

# WEEKLY BLOGS

## SERIAL 4 : BELGIUM

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# WHY BELGIUM ?

Belgium is a compact country with a rich personality, blending medieval charm, vibrant cities, and scenic countryside. From the winding canals of Bruges and the historic streets of Ghent to the bustling squares of Brussels and the forests of the Ardennes, Belgium captivates every visitor. Imagine cruising along tranquil canals, sampling world-class chocolate and beer, exploring grand cathedrals, and ending your day at a lively café with a plate of moules frites. Whether you are drawn by history, art, cuisine, festivals, or nature, Belgium is a destination that offers both charm and energy.



## What do we know about Belgium?

### Here's why it's a must-visit:

#### Diverse Landscapes 🌄

Belgium offers a mix of charming canals, rolling hills, dense forests, and scenic coastlines. From the fairy-tale streets of Bruges to the lush Ardennes, every region has its own unique scenery and atmosphere.

#### Cultural & Historical Legacy 🏰

Belgium is rich in art, architecture, and history. Brussels' Grand Place, Ghent's medieval castles, and Antwerp's historic quarters showcase centuries of culture, while festivals and street art keep creativity alive today.

#### Adventure Opportunities 🏕️

Outdoor lovers can hike, cycle, kayak, or explore caves in the Ardennes, while the coast offers sailing, beach walks, and water sports. Scenic trails and rivers make every adventure memorable.

#### Historic Cities 🏰

Brussels, Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp blend medieval charm with modern vibrancy. From cathedrals and museums to lively squares and contemporary art, Belgium's cities are rich in experiences.

#### Culinary Delights 🍷

Belgium is famous for waffles, chocolate, fries, moules frites, and hearty stews like Carbonnade Flamande. Cafés, bistros, and friteries are perfect for sampling traditional dishes and enjoying local flavours.

### Quick Facts About Belgium:

- **Location:** Belgium is in Western Europe, bordered by France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the North Sea.
- **Area:** Belgium covers 30,688 km<sup>2</sup>, combining flat coastal plains, rolling hills, and forested regions.
- **Population:** Approximately 11.7 million people live in Belgium as of 2025.
- **Capital City:** Brussels, known for its grand squares, EU institutions, and vibrant culture, is Belgium's capital.
- **Official Languages:** Dutch, French, and German are official, reflecting the country's diverse regions and communities.
- **Currency:** The Euro (EUR) is used for all transactions.
- **Time Zone:** Belgium follows Central European Time (UTC+1), with daylight saving in summer (UTC+2).
- **Climate:** Belgium has a temperate maritime climate with mild summers, cool winters, and frequent rainfall throughout the year.
- **Fun Fact:** Belgium is famous for producing over 2,000 different types of beer, making it one of the world's top beer countries.



## WHAT EXACTLY IS BELGIAN CUISINE?

- Belgian cuisine is a delightful blend of comfort, tradition, and rich regional flavors. Influenced by neighboring France, Germany, and the Netherlands, it is hearty, varied, and deeply connected to local culture and history. Every dish tells a story of trade, regional produce, and centuries of culinary evolution.
- At its heart are the world-famous Belgian waffles – Liège waffles, sweet and caramelized with pearl sugar, and Brussels waffles, light and crispy, perfect with cream, chocolate, or fresh fruit. Belgian chocolate is another icon, with artisanal pralines and truffles crafted to perfection by master chocolatiers. Moules frites, a classic dish of steamed mussels in a fragrant broth served with crispy fries, showcases Belgium's love of simple, satisfying meals. Carbonnade flamande, beef slowly stewed in dark beer, offers rich, comforting flavors, while stoemp, a creamy mash of potatoes and vegetables, highlights rustic home cooking.
- Belgium also shines in its snack culture. Fries, often enjoyed with mayonnaise or other sauces, and spiced biscuits like speculoos are beloved treats. Waterzooi, a creamy chicken or fish stew from Ghent, is another regional specialty, reflecting the country's diverse culinary traditions.
- To drink, Belgium is famous for its world-class beers, with thousands of varieties brewed across the country, from Trappist ales to crisp, refreshing lagers. Belgian cafés and bistros are lively gathering spots where locals enjoy good food, conversation, and a sense of community. Belgian cuisine is a feast for the senses, offering both tradition and innovation in every bite.

## 10 Best Belgian Foods You Must Try 🇧🇪

Belgium is a paradise for food lovers. Don't leave without trying its iconic dishes and drinks:

### I. Waffles — Liège style and Brussels style 🍩

Liège waffles are dense, chewy and studded with caramelised pearl sugar; Brussels waffles are lighter, crisp and rectangular, both are perfect warm with toppings like cream, fruit or maple syrup.

