# **Destination Guide for Belgium**



**Overview** 

#### **Destination Guide Content**

#### **Destination Risk Levels**

Low Medical Risk for Belgium

Low Travel Risk for Belgium

# **Standing Travel Advice**

- Travel to Belgium can continue with standard security precautions.
- Take basic security precautions against petty and street crime.
- Strikes within the transport sector can disrupt travel. Stay abreast of planned industrial action and plan itineraries accordingly.
- Protests and demonstrations over various political and socio-economic issues are common but usually pass of peacefully. Plan journeys bypassing them as a precaution and to minimise travel delays.
- There is a credible threat of terrorism from a wide variety of actors. Exercise vigilance at notable targets, including migrant centres, religious sites, transport hubs and tourist attractions. Carry out a profile- and industry-specific risk assessment as required.
- Be alert to suspicious behaviour and report any suspect packages to the authorities.
- Security alerts or hoaxes can trigger the short-notice evacuation of transport hubs or public locations, which can cause disruption. Follow all directives issued by the authorities during any security operation and do not act on the basis of unverified information.

# Active Alerts (2)

Notice
23 October 2024 at 20:13

Expect disruption across airports on 24-28 October during environmental protests **Location:** Belgium

Category: Protest/Rally, Airport disruption, Road disruption

## Situation:

Expect disruption at airports across the country during environmental protests planned **for 24-28 October** by the environmentalist movement Code Red (Code Rouge-Rood). The protests are being held against the environmental impact of the fossil fuel industry and aviation sector. While the timing and location of gatherings have not yet been confirmed, activists have previously targeted Antwerp (ANR) and Liege (LGG) airports. Expect a heightened security presence near airports. Liaise with local contacts regarding protests in your area and reconfirm the status of routes if travelling to or from a facility.

# Advice:

- Liaise with local contacts for information on related protests in your area. Expect airport disruption during related protests and plan journeys accordingly. Reconfirm the status of routes before setting out and allow extra time for travel.
- Do not attempt to cross roadblocks erected by demonstrators, as this is liable to elicit a hostile response. If you encounter a roadblock, turn around and seek an alternative route to your destination.
- We do not hold information on specific flights. Contact the airport or the relevant airline for the latest information on the status of your flight.
- Expect heightened security near related protests and follow all official directives.
- Monitor our Belgium alerts for updates.

Notice29 December 2023 at 08:55

Brussels: Anticipate disruption during taxi driver's strike at airport on 29 December

Location: Belgium

Category: Strike, Road disruption

### Situation:

Anticipate disruption at capital Brussels' Airport (BRU) on **29 December** during a planned strike by taxi drivers. The drivers are protesting against the regional government's plan to impose a mandatory Dutch language exam from 2024. The strike is expected to take place from **15.00-17.30** (local time), with fewer taxis expected at the airport's Arrivals area. Related demonstrations are possible. If travelling to or from the facility, use alternative modes of transport, such as public transport, and allow additional time to compete journeys.

### Advice:

- Liaise with local contacts to remain apprised of related developments, including any protests in your area. Anticipate associated disruption and plan journeys accordingly.
- Expect a shortage of traditional taxis during the strike and reconfirm bookings before setting out. If required, make alternative travel arrangements to minimise inconvenience. Allow additional time for travel.
- Expect heightened security in the vicinity of any related protests and follow all official directives.
- Monitor our Belgium alerts for updates.

# **Destination Guide for Belgium**



# **Before You Travel**

#### **Destination Guide Content**

# Visa Requirements

#### **IMMIGRATION REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES**

#### British

Passport Required Yes

Visa Required No

Return Ticket Required No

#### Australian

Passport Required Yes

Visa Required No

Return Ticket Required Yes

#### Canadian

Passport Required Yes

Visa Required No

Return Ticket Required Yes

#### USA

Passport Required Yes

Visa Required No

Return Ticket Required Yes

# Visas

Visas are not required by nationals referred to in the chart above for stays of up to three months within a six-month period. Nationals not referred to in the chart above should contact their embassy to check visa requirements. Foreign nationals should ensure that their passport has at least one blank page while applying for tourist visa and a letter of invitation stating the purpose of visit while seeking a business visa. Nationals staying for longer than three months may require a long-stay visa. Short-stay visas are valid for stays not exceeding 90 days.

