donates 5% of Lonely Planet company profits to projects selected by staff and authors. Our partners range from Kabissa, which provides small nonprofits across Africa with access to technology, to the Foundation for Developing Cambodian Orphans, which supports girls at risk of falling victim to sex traffickers.

Our nonprofit partners are linked by a grass-roots approach to the areas of health, education or sustainable tourism. Many – such as Louis Sarno who works with BaAka (Pygmy) children in the forested areas of Central African Republic – choose to focus on women and children as one of the most effective ways to support the whole community. Louis is determined to give options to children who are discriminated against by the majority Bantu population.

Sometimes foundation assistance is as simple as restoring a local ruin like the Minaret of Jam in Afghanistan; this incredible monument now draws intrepid tourists to the area and its restoration has greatly improved options for local people.

Just as travel is often about learning to see with new eyes, so many of the groups we work with aim to change the way people see themselves and the future for their children and communities.

two main green political parties, Groen! (renamed in 2003 from Agalev; in Flanders) and Ecolo (in Wallonia). Their 1999 electoral success, however, was torpedoed at the national election in 2003, and the downward trend has continued, with both parties polling poorly at communal elections in 2006.

Belgium needs better vision – and action – in relation to sustainable energy and air quality, and the government must put into place more fiscal measures to encourage ecologically sound practices. One of the chief stumbling blocks on environmental matters is the country's linguistic divide; until there's greater cooperation between the three regions – Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels – it's likely things will continue to stagnate.

Mmmm...Beer

Belgium may be tiny, but its beers are big and bold. No country in the world boasts a brewing tradition as rich and diverse. And nowhere will you find the quantity of quality beers as is offered by this little nation. Forget the stock-standard lagers of Jupiler, Maes and Stella Artois – these conventional beers mirror brands the world round. It's the Trappist beers made by monks, the golden nectars named after the devil himself, and the acquired taste of tangy lambics that get connoisseurs in a tizz.

The Belgian love of beer has nabbed both sexes and all ages. There's none of that beer-belly baggage that goes with beer drinking in Britain, the US or Australia. Here it's about sipping and appreciating flavours, not quaffing and nurturing hangovers. Unlike in many other countries, bottled beer is the preferred choice and, in *cafés* (pubs/bars) stocking several hundred brews, the lion's share will come bottled. Some beers even arrive in a champagne-style bottle with a caged cork. Presentation is all-important. Every beer has its own glass, uniquely embossed and specially shaped to enhance the taste and aroma. The Kwak glass looks like a science-lab escapee, and definitely takes some juggling. Some waiters pour beers, others leave that pleasure to you. There's an art to pouring Belgian beers and techniques differ from beer to beer. A tiny bowl of peanuts, cubed cheese or other savoury nibbles will also be offered. This seductive presentation and personal involvement is all part of the pleasure of beer drinking in Belgium.

It is St Arnold, the patron saint of brewers, who must be thanked for this bevy of beers. When plague broke out in the Middle Ages, St Arnold convinced locals to drink beer rather than water. As beer was boiled and water wasn't, this so-called 'cure' worked. Beer became an everyday drink – a 'liquid bread' to supplement an otherwise meagre diet. Honey and spices were added to enhance the flavour, as was *gruut*, a blend of herbs and flowers such as rosemary and myrtle. Coriander is another favoured spice, believed to protect against hangovers.

By the early 19th century, Belgium had more than 3000 breweries; however, WWI caused the collapse of half and, by 1946, only 775 remained. These days, about 100 breweries compete for the local market, though only a handful has taken on the international arena. This explains why, until the late 1980s, Belgian beer was one of Europe's best-kept secrets. Some of the quality beers – Chimay, Orval and Duvel for example – now commonly sit in off-licences worldwide, though mostly it's brews (such as Stella, Hoegaarden and Leffe) owned by Leuven-based InBev, the country's largest brewer and exporter, that dominate the market.

This chapter will unravel some of Belgium's beer mysteries, detail which breweries open their doors to curious travellers, and let you in on the dos and don'ts of Belgian beer. If you like beer, you'll love Belgium, and if you don't like beer, you soon might.

BEER CHECKLIST

Walk into a specialist beer *café* in Belgium, such as Brussels' Le Bier Circus (p107) or 't Brugs Beertje (p137) in Bruges, and you'll be handed a beer menu the size of a book. It's hard to define numbers – between 400 and 800 different beers are brewed in Belgium – ranging from deep-brown Trappist beers that come with a creamy white head and a kick to them, to thirst-quenching white beers that go down deliciously on hot summer days. Spontaneously fermented lambics sit alongside amber beers that hint at godly connections,

The Good Beer Guide to Belgium & Holland by Tim Webb is an excellent book, giving a bar-by-bar account of what to taste, where to taste it and which breweries welcome devotees.

www.belgianstyle.com is a US-oriented site but shows a love of Belgian beer, listing pubs, breweries and links.

and then there's a whole range of speciality beers produced for festive occasions or simply for the fun of creating.

Most *cafés*, of course, don't have every brew in stock, but your average pub will have no trouble coming up with 20 different beers and in specialist pubs you'll be looking at several hundred. With such choice, it's no wonder first-time visitors go gaga over the beer menu. Taking a stab in the dark or picking a beer by name is one solution; however, tasting by name is a tantalising if dangerous way to go – after sinking a Duchesse de Bourgogne, followed by a Guillotine and a Satan, you'll think you've got Delirium Tremens (whose logo appropriately features pink elephants); come the next morning you'll wish for Mort Subite (literally, Instant Death). Endeavour to resist the temptation to sample 10 different beers in the first night – Belgians generally stick to one or two types per night, and shine the next day.

No Belgian beer is exactly like the next – keep this in mind for acquired tastes like lambic, some of the artisanal brews, and even your first Trappist. The uninitiated have been known to make ghastly comments about their first Belgian beer. 'It's worse than medicine' was one Australian woman's reaction to one of the great Trappist ales. Harry Pearson, author of *A Tall Man in a Low Land*, also struck a brew he didn't much admire during his time touring Belgium: 'It came in a bottle with a witch on it and had a tannic edge so hard it felt like it was scraping the enamel off your teeth and using it to sandblast your tastebuds'. Our advice: start tasting and judge for yourself.

Trappist Beers

Belgium's most famous tipples are divine creations. Trappist beers – gold or dark in colour, smooth in taste and dangerously strong (from 6% to 12%



BELGIUM BY BREWERY

- Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze (p90) – best intro to Brussels' strange lambic brews.
- De Dolle Brouwers (p50) – crazy brewers that defy categorisation.
- Brasserie à Vapeur (p51) – still blowing steam, and a great day out.
- Brouwerij De Halve Maan (p128) – Belgium's most accessible brewery.

alcohol by volume) – have been made for centuries by Trappist monks, members of the strict Cistercian order. In earlier times, when water was foul, monks were permitted to consume the regional beverage: those in France and Italy took to wine; in Belgium monks chose between buttermilk and beer. Only a handful of European abbeys have carried the brewing tradition into the 21st century, and Belgium has six – Westmalle, Westvleteren and Achel in Flanders, and Chimay, Orval, and Rochefort in Wallonia. Only Orval monastery (p243), except its brewing hall, is open to visitors.

Westmalle (www.trappistwestmalle.be; Antwerpsesteenweg 496, Westmalle; ☒ not open to visitors), northeast of Antwerp, is the oldest of the six-pack. Brewing started here in 1836 and these days it's well known for two beers: the deep-brown Double (7%), known as Dubbel in Flemish, and the gloriously bronze Triple (9%), one of Belgium's most popular drinks. The latter also has a devoted international following – during a recent beer competition organised by *The New York Times*, Westmalle Triple trumped the 25 contenders. Beer devotees will find **Café Trappisten** (☎ 03 312 05 02; Antwerpsesteenweg 487, Westmalle; ☒ 9am-midnight), a popular pit stop for thirsty cyclists on the main road near the abbey, is the closest drink they'll get to the abbey.