### II. Belgian Chocolate — artisanal pralines and truffles 🍫

Belgian chocolatiers craft silky ganaches and filled pralines by hand; expect rich, refined flavours and beautiful packaging: a true souvenir (and irresistible snack).

### III. Moules frites — mussels with fries 🍷🍟

Steamed mussels in a fragrant broth of white wine, garlic and herbs served with a pile of crisp fries- simple, communal and utterly comforting.

### IV. Carbonnade flamande — beef stewed in beer 🍷🍖

Slow-braised beef simmered in dark beer with onions and a touch of brown sugar or mustard for sweet-sour depth hearty, soulful and best served with bread or fries.

### V. Stoemp — mashed potato with vegetables 🥔🥕

Creamy mashed potato blended with carrots, leeks or cabbage and seasoned with herbs; a cozy, rustic side that pairs beautifully with sausages or stews.

### VI. Fries served with a variety of sauces 🍟🥫

Belgian fries are thick, twice-fried for crunch and offered with countless sauces: classic mayonnaise, Andalouse, samurai or tartar, customise every bite.

### VII. Speculoos — spiced biscuits often served with coffee 🍪☕

Crunchy spiced biscuits (think cinnamon, nutmeg and caramel notes) that pair perfectly with coffee and appear as cookies, spreads and desserts across Belgium.

### VIII. Waterzooi — creamy fish or chicken stew from Ghent 🐟🍲

A silky stew of fish or chicken, root veg and cream or egg-thickened broth; delicate, nourishing and a signature comfort dish of Ghent.

### IX. Belgian Fries with mayonnaise from a friterie 🍟❤️

Taken straight from the paper cone at a friterie and doused in cool, rich mayonnaise, the quintessential Belgian street food moment.

### X. Triple-cooked potatoes and regional cheeses 🥔🧀

Potatoes cooked to extra-crispy perfection (boil, dry, fry) paired with mellow regional cheeses, think creamy Passendale or farmhouse varieties — a perfect combo of crunch and cream.



## The Heartbeat of Belgium: Culture, Lifestyle & Traditions

Belgium's culture is a lively mix of history, art, and regional traditions that create a vibrant national identity. At its core lies a love for community, celebration, and local pride – whether through food, festivals, or everyday rituals, Belgians embrace life with charm and warmth. Here are ten cultural traits that define the Belgian way of life:

### Café Culture ☕

Belgian cafés and brasseries are social hubs where locals gather to enjoy coffee, beer, or a light meal while chatting, playing games, or watching football. From historic city cafés in Brussels to cozy village spots, these spaces foster connection and conversation.

### Music and Festivals 🎵

Belgium celebrates music in all forms, from classical concerts in Antwerp to lively jazz festivals in Ghent. Carnival events, folk festivals, and city-wide music celebrations keep communities engaged and highlight the country's creative spirit.

### Seasonal Celebrations 🎄

Belgians cherish traditions tied to the calendar. Christmas markets fill town squares with lights, mulled wine, and festive treats. Easter brings decorated eggs and family gatherings, while summer features outdoor festivals and the colorful processions of local saints' days. These seasonal customs give Belgium a lively, year-round cultural rhythm.



## The Heartbeat of Belgium: Culture, Lifestyle & Traditions

### Outdoor Lifestyle 🌳

Belgium may be small, but its landscapes are diverse and inviting. From the rolling hills and forests of the Ardennes to the sandy beaches of the North Sea, Belgians enjoy hiking, cycling, boating, and nature walks. Parks, rivers, and trails are popular spots for relaxation, sports, and weekend getaways, making outdoor life an integral part of daily routines.

### Festivals & Folklore 🎭

Belgium celebrates its rich cultural heritage with numerous festivals, from the colorful Carnival of Binche to the flower carpet in Brussels. Traditional music, dance, and costumes remain part of local festivities, while contemporary arts and street performances bring modern energy to historic towns. These events connect Belgians to their roots and foster community pride.

### Politeness & Hospitality 🍷

Belgians are courteous and welcoming, with formal greetings often involving a handshake or cheek kiss depending on the region. Respect for personal space, punctuality, and proper manners are important, and visitors are often invited to enjoy coffee, beer, or local treats when welcomed into homes or social settings.

### Passion for Order & Cleanliness 🧹

Belgium values cleanliness, well-maintained streets, and organized public spaces. Recycling is strictly observed, public transport runs efficiently, and parks and historic sites are cared for meticulously, reflecting a strong respect for community and environment.



## Love of Beer & Local Taverns 🍺

In Belgium, cozy pubs, brasseries, and beer cafés are cultural treasures. Locals gather to enjoy world-class beers, hearty dishes, and friendly conversation. These welcoming spots blend dining, socialising, and tradition, offering a true taste of Belgian community life.