As per EU, starting in mid-2025, nationals of visa-exempt countries will need to obtain an ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorisation System) travel authorisation to visit any of the European countries mentioned here for up to 90 days within any 180-day period.

The exact date of its implementation is yet to be announced. For updates on the ETIAS launch date and new requirements, check the ETIAS news corner. ETIAS applications can be made via official ETIAS website or the official ETIAS mobile app once it is operational. For information on travel documents required to apply for ETIAS and payment exemptions, visit here. ETIAS travel authorisation is valid for three years or until the travel document you used in your application expires - whichever comes first. It is for short-term stays and allows business travellers and foreign nationals to stay up to 90 days within any 180-day period. Most applications will be processed within minutes, however, in some cases it may take longer ranging from four to 30 days. If your application is rejected, the email will provide the reasons for this decision. It will also include information about how to appeal, details of the competent authority, as well as the relevant time limit to appeal. Applicants of rejected ETIAS can also apply for ETIAS travel authorisation with limited validity. More information about this is available here.

### Procedures

Business travellers should not encounter major delays, particularly when arriving from other EU member countries. Non-EU nationals staying in a private residence are required to register with local Commune authorities within three days of arrival.

Starting from the first half of 2025, nationals of visa-exempt countries will need to obtain an ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorisation System) travel authorisation to visit any of the European countries mentioned here. The exact date of its implementation is yet to be announced. ETIAS travel authorisation is valid for three years or until the travel document used in the application expires, whichever comes first. It is for short-term stays and allows business travellers and foreign nationals to stay up to 90 days within any 180-day period. While most applications will be processed within minutes, in some cases it may take longer, ranging from four to 30 days.

# **Entry/Exit Requirements**

# Entry/Exit requirements

Inbound travellers must possess a return/onward ticket, proof of sufficient funds and the address of local residence. People entering or leaving the EU with 10,000 euros or more, or the equivalent in another currency, are required to make a declaration on arrival or departure. This declaration is neither applied to passengers who are in transit via the EU to a non-EU country, provided the journey started from a non-EU country, nor to those travelling within the EU.

According to Belgian law, you must have identification with you at all times.

# **Cultural Tips**

### CULTURAL ISSUES AND ETIQUETTE

### General cultural tips

- Language can be a sensitive issue because the country is divided between French-speakers in the southern region of Wallonia and Dutchspeakers in the northern region of Flanders. Relatively few people in either region speak the other region's language, particularly in Wallonia. Business travellers should be aware that in Flanders, some people remain reluctant to speak French even though they are able to do so, and prefer to speak to foreign nationals in English rather than French.
- Brussels is officially bilingual and many residents speak both languages. English is also widely understood within the Wallonian business community.
- French and Dutch names for certain cities and towns can be different, for example Anvers/Antwerp and Malines/Mechelen.
- It is mandatory by law to carry personal identification documents at all times.
- Foreign nationals should be aware that wearing masks or covering their faces in public places is illegal and could lead to detention and/or a fine.

• There are no legal restrictions for LGBTQ individuals. Societal attitudes towards the LGBTQ community are generally tolerant.

# **Getting There**

# **METHOD OF ARRIVAL**

### By air

The main airport used for international flights is the capital's Brussels Zaventem International Airport (BRU). Short-haul services also operate from other major European cities to airports in Antwerp (ANR), Brussels South Charleroi (CRL), Liège (LGG) and Ostend (OST).

Airlines have variable security standards. You may wish to consult the European Commission's <u>website</u> for a list of airlines banned within the EU and the US Federal Aviation Administration's <u>website</u> for a database of aviation accidents and statistics.

### By land

Belgium shares borders with France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Efficient rail services operate between Brussels and major cities in all these countries. These include the high-speed Thalys service to France, Germany and the Netherlands, and Eurostar services to London (UK) via the Channel Tunnel and to Amsterdam (the Netherlands).

### By sea

Regular ferries operated by Transeuropa Ferries are available from Ramsgate port (Kent county, UK) to Ostend (Flanders region).

### Procedures

Business travellers should not encounter major delays, particularly when arriving from other EU member countries. Non-EU nationals staying in a private residence are required to register with local Commune authorities within three days of arrival.

