



Belgium

A small kingdom at the crossroads of Europe, with medieval market squares, three official languages, world-famous chocolate and a beer for every occasion.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Brussels

POPULATION

About 11.9 million

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Dutch, French and German

CURRENCY

Euro, since 2002. Before that, the Belgian franc

AREA

About 30,700 km²

GOVERNMENT

Federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy. As of September 2026 the head of state is King Philippe

HIGHEST POINT

Signal de Botrange, 694 m, on the High Fens plateau in the east

MAIN RIVERS

The Meuse (925 km long) through Wallonia and the Scheldt (about 360 km long) through Flanders, both flowing on through the Netherlands to the North Sea

NEIGHBOURS

The Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg and France by land. The United Kingdom lies across the North Sea

DRIVES ON THE

Right

CALLING CODE

+32

A 45-minute trip to Belgium

Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find Belgium together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story: 57 BC: Caesar conquers the Belgae; 1839: The Treaty of London; 1993: Belgium becomes a federal state. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Mussels with fries and Belgian fries. Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Bonjour" (Hello, good day), "Bonsoir" (Good evening), "Bonne nuit" (Good night). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://worldstroll.com/countries/belgium/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

Belgium and its cities



- Brussels (Brussels-Capital Region): The Grand-Place, Manneken Pis and the Atomium, Art Nouveau houses and comic strips
- Antwerp (Antwerp Province, Flanders): The diamond trade, The Cathedral of Our Lady, The painter Rubens and the 1920 Olympic Games
- Ghent (East Flanders): The Gravensteen castle, The Ghent Altarpiece by the Van Eyck brothers, The ten-day Gentse Feesten festival
- Bruges (West Flanders): The Belfry on the Markt, Canals and lace, The Procession of the Holy Blood
- Liège (Liège Province, Wallonia): The 374 steps of the Montagne de Bueren, Liège waffles and boulets, The 15 August street festival
- Namur (Namur Province, Wallonia): The Citadel of Namur, Its belfry, a UNESCO site, Jousting on stilts
- Leuven (Flemish Brabant): The Gothic Town Hall with 236 statues, KU Leuven university, The Great Beguinage
- Mons (Hainaut): The Doudou festival, with Saint George fighting a dragon, Its Baroque belfry, The Neolithic flint mines at Spiennes
- Ostend (West Flanders): Beaches and the seafront promenade, The painter James Ensor, Fish and seafood

- Ypres (West Flanders): The Menin Gate and the Last Post, The Cloth Hall and the In Flanders Fields Museum, The Cat Parade every three years
- Dinant (Namur Province, Wallonia): The onion-domed Collegiate Church, The house where Adolphe Sax was born, now a museum, The very hard couque de Dinant biscuit
- Mechelen (Antwerp Province, Flanders): St. Rumbold's Cathedral tower, The world's leading carillon school, Kazerne Dossin memorial

A short history of Belgium

Belgium's story runs from Caesar's wars with the Belgae, through the rich cloth towns of Flanders and centuries of foreign rulers, to independence in 1830, two world wars and a new role at the heart of the European Union.

57 BC **Caesar conquers the Belgae**

Julius Caesar began his conquest of the Belgae, a group of tribes he described as the bravest of the Gauls. The land became part of the Roman province of Gallia Belgica.

AD 843 **The Treaty of Verdun**

The grandsons of Charlemagne divided his empire into three kingdoms. Flanders, west of the Scheldt river, went to the western kingdom that became France, while most of today's Belgium fell to the middle kingdom.

1302 **The Battle of the Golden Spurs**

Flemish town militias won a surprise victory over an army of mounted French knights. Flanders, rich from its cloth trade, was then one of the wealthiest areas in Europe.

1500 **Charles V is born in Ghent**

The future Emperor Charles V was born in Ghent on 24 February 1500. He came to rule Spain, the Holy Roman Empire and the Low Countries, and in 1549 he made the Seventeen Provinces of the Low Countries a single unit.