The Trappist beers hardest to come by are the trio produced by the **Abdij St Sixtus** (www.sintsixtus.be; ☒ not open to visitors) at **Westvleteren**, west of Ypres. These beers aren't even labelled – they come in dark bottles identified by the colour of their cap: the green cap (5.8%) is blond, light and refreshing while the blue cap (8%), known as 8, and the yellow cap (10.8%), or 12, are both dark, unfiltered, malty beers with vigorous flavours. Indeed, the latter was recently voted as the world's best beer by thousands of beer enthusiasts from 65 countries on www.ratebeer.com.

Westvleteren is the smallest of the Trappist breweries, producing just 500,000L annually, all of which sells out within days of being on the market. According to the monks, they have no plans to increase production, despite worldwide popularity. Very few ordinary *cafés* around Belgium stock Westvleteren beers – Oud Arsenal (p193) in Antwerp is a notable exception.

The abbey is not open to visitors but you can visit the big, modern **café In de Vrede** (☎ 057 40 03 77; Donkerstraat 13, Westvleteren; ☒ 10am-8pm Sat-Thu), opposite the abbey, which also contains a small museum and beer shop. This place figures prominently on cycle routes in the area but there's no public transport passing by. At the shop you can buy six-packs (€8.70), but for larger purchases make an appointment with the abbey's beer master (☎ 057 40 10 57), then drive to Westvleteren to pick up the goodies. A crate costs €30 and, in order to make things fair, the monks limit purchases to two crates per car. The appointment system is new, introduced in 2006 to stem the queue of cars – it's not unknown for beer lovers from Italy to cross the Alps just for a crate or two, and in recent times police have been called in to handle traffic chaos.

Close to the Dutch border, in the province of Limburg, is the Benedictine abbey **De Achelse Kluis** (www.achelsekluis.org; De Kluis 1, Hamont-Achel; ☒ not open to visitors) in **Achel**. Monks from Westmalle founded this abbey in 1846 but it closed down during WWI. In 1999 another Westmalle monk, Brother Thomas, started

Many beers are best drunk at room temperature – ask for *van 't schap* (from the shelf) in Flemish or *tempéré* in French.

www.beerparadise.be is the site of the Confederation of Belgian Brewers.

Alcohol-free beers (*alcoholvrije bieren/bières sans alcool*) do exist in Belgium – try Tourtel, Jupiler NA or Groene Palm.

brewing three beers – 4, 5 and 6, named after their alcohol content. There's also now an Achel 8. The abbey's **pub** (☎ 011 80 07 69; 🕒 11am–6pm Tue–Sun) sells all the beers plus other local produce. To get there from Hasselt, take bus 18A.

The **Abbaye Notre Dame de Scourmont** (www.scourmont.com; Forges; not open to visitors), on a hillock near **Chimay** in the province of Hainaut in Wallonia, is the most famous Trappist monastery. In 1860 Chimay led the commercialisation of Trappist brews, and these days it's the one you're most likely to find in your local off-licence. Chimay's three main beers are identified by the colour of their caps and labels: Chimay red (7%) is bronze coloured and soft flavoured; Chimay white (8%) is golden with a fresh, slightly bitter taste; and Chimay blue (9%) is dark, fruity and aromatic. **Auberge de Poteaupré** (p228) is the abbey's official watering hole.

As locations go, the **Abbaye Notre Dame** (p243) at **Orval** boasts the most scenic monastic surroundings. Southeast of Bouillon, deep in the forests of the Ardennes and close to the French frontier, it is the only abbey open to visitors. Unlike all the other Trappist breweries, Orval produces just one beer – a beautiful deep-orange brew that undergoes a second fermentation, has a hoppy character, and is served in a solid, gold-rimmed glass.

Also in the Ardennes is the **Abbaye de St Rémy** (www.trappistes-rochefort.com in French; 🕒 not open to visitors) at **Rochefort**. This abbey produces the strongest Trappist ale but its three brews are not as well known as those of Westmalle or Chimay. In ascending order of strength there's 6 (7.5%), a deep-amber beer with a spicy, fruity taste, 8 (9.5%), a poignantly dry brew with an assertive pallet, and 10 (11.3%), with a red-brown colour and full-on flavour.

Trappist beers should be poured slowly with the glass tilted – aim to have a full glass with a solid head. Many bartenders don't pour the last few millimetres of Trappist brews as the dregs cloud the beer, but it's perfectly fine to drink them.

White Beers

White beers – known as *witbier* in Flemish and *bière blanche* in French – are thirst-quenching wheat beers, drunk iced with a twist of lemon on summer afternoons. Typically pale and cloudy and served in a solid tumbler, the

The colour of a beer usually depends on the temperature during the malting process – a pale malt makes light beers while well-roasted malt results in dark brews. The addition of sweeteners such as caramel and candy sugar also affect colour.

TOP 10 BREWS

- Achel 6 – a relative newcomer to the Trappist scene, and richly flavoured.
- Bush Prestige – at 13% it's Belgium's strongest beer, produced by Dubuisson, a little brewery in Hainaut.
- Cantillon Gueuze – Brussels' lambic that's nectar to those in the know; others may need convincing.
- De Koninck – bowl up to a bar in Antwerp and order a *bolleke* of this much-loved ale.
- Duvel – a hallowed golden brew that stands in a class of its own. Loved on hot summer days as well as in the depth of winter. Deceptively strong, at 8.5% alcohol by volume.
- Karmeliet – strong amber abbey beer.
- Orval – Trappist brew deserving of its devoted following.
- Rochefort 10 – top-shelf Trappist that packs an 11.3% punch. If that's too strong, go for the 8 (9.5%).
- Westmalle Triple – all-time Trappist favourite, chocolate-brown and creamy, with a 9% kick.
- Westvleteren 12 – recently voted the 'world's best beer', but notoriously difficult to come by.

best-known and most popular is **Hoegaarden**, named after a Flemish village about 40km east of Brussels where this regional beer was revived by Pierre Celis in the 1960s. Celis thought the beer would be liked by older folk but it took off with young people and has been a hit ever since. That said, some connoisseurs have recently struck it off their list, claiming its flavour has gone downhill since beer giant InBev took over the brewery and subsequently moved it from Hoegaarden to a site near Liège.

If you're keen to try a white beer produced by a small local brewery, choose Brugs Tarwebier, produced by De Gouden Boom (The Golden Tree) in Bruges.

Lambics

The champagne of the beer world – that's lambic (*lambiek* in Flemish). Like real champagne, this unique beer takes up to three years to make and comes out sparkling at the end. On the way it spends a night of revelry with wild microorganisms in a cold attic, and later spontaneously ferments. Unlike champagne, lambics are not immediately likable – they're sharp and acidic and tend to contort the faces of novices.

Lambic is the traditional beer of Brussels and is best explored at the **Cantillon Brewery** (www.cantillon.be), also known as the Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze (see p90). This brewery and museum is one of Belgium's most atmospheric breweries. Located on a faceless backstreet in dog-eared Anderlecht, it's utterly unpretentious – the outside is unrecognisable as a brewery and inside is full of dusty old barrels and pungent aromas. The Cantillon family has brewed lambic here for four generations and they know their stuff. Tours include the attic room where the wort (a cooked mixture of wheat, water, malt and hops) spends a night in a huge, shallow tub in order to meet up with lambic's essential ingredient, wild yeast. These microorganisms fly around in the grimy Anderlecht air and spark the beer's spontaneous fermentation.