Starting from the first half of 2025, nationals of visa-exempt countries will need to obtain an ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorisation System) travel authorisation to visit any of the European countries mentioned here. The exact date of its implementation is yet to be announced. ETIAS travel authorisation is valid for three years or until the travel document used in the application expires, whichever comes first. It is for short-term stays and allows business travellers and foreign nationals to stay up to 90 days within any 180-day period. While most applications will be processed within minutes, in some cases it may take longer, ranging from four to 30 days.

# **Getting Around**

# **BY AIR**

Business travellers will find it more convenient to travel by train or car than by air. Brussels Airlines is the national carrier.

# **BY ROAD**

Driving is on the right. Foreign nationals can drive provided they have a valid national driver's licence. There should be no problem hiring a car and most cities provide car parks and street parking-meters. Hotels and limousine companies can arrange the hire of cars with drivers daily. Foreign nationals can hire cars from international car rental companies, such as Avis, Europcar and Sixt.

Highways are well maintained. However, secondary roads can be narrow and poorly lit. Potholes can be encountered, even on principal roads.The maximum speed limit on highways is 72 miles per hour (120kph). In urban areas, it is 30 miles per hour (50kph), while in main parts of Brussels, the limit is 18 miles per hour (30kph). Although these speed limits are imposed by the authorities with the help of speed traps and cameras, motorists frequently exceed the limits and often drive aggressively. Fines for violating the speed limit and drink-driving are severe. Business travellers can have their vehicles impounded if they are unable to pay on the spot.

Information concerning road navigability and transportation is easily available within the country.

Road signage is adequate. Roadside assistance is efficient and can be availed in English through Touring Mobilis (+32 2 286-3332) along with information on road conditions. Vehicles joining from the right are given priority, as are trams and buses over other traffic. Foreign nationals should carry a blank copy of the accident reporting form (CONSTAT) in case they become involved in an accident. The police must be informed of accidents and drivers should remain at the site until the police write their report. Vehicle-related crime, such as carjacking, is a serious problem in and around Brussels and in Charleroi (Hainaut province).

## **BY TAXI**

Foreign nationals should use registered taxis, which provide a safe way of travelling around. They are available at taxi stands in most towns and cities or can be booked by telephone. Smartphone taxi applications or ride-sharing services, like Uber, are a reasonably safe and reliable form of transport for business travellers in major cities in Belgium.

## **BY TRAIN**

The National Railway Company of Belgium (French: SNCB, Dutch: NMBS) operates services throughout the country. Suburban commuter and intercity services are reliable, though railway workers stage occasional strikes during disputes with the management overpay and conditions. Members can use a rail pass for all destinations across the country. It can be purchased online or at the stations and is valid for one year.

# **BY OTHER MEANS**

Domestic bus services are operated by Société des Transports Intercommunaux de Bruxelles (STIB, Brussels metropolitan area), Transport En Commun (TEC, Wallonia region) and <u>De Lijn</u> (Flanders region). These have fixed timetables and operate between all the major cities. However, trains are usually a quicker and more efficient way of travelling around the country.

# **Business Women**

### BUSINESSWOMEN

Women face no particular security concerns. Unwanted physical attention and verbal harassment are rare, though standard security precautions should be observed, particularly at night.

Belgian society is egalitarian, and women are unlikely to face any kind of discrimination in business and political circles on account of their gender.

# **Working Week**

### **WORKING WEEK**

- Working week: Monday to Friday
- Working hours: 08.30-17.30
- Banking hours: 09.00-16.00

## Language & Money

#### LANGUAGE

Belgium has three official languages: French, Dutch (known in Flanders as Flemish) and German. Dutch-speakers in the northern region of Flanders represent 59% of the population, while 40% belong to the French-speaking community in the southern region of Wallonia.

Brussels is officially bilingual and many residents speak both languages. German is is spoken by less than 1% of the population on the German border. Few people in Flanders speak good French, even fewer Walloons speak Dutch, and using the other community's language is rarely fruitful. Many businesspeople and most government officials are also likely to speak English, particularly in Brussels and the larger towns of Flanders.