1585 **The fall of Antwerp**

After a siege of more than a year, Antwerp surrendered to Spanish forces on 17 August 1585. The south stayed under Spanish rule, while the north went on to become the independent Dutch Republic.

1815 **The Battle of Waterloo**

On 18 June 1815 Napoleon was finally defeated at Waterloo, about 15 km south of Brussels. The Congress of Vienna then joined Belgium to the Netherlands in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.

- 1830** **The Belgian Revolution**
In August 1830 an opera audience in Brussels spilled into the streets singing patriotic songs, and a revolt against Dutch rule followed. A provisional government declared independence on 4 October 1830.
- 1831** **Leopold I becomes king**
On 21 July 1831 Leopold of Saxe-Coburg was sworn in as the first King of the Belgians. The date is now Belgium's National Day.
- 1839** **The Treaty of London**
The Netherlands and the great powers of Europe recognised Belgium's independence and promised to guard its neutrality. Germany's breach of this promise in 1914 was Britain's stated reason for entering the First World War.
- 1908** **Belgium takes over the Congo**
King Leopold II had ruled the Congo Free State as his private possession, and many Congolese were killed by his agents for failing to deliver enough rubber and ivory. After an international outcry, the Belgian state took it over in 1908 as the Belgian Congo.
- 1914** **Germany invades Belgium**
In August 1914 German armies crossed neutral Belgium to attack France. Belgian forces held them up at Liège and on the Yser, and much of the Western Front ran through western Belgium for four years.
- 1940** **The second German invasion**
On 10 May 1940 Germany invaded again. After 18 days of fighting the army and King Leopold III surrendered, and Belgium was occupied until the Allies liberated it in 1944 and 1945.
- 1957** **A founder of the European Community**
Belgium was one of the six founding members of the European Economic Community, set up in 1957, which grew into today's European Union. Brussels later became home to its main institutions.
- 1958** **Expo 58 and the Atomium**
From April to October 1958 Brussels hosted a World's Fair on the Heysel plateau. Its centrepiece, the Atomium, still stands as a symbol of the city.

1960

Congo becomes independent

The Belgian Congo became independent in 1960. Rwanda and Burundi, which Belgium had governed since the First World War, followed two years later.

1993

Belgium becomes a federal state

After decades of tension between Dutch and French speakers, a series of reforms ended with the 1993 reform that made Belgium a federal state of communities and regions.

What people eat in Belgium

Belgian food combines the refinement of French cooking with the hearty dishes of Flanders. Belgians love seasonal produce: grey shrimp from the North Sea, white asparagus, endive and mussels. Fries, waffles, chocolate and beer are famous far beyond the country, and beer is matched to a meal almost like wine: wheat beer with fish, blond or tripel beer with chicken, dark beer with red meat and fruit beer with dessert.

Mussels with fries (moules-frites or mosselen met friet)

All of Belgium, especially the coast; also popular in northern France

A big pot of mussels steamed with onions or shallots and celery, often with white wine or beer, served with a separate bowl of crisp fries so that they do not go soggy. It is often called Belgium's national dish.

Belgian fries (frites or frieten)

All of Belgium

Thick potato fries fried twice, first at a lower heat to cook them through and then hotter to make them crisp. They are sold at fry shacks called friteries or frietkoten, in a paper cone with a spoonful of mayonnaise or one of more than a dozen other sauces on top.

Flemish beef and beer stew (carbonade flamande, stoofvlees or stoverij)

Flanders, now eaten all over Belgium

Beef slowly stewed with onions in a dark Flemish beer, thickened with a slice of bread spread with mustard. A little brown sugar and vinegar give the sauce a gentle sweet and sour taste. It is served with fries, boiled potatoes or stoemp.

Ghent waterzooi (Gentse waterzooi)

Ghent, in East Flanders

A creamy soup-stew of chicken or fish with carrots, leeks, celery and potatoes, enriched at the end with cream and egg yolk.

