

# Hostelworld Guide for Brussels



Think of a city and you normally associate it with something. Think of Venice and images of canals flow into your head; imagine Paris and visions of the Eiffel Tower will come streaming into your mind. But Brussels is different. It's hard to pinpoint exactly what Brussels is famous for. The problem is, there are simply too many things to relate it to. This is where you will find Art Nouveau on every second street corner. It's also home to the European Union. Then you've got beer, chocolate, cartoon murals...the list goes on. Just ensure you have enough time to take it all in.

## In this Guide...

Useful Information  
After Dark  
Places to Eat  
Top Attractions  
Budget Tips  
Where to Shop



## The Essentials

### Getting There

**By plane:** Brussels is served by two airports. Most airlines land in Brussels International Airport while some budget airlines use Brussels Charleroi. The main airport is connected to the city by train while a coach service brings you from Charleroi to the city centre.

**By train:** Trains travelling to Brussels from international destinations arrive in Gare du Midi, just south of the centre.

**By bus:** Brussels' main bus station is beside Gare du Nord in Brussels' 'Little Manhattan'.

### Getting Around

**On foot:** You can cover the vast majority of what Brussels has to offer on foot, although places such as Palais de Justice and the Grand Place are quite far from each other.

**By metro/tram:** Brussels' metro network is easy to use and connects the eastern and western districts of the city. Unusually, some of the city's trams operate underground also. Single journeys cost €1.60 while a day-card is €4.20.

**By bus:** The Belgian capital's bus network covers almost the entire city but you probably won't need to use it during your stay.

### Brussels facts

**Location:** The city of Brussels, which is the official Belgian capital, is one of 19 municipalities found inside the Brussels-Capital Region.

**Population:** Around one million people live in and around the city of Brussels.

**Area:** The city covers an area of around 162 square kilometres.

**Founded:** Brussels was founded back in 979.

## Climate

Due to Brussels' location not far from the North Sea, the Belgian climate is of the maritime variety. This means it experiences its fair share of rain and grey skies. In wintertime, days are short, cold and damp. Things don't pick up until April when temperatures may reach a respectful 15°C. From here on temperatures begin to climb, sometimes reaching 30°C in July or August. Unfortunately these months can also be quite wet. September is regarded as a good month to visit weather-wise.

### Average Monthly Stats

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
C	3	3	6	9	13	16	17	17	14	11	6	3
MM	66	53	74	58	71	79	78	64	58	71	79	76
☀	2	2	4	5	7	7	6	6	5	4	2	1

C: Average Temp Centigrade

MM: Average Rainfall

☀: Average Hrs Sunshine

### Good to know...

**Language:** Flemish/French

**Currency:** Euro

**Electricity:** 220 Volts, AC/50Hz

**Area Code:** +32 (Belgium), 02 (Brussels)

**Emergency Codes:** Ambulance 100 / Fire 100 / Police 101

**Time Zone:** Central European Time (GMT + 1)

**Central Post Office:** 6 Blvd. Anspach

**Main Tourist Office:** Town Hall, Grand Place

### Embassies

**USA:** +32 (0)2 508 2111

**UK:** +32 (0)2 287 6211

**Canada:** +32 (0)2 741 0611

**Australia:** +32 (0)2 286 0500

**South Africa:** +32 (0)2 285 4400

**Ireland:** +32 (0)2 282 3400

**Germany:** +32 (0)2 787 1800

**Spain:** +32 (0)2 230 0340

**Italy:** +32 (0)2 643 3850

**New Zealand:** +32 (0)2 512 1040

**France:** +32 (0)2 548 8811

## Cheap Eats

**Le Pain Quotidien, Rue Antoine Dansaert 16** Located just minutes from the Grand Place, Le Pain Quotidien is arguably the nicest place for breakfast in the city. Choose from combo meals made up of croissants, tea and orange juice or simply sip on a coffee and nibble on a croissant. *Open daily from 8am-6pm.*

**Bar Sabir, Rue de Flandre 12** Bar Sabir is one of the coolest little eateries in the Belgian capital. Found deep in the heart of the St Catherine district, you can turn up in the afternoon for a steaming bowl of hearty soup or pop round after dark when you have two main courses to choose from, each very reasonably priced. *Open 12pm-3pm Mon-Wed, Thurs & Fri 12pm-3pm and 6pm-10pm.*