#### MONEY

Belgium is a member of the European Economic and Monetary Union and its currency is the euro. Euro-denominated credit cards (Visa and MasterCard) are widely accepted in main hotels, shops and restaurants. Traveller's cheques are also often accepted. Smaller establishments may accept cash only. ATMs are widely available in major cities and accept cards linked to networks such as Cirrus and Plus. Some banks and exchange facilities are not equipped to identify counterfeit currency and as a result, they can refuse U.S. dollar denominations of \$50 and \$100.

# Tipping

#### TIPPING

Tipping is usually not required as service charges are usually included in the bill. However, porters, cloakroom and bathroom attendants are generally tipped.

# **Geography & Weather**

### GEOGRAPHY

The Kingdom of Belgium is a European country bordered by France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The landscape is varied. The rivers and gorges of the Ardennes contrast sharply with the rolling plains that make up much of the countryside. The major North Sea port of Antwerp lies on Belgium's coast and gives the country strategic importance to continental Europe. The low-lying areas on the Scheldt estuary are prone to flooding. The country is divided into three regions: the Dutch-speaking Flemish Region (Flanders), the French-dominated Walloon Region (Wallonia) and the Dutchand French-speaking Brussels-Capital Region.

### CLIMATE

#### Climate overview

- The climate is temperate, with mild winters, cool summers and significant precipitation throughout the year.
- Monitor the website of the Royal Meteorological Institute for weather updates and warnings.

### Flooding

- Floods are the most common natural hazard in the country.
- Coastal areas and some parts of Wallonia (Hainaut, Liege and Luxembourg provinces) situated next to main rivers are prone to flooding.
- Flooding can cause power and water outages, as well as disrupt air, road and rail travel.
- In January 2024, flooding and associated disruption occurred in several provinces, including East Flanders, Flemish Brabant and Luxembourg.
- In July 2021, severe flooding impacted Belgium, killing more than 40 people, causing widespread power outages and infrastructure damage, and prompting evacuations in Belgium.

### Heavy snowfall

- Heavy snowfall occurs occasionally during winters.
- Ice on roads can create dangerous driving conditions, while trains, including high-speed services, and flights can be cancelled.

#### Heatwaves

- Heatwaves affect the country between June and August.
- Disruption to rail services and power outages can occur during heatwaves.

## **International Dialing & Power**

#### **DIALLING CODES**

Country Code 32

IDD Prefix (International Direct Dialling) 00

NDD Prefix (National Direct Dialling) 0

#### COMMUNICATIONS

The telephone system and postal service are efficient. Local pay telephones take coins and phonecards, which can be purchased at any post office. Mobile coverage is generally good. Short-term mobile telephone rental is available for visiting foreign nationals but is generally significantly more expensive than using roaming services. Major mobile network providers include Mobistar, Proximus and BASE. All major hotels have internet access and fax facilities. Internet cafes are widely available.

### ELECTRICITY

These are the most common plug types used:

# Calendar

#### **Holidays & Security Dates**

2024 01 Nov All Saints Day

## 11 Nov Veterans Day

**25 Dec** Christmas Day

In some countries, if this holiday falls on a Saturday or Sunday, a public holiday is declared for the following Monday.

# 2025

**01 Jan** New Year's Day

In many countries, if this holiday falls on a Saturday or Sunday, a public holiday is declared for the following Monday.

11 Jul Local holiday - North

**21 Jul** Belgian National Day

**15 Aug** Assumption of Mary

**27 Sep** French Community Day

French-speaking community only.

# **Destination Guide for Belgium**



Medical

#### **Destination Guide Content**

# **Medical Care**

#### **Excellent**

Standard of Health Care

There is a high standard of medical care in Belgium, and travellers should not encounter any difficulty with obtaining quality medical care. There are both private and public hospitals, and one's choice of hospital will depend upon the nature of the problem and where they are located. Medical facilities can be limited in rural areas.

