

## **Belgium**

### **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:** 10,348,276 (July 2004 est.)

**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 labelled 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.

Why not learn some useful French phrases, Dutch phrases or German phrases?

### **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. 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.