**Funny Lunch, Rue de la Régence 59** Easily found due to its bright green and yellow front, Funny Lunch makes for the perfect pit-stop at lunchtime after visiting Palais du Justice. Sandwiches, baguettes and paninis are quite cheap here or you can treat yourself to some pasta. *Open daily from 6am-4pm.*

## Moules et frites, s'il vous plaît!



**Chez Leon, Rue des Bouchers 18** Dating back to 1893, Chez Leon is the best place to sample Belgium's national dish 'mussels and fries'. It's located on the colourful Rue de Bouchers. While you're here, try the 'Formule Leon' for which is comprised of a rather large dish of steaming mussels and chunky, home-cut fries. *Open Sun-Thurs 11.30am-11pm, Fri & Sat 11.30am-11.30pm.*

**Belgian waffles** Dotted throughout the city centre are waffle stands that dish out hundreds of Belgian waffles to ravenous tourists every day. Extremely sweet but equally tasty, they are really very affordable. Decide that you want them smothered in syrup or any other topping and you'll pay a few cent extra but they're totally worth it.

## After Dark

**Délirium Café, Impasse de la Fidélité 4A** With over 2,000 types of beer to choose from (yes, 2,000), Délirium offers one of the vastest selections of beer in the city. Even though it's found down a basement in a building tucked down an alley, throngs of backpackers and locals visit this bar regularly. Thursday nights are particularly busy due to live music. *Open daily from 10am-4am.*

**Le Cirio, Rue de la Bourse 20** Le Cirio is something of an institution in the Belgian capital, and first opened its ornate doors to the flocking public in 1888. Home to the city's famous 'half and half' tippale which is half champagne and half white wine, this is the perfect place for a sedate night out, but not a hectic one. *Open daily from 10am-midnight.*

## Gay / Lesbian Brussels

As you would expect from a Western European capital, the gay scene in Brussels is extremely active, with most of the bars and clubs located in the city centre. One of the oldest gay bars in the city is **Le Belgica** (Rue du Marché au Charbon 32) which attracts a somewhat older crowd. The city's two cabaret bars are **Chez Maman** (Rue des Grands Carmes 7) and **Coucous Bar** (Rue du Jardin des Olives 10), while clubbers should check out the monthly **La Démence** night in **Fuse** (Blaesstraat 208).

**Zebra, Place St Gery 31** One of three bars that border the über-trendy Place St Gery, Zebra is a little rough around the edges when compared to its neighbours. The red-brick wall gives it a slightly rustic feel, but the laid-back tunes and chilled-out atmosphere bring it right back up to date. *Open daily from 10am-2am.*

**Le Roi des Belges, Rue Jules van Praet 35** When you get to this bar climb the steel, spiral staircase and get a seat on the upper level. Here DJs spin cool tunes to entertain the chic crowd while a barman mixes cocktails and pours beers to stop them from going thirsty. Downstairs isn't that bad either. *Open Sun-Thurs 11am-2.30am, Fri & Sat 11am-4am.*

**O'Reilly's, Place de la Bourse 1** Every city has an Irish bar and O'Reilly's is Brussels'. Yes, drink is slightly more expensive here than in most of the bars, but it has an enticing balcony overlooking Place de la Bourse making it a good people-watching spot. *Open Sun-Thurs 11am-1am, Fri & Sat 11am-4am.*

## Don't Miss

**Grand Place** Swarmed with tourists regardless of the season or weather, nothing can deny the fact that the Grand Place is one of the grandest and most beautiful squares in the world. Dominated by the façade of the gothic Hôtel de Ville, it looks even more beautiful after dark so make sure to return after sundown.

**Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée, Rue des Sables 20** The Belgians are famous for many things, and comic strip art is one of them. Tintin, Lucky Luke, The Smurfs...they all came from the minds of creative Belgian artists. This museum in the city centre explains the importance of these comic strips and has various galleries also. *Open Tues-Sun 10am-6pm; admission €8 (children €3).*

## Beer, glorious beer



**Musée Bruxellois de la Gueuze, Rue Gheude 56, Anderlecht** Located south of the city centre in the Anderlecht district, this museum, otherwise known as the Cantillon Brewery, is the perfect place for an insight into how the Belgians make beer. On the short tour you can see the larger-than-life instruments used to make beer as well as stroll through the dusty beer cellars. *Open Mon-Fri from 8.30am-5pm & Sat from 10am-5pm; admission €5.*

**Palais de Justice, Place Poelaert** Built between 1866 and 1883, Palais de Justice was for many years the world's largest building. Today you can wander around the main hall or book yourself on to one of the free, organised tours. *Open Mon-Fri 8am-5pm.*

**Place Royal** More a series of attractions than just one, around Place Royal is where you will find the sprawling Parc de Bruxelles, notable buildings such as Palais Royal and Eglise St Jacques sur Coudenberg, and museums such as the city's number one art gallery Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique.

## Mark Your Calendar

**March - Festival Pistes de Lancement** Brussels' Saint-Gilles district is where you will be treated to a host of performances put on by clowns from all over the world for the city's 'Clown Festival'.

**April to May - Laeken Glasshouses** Located within the Belgian Royal Parks, the Laeken Glasshouses are usually closed to the public. But once a year between April and May their gates are opened and thousands flock to see them.

**May - Botanical Nights** Whether it's jazz, pop, or reggae music that rocks your boat, you will find something you like at the annual 'Nuits Botaniques' festival in the Botanique cultural centre.

**May - Brussels Jazz Marathon** This free music festival is one of the most popular to take place in Brussels and annually attracts the biggest names in jazz music to the stage erected in the Grand Place.

**May - Gay Pride** Over 15,000 gay and lesbian Belgians take to the streets of the capital each year at the end of May for rallies, marches and parties.

**July - Ommegang** Every year at the beginning of July this parade, which has been taking place in Brussels since medieval times, attracts thousands to the Grand Place where it finishes.

**July - National Day** Ever since Léopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha was elected King of Belgium on July 21st, 1831, it has been the Belgian's national day. Expect street parties, live music and fireworks displays.

**August - Meyboom** The 9th of August is an eventful day in the Belgian capital when a Meyboom (May tree) is erected at the intersection of Rue du Marais and Rue des Sables. A group of costumed giants then bring it to the Grand Place.

**September - Brussels Beer Weekend** At this festival in the Grand Place beer tents are erected by different breweries from all over the country.

**October - Big Scarecrow Festival** People from all over Brussels compete against each other to have the best scarecrow which are judged in the Grand Place. One of the city's stranger events.

**December - Christmas Markets** Every Christmas some of Europe's most enchanting markets can be found in Place Sainte Catherine and the Grand Place, where there is also an ice-skating rink.

## Neighbourhood Watch

**Heysel** Located 20 minutes outside the city centre on the yellow metro line, Heysel is where Brussels' famous 'Atomium' structure can be found. Once you're there take time out to explore the district. Other attractions include Place de Belgique, Parc des Expositions and Parc de Laeken.

## Trendy Brussels



**Dansaert** Incorporating the area from the Bourse (Stock Exchange) to the canal and everywhere in between, Dansaert is where you will find St Géry and Ste Catherine, two of the city's coolest areas. The former is where all hippest bars can be found while the latter is where the trendiest restaurants can be located.

**Marolles** Best known for its daily flea-market on Place du Jeu, Marolles is traditionally Brussels' working-class district. Today, though, you can also find a host of restaurants, cafés and bars beside antique shops. Many say this is *real* Brussels.

**EU Area** East of the city centre around Schuman metro station is the EU area, where delegates from the European Union Member States sit to discuss the continent's issues. The most obvious attraction is the European Parliament but don't leave without exploring Parc du Cinquanteaire.

**Sablon** Stroll down Rue de la Régence after visiting Palais du Justice and you will be in the heart of the Sablon district. Its focal point is Place du Sablon, a pedestrianised square bordered by cafés and antique shops.

**Ixelles** Ixelles, just south of the extremely wide and affluent Avenue Louise, is another area known for its cafés and restaurants. It is also famous for its art nouveau architecture. It's a bit of a hike from the city centre but a good place to retreat to when the crowds at the Grand Place get too much.

## Retail Therapy

**Rue Neuve** Long, pedestrianised and always busy, Rue Neuve is Brussels' flagship shopping street. Here you will find all the brands you'd expect to see on such a street such as Benetton, Footlocker, H&M, Zara and Esprit, thus making it the perfect place to do damage to your credit card.