## Balance of Tradition & Modernity ⚖️

Belgium is a country where medieval architecture and historic squares stand alongside contemporary museums and modern art galleries. Centuries-old festivals coexist with electronic music events and urban cultural movements, creating a dynamic balance between heritage and modern innovation.



# The Ultimate Belgium Travel Bucket List

## 1. Brussels – “The Political & Cultural Capital” 🎯

Brussels is where grand squares, modern institutions, and lively neighbourhood cafés meet. Wander the gilded Grand Place, marvel at the Atomium’s futuristic spheres, and explore world-class museums and comic-strip culture. The European quarter adds a unique political dimension, while neighbourhoods like Sablon and Saint-Géry combine artisanal chocolate shops, antiquarian bookshops and buzzing terraces. Evenings are for sampling beers in cosy brasseries or watching street musicians animate the squares.

- Grand Place 🏰 – Stunning UNESCO-listed square and ornate guild houses
- Atomium 🌌 – Iconic modern landmark with panoramic views
- European Quarter 🏛️ – Institutions, museums and leafy parks

📍 Main Access: Brussels Airport (BRU) and Brussels South Charleroi (CRL).

🕒 Suggested Stay: 2–4 days

🌞 Best Time: April–October.



## 2. Bruges – “Medieval Canals & Fairytale Streets” 🏰

Bruges feels like stepping into a storybook, with cobbled alleys, tranquil canals and ornate medieval façades. Drift on a canal cruise, climb the Belfry for sweeping town views, and follow chocolate-scented lanes to boutique chocolatiers. The compact centre is perfect for wandering—discover hidden courtyards, artisan workshops and atmospheric squares that glow at dusk. Though popular, Bruges rewards slower travel: linger over coffee, sample local beer, and watch the city reveal its details.

- Canal Cruises 🚤 – Picturesque rides through the heart of the city
- Belfry & Markt 🏰 – Panoramic views and lively market square
- Chocolatiers & Lace Shops 💎 – Craft traditions and delicious souvenirs

📍 Main Access: Reachable by train from Brussels or by road; nearest airports include Brussels and Ostend.

🕒 Suggested Stay: 1–2 days

🌞 Best Time: April–October (for best weather and events).

## 3. Ghent – “Lively Medieval & Student City” 🎓

Ghent blends a rich medieval past with a youthful creative pulse. Explore the imposing Gravensteen castle, stroll the atmospheric Graslei and Korenlei riverfronts, and dive into a thriving arts scene of galleries, street art and live music. Canal-side cafés and student-run venues give Ghent an energetic nightlife without losing its historic charm. Food markets, boat tours and evening light shows make the city an engaging stop for culture lovers and curious travellers alike.

- Gravensteen Castle 🏰 – Well-preserved medieval fortress with great views
- Graslei & Korenlei 🌉 – Picturesque riverfront and cafés
- Contemporary Arts & Nightlife 🎨 – Galleries, live music and student venues

📍 Main Access: Ghent St. Pieters station; easy rail links from Brussels and Antwerp.

🕒 Suggested Stay: 1–2 days

🌞 Best Time: May–September.



#### 4. Antwerp – “Diamonds, Fashion & Port Energy” 💎

Antwerp is a stylish mix of historic grandeur and contemporary creativity. Its cathedral houses Rubens masterpieces, the diamond quarter hums with trade centuries old, and the fashion district pulses with cutting-edge designers. The old port and redeveloped quay areas add maritime character, while cosy cafés and Michelin kitchens show Belgium’s culinary confidence. Antwerp is a city for shoppers, art lovers and foodies who appreciate a confident, modern European vibe.

- Cathedral of Our Lady 🏰 – Home to Rubens’ masterpieces
- Diamond District 💎 – Global centre for diamond trade and craftsmanship
- Fashion Quarter 👗 – Boutiques, museums and innovative design

📍 Main Access: Antwerp International Airport (ANR) and Antwerp Central rail hub.

🍷 Suggested Stay: 1-2 days

🌞 Best Time: April–October.

#### 5. Ardennes – “Hills, Forests & Outdoor Adventure” 🌲

The Ardennes are Belgium’s green retreat: rolling hills, dense forests, and winding rivers perfect for hiking, cycling and canoeing. Small towns and villages offer cosy guesthouses, hearty regional cuisine and local markets. History buffs will find battlefield sites and fortresses, while nature lovers can follow scenic trails, discover caves, and paddle quiet waterways. The Ardennes feels quietly wild in summer and atmospheric under autumn’s golden canopy.

- Hiking & Cycling Trails 🥾 – Extensive routes through forests and valleys
- River Activities 🛶 – Canoeing, kayaking and peaceful river cruises
- Historic Villages & Wartime Sites 🏰 – Forts, museums and cultural heritage

📍 Main Access: Regional access via Liège, Namur or Brussels by car/train.