Faro is a young lambic that's been sweetened with sugar or caramel and has a short shelf life; straight lambic has matured for longer, usually at least a year, and hasn't been tampered with sweeteners. Both are difficult to find in *cafés*. The most popular lambic is gueuze (pronounced 'gerze') – a sour, refreshing beer made from a mix of different-aged lambics. It's reminiscent of a hard-core cider and is readily available in many pubs. Then there are fruit lambics, made more palatable by adding real cherries, called *kriek*, or fresh *framboise* (raspberries). Make no mistake, they're still sour-tasting beers. Lambics are generally moderate alcohol beers (4% to 6%).

Easy to find are imitation fruit lambics. These beers are made using quick brewing methods, and fake sweeteners and flavourings are added for mass appeal. The results tend to be sickly sweet and nothing like the real thing.

Golden Ales & Abbey Beers

Golden ales comprise all the gleaming beers that have crept onto the market in recent years in an attempt to imitate one of Belgium's most beloved brews, **Duvel** (www.duvel.be). Duvel was invented immediately after WWI as a dark-coloured victory drink, and a passing comment that its taste 'comes from the devil' supplied the name. It was reinvented as a golden ale after WWII but it wasn't until 1970 that the present-day brew made its appearance. Duvel comes in a seductive undulating glass and has a dense, creamy, two-inch-thick head that slowly dissolves to reveal a strong, distinct flavour. It's produced by Duvel-Moortgat.

Another golden ale worth sizing is **Straffe Hendrik Blonde**, produced by De Halve Maan brewery (p128) in Bruges. This brewery does tours for individuals and groups but, as it's located in the heart of one of Belgium's most

One of the world's best beer writers, Michael Jackson waxes lyrical on all that Belgium has to offer in *The Great Beers of Belgium*. He goes into great detail to explain the different varieties of beer, their tastes and unique attributes.

A *gistje*, a foul-tasting yeast extract, is served in schnapps glasses in some pubs in Antwerp and downed by drinkers needing a shot of vitamin B. It's a brewing by-product and, not surprisingly, free.

TOP 10 BEER PUBS

- Beermania, Brussels (p113) – the place to start, or finish, any serious beer study.
- Bierhuis Kulminator, Antwerp (p193) – off the beaten route but well worth finding.
- Café Botteltje, Ostend (p144) – seaside pub with 280 beers and counting.
- De Garre, Bruges (p137) – well-hidden bar between Bruges' main squares.
- Herberg de Dulle Griet, Ghent (p168) – inside or outside, as the weather dictates.
- Het Waterhuis aan de Bierkant, Ghent (p168) – waterside location and a superb array of brews.
- Moeder Lambic, Brussels (p107) – grungy bar known worldwide for its extensive beer list.
- Oud Arsenal, Antwerp (p193) – not a strict beer-specialist *café* (pub/bar), but can hold its own among the big guns.
- 't Brugs Beertje, Bruges (p137) – Belgium's most famous beer-specialist pub.
- Ter Posterie, Ypres (p153) – cellar *café* with a great summer courtyard.

touristy towns, the tours tend to be crowded and impersonal. Still, they're a good way to see inside a relatively small brewery, and if you're there outside summer the crowds will have thinned.

A plethora of **abbey beers** – Grimbergen, Maredsous and the ubiquitous Leffe, to name a few – compete in Belgium. Despite the divine title, these beers are not touched by the hand of God nor made in a monastery. The abbeys after which they're named have sold their labels to the big boys such as InBev and Moortgat. Abbey beers tend to be strong amber ales with substantial flavour. Karmeliet is a relative newcomer to this group, and well worth trying.

Vlaams Rood & Oud Bruin

Vlaams Rood, or Flemish Red beers, are produced in the province of West-Vlaanderen and are best represented by Rodenbach brewery in Roeselare. Rodenbach Grand Cru is a Belgian classic and takes up to 20 months to mature in huge wooden barrels.

Oud Bruin, or Old Brown, beers originate from around Oudenaarde and nearby Zottegem in the province of Oost-Vlaanderen and are made by blending young and old beers that undergo a secondary fermentation in the bottle. They're a sourish beer with a nutty character and usually come in at around 5% alcohol per volume – the breweries of Roman (established in 1545) at Mater, and Liefmans (since 1679) at Oudenaarde are two of the best known. Neither brewery is open for visits, though *cafés* in Oudenaarde (p160) stock plenty of local brews.

Speciality Brews

A plethora of small-production artisanal breweries in Belgium produce special beers that can't be categorised. They'll pull out a new one especially for Christmas, or try new variations of age-old recipes simply for the fun of brewing. In Wallonia they're often referred to as *saisons*, or 'seasonal' beers, which tend to be light-flavoured but hoppy and are best imbibed on hot days to quench the thirst. These speciality brews explain why it's impossible to pin down the number of beers produced in Belgium – it's as fluid as the product being created.

De Dolle Brouwers (☎ 051 50 27 81; www.dedollebrouwers.be; Roeselarestraat 12B, Esen; ☎ café 2-7pm Sat & Sun, tour 3pm Sun) is the nation's wackiest brewery. Its name – 'The Crazy Brewers' – says it all. Located about 3km east of Diksmuide in the province of West-Vlaanderen, it's well worth a stop if you're prepared to

www.beermania.be is the site of a Brussels beer shop that organises exports worldwide.

Brussels' Grand Place is the setting for the Belgian Beer Weekend (www.belgianbeerweekend.be), a beer-tasting event showcasing new and time-honoured brews held annually in early September. Some 48 brewers were represented in 2006.

BEER ON THE HOP

Belgium's most popular beers can be bought in any old supermarket but for the greatest diversity you'll need to head to a specialist beer shop.

- Beermania, Brussels (p113)
- Bottle Shop, Bruges (p138)
- De Biertempel, Brussels (p113)
- Den Dorstvleugel, Antwerp (p196)
- Ter Posterie, Ypres (p153)

get off the beaten track. The brewery opens its doors on weekends and offers a free tour. Four beers – each with kooky labels – are produced. The best known is Oerbier, while Dulle Teve (Mad Bitch) has one of the nation's more descriptive names. All are available for tasting in the brewery's little *café*.

Brasserie à Vapeur (☎ 069 66 20 47; www.vapeur.com; Rue du Maréchal 1, Pipaix; admission incl a beer €5; ☎ 9am-noon Sun Mar-Oct & last Sat of each month), as its name foretells, is a steam-operated brewery, unique in Belgium. It's located in a snoozy village in the province of Hainaut, about 15km east of Tournai off the road to Ath. The current owner, Louis Dits, bought the place in the mid-1980s and has painstakingly restored it to its 18th-century origins. The beers – *saisons* and one called Cochonne (or Little Bastard) – have a strong hops flavour and some are quite spicy. Unquestionably, the best time to visit is the last Saturday of each month when Louis fires up the kettles at 9am to brew a new batch. Visitors can watch the whole process. At noon, sit down to a feast – including dishes made with the brews and unlimited beer – for €20. Book in advance if you plan to stay for lunch. To get there from Tournai, take the train or bus to Leuze and then another bus back to Pipaix (30 minutes all up).

While you're in the neighbourhood, another local brewery worth discovering is **Brasserie Dubuisson** (☎ 069 67 22 21; www.br-dubuisson.com; Chaussée de Mons 28, Pipaix; admission €5; ☎ tour 3pm Sat), maker of Bush Prestige (13%) – Belgium's strongest beer. Others in the range include the bitter-sweet Amber (12%), the strong Blonde (10.5%), and a light ale (7%).

Antwerp extols the virtues of Belgian beers with the Bierpassie Weekend (www.beerpassion.com) in late June.