#### **EMERGENCY NUMBERS**

Ambulance 100/ 112 Fire service 100/ 112 Police 101/ 112

The number 112 can be used to call emergency services throughout the EU and supplements the local emergency numbers. Contact International SOS for help with your medical situation. Contact us

**Hospitals & Clinics** 

#### **CHU Saint-Pierre**

Category: Hospital Address: 322 Rue Haute, Brussels, Brussels Phone: 32 25353111 Email: info@stpierre-bru.be

# **Cliniques Universitaires Saint Luc**

Category: Hospital Address: 10 Hippocrate Avenue, Brussels, Brussels-Capital Phone: 32 27641111 Email: international-saintluc@uclouvain.be

### **Delta Hospital Chirec**

Category: Hospital Address: 201 Boulevard du Triomphe, Brussels Phones: 32 24345558, 32 24348111 Email: patients.international@chirec.be

### **Europe Hospitals - St Elisabeth Site**

Category: Hospital Address: 206 Avenue de Frelaan, Brussels, Brussels Phone: 32 26142000 Emails: administrationpatients@cliniquesdeleurope.be, info@euhos.be

#### **University Ziekenhuis Antwerpen**

Category: Hospital Address: 655 Drie Eikenstraat, Edegem, Antwerp Phone: 32 38213000 Emails: medischeinformatie@uza.be, vragen@uza.be

### Vaccinations

#### COVID-19

Vaccination is recommended for all travellers.

#### **Hepatitis A**

Many travel health professionals recommend hepatitis A vaccination for all travellers regardless of destination, especially those who are at higher risk (see US CDC), such as gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men, people who use illicit drugs or those with liver disease.

# Hepatitis **B**

Recommended for health care workers and anyone who may have a new sexual partner, share needles or get a tattoo or body piercing. Many travel health professionals recommend hepatitis B vaccination for all travellers and international assignees, regardless of destination.

### Tickborne encephalitis

Recommended for:

- people who will spend time in forested or grassy areas during tick season (particularly those who will hike, camp, perform fieldwork, etc.);
- people residing in this country for longer periods (i.e., six months or more).

# **Routine Vaccinations**

#### Influenza

#### Influenza occurs in:

- Temperate southern hemisphere: April to September.
- Temperate northern hemisphere: November to March.
- Tropics: year-round.

Annual vaccination is recommended. Vaccination is especially important for people at higher risk of severe disease. People who are at higher risk for severe disease include:

- People over the age of 65.
- People with underlying health conditions.
- Pregnant women.

### Measles-Mumps-Rubella

Vaccinations against measles, mumps and rubella are routine in childhood, and are usually available as a combined vaccine "MMR". See routine childhood vaccination schedules: Australia, Canada, Europe, USA, UK All adults should ensure they are immune to these diseases before they travel abroad. If unsure of your immunity, consult your health professional. You may need to be vaccinated.

#### Polio

Vaccination against polio is routine in childhood in many countries. See routine childhood vaccination schedules: Australia, Canada, Europe, USA, UK All adults should ensure they are immune to the disease before they travel abroad. If unsure of your immunity, consult your health professional. You may need a *primary vaccination* or a *booster*. Booster recommendations vary by country.

#### Tetanus-Diphtheria-Pertussis

Vaccinations against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis are routine in childhood.

See routine childhood vaccination schedules: Australia, Canada, Europe, USA, UK

All adults should ensure they are immune to these diseases before they travel abroad. If unsure of your immunity, consult your health professional. You may need a *primary vaccination* or *booster*. Booster recommendations vary by country.

### Varicella

Varicella (chickenpox) vaccinations are included in the routine childhood immunization schedule of some countries. See routine childhood vaccination schedules: Australia, Canada, Europe, USA, UK

All adults should ensure they are immune to varicella before they travel abroad. If unsure of your immunity, consult your health professional.

# Malaria

#### None

### **Yellow Fever**

#### **Routine only**

# **Health Threats**

#### Hantaviruses

Hantaviruses are a group of viruses that belong to the *bunyaviridae* family. They can cause two different types of illness in humans: Haemorrhagic Fever with Renal Syndrome (HFRS) involves the kidneys while Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) involves the respiratory system. Regardless of which illness they cause, hantaviruses are carried by infected rodents. Virus is present in the animal's saliva, urine and faeces. Droplets of these excretions can contaminate the air in a process called aerosolisation. Humans become sick when they inhale the virus.

The incubation period of HPS is not positively known. Limited data suggests that people become sick within one to eight weeks after being exposed to the virus. The incubation period for HFRS is usually 1 to 2 weeks after exposure but could be as long as 8 weeks.