🍷 Suggested Stay: 2–4 days

🌞 Best Time: May–September.



#### 6. Coastal Towns – “Sandy Beaches & Seaside Resorts” 🌊

Belgium’s North Sea coast pairs brisk seaside air with charming promenades, seafood restaurants and family-friendly beaches. Seaside towns like Ostend combine broad beachfronts and cultural venues, Knokke offers stylish beach clubs and galleries, and De Haan charms with Belle Époque architecture and relaxed promenades. Summer brings sun and festivals; shoulder seasons are quieter and ideal for long walks on the sand and fresh seafood by the water.

- Ostend Promenade 🏖️ – Broad sandy beaches and lively boardwalk
- Knokke-Heist 🏖️ – Upscale beach clubs, galleries and shopping
- De Haan 🏖️ – Belle Époque charm and peaceful seaside lanes

📍 Main Access: Trains and roads from Brussels and Bruges; Ostend coastal towns are reachable by rail and road.

🍷 Suggested Stay: 1–3 days

🌞 Best Time: June–August for beach weather; May–September for milder crowds.

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## Rules Every Traveller Must Know Before Visiting Belgium:

Belgium is a beautiful and welcoming country, but it also comes with important rules and customs that travellers must follow to ensure a smooth, safe, and enjoyable trip. From entry requirements to cultural etiquette, respecting Belgian laws and traditions is essential. Here's everything you need to know before you land:

### Passport & Visa Requirements

- **Passport Validity:** Your passport must be valid for at least 3 months beyond your intended departure from Belgium.
- **Visa:** Belgium is part of the Schengen Area. Travellers from many countries can enter visa-free for up to 90 days. Others must obtain a Schengen visa before arrival.
- **Registration Requirement:** If staying in Belgium for more than 3 nights, you must register your address with the local authorities (usually handled by your hotel).

### Biosecurity & Customs

- Declare large sums of cash (over €10,000) when entering or leaving the EU.
- Prohibited items include illegal drugs, counterfeit goods, and protected cultural artifacts.
- Duty-free allowances apply for alcohol and tobacco but must stay within EU limits.

### Driving in Belgium

- Drive on the right-hand side of the road.
- Seatbelts are mandatory for all passengers.
- Motorways commonly have a 120 km/h speed limit, while built-up areas are usually 50 km/h unless signs indicate otherwise.
- Driving under the influence: Strict blood alcohol limit of 0.05%. For new drivers (less than 2 years license), the limit is 0.02%.



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### Medication & Health Rules

- Carry prescription medications in original packaging with a doctor's note.
- Some medications legal elsewhere may be restricted in Belgium – check before travelling.
- Tap water is safe and of high quality throughout the country

### Photography Etiquette

- Allowed in most public places, but always respect “No Photography” signs in museums and churches.
- Avoid photographing military areas, police, or government buildings.
- Always ask before photographing locals, especially in small towns or villages.

### Outdoor Safety

- Weather can change quickly – carry proper clothing and gear.
- Stick to marked trails when hiking or cycling; off-trail walking can be dangerous and is discouraged.
- In winter, check local warnings before skiing, snowboarding, or other seasonal activities.

### Local Culture & Etiquette

- Greetings are generally polite and can include a handshake or cheek kiss depending on the region.
- Address people with appropriate titles unless invited to use first names.
- Punctuality is highly valued – being late is considered disrespectful.
- In churches and cultural sites, dress modestly and behave quietly.



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### Smoking & Alcohol

- Smoking is banned inside restaurants, cafés, and most public buildings.
- Legal drinking age: 16 for beer and wine, 18 for spirits.
- Drinking alcohol in public is generally allowed but may be frowned upon in formal areas.

### Immigration & Legal Rules

- Belgium is part of the Schengen Area – many visitors can stay up to 90 days visa-free, while others require a Schengen visa.
- Carry valid ID or a passport at all times; random checks are possible.
- Illegal drugs, weapons, and counterfeit goods are strictly banned with severe penalties.

### Food & Cultural Tips

- Always say “Bon appétit” or “Smakelijk” before eating with others – it is polite and traditional.
- Respect café and bistro culture: order at least one item if you plan to sit for a long time.
- In churches or cultural sites, dress modestly and keep your voice low.

### Emergency & Assistance

- Emergency Number (EU-wide): 112
- Police: 101 | Fire: 100 | Ambulance: 112
- Pharmacies are marked with a green cross, and at least one is always open in each city on rotation.

### Key Travel Tips

- Dress modestly for churches and formal events.
- Learn a few local phrases in French, Dutch, or German – locals appreciate the effort.
- Try public transport: efficient, clean, and scenic.
- Cash is still widely used, though cards are common in cities.
- Respect quiet hours, especially in residential areas.



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