According to its label, Bush, one of the country's strongest beers (13% alcohol by volume), is produced by 'passion passed on for eight generations'.

Food & Drink

Belgians love their food...and foodies love Belgium. The country's cuisine is highly regarded throughout Europe – some say it's second only to French while in other people's eyes it's equal. Belgians are reputed to dine out, on average, more than any other people in the world. This national pastime crosses all age boundaries and is cherished by both sexes. It's as common to find octogenarians languishing over a beer at the end of a five-course lunch as it is to see minimalist restaurants filled night after night by the designer set. Discussing the merits of a particular restaurant or a new dish occupies Belgians for hours. And you can be sure every Belgian can run off their top-10 places to eat.

Qualitywise, there's rarely reason to complain. Beautifully presented food using fresh ingredients and timeless recipes are paramount to the dining experience. From chic restaurants to casual brasseries, quality is the yardstick. Naturally, this high standard involves seasonal appreciation. Belgians count the days until spears of spring asparagus appear; they know by heart which months mean mussels; they eagerly await autumn's tasty game dishes, and year-round they warm up on soup.

Meat and seafood are abundantly consumed and although there are traditional regional dishes – such as Ghent's famous *waterzooi* (a cream-based chicken stew) – the most popular dishes have crossed local boundaries. And it's not all local fare. The Belgian palate is broad; Italian, Japanese, Irish, Greek, Turkish, North African, Portuguese and Asian cuisines all thrive here.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Breakfast in Belgium mirrors the nation's cultural divide – folks in Flanders sit down to a hearty meal of cold meats, sliced cheese, bread, butter, chocolate, jam and coffee, while those in Wallonia content themselves with a coffee, croissant and bit of baguette (continental breakfast). This difference may go unseen, as visitors staying in hotels or B&Bs generally receive the full kit and caboodle, no matter whether in Antwerp or Liège; however, if your survival depends on a solid start to the day, quiz your accommodation host about their style of breakfast as some hotels still do just the continental version.

Lunch and dinner hold almost equal importance, and if you want to get into a particular Brussels restaurant at *midi* (noon), you'd be wise to book. If you're looking for a bargain, take advantage of lunchtime when many restaurants offer a *dagschotel/plat du jour* (dish of the day). Also watch for a 'menu of the day' (*dagmenu* in Flemish or *menu du jour* in French). These menus comprise three courses (but sometimes expand to seven), and work out cheaper than selecting individual courses à la carte.

Belgians are great soup eaters and this timeless food is seeing a huge revival, with modern soup kitchens popping up in the trendiest cities. Game, including pheasant and boar, is an autumn speciality from the Ardennes, often accompanied by wild mushrooms and sauces made from forest berries. The Ardennes is also famed for its cured hams and pâté. Horse, rabbit, hare and guinea fowl are typical offerings throughout Belgium as is offal, including kidneys, brains, tripe and liver. Some chefs now incorporate Belgium's incredible range of beers into sauces to reveal unique flavours.

Steak is cooked in a way slightly unfamiliar to most English-speaking visitors. *Saignant* (rare) is a euphemism for dripping with blood; *à point* (medium) is what Anglophones would consider rare, and *bien cuit* is the closest thing you'll get to well done.

The Belgo Cookbook by Denis Blais and André Plismier, the creators of a London-based Belgian restaurant, is a zany, in-your-face cookbook with advice on good tunes to play while cooking guinea fowl in raspberry beer, among other things.

A cute exposé on chocolate making and its history can be found at www.users.skynet.be/chocolat/uk

Vegetarians and vegans should keep in mind that salads, though popular entrées, often contain some form of cheese or meat, such as the ever-popular *salade de Liège* with potatoes, bacon and beans (see p56).

DRINKS

Nonalcoholic Drinks

Bottled mineral water, such as the Belgian manufactured Spa, is preferred over tap water. In a restaurant, you'll automatically be given costly mineral water – brace yourself for a contemptuous look should you summon ordinary *kraantjeswater/de l'eau du robinet* (tap water).

Coffee is generally strong and aromatic and served espresso-style. In Wallonia you can order *café au lait* (coffee with steamed milk). In Flanders coffee is usually accompanied by a tub of evaporated milk. Cappuccino-lovers beware: Belgians often replace the much-loved froth with artificial whipped cream.

Tea, including herbal varieties, is widely available.

Alcoholic Drinks

In Belgium, beer rules – and deservedly so. The quality is excellent and the variety incomparable (see p45). Prices match quality, with a 250mL lager costing from €1.60 to €2.50, and a 330mL Trappist beer going for between €2.80 and €4.50, depending on the *café* (pub/bar).

Wine – everything from French to international – is the standard accompaniment when dining; there's no such thing as bring your own (BYO). Belgium has a tiny home-grown wine industry that started in the 1970s. There are three appellations: Hageland, based around the villages of Rillaar and Zoutleeuw east of Leuven; Haspengouw, in the eastern part of Limburg province; and Côtes de Sambre et Meuse in Wallonia. The wines are predominantly white, rose and sparkling, and most are Germanic in style. They're not all that easy to find, though slowly more and more restaurants and wine bars are stocking these home-grown products.

To wash it all down, there's *jenever/genièvre* (gin). Like beer, it's hard to ascertain how many *jenever*s are made in Belgium – figures range from 150 to 270. There are two categories: *jonge* (young) and *oude* (old). These names are a misnomer as age is not what determines the category, rather it's the ingredients and techniques used. Age does decide quality: the best *jenever*s have matured in wooden barrels for at least eight years. Old *jenever* is typically pale yellow, has a smooth taste and contains 35% to 40% alcohol per volume. Other types include sweetened fruit *jenever*s and *pékèt*, a lighter *jenever* made in Wallonia.

Jenever is often sold in big earthenware bottles that are best stored at room temperature. When ordering at a bar in Flanders, ask for a *witteke* (literally, a 'little white one') – it should come in a tall shot-glass cooled in a bed of ice. Expect to pay anywhere from €2.50 to €3.50 depending on quality. For more, see boxed text, (p55).

CELEBRATIONS

You only need look back at a Middle Ages painting by Breugel to see the importance of food and drink to the Belgian psyche and the high place it's awarded in festivals and celebrations. No gathering here goes without food, and this starts right at the very beginning. On the arrival of each child, elaborately presented *suikerbonen* (sugar-coated almonds) are given to relatives and friends by proud new parents. Weddings, of course, are gourmet affairs, with entire afternoons and evenings taken over to drinking and feasting. Funerals also end in a reunion, with family and friends saying final farewells over coffee and cake. Birthdays, Christmas and Easter are always reason enough for families to come together for a five-course meal. Specialities of

Godiva (www.godiva.com) is one of the most famous names in Belgian chocolate, although it's no longer Belgian owned.

BELGIAN CHOCOLATE

Chocoholics beware! Nowhere in the world will test your self-control as much as Belgium. The Belgians have been quietly making the world's finest chocolate for well over a century, and locals simply regard good chocolate as an everyday part of life. Every Belgian city of any size has divine chocolate shops but in Brussels the choice is staggering.

Filled chocolates, or pralines (pronounced 'prah-leens'), are the nation's forte. Prices match quality and reputation – in the better establishments you'll be paying for the white gloves they wear to hand-pick each praline. Count on anywhere between €30 and €58 per kilogram, and savour the moment each praline is popped into a special little box, known as a *ballotin*.

Belgium's first chocolate shop, Neuhaus (p113) in Brussels' Galeries St Hubert, opened in 1857 and still exists. Neuhaus' grandson is credited with inventing the praline – in 1912 he filled an empty chocolate shell with sweet substances, and so a Belgian institution was born.