Endive with ham and cheese sauce (chicons au gratin or gegratineerd witloof)

All of Belgium

Heads of Belgian endive, each wrapped in a slice of ham, baked under a cheese sauce until golden. The slightly bitter endive and the rich sauce make a classic winter dish.

Stoemp (stoemp)

Brussels and Flanders

Potatoes mashed together with one or more vegetables such as carrots, leeks, spinach or cabbage, often with a little cream or bacon. It is served with sausages, bacon or a fried egg.

Grey shrimp croquettes (croquettes aux crevettes or garnaalkroketten)

The Belgian coast

Crisp breaded croquettes with a thick, creamy béchamel filling full of small North Sea grey shrimp, served with a slice of lemon and fried parsley.

Liège meatballs (boulets à la liégeoise)

Liège

One or two large meatballs in a sweet and sour brown sauce called sauce lapin, made with sirop de Liège, a thick fruit syrup, onions, vinegar and raisins. They are served with fries.

Liège waffle (gaufre de Liège)

Liège

A small, rounded, chewy waffle made from a rich yeast dough like brioche, with nuggets of pearl sugar that caramelize in the iron. It is eaten plain, often warm from a street stall.

Brussels waffle (gaufre de Bruxelles)

Brussels and Ghent

A large, light and crisp rectangular waffle with deep pockets, made from a yeast batter. In Belgium it is dusted with icing sugar; in tourist areas it may come with cream, fruit or chocolate.

Speculoos biscuits (speculoos or speculaas)

Flanders and the Low Countries

Thin, crunchy spiced biscuits flavoured with caramelised sugar and cinnamon, often pressed in wooden moulds with pictures such as Saint Nicholas. Belgians traditionally bake them for Saint Nicholas Day on 6 December.

Belgian pralines (pralines)

Brussels, now all of Belgium

Bite-sized chocolates with a soft filling, sold in boxes by famous houses such as Neuhaus, Leonidas, Godiva and Côte d'Or and by many small chocolatiers.

Cuberdon (cuberdon or Gentse neus)

Ghent

A purple, cone-shaped sweet with a thin crust made with gum arabic and a soft raspberry-flavoured centre.

Rice tart (tarte au riz or rijstevlaai)

Verviers, in eastern Belgium

An open tart filled with thick, creamy rice pudding, loved across eastern Belgium and the neighbouring parts of the Netherlands and Germany. Flemish versions add custard to the filling, Walloon versions only eggs.

Trappist beer (Trappist)

Abbeys in Flanders and Wallonia

Strong, rich ales brewed within the walls of Trappist monasteries under the monks' supervision, with the profits going to the community and to charity. As of 2026 five Belgian breweries carry the official label: Westmalle, Westvleteren, Chimay, Orval and Rochefort.

Jenever (jenever, genièvre or peket)

All of Belgium; in Liège it is called peket

A juniper-flavoured spirit, the forerunner of gin, traditionally sold in stoneware jugs and served ice cold in a small glass filled to the brim.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- Before a meal, Dutch speakers say 'Smakelijk' and French speakers 'Bon appétit' (enjoy your meal).
- When glasses are raised, French speakers say 'Santé!' (cheers).
- Each Belgian beer is served in its own glass, and bars take care to use the right one.
- Fries are traditionally eaten with mayonnaise, not ketchup, often from a paper cone with the sauce on top.
- With mussels, the fries come in a separate bowl so that they stay crisp.

Mussels with fries

A big pot of mussels steamed with onions or shallots and celery, often with white wine or beer, served with a separate bowl of crisp fries so that they do not go soggy. It is often called Belgium's national dish.