Initial symptoms of HPS include fatigue, fever, and muscle aches. About 50 percent of HPS patients also experience headache, dizziness, and abdominal symptoms (nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, pain). The "late stage" symptoms of HPS are cough/shortness of breath and a feeling of overall tightness in the chest. Heartbeat and breathing may both become rapid at this stage of illness. Symptoms of HFRS appear suddenly and include intense headaches, back and abdominal pain, fever, chills, nausea and blurred vision. As the disease progresses, patients may develop flushing of the face, inflammation, redness of the eyes or a rash. Later symptoms include bleeding from the skin, conjunctiva of the eye, and mouth. In the most severe cases renal failure develops.

There is no specific treatment or cure. Patients are treated supportively, meaning their symptoms are addressed even though the disease itself cannot be cured. Patients usually require hospitalisation in an intensive care unit. An antiviral medication, ribavirin, may be used to treat the HFRS although its effectiveness has not been proven in HPS. There is no vaccine for HPS. Vaccines against HFRS are being used in many Asian countries. The best way to avoid infection is to eliminate rodents from your living space and worksite, and/or avoid contact with them. Keep food in tightly sealed containers, clean dishes immediately after use, do not leave pet food out all day, and seal holes to the outside – generally, make your environment inhospitable to rodents.

Cases of hantavirus infection occur periodically.

# Rabies

Rabies is a viral disease contracted when bitten or scratched by an infected (rabid) animal, often a dog. Once it enters the body, the virus travels along nerves and causes paralysis. As it reaches important organs like the spinal cord and the brain, it causes coma and death.

In countries where rabies is present in animals or bats, ALL animal / bat bites, scratches and licks to broken skin must be treated seriously. Rabies vaccination is very effective in preventing rabies, even after a bite/scratch by a rabid animal.

## **Rabies vaccination**

Pre-exposure vaccination is often recommended for expatriates and longterm visitors to destinations where rabies is present. It's especially recommended if quality medical care may not be available after being bitten or scratched by an animal. Pre-exposure treatment can be especially useful for children, since they may not tell their parents that they have been bitten/scratched.

Pre-exposure vaccination makes it easier to treat a bite or scratch. That's important because some types of rabies treatment can be in short supply in many countries, even in cities.

If bitten, scratched or licked (on broken skin) by an animal:

- Immediately cleanse the wound with soap and water and a povidoneiodine solution if available.
- Seek medical advice from a qualified source or your assistance company.
- Notify local health authorities immediately. You may need *post-exposure vaccination*, even if you have had pre-exposure vaccination. (THIS CAN BE LIFE SAVING.)

Rabies is present in bats only and the risk of exposure for average travellers is low.

# Lyme disease

Lyme disease occurs in North America, Europe and Asia. It is transmitted to humans by the bite of a particular species of tick. Lyme disease can cause an expanding rash at the site of the bite, fever, arthritis and nerve problems such as facial palsy.

To prevent tick bites:

- Avoid tick habitats
- Use insect repellents
- Check daily for ticks

Lyme disease vaccination is no longer available.

If you develop a rash at the site of a tick bite or other symptoms of Lyme disease, seek medical attention. A course of antibiotics can cure Lyme disease.

# Tickborne encephalitis

Tickborne encephalitis (TBE) is a viral infection which is mostly transmitted to people through tick bites. Ticks live in or near forests and are usually active during warmer months. TBE infection can also be acquired by consuming unpasteurized dairy products from infected cows, goats or sheep. Most people will not have any symptoms. For those who do, initial symptoms include fever, headache, muscle aches, nausea, and fatigue. These may resolve in a week or so, but if the infection spreads to the brain, the symptoms may become more severe (decreased mental state, severe headaches, convulsions, weakness and/or coma). TBE can be fatal. Prevention is through avoiding tick bites and vaccination.

Sporadic cases of TBE have been reported in Belgium, indicating that there is a risk of TBE in the country, especially in forested areas. Transmission occurs when ticks are most active, from early spring to late autumn.

### COVID-19

COVID-19 is predominantly a respiratory illness, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Transmission is from person to person via contaminated respiratory droplets. People are infected when these droplets are inhaled or land directly on the mouth/nose/eyes, or indirectly when transferred by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching the mouth/nose/eyes.

