



# 24 HOURS IN BRUSSELS

Words by Kimberley Lovato Illustration by Fernando Volken Togni

Connect Brussels, Belgium → Distance: 4,904 km → Flight Time: 7 hours, 10 minutes → Frequency: 5 flights a week

**BELGIUM GAINED INDEPENDENCE IN 1830. PRIOR TO THAT THE TERRITORY WAS RULED BY NEARLY EVERY**

**EUROPEAN POWER** including the Roman Empire, France, Austria, Hapsburgian Spain, and the Netherlands. It's fitting, then, that the capital city of Brussels has grown from its roots as a 10<sup>th</sup>-century fortified town along the Zenne River (now bricked over) into a bilingual metropolis of over one million inhabitants, half of whom hail from elsewhere.

It's also the home of NATO, the European Union, and nearly 2,000 international companies and organisations, reflecting

the multicultural and effervescent spirit of a city.

But don't ignore its home-grown heroes. Brussels is the cradle of Art Nouveau, and opulent structures – such as the UNESCO townhouses of Victor Horta – dot the cityscape. Chocolate-lovers can thank Brussels chocolatier Jean Neuhaus for inventing the praline: the filling-stuffed chocolates we are familiar with today. And did you know The Smurfs, Tintin, and Lucky Luke are just a few of the comic characters created by Belgian authors and cartoonists? It's no wonder Brussels is called the capital of Europe.



© jan kramendonk/istockphoto.com

Royal Palace and gardens

**GETTING AROUND**



**taxi**

Taxis are found at the airport, hotels, or train stations, but can't be hailed on the streets.



**walk**

Brussels is compact, and the various neighbourhoods, squares, and green spaces are best discovered on foot – when it's not raining.



**bike**

For the very brave, there are 180 Villo bike stations around Brussels that charge only €1.50 per day and €7 per week.



**train**

The city's buses, trams, and underground trains are efficient and affordable: only €1.70 per journey or €12.30 for ten rides.

**CITY PROFILE**

**OFTEN CONSIDERED THE UGLY STEP-SISTER OF MORE GLAMOROUS NEIGHBOURS** London, Amsterdam, and Paris, Brussels is viewed as a quick stop en route to somewhere else. But those who live and work there know the city possesses an understated sophistication not

perceptible from a cursory glance. A patchwork of sundry neighbourhoods, top-notch restaurants, and cutting-edge cultural venues, Brussels presents a bevy of surprises for those willing to branch out beyond the main tourist traps and uncover her hidden beauty.

01.00

**Salsa on over to Maria's**, in the heart of the city, where Spanish tapas is served until midnight, and live music and dancing pulse until the wee hours. (Rue Auguste Orts 6.)

07.00

**Outdoor markets are the cornerstone of daily life in Brussels**, and Place Ste. Catherine is a local favourite, set amongst gabled Flemish houses and cafés.

09.00

**The Grand'Place, a UNESCO site** and touted as "the most beautiful square in Europe" by Victor Hugo, inspires gaping at gold-tipped guild houses and a 96-metre spire-topped town hall.

10.00

**Explore Les Marolles, a working-class neighbourhood** popular for its daily flea market, and the only place you might hear Bruxellois, an old dialect mixing French, Flemish, and a bit of Spanish.

12.00

**Follow Brussels' whimsical spirit along the Comic Strip Trail:** 36 larger-than-life comic murals painted on buildings around the city centre illustrating Belgium's beloved art form.

13.00

**René Magritte is venerated at the Magritte Museum**, opened in 2009 and showcasing the world's largest collection of the surrealist's work. Book tickets online.

15.00

**Indulge your sweet tooth at the small café above Wittamer** on the Place du Grand Sablon – a stunning square laced with chocolate shops, chic boutiques, and outdoor terraces.

16.00

**Rejuvenate at the Zein Oriental Spa** inside the historic Tour & Taxis building, once the base for the first European postal service, which ran between Brussels and Vienna.

20.00

**Architecture and gastronomy meet at Belga Queen**, a Belle Époque bank-turned-sumptuous restaurant with dishes using ingredients exclusively from Belgian sources. Downstairs, a cigar bar sits in the former vault.

22.00

**The neon-blue sign on fashionable Rue Antoine Dansaert is L'Archiduc**, a legendary Art Deco bar known for its smooth cocktails, cool jazz, and 5am closing time.

→ Although Brussels is officially a bilingual region, French is the predominant language. Most people speak more than one language.