Ingredients

- 2 kg fresh live mussels
- 2 shallots or 1 onion, finely chopped
- 2 sticks of celery, finely chopped
- 30 g butter
- 200 ml dry white wine, or a light Belgian beer
- A handful of chopped parsley and black pepper
- Fries and mayonnaise, to serve

Method

1. Rinse and scrub the mussels in cold water and pull off any beards. Throw away any with broken shells, and any open mussel that does not close when you tap it. People with a shellfish allergy should not eat this dish.
2. Melt the butter in a large pot with a lid and cook the shallots and celery gently for 5 minutes until soft.
3. Turn up the heat, add the wine and the mussels and put the lid on. Cook for 5 to 7 minutes, shaking the pot now and then, until the shells open.
4. Throw away any mussels that stay closed. Season with pepper and scatter over the parsley.
5. Serve in the pot with a bowl of hot fries and mayonnaise on the side.

Flemish beef and beer stew

Beef slowly stewed with onions in a dark Flemish beer, thickened with a slice of bread spread with mustard. A little brown sugar and vinegar give the sauce a gentle sweet and sour taste. It is served with fries, boiled potatoes or stoemp.

Ingredients

- 1 kg stewing beef, such as chuck, cut in large cubes
- 3 onions, sliced
- 30 g butter and 1 tablespoon oil
- 1 tablespoon plain flour
- 500 ml Flemish brown ale (oud bruin) or another dark beer
- 2 slices of bread, spread thickly with mustard
- 2 bay leaves and a few sprigs of thyme
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar and 1 tablespoon cider or wine vinegar
- Salt and black pepper

Method

1. Season the beef with salt and pepper. Brown it in batches in the butter and oil in a heavy casserole, then set it aside.
2. Cook the onions in the same pot over a low heat for about 15 minutes until soft and golden. Stir in the flour.
3. Put the beef back, pour in the beer and add the herbs. Lay the bread slices on top, mustard side down.
4. Cover and simmer very gently for 2 to 2.5 hours, stirring now and then, until the meat is very tender and the bread has melted into the sauce.
5. Stir in the sugar and vinegar, taste for salt and pepper and serve with fries or boiled potatoes.

Ghent waterzooi

A creamy soup-stew of chicken or fish with carrots, leeks, celery and potatoes, enriched at the end with cream and egg yolk.

Ingredients

- 4 chicken legs or 800 g chicken thighs
- 1.2 litres chicken stock
- 2 carrots and 2 leeks, cut in thin strips
- 2 sticks of celery, sliced, and 1 onion, chopped
- 4 waxy potatoes, peeled and cut in chunks
- 30 g butter
- 150 ml single cream and 2 egg yolks
- Chopped parsley, salt and pepper

Method

1. Simmer the chicken in the stock for about 35 minutes until cooked through. Lift it out, remove the skin and bones and pull the meat into large pieces.
2. Meanwhile soften the onion, carrots, leeks and celery in the butter for 10 minutes without browning.
3. Add the vegetables and potatoes to the stock and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes until the potatoes are tender. Put the chicken back in.
4. Whisk the cream and egg yolks in a bowl, then whisk in a ladle of the hot soup. Pour this back into the pot and heat gently, stirring, until the soup thickens a little and is steaming hot all through. Do not let it boil.
5. Season, sprinkle with parsley and serve in deep plates with bread.

Endive with ham and cheese sauce

Heads of Belgian endive, each wrapped in a slice of ham, baked under a cheese sauce until golden. The slightly bitter endive and the rich sauce make a classic winter dish.

Ingredients

- 8 heads of Belgian endive
- 8 slices of cooked ham
- 40 g butter and 40 g plain flour
- 500 ml milk
- 150 g grated Gruyère or other hard cheese
- A pinch of nutmeg, salt and pepper

Method

1. Trim the base of the endives. Simmer them in salted water for about 15 minutes, or steam them, until tender. Drain very well and squeeze gently, as they hold a lot of water.
2. Heat the oven to 200°C. Melt the butter, stir in the flour for 1 minute, then whisk in the milk a little at a time and simmer until thick and smooth.
3. Take the sauce off the heat and stir in two thirds of the cheese, the nutmeg, salt and pepper.
4. Wrap each endive in a slice of ham and lay them in a buttered baking dish. Pour over the sauce and sprinkle with the rest of the cheese.
5. Bake for about 25 minutes until bubbling and golden. Serve with mashed or boiled potatoes.

