

BRUSSELS

Brussels, officially the Brussels Capital-Region, is the de facto capital city of the **European Union** (EU) and the largest urban area in Belgium. It includes the City of Brussels municipality which is the capital of Belgium, of Flanders, and of the French Community of **Belgium**.

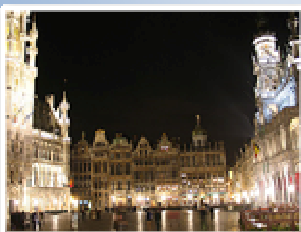
Since the end of the Second World War, Brussels has been an important centre for international politics. It hosts the main institutions of the European Union, and the headquarters of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Thus, Brussels is the polyglot home of many international organisations, politicians, diplomats and civil servants. Brussels is the EU's third-richest city in terms of per capita income.

Although historically the majority language in **Brussels** was a Brabantian dialect of the Dutch language, the city has now become in its majority Francophone following a long period of Frenchification. Today most inhabitants are native French-speakers, although both languages have official status. This process has led to a longstanding conflict between the French- and Dutch-speaking communities of Belgium, reflecting the situation in the country at large. Brussels is the capital of **Flanders** and of the French Community of **Belgium**.



The Royal Palace: is the official palace of the King of the **Belgians** in the centre of the nation's capital **Brussels**. However it is not used as a royal residence, as the king and his family live in the **Royal Castle of Laeken** on the outskirts of Brussels.

The palace is situated in front of Brussels Park. A long square called the Paleizenplein/Place des Palais separates the palace from the park. The middle axis of the park marks both the middle peristyle of the palace and the middle of the facing building on the other side of the park, which is the Palace of the Nation. The two facing buildings are said to symbolize Belgium's system of government: a constitutional monarchy.



The Grote Markt: (Dutch) or Grand Place (French) is the central market square of Brussels. It is surrounded by guild houses, the city's Town Hall, and the Bread House. The square is the most important tourist destination and most memorable landmark in Brussels next to the Atomium and Manneken Pis.



Manneken Pis: also known in French as the petit Julien, is a very famous **Brussels** landmark. It is a small bronze fountain sculpture depicting a naked little boy urinating into the fountain's basin.

On many occasions, the statue is dressed in a costume. His wardrobe now consists of several hundred different costumes. The costumes are changed according to a schedule managed by the non-profit association.

The Belgian Centre for Comic Strip Art: chronicles the history of **Belgian** comics. Housed in a former department store in Brussels' business district, it exhibits examples of comic strips in French, Dutch and English.

The full range of comic art is covered, including science fiction, wild west, crime and politics as well as children's comics such as The Smurfs. There is a shop, research library and restaurant on the ground floor of the historic building, which was designed by the Belgian art nouveau architect Victor Horta.

Atomium: Built for the 1958 Brussels World Fair (Expo '58), it is a 335 foot (102 meters) tall representation of an atomic unit cell. More precisely, it is symbolic of a unit cell of an iron crystal magnified 165 billion times. Nine steel spheres 54 feet (18 meters) in diameter connect via tubes with elevators 105 feet (35 meters) long. Windows in the top sphere provide an awesome panoramic view of **Brussels**.

The Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium: is one of the most famous museums in **Belgium**. There are four museums connected with the Royal Museum, and two of them (the Museum of Ancient Art and the Museum of Modern Art), are in the main building. The other two (the Museum Constantin Meunier and the Antoine Wiertz Museum) are dedicated to specific Belgian artists, are much smaller, and are located at different points in the city.

The Royal Museum contains over 20,000 drawings, sculptures, and paintings, which date from the early 15th century to the present.

USEFUL INFORMATION

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