But not everything to do with chocolate is sweet. Arguments have raged in recent times over the EU's definition of chocolate. Belgian chocolate traditionally mixes cocoa paste, sugar and cocoa butter in varying proportions. Dark chocolate uses the most cocoa, milk chocolate mixes in milk, and white chocolate is made by extracting only the butter from the cocoa. Pure cocoa butter is the fundamental ingredient, and it was the EU's decision to allow cheaper vegetable fats to replace 5% of the cocoa butter that had Belgian manufacturers up in arms.

Five percent more or less may seem incidental to novices, but there's no denying the taste or smoothness of Belgian chocolate. Stirring the chocolate, or 'conching' as it's known in the industry, is what defines smoothness – grainy chocolate just hasn't been conched enough. And if you never thought your average block of chocolate was grainy before, you'll think differently after trying Belgian chocolate.

The Players

From local bakeries and supermarket delis, to chain stores and top-notch *chocolateries* (chocolate shops), hundreds of chocolate producers vie for the domestic market, though only a handful have gone international, such as the elephant-embazoned Côte d'Or, the US-owned Godiva, and the seashell-shaped Guylian.

Domestically, the praline scene divides neatly into popular chains and national stars. Leonidas is the most ubiquitous of the chain shops. Next up is Neuhaus and Corné, both good mid-range producers. Galler has made a name for itself by experimenting with flavours and making the results accessible in a range of chocolate bars. Top of the ladder is a host of independent *chocolateries* such as Burie and Del Rey in Antwerp (see p196) and Mary's or Pierre Marcolini in Brussels (p113). In a short space of time, Marcolini has taken Belgium and key international cities by storm, dishing up the country's – and possibly the world's – most expensive pralines (€58 per kilo) in innovative boxes that break the *ballotin* mould.

Shopping List

Entering a Belgian chocolate shop involves a shift of consciousness. Row upon row of assorted pralines await, all lounging in air-conditioned comfort and attended by glove-clad assistants. The smell is sweet but spiced, the atmosphere calm and seductive. Lined up at the counter are the *ballotins*, ranging from 125g, 250g, 375g, 500g and 750g to 1kg jumbo packs. Many shops have prepackaged boxes, but that takes the fun out of buying. Ask the assistant to cover the full spectrum or to go heavy on a particular type if you've got a preference. Some terms include:

- *Crème fraîche* – praline filling made from fresh whipped cream.
- *Ganache* – blend of chocolate, fresh cream and extra cocoa butter flavoured with coffee, cinnamon or liqueurs.
- *Gianduja* – blend of milk chocolate and hazelnut paste.
- *Praliné* – mix of chocolate and finely ground toffee or nuts.
- *Praliné nougatine* – ditto but uses larger pieces of nuts or toffee to provide the crunch.

these times include *speculaas* (cinnamon-flavoured biscuits), traditionally given on December 6, the day Sinterklaas (St Nicholas) supposedly arrives by boat from Spain, riding a white horse and accompanied by his (now politically correct) offside Piet (formerly, the Zwarte Piet, or Black Peter). These days *speculaas* are devoured at any time, and there are even shops specialising in them (see p113). On Easter Sunday, many kids eagerly await not only the Easter Bunny but also the Klokken van Rome (Bells of Rome), which apparently fly all the way from Rome and drop small chocolate eggs from the sky when they arrive in Belgium. And if you're the sort who likes turning simple ol' Sunday mornings into a special time of relaxation, Belgium's fabulous. Just wander down to the local bakery and join the locals choosing *koffiekoeken* (coffee cakes) from Sunday's vast array.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Belgium's dining scene reflects the nation's love of food. Any place, any time, you'll find honest food being served at much-loved eateries. This love affair explains why so many restaurants can sit side by side in a city the size of Antwerp, and not only survive but thrive.

Restaurants command the lion's share of the dining scene and generally open for lunch and dinner, but some open for dinner only (for standard opening hours see p303). Brasseries and bistros tend to open from 11am to midnight. They're the type of place you come to for a drink and end up staying to eat. The food is usually either traditional Belgian fare, with sound portions and good quality, or a Belgian-world mix. Unlike restaurants, brasserie kitchens don't close, making them a great place to catch a late-night bite or to dine outside standard restaurant hours.

Tearooms open for breakfast and shut by about 6pm. They usually offer sandwiches, light meals and nonalcoholic drinks, served in convivial surroundings.

Quick Eats

The Belgians swear they invented *frietten/frites* – chips or fries – and judging by the availability, it's a claim few would contest. The popularity of this snack cannot be understated. Every Belgian village has at least one *frituur/friture* (chip shop) where *frites* are served in a paper cone or dish, smothered until unrecognisable with large blobs of thick mayonnaise (or flavoured sauces) and eaten with a small wooden fork in a futile attempt to keep your fingers clean.

THE ORIGINAL GIN

Jenever/genièvre (ye-nai-ver) is the precursor of modern-day gin. Traditionally made from grain spirit, grasses and juniper berries, it's been distilled in Belgium since the Middle Ages when it was drunk medicinally. Later it spread to Britain where the taste was adapted and the name changed to 'gin'. Today there are about 70 distilleries scattered around Belgium, but the big names are Filliers, St-Pol and Smeets.

Limburg is a good place for serious study and sampling (remember, it's sip not slam). The Limburg capital, Hasselt, boasts the Nationaal Jenevermuseum (p211) and it puts on the Hasseltse Jeneverfeesten (p211) in October.

On a daily level, the following trio are specialist *jenever cafés*:

- De Vagant, Antwerp (p193)
- 't Dreupelkot, Ghent (p168)
- La Maison du Pékèt, Liège (p253)

Browse menus and book a table on www.resto.be, which lists almost 10,000 restaurants in Belgium.

What does a Belgian, when returning from space, most desire? According to cosmonaut Frank De Winne, nothing less than *frites!* He's gotta be Belgian.

ABC OF BELGIAN CAFÉS

Belgium's *café* (pub/bar) scene is one of its idiosyncratic delights. All *cafés* serve alcohol and are open from around 10am. There's no official closing time – these linger-as-long-as-you-like pubs stay open until the last person leaves. On sunny days the populace emerges to soak up the sun and a drink at pavement *cafés* or, as the Flemish put it, *een terrasje doen* (doing a terrace). A few local terms include:

- Bar – mostly associated with *jenever* (gin) and other strong drinks; no food. See La Maison du Pékèt (p253).
- Brasserie – spacious modern eateries, often with a terrace, and staying open from lunch 'til late. Great for casual dining or a drink at any time. See Café Belga (p107).
- *Bruin café* – 'brown *café*'; a small, old-fashioned pub noted for its décor: wood panelling, mirrored walls and globe lights. Mostly drinking only. Also called a *bruine kroeg*. See Oud Arsenaal (p193).
- *Eetcafé* – literally 'eating *café*'. Flemish name for a *café* serving a decent range of beers plus a limited number of meals. Also called *eetkroeg* or *estaminet*. See Lokkedize (p135).
- Grand *café* – old-world establishments adored by elderly *mesdames* but attracting an eclectic clientele. Good for a drink or meal at any time. See Falstaff (p106) or Le Cirio (p106).
- *Herberg* – old Flemish title for a tavern. These places tend to be larger than ordinary *cafés*, and dish up drinks and sometimes meals. See Herberg Vlissinghe (p137).

A *belegd broodje/sandwich garni* is half a baguette filled with one of an array of prepared fillings – from *thon mayonnaise* (tuna with mayonnaise) to *poulet samourai* (spiced chicken). Such sandwiches are immensely popular snack foods and cost around €2.50 or €3.50. Panos is a good national outlet. Stuffed *pitas* (pitta breads, also called *gyros*) are also popular snacks. On the coast, steaming bowls of *wollekes* (sea snails) are dished up from sidewalk stalls.