Stoemp

Potatoes mashed together with one or more vegetables such as carrots, leeks, spinach or cabbage, often with a little cream or bacon. It is served with sausages, bacon or a fried egg.

Ingredients

- 1 kg floury potatoes, peeled and cut in chunks
- 500 g carrots, sliced, or 2 leeks, sliced
- 1 onion, chopped
- 40 g butter and 50 ml single cream or milk
- Nutmeg, salt and pepper

Method

1. Boil the potatoes and carrots together in salted water for about 20 minutes until soft. If using leeks, soften them in a little of the butter instead.
2. Meanwhile cook the onion gently in half the butter until soft.
3. Drain the potatoes and carrots well and mash them roughly with the rest of the butter and the cream.
4. Stir in the onion (and leeks, if using) and season with nutmeg, salt and pepper.
5. Serve hot with grilled sausages or crisp bacon.

Useful phrases

Bonjour

bawn-ZHOOR · Hello, good day

Bonsoir

bawn-SWAHR · Good evening

Bonne nuit

bon NWEE · Good night

Au revoir

oh ruh-VWAHR · Goodbye

Salut

sah-LUU · Hi, or bye (informal)

Comment allez-vous ?

koh-mahn tah-lay VOO · How are you? (polite)

Bien, merci

byang, merr-SEE · Fine, thank you

Enchanté

ahn-shahn-TAY · Nice to meet you

S'il vous plaît

seel voo PLEH · Please

Merci

merr-SEE · Thank you

De rien

duh RYEHNG · You're welcome

Excusez-moi

ehk-SKEW-zay MWAH · Excuse me

Parlez-vous anglais ?

par-lay VOO ahng-LEH · Do you speak English?

Je ne comprends pas

zhuh nuh KOHM-prahn pah · I don't understand

Où sont les toilettes ?

OOH sohn leh twah-LET · Where is the toilet?

Combien coûte ceci ?

kom-BYAN koot suh-SEE · How much does this cost?

L'addition, s'il vous plaît

lah-dee-SYOHN, seel voo PLEH · The bill, please

Bon appétit !

bon ah-pay-TEE · Enjoy your meal

Santé !

sahn-TAY · Cheers!

Things you might not know

1. The saxophone was invented by a Belgian. Adolphe Sax, born in Dinant in 1814, patented it in 1846.
2. Tintin, the young reporter who travels the world with his dog, was created by the Belgian artist Hergé, whose real name was Georges Remi. He first appeared on 10 January 1929 in a supplement of a Belgian newspaper, and his adventures fill 24 albums.
3. The idea that the universe is expanding and began from a single 'primeval atom' was put forward by Georges Lemaître, a Belgian priest and professor at Leuven, in 1927 and 1931. It later became known as the Big Bang theory.
4. The Flemish mapmaker Gerardus Mercator, born in 1512 in Rupelmonde, south-west of Antwerp, published his famous world map for sailors in 1569 and was the first to call a book of maps an 'atlas'.
5. Manneken Pis, the little bronze statue of a boy in Brussels, has a wardrobe of about 1,000 costumes. The statue on the street is a copy; the original from 1619 is kept safe in the Brussels City Museum.
6. Filled chocolate pralines were first made in Brussels by Jean Neuhaus in 1912.
7. After the election of June 2010, Belgian parties took 541 days to form a new federal government. In the meantime the outgoing government kept the country running.
8. Voting is compulsory in Belgian national elections, so turnout is among the highest in the world.
9. In Oostduinkerke, on the Belgian coast, shrimp are still caught by fishermen on horseback. As of 2021, 17 of them were still active.
10. Belgian French has its own words for some numbers: 'septante' for 70 and 'nonante' for 90, where people in France say 'soixante-dix' and 'quatre-vingt-dix'.
11. In 2011 Belgium brewed 1,132 different beers, and Belgium has more than 2,000 chocolatiers, large and small.
12. Brussels hosts the European Commission, the Council of the European

Union and the European Council, as well as the headquarters of NATO.