**Galleries St Hubert, Rue du Marché aux Herbes/Rue de l'Écuier** When Galleries St Hubert was first built in 1847 it was the world's first covered shopping gallery. It has aged well as today it is one of the most beautiful galleries in Europe. Most stores are quite touristy so you might not buy anything but make sure to stroll though it when you're there. *Open daily from 9am-6pm.*

**Avenue Louise** From the moment you see the Cartier store at the top of this street, you know that this is where you will discover some of Brussels' more luxuriant stores. Others that line this sprawling boulevard aren't as instantly recognisable, but if you're intent on treating yourself to something nice this is where to do it.

## A bit of this, a bit of that



**Place du Jeu de Balle Flea Market** This market in the city's Marolles district is where hundreds of market sellers do their utmost to offload all sorts of antiques, bric-a-brac and more to the people of Brussels on a daily basis. If you find yourself here you may realise there's nothing which could spark a sale but it's a hive of activity nonetheless. *Open daily from 6am-2pm.*

**Rue Antoine Dansaert** While Avenue Louise is the street that draws Brussels' more affluent shoppers, Rue Antoine Dansaert is the one that pulls its trendier ones. You won't be familiar with the names over the doors of these outlets but the clothes that decorate the hangers inside are the coolest in the city. Along with shops designed for men and women (and both) you'll find jewellery shops and more.

## Budget Tips

**Save money on Brussels' museums** If your visit to the Belgian capital takes in a Wednesday, you could save yourself a few Euro as this is when some of its museums are free. The Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of Ancient Art (both in Musée Royaux Des Beaux-Arts de Belgique) and the Musée des Instruments de Musique are all free on the first Wednesday of the month.

**Take in some views of the city** Brussels is quite a big city with some of its main attractions outside the city centre. To see them without leaving the city centre go to one of the city's vantage points. The best known of these is at Palais du Justice while the café in Musée des Instruments de Musique boasts breathtaking views also.

## City walks



**Embark on a city walk** Brussels' city centre streets are where you will find two of its best attributes - comic art and Art Nouveau buildings. Visit the city's tourist office at Hotel de Ville in the Grand Place and request either the comic art walk or Art Nouveau walk. Then simply lose yourself for the afternoon, admiring the sights along the way at no cost whatsoever.

**Visit Brussels' churches** Just like in a lot of European cities, most of Brussels' cathedrals and churches are free to visit. Many of them are also some of the city's most beautiful buildings. Notable ones include the city's cathedral **Cathédrale des Sts Michel and Dudule** which is Belgium's national church, **Eglise St Jacques sur Coudenberg** which was inspired by a Roman temple, and **Eglise St Catherine** on the square of the same name.

**Save money on public transport** If you're travelling around Brussels in a group and need to use public transport, don't buy separate tickets. Instead buy a 1-day groupcard for €10 which gives up to 5 people unlimited travel for the day.

## A Day in Brussels...



Start the day with tea (or coffee), freshly baked bread and jam in Le Pain Quotidien on Rue Antoine Dansaert, the best place for breakfast in Brussels.



Beat the crowds and visit the Grand Place in the morning. You will find it difficult to peel your eyes off the gothic Hotel de Ville in what is one of Europe's most beautiful squares.



Make your way up to Place Royal in the city's Upper Town. Here you will find a host of attractions, most notably Palais Royal and the city's flagship art gallery.



After taking in all the sights, walk through the Sablon district on Rue de la Régence en route to Palais du Justice. Stop for lunch in the aptly named 'Funny Lunch'.



Gaze in awe at Palais du Justice, for many years the biggest building in the world. Also take in the views over the city from Place Poelaert.



Take the metro from 'Louise' (just outside Palais du Justice) to De Brouckère. From there visit Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée, Brussels' comic art museum.



Begin your night with some rest and relaxation in 'Le Cirio', one of Brussels' best known cafés. Order its most famous drink, a 'half and half'.



Take the short stroll to the bright and brash Rue des Bouchers to 'Chez Leon'. Enjoy 'moules et frites' (mussels and fries).



Finish the night off in one of the bars on Place St Géry. 'Zebra' is the grungiest on the square, while 'Le Roi des Belges' attracts a trendier clientele. Try out both!