For something sweet, there's always a *wafel/gaufre* (waffle). Cooked as you wait and served piping hot from street vendors, they're a national favourite. And don't worry if someone suggests smothering them in *slagroom* – it's the Flemish word for whipped cream.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Fear not: Belgium may be carnivore kingdom but vegetarians are catered for, albeit reluctantly at times. Vegans, on the other hand, will go hungry almost everywhere. The scene pretty much divides neatly into mainstream bistros and restaurants offering one or two vegetarian options (it may be nothing more exciting than a cheese omelette), health-food shops that have tacked on some form of eatery, and full-blown veggie restaurants where the clientele demand smoke-free surroundings untainted by meat. The latter have only surfaced in the past decade or so; prior to that vegetarians were

BELGIUM'S TOP FIVE EATERIES

- Taverne du Passage, Brussels (p102)
- Le Pain Quotidien/Het Dagelijks Brood (p103)
- Kaffee Pergola, Bruges (p135)
- Walrus, Antwerp (p191)
- Bouchon, Hasselt (p212)

considered somewhat of an enigma to this heavily meat-based society and restaurants were predominantly hidden behind or above health-food shops. The exception to all this is Lombardia (p191), a hypercool Antwerp eatery that's been telling meat eaters where to stuff it for decades. We've listed vegetarian options throughout the guide.

EATING WITH KIDS

Dining out with the kids is quite normal in Belgium. Local kids eat out at top-end establishments, but they're expected to behave perfectly. Highchairs for toddlers are often available but ring ahead if you want to be sure. Restaurants in Belgium became smoke-free in 2007, but bear in mind that *cafés* (often good for a snack) were exempt from this ruling and are still generally full of smoke – not the healthiest of environments for kids to hang out in. A great place to eat with kids is Lunch Garden, a chain of family-friendly, self-service restaurants – we've mentioned a couple in this guide. Midrange restaurants will often list children's meals on their menus. For jars of organic baby food, check out the Hipp Bio range sold in Delhaize supermarkets.

As far as snacking goes, indulging in chocolates, *frites* or waffles is sure to be a winner. For more general information on travelling with little ones, see p303.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

You're in for the duration when dining in Belgium. The national passion for eating means you'll find leisurely breakfasts followed by long lunches and topped by decadent dinners. It's common for Belgians, even at home, to have two- or three-course dinners, with soup being the standard starter. Considering the amount of time the average Belgian spends at the table, it's remarkable they aren't as fat as butter. Belgians take good food – along with great chocolate and beer – as part of everyday life. It's appreciated often, but not overdone.

Smoking in restaurants was banned in Belgium in January 2007. The exception is restaurants that provide a special 'smoking room' – here blazing up is allowed only before meals are served and during dessert. Due to this development, nonsmoking symbols are not included in reviews throughout the Belgian chapters of this guide.

Fast food in the form of international chains has only belatedly found a foothold. The country's indigenous alternatives – *frituren/fritureries* and the hamburger chain Quick – have been strong enough to keep big guns such as McDonald's to a minimum.

DOS & DON'TS

- Feel free to take your children to restaurants of all persuasions. Belgian children are educated at an early age into fine dining and generally behave perfectly. Don't let yours run riot.
- If you're invited to someone's home for dinner, it's usual to bring a gift – chocolates, flowers or a bottle of wine are standard accompaniments.
- Belgians sit down to eat, and expect it to be a social occasion, whether at home or not. Even in ubiquitous sandwich bars such as Panos, seating is provided; stuffing your face on the hoof is just not done. About the only thing you'll see Belgians munching as they window shop are piping hot waffles in winter and ice creams in summer.
- Traditionally, the rule of thumb is to eat mussels only during months with an 'r' in their name. But modern cultivation techniques have extended the season, and locals now tuck in from July. Don't eat any that haven't opened properly once they've been cooked. And don't worry about a fork – use an empty mussel shell to prise the others out.

French-English Dictionary of Good Eating & Drinking, by Christian de Fouloy, aims to take some of the guesswork out of deciphering the many French menus you'll come across in Belgium and Luxembourg.

TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

- *Bloedworst* – black pudding; blood sausage made from leftover pig. The meat is mixed with pig's blood, fat and bread and is made into sausages. It's traditionally served with *appelmoes* (apple sauce).
- *Breugel Kop* – the name translates to Breugel's Head, though how the great artist would take to being compared to chunks of beef and tongue set in gelatine is anyone's guess.
- *Cervelle de veau/agneau* – brain, either veal or sheep, was big on Belgian plates until mad cow disease made it lose its lustre.
- *Croque monsieur* – the essential grilled ham and cheese sandwich.
- *Filet américain* – deceptive name for this most adventurous of Belgian dishes. What sounds like a succulent American steak is actually a blob of minced beef served raw. Has been blamed for giving people worms, though it's still found on many menus around the country and is traditionally served with a pile of chips.
- *Fondue au fromage* – no swirling pot of melted cheese and chunks of bread here. This dish comprises deep-fried croquettes made with a cheesy/creamy filling.
- *Konijn met pruimen* – the Flemish favourite. Rabbit cooked until tender in a sauce spiked with prunes.
- *Mechelse asperges* – spring asparagus from Mechelen; a firm favourite.
- *Mosselen/moules* – considered by many to be Belgium's national dish: mussels cooked in white wine, or other less traditional sauces, served in steaming cauldrons and accompanied by a bowl of *frites* (chips or fries). Most mussels served in Belgium are grown in the Netherlands, but the first home-grown bivalves are expected to arrive on Belgian plates in 2007.
- *Paardefilet/steack de cheval* – no matter how you write it, this is horse in no uncertain terms.
- *Paling in 't groen/anguilles-au-vert* – eel in spinach sauce. Not the most visually appetising of dishes, nor is it moreish after the fourth chunk; try it as an entree.
- *Stoemp* – Grandma's kitchen come to the city. Princely portions of mashed potatoes are tarted up with toppings such as a *spiegelei* (fried egg) or a fat sausage.
- *Truffels/truffles* – Truffles; subterranean fungi that's a highly prized seasonal delicacy (autumn and winter).
- *Truite à l'Ardennaise* – Ardennes trout poached in a wine sauce and served sprinkled with almonds.
- *Waterzooi* – cream-based stew originating in Ghent where it was traditionally made with chicken. These days you'll find regional variations such as *Oostendse Waterzooi*, Ostend's fish version.

EAT YOUR WORDS

Want to be able to recognise horse from herring? Bacon from brains? Get behind the cuisine scene by getting to know the languages – both of them. For Flemish pronunciation guidelines see p330; for French see p333.

Useful Phrases

FLEMISH

A table for two, please.

Een tafel voor twee, alstublieft. ən ˈtaː-fəl voar tway als-tu-bleeft

Do you have a menu in English?

Hebt U de kaart in het Engels? hept u də kaart in hət ɛŋ-əls

What's the speciality here?

Wat is hier de specialiteit? wat is heer də spay-sya-lee-tayt

I'd like the dish of the day.

Ik had graag de dagschotel. ik hat khraakh də dakh-skhoa-təl

I'd like the set menu.

Ik neem het dagmenu.

ik naym hət dakh-mə-nu

I'm a vegetarian.

Ik ben vegetariër.

ik ben vay-khay-taa-ree-yər

I'd like to order the...

Ik zou graag... willen bestellen.

ik zow khraakh... wi-lə bə-stē-lən

The bill, please.

De rekening alstublieft.

də ray-kə-ning als-tu-bleeft

FRENCH

A table for two, please.

Une table pour deux, s'il vous plaît.

ewn ta-bler poor der seel voo play

Do you have a menu in English?