- 13.** The first Olympic Games after the First World War were held in Antwerp in 1920.

TALK ABOUT IT

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to Belgium, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Mussels with fries or Belgian fries? What is a dish you remember from a trip?
- Congo becomes independent (1960). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Belgium becomes a federal state (1993). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen The Grand-Place, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of Belgium, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know Belgium?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. As of 2026, how many Belgian breweries carry the official Authentic Trappist Product label?

- A) Two
- B) Twelve
- C) Twenty
- D) Five

2. Which city is the capital of Wallonia?

- A) Liège
- B) Namur
- C) Mons
- D) Dinant

3. Filled chocolate pralines were first made in Brussels by Jean Neuhaus in 1912.

- A) True
- B) False

4. The purple cuberdon sweet has a Dutch nickname, 'neuzeke'. What does it mean?

- A) Little bell
- B) Little star
- C) Little tear
- D) Little nose

5. Which three languages are official in Belgium?

- A) Dutch, German and Danish
- B) French, German and Italian
- C) Dutch, French and English
- D) Dutch, French and German

6. The Atomium in Brussels was built for which event?

- A) The 1920 Olympic Games
- B) The coronation of King Philippe
- C) The 1958 World's Fair
- D) The first NATO summit

7. Which Dutch phrase means 'thank you very much'?

- A) Alstublieft
- B) Pardon
- C) Dank u wel
- D) Vandaag

8. What is the highest point in Belgium?

- A) Mont Blanc
- B) Zugspitze
- C) Signal de Botrange
- D) Ben Nevis

9. The Emperor Charles V was born in Bruges.

- A) True
- B) False

10. Which dish is often called Belgium's national dish?

- A) Rice tart
- B) Stoemp
- C) Cuberdon
- D) Mussels with fries

11. About how many costumes does the Manneken Pis statue in Brussels have?

- A) About 50
- B) About 10
- C) About 1,000
- D) About 100,000

12. Belgian endive is grown in bright sunlight to make its leaves dark green.

- A) True

B) False

Quiz answers

1. D) Five

Five: Westmalle, Westvleteren, Chimay, Orval and Rochefort. Achel lost the label in 2021, when its last monks left the abbey.

2. B) Namur

Namur, where the Sambre flows into the Meuse, is the capital of Wallonia.

3. True

True. Jean Neuhaus created the first filled pralines in 1912 in his shop in the Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert.

4. D) Little nose

'Neuzeke' means little nose, because of the sweet's cone shape. The cuberdon comes from Ghent.

5. D) Dutch, French and German

Dutch, French and German are the three official languages: Dutch in Flanders, French in Wallonia and a small German-speaking area in the east.

6. C) The 1958 World's Fair

The Atomium was built as the centrepiece of the 1958 World's Fair, Expo 58, in Brussels.

7. C) Dank u wel

'Dank u wel' means thank you very much. 'Alstublieft' means please, 'pardon' excuse me and 'vandaag' today.

8. C) Signal de Botrange

Signal de Botrange, 694 m, on the High Fens plateau near the German border, is the highest point in Belgium. The others are in France and Italy, Germany and Scotland.

9. False

False. Charles V was born in Ghent on 24 February 1500.

10. D) Mussels with fries

Mussels with fries, moules-frites, is often called Belgium's national dish. The fries come in a separate bowl so that they stay crisp.

11. C) About 1,000

Manneken Pis has a wardrobe of about 1,000 costumes, kept in a small museum near the statue.

12. False

False. Belgian endive is grown in the dark from a stored chicory root, which keeps its leaves pale and closed.

Belgium visa page

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