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## BELGIUM

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### FACTS AND STATISTICS

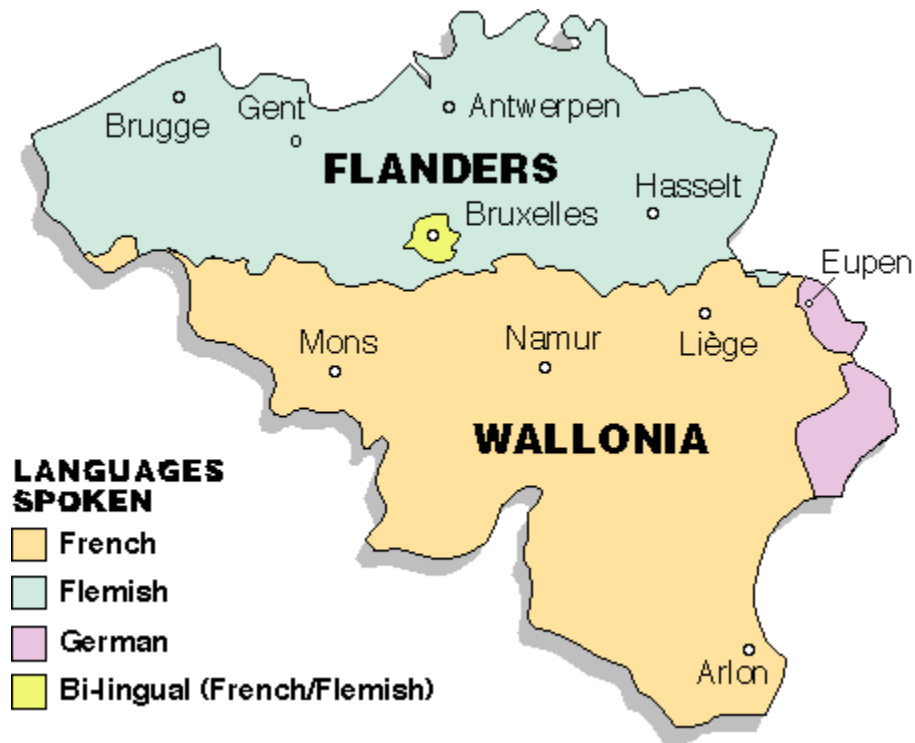
**Location:** Western Europe, bordering **France** 620 km, **Germany** 167 km, **Luxembourg** 148 km, **Netherlands** 450 km

**Capital:** Brussels

**Climate:** temperate; mild winters, cool summers; rainy, humid, cloudy

**Population:** 11.59 million (2020)

- **Ethnic Make-up:** Fleming 58%, Walloon 31%, mixed or other 11%
- **Religions:** Roman Catholic 75%, Protestant or other 25%
- **Government:** federal parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarch



### LANGUAGES OF BELGIUM

Official Languages of Belgium are French, Dutch and German. Wallon is used by 33% of population. Flemish, the local variant of Dutch, is used by more than 60% of the population and is spoken in the northern part of the country.

- The languages learned at school are officially labeled French and Dutch. German, spoken by 1% of population can be found in the cantons in the east of the Wallon region.
- Brussels, the capital of Belgium, has two official languages: French and Dutch.
- Luxembourgish is spoken by around 0.5% of the population, but the language has no official status.
- About 10% of the Belgian population are non-native, and languages spoken include Italian, Spanish, Greek, Arabic and Turkish.

### BELGIAN SOCIETY & CULTURE

Belgium is not a homogeneous country with one national identity. As such, it is therefore difficult to give a general overview that applies to all Belgians.

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Each area will have its own particularities. The three predominant cultures are:

- 1) in north, Flanders - primarily Dutch,
- 2) in the south, Wallonia - primarily French and
- 3) the northeast - primarily German influenced.

The following are brief aspects that are applicable to all areas.

### **Belgian Family Values**

- Family plays a central role in most Belgians' lives.
- The obligation to the family is a person's first priority.
- Many people remain in the town in which they were raised, which creates close extended families.

### **Appearances Matter**

- Appearances are important to Belgians.
- They can often be seen washing the pavement or steps in front of their house or even sweeping the street.
- Cleanliness is a matter of national pride.
- Belgians take great pride in their houses. To have overgrown hedges or untidy gardens would disgrace the family and insult their neighbors.
- Belgians take pride in their personal appearance too. They dress well and are concerned with the impression they make on others.

### **Egalitarianism in Belgian Society**

- Belgium is on the whole an egalitarian society.
- Women are not expected to change their name when they marry.
- There are laws governing paternity as well as maternity leaves and laws forbidding sexual harassment in the workplace.

### **Tipping**

- The majority of restaurants in Belgium include a service charge of 10-15% of the bill.
- Tips in addition to this fee are not expected.
- Consider rounding up the bill for taxi drivers.
- It's not common to tip house keeping / concierge or bar staff.

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## ETIQUETTE & MANNERS IN BELGIUM

### Meeting Etiquette

- Greetings entail a degree of formality. A brief handshake is the common greeting among people who do not know each other.
- Once a relationship is developed, one kiss on the cheek may replace the handshake. The Dutch do three kisses. This is more kissing of the air near the person's cheek. Start with the left cheek and alternate. But basically, you touch your right cheeks together.
- Men never kiss other men; they always shake hands.

### Gift Giving Etiquette

- If you are invited to a Belgian's house, bring flowers or good quality chocolates for the hostess.
- Older Belgians may expect flowers to be unwrapped.
- Do not give white chrysanthemums as they signify death.
- Flowers should be given in an odd number, but not 13.
- Liquor or wine should only be given to close friends.
- Gifts are opened when received.

### Dining Etiquette

- Belgians socialize in their homes and restaurants, although the home is reserved for family or close friends.
- If you receive a written invitation, the response must be written as well.
- Wait for your host or hostess to introduce you to the other guests.
- Dress conservatively. Belgians take pride in their appearance and expect you to do the same.
- Arrive on time. Punctuality demonstrates respect.
- Wait for your host to tell you where to sit.
- Women take their seats before men.
- Table manners are Continental -- the fork is held in the left hand and the knife in the right while eating.
- Keep your wrists above the table when eating.
- Wait to see if your host offers a toast before sipping your drink.
- The guest of honor may also give a toast.
- Women may offer a toast.
- It is polite to stand for a toast.

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- The Flemish raise their glasses twice during a toast. The glass is initially raised during the toast and then at the completion of the toast.
  - Never leave food on your plate. It is seen as both rude and wasteful.
  - Indicate you have finished eating by laying your knife and fork parallel on your plate, tines facing upwards, with the handles facing to the right.
  - Belgians take pride in their cuisine, so praising a meal is a sincere compliment.