Est-ce que vous avez la carte en anglais?

es-ker voo za-vay la kart on ong-lay

What's the speciality here?

Quelle est la spécialité ici?

kel ay ler spay-sya-lee-tay ees-ee

I'd like the dish of the day.

Je voudrais avoir le plat du jour.

zher voo-dray a-vwar ler pla doo zhoor

I'd like the set menu.

Je prends le menu.

zher pron ler mer-new

I'm a vegetarian.

Je suis végétarien/végétarienne (m/f).

zher swee vay-zhay-ta-ryun/vay-zhay-ta-ryen

I'd like to order the...

Je voudrais commander...

zher voo-dray ko-mon-day

The bill, please.

La note, s'il vous plaît.

la not seel voo play

Food Glossary

FLEMISH

Basics

<i>avondmaal</i>	<i>aa-vont-maal</i>	dinner
<i>frituur</i>	<i>free-tur</i>	chip shop
<i>gevogelte</i>	<i>khə-voa-khəl-tə</i>	poultry
<i>groente</i>	<i>khroon-tə</i>	vegetable
<i>kruidenier</i>	<i>kray-də-neer</i>	grocery store
<i>middagmaal</i>	<i>mi-dakh-maal</i>	lunch
<i>nagerecht</i>	<i>naa-khə-rekht</i>	dessert
<i>ontbijt</i>	<i>ont-bayt</i>	breakfast
<i>vis</i>	<i>vis</i>	fish
<i>vlees</i>	<i>vlays</i>	meat
<i>wild</i>	<i>wilt</i>	game

Starters, Soups & Snacks

<i>belegd broodje</i>	<i>bə-lekht broa-tye</i>	filled sandwich
<i>baterham</i>	<i>baa-tər-ham</i>	slice of bread (with filling)
<i>frietten</i>	<i>free-tən</i>	chips/French fries
<i>koude voorgerechten</i>	<i>kow-də voar-khə-rekh-tən</i>	cold starters
<i>pide</i>	<i>pee-də</i>	Turkish pizza
<i>snee brood</i>	<i>snay broat</i>	slice of bread (no filling)
<i>soep</i>	<i>soop</i>	soup
<i>warme voorgerechten</i>	<i>war-mə voar-khə-rekh-tən</i>	warm starters

Meat

<i>bloedworst</i>	<i>blood-worst</i>	black pudding
<i>eend</i>	<i>aynt</i>	duck

<i>everzwijn</i>	<i>ay-vər-zwayn</i>
<i>fazant</i>	<i>fə-zant</i>
<i>hammetje</i>	<i>hə-mə-tye</i>
<i>hersenen</i>	<i>her-sə-nən</i>
<i>hert</i>	<i>hert</i>
<i>hesp</i>	<i>hesp</i>
<i>kalfsvlees</i>	<i>kalfs-vlays</i>
<i>kalkoen</i>	<i>kal-koon</i>
<i>kip</i>	<i>kip</i>
<i>konijn</i>	<i>ko-nayn</i>
<i>lam</i>	<i>lam</i>
<i>lever</i>	<i>lay-vər</i>
<i>paard</i>	<i>paart</i>
<i>parelhoen</i>	<i>paa-rəl-hoon</i>
<i>ribstuk</i>	<i>rip-stək</i>
<i>rund</i>	<i>rənd</i>
<i>schaap</i>	<i>skhaap</i>
<i>slak</i>	<i>slak</i>
<i>spek</i>	<i>spek</i>
<i>tong</i>	<i>tong</i>
<i>varkensvlees</i>	<i>var-kəns-vlays</i>
<i>vleeswaren</i>	<i>vlays-waa-rən</i>
<i>worst</i>	<i>worst</i>

Fish & Seafood

<i>ansjovis</i>	<i>an-shoa-vis</i>
<i>baars</i>	<i>baars</i>
<i>forel</i>	<i>foa-rel</i>
<i>garmaal</i>	<i>khar-naal</i>
<i>haring</i>	<i>haa-ring</i>
<i>inktvis</i>	<i>ingt-vis</i>
<i>kabeljauw</i>	<i>ka-bəl-jow</i>
<i>krab</i>	<i>krap</i>
<i>kreeft</i>	<i>krayft</i>
<i>maatjes</i>	<i>maa-tyəs</i>
<i>oester</i>	<i>oos-tər</i>
<i>paling</i>	<i>paa-ling</i>
<i>rivierkreeft</i>	<i>ree-veer-krayft</i>
<i>roodbaars</i>	<i>roat-baars</i>
<i>St Jacobsschelp</i>	<i>sint-yaa-kop-skhelp</i>
<i>steurgarnaal</i>	<i>steur-khar-naal</i>
<i>tong</i>	<i>tong</i>
<i>tonijn</i>	<i>to-nayn</i>
<i>zalm</i>	<i>zalm</i>
<i>zeebaars</i>	<i>zay-baars</i>

Vegetables

<i>aardappel</i>	<i>aart-a-pəl</i>
<i>ajuin</i>	<i>a-yəyn</i>
<i>artisjok</i>	<i>ar-tee-shok</i>
<i>asperge</i>	<i>as-per-zhə</i>
<i>aubergine</i>	<i>oa-bər-zhee-nə</i>
<i>boon</i>	<i>boan</i>
<i>champignon</i>	<i>sham-pee-nyon</i>
<i>courgette</i>	<i>koor-zhet</i>

<i>boar</i>
<i>pheasant</i>
<i>ham on the bone</i>
<i>brains</i>
<i>venison</i>
<i>ham</i>
<i>veal</i>
<i>turkey</i>
<i>chicken</i>
<i>rabbit</i>
<i>lamb</i>
<i>liver</i>
<i>horse</i>
<i>guinea fowl</i>
<i>rib steak</i>
<i>beef</i>
<i>mutton</i>
<i>snail</i>
<i>bacon</i>
<i>tongue</i>
<i>pork</i>
<i>cooked/prepared meats</i>
<i>sausage</i>

<i>anchovy</i>
<i>bream</i>
<i>trout</i>
<i>shrimp</i>
<i>herring</i>
<i>squid</i>
<i>cod</i>
<i>crab</i>
<i>lobster</i>
<i>herring fillets</i>
<i>oyster</i>
<i>eel</i>
<i>crayfish</i>
<i>red mullet</i>
<i>scallop</i>
<i>prawn</i>
<i>sole</i>
<i>tuna</i>
<i>salmon</i>
<i>sea bream</i>

<i>potato</i>
<i>onion</i>
<i>artichoke</i>
<i>asparagus</i>
<i>eggplant</i>
<i>bean</i>
<i>mushroom</i>
<i>zucchini</i>

<i>erwtjes</i>	<i>erw-tyəs</i>
<i>groene paprika</i>	<i>khroo-nə pap-raa-ka</i>
<i>komkommer</i>	<i>kom-kom-ər</i>
<i>kool</i>	<i>koal</i>
<i>look</i>	<i>loak</i>
<i>mais</i>	<i>ma-yees</i>
<i>olijf</i>	<i>o-layf</i>
<i>peterselie</i>	<i>pay-tər-say-lee</i>
<i>pompoen</i>	<i>pom-poon</i>
<i>prei</i>	<i>pray</i>
<i>rode paprika</i>	<i>roa-də pap-ree-ka</i>
<i>selder</i>	<i>sel-dər</i>
<i>spinazie</i>	<i>spee-naa-zee</i>
<i>spruitjes</i>	<i>spray-tyes</i>
<i>witloof</i>	<i>wit-loaf</i>
<i>wortel</i>	<i>wor-təl</i>

Desserts

<i>cake</i>	<i>kayk</i>
<i>koek</i>	<i>kook</i>
<i>roomijs</i>	<i>room-ays</i>
<i>taart</i>	<i>taart</i>
<i>wafel</i>	<i>waa-fəl</i>

Drinks

<i>bier</i>	<i>beer</i>
<i>jenever</i>	<i>zhə-nay-vər</i>
<i>lambiek</i>	<i>lam-beek</i>
<i>wijn</i>	<i>wayn</i>

Miscellaneous

<i>azijn</i>	<i>a-zayn</i>
<i>boter</i>	<i>boa-tər</i>
<i>brood</i>	<i>broat</i>
<i>ei</i>	<i>ay</i>
<i>geitenkaas</i>	<i>khay-tən-kaas</i>
<i>kaas</i>	<i>kaas</i>
<i>konfituur</i>	<i>kon-fee-tur</i>
<i>melk</i>	<i>melk</i>
<i>pannenkoek</i>	<i>pa-nə-kook</i>
<i>peper</i>	<i>pay-pər</i>
<i>rijst</i>	<i>rayst</i>
<i>speculaas</i>	<i>spay-ku-laas</i>
<i>suiker</i>	<i>səy-kər</i>
<i>zout</i>	<i>zowt</i>
<i>water</i>	<i>waa-tər</i>

Cooking Methods

<i>gebakken</i>	<i>khə-ba-kən</i>
<i>gegratineerd</i>	<i>khə-khra-tee-nayrt</i>
<i>gegrild</i>	<i>khə-khrilt</i>
<i>gegrild aan 't spit</i>	<i>khə-khrilt aant spit</i>
<i>gepaneerd</i>	<i>khə-pa-nayrt</i>
<i>gesauteerd</i>	<i>khə-soa-tayrt</i>
<i>gestoomd</i>	<i>khə-stoamt</i>

<i>peas</i>
<i>green pepper (capsicum)</i>
<i>cucumber</i>
<i>cabbage</i>
<i>garlic</i>
<i>sweet corn</i>
<i>olive</i>
<i>parsley</i>
<i>pumpkin</i>
<i>leek</i>
<i>red pepper (capsicum)</i>
<i>celery</i>
<i>spinach</i>
<i>Brussels sprouts</i>
<i>chicory</i>
<i>carrot</i>

<i>cake</i>
<i>biscuit</i>
<i>ice cream</i>
<i>tart (pie)</i>
<i>waffle</i>

<i>beer</i>
<i>Belgian gin</i>
<i>Brussels beer</i>
<i>wine</i>

<i>vinegar</i>
<i>butter</i>
<i>bread</i>
<i>egg</i>
<i>goat's cheese</i>
<i>cheese</i>
<i>jam</i>
<i>milk</i>
<i>pancake</i>
<i>pepper</i>
<i>rice</i>
<i>cinnamon-flavoured biscuit</i>
<i>sugar</i>
<i>salt</i>
<i>water</i>

<i>baked</i>
<i>browned on top with cheese</i>
<i>grilled</i>
<i>spit-roasted</i>
<i>coated in breadcrumbs</i>
<i>sautéed</i>
<i>steamed</i>

gerookt
geroosterd
gevuld
op het houtvuur bereid

khə-roakt
khə-roas-tərt
khə-vəlt
op hət howt-vur bə-rayt

FRENCH

Basics

déjeuner day-zher-nay
dessert day-sair
dîner dee-nay
épicerie ay-pee-say-ree
friture free-tewr
gibier zhee-byay
légume lay-gewm
petit déjeuner per-tee day-zher-nay
poisson pwa-son
viande vyond
volaille vo-lai

Starters, Soups & Snacks

croque monsieur krok mer-syer

entrées chaudes on-tray shod
entrées froides on-tray fwad
frites freet
potage po-tazh
sandwich garni son-dweesh gar-nay
tartine tar-teen

Meat

agneau a-nyo
bœuf berf
boudin noir boo-dun-nwar
brochette bro-shet
canard ka-nar
cerf ser
cervelle sair-vel
charcuterie shar-kew-tree
cheval sher-val
dinde dund
entrecôte on-trer-kot
escargot es-kar-go
faisan fay-zon
foie fwa
jambon zhom-bon
jambonneau zhom-bon-no
langue long
lapin la-pun
marcassin mar-ka-sun
mouton moo-ton
pintade pun-tad
porc por
poulet poo-lay
saucisson so-see-son
veau vo

smoked
roasted
stuffed
cooked in a wood stove

lunch
dessert
dinner
grocery store
chip shop
game
vegetable
breakfast
fish
meat
poultry

grilled ham and cheese sandwich
warm starters
cold starters
chips/French fries
soup
filled sandwich
slice of bread

lamb
beef
black pudding
kebab
duck
venison
brains
cooked/prepared meats
horse
turkey
rib steak
snail
pheasant
liver
ham
ham on the bone
tongue
rabbit
boar
mutton
guinea fowl
pork
chicken
sausage
veal

Fish & Seafood

anchois
anguille
brème
cabillaud
calmar
coquille St Jacques
crevette
dorade
hareng
homard
huitre
langouste
raie
rouget
saumon
scampi
thon
truite

on-shwa
ong-gee-yer
brem
ka-bee-yo
kal-mar
ko-kee-yer sun-zhak
krer-vet
do-rad
a-rong
om-ar
wee-trer
long-goost
ray
roo-zhay
so-mon
skom-pee
ton
trweet

anchovy
eel
bream
cod
squid
scallop
shrimp
sea bream
herring
lobster
oyster
crayfish
ray
red mullet
salmon
prawn
tuna
trout

Vegetables

ail
artichaut
asperge
aubergine
champignon
chicon
chou
choux de Bruxelles
citrouille
concombre
courgette
échalote
épinards
haricot
maïs
oignon
persil
petit pois
poireau
poivron rouge/vert

pomme de terre
truffe

ai
ar-tee-sho
a-spairzh
o-bair-zheen
shom-pee-nyon
shee-kon
shoo
shoo der brew-sel
see-troo-yer
kong-kombr
koo-zhet
ay-sha-lot
ay-pee-nar
a-ree-ko
ma-ees
on-yon
pair-sil
pay-tee pwa
pwa-ro
pwav-ron roozh/vair

pom der tair
trewf

garlic
artichoke
asparagus
eggplant
mushroom
chicory
cabbage
Brussels sprouts
pumpkin
cucumber
zucchini
shallot
spinach
bean
sweet corn
onion
parsley
peas
leek
red/green pepper (capsicum)
potato
truffle

Desserts

couque
gâteau
gaufre
tarte
glace

kook
ga-to
go-fref
tart
glas

biscuit
cake
waffle
tart (pie)
ice cream

Drinks

bière
genièvre

bee-yair
zhay-nyeyv

beer
Belgian gin

*lambic
vin*

lom-bik
vun

Brussels beer
wine

Miscellaneous

*beurre
confiture
crêpe
eau
fromage
fromage de chèvre
œuf
lait
pain
poivre
riz
sel
sucre
vinaigre*

bur
kon-fee-tewr
krep
o
fro-mazh
fro-mazh der she-vrer
erf
lay
pun
pwa-vrer
ree
sel
sew-krer
vee-nay-grer

butter
jam
pancake
water
cheese
goat's cheese
egg
milk
bread
pepper
rice
salt
sugar
vinegar

Cooking Methods

*à la broche
à la vapeur
au feu de bois
au four
farci
fumé
gratiné
grillé
pané
rôti
sauté*

a la brosh
a la va-per
o fer der bwa
o foor
far-see
foo-may
gra-tee-nay
gree-yay
pa-nay
ro-tee
so-tay

spit-roasted
steamed
cooked over a wood stove
baked
stuffed
smoked
browned on top with cheese
grilled
coated in breadcrumbs
roasted
sautéed