Most people will develop a mild to moderate illness only which lasts up to two weeks, or have no symptoms. Symptoms vary greatly. Common symptoms include fever, cough and sore throat. Sometimes there is a loss of or change in the sense of smell or taste. The illness can progress to being severe and can be fatal. Older people and people with underlying health conditions are at higher risk of severe disease and death. Antiviral treatment is available and is particularly important for people at higher risk of severe illness.

Some people may continue to have symptoms that last for weeks or months after the initial infection has gone.

Prevention is through vaccination, hand hygiene, and physical distancing. Wearing a mask, and ensuring adequate ventilation in enclosed spaces can reduce the risk of infection.

The first imported case of COVID-19 was reported in early February 2020. See the Government COVID-19 website and COVID-19 dashboard for the latest information on the situation. The COVID-19 hotline is: 0800 14 689.

# HIV, Hepatitis B and C, and STIs

HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C are spread by contact with bodily fluids (especially blood and semen).

- unprotected sex,
- needle sharing during IV drug use, or
- unsafe blood or medical/dental instruments.

Genital herpes (HSV), genital warts (HPV), gonorrhoea, chlamydia, syphilis and most other sexually transmitted diseases are spread by genital contact. Prevention:

- In many countries, hepatitis B is now a routine childhood immunisation and need not be repeated. All non-immune travellers should consider vaccination.
- Always use new condoms (preferably brought from your home country).
- IV drug users should not share needles.
- Avoid having tattoos or piercings done.
- In healthcare settings, make sure that needles and syringes are sterile and not shared between patients.
- Call International SOS or your corporate medical department if you are hospitalised.
- Be aware of your risk when assisting anyone with an injury. Protect yourself from contact with bodily fluids.

• Seek medical attention within 24 hours if you accidentally come into contact with someone else's bodily fluids.

# Food & Water

### **Generally safe**

Food Risk

Food hygiene standards are generally high.

Water and Beverages

Tap water is considered safe to drink.

# **Destination Guide for Belgium**



Security

#### **Destination Guide Content**

## **Personal Security**

#### STANDING TRAVEL ADVICE

- Travel to Belgium can continue with standard security precautions.
- Take basic security precautions against petty and street crime.
- Strikes within the transport sector can disrupt travel. Stay abreast of planned industrial action and plan itineraries accordingly.
- Protests and demonstrations over various political and socio-economic issues are common but usually pass of peacefully. Plan journeys bypassing them as a precaution and to minimise travel delays.
- There is a credible threat of terrorism from a wide variety of actors. Exercise vigilance at notable targets, including migrant centres, religious sites, transport hubs and tourist attractions. Carry out a profile- and industry-specific risk assessment as required.
- Be alert to suspicious behaviour and report any suspect packages to the authorities.
- Security alerts or hoaxes can trigger the short-notice evacuation of transport hubs or public locations, which can cause disruption. Follow all directives issued by the authorities during any security operation and do not act on the basis of unverified information.

# Crime

# Limited to hot spots

#### CRIME

Although rates of violent crime are relatively low, petty street crime does pose a risk to people in urban centres, including Brussels and Antwerp (Antwerp province). Pickpocketing, mugging and snatch-and-run theft are commonly reported in crowded public transport hubs, notably the tram, metro and train stations. A common ploy is to divert a person's attention by asking for directions while an accomplice steals their luggage or other items. Thieves also operate near escalators, elevators or where there is a choke point in pedestrian traffic, obstructing movement while an accomplice commits the crime. Remain alert to your immediate surroundings, keep belongings within your line of sight and avoid displaying valuable items in public.

Thefts from cars, even those waiting at traffic lights, are common, but basic precautions, including keeping windows closed, doors locked and concealing expensive items, can mitigate this risk. The theft of expensive makes and models of cars also remains a risk, including in carjackings.

Burglars target empty residences, particularly during the holiday periods in August, around Christmas and during winter holidays in February. Thieves conduct reconnaissance by posing as utility employees or charity workers to gain access to the residence. Do not allow entry to unknown individuals and always ask for identification. Effective security features, such as door chains and three-point locks, can also mitigate risks.

# Terrorism

# Limited indirect risk to foreign nationals

#### TERRORISM

Several terrorist incidents highlight the risk posed by Islamist militant groups and extremist-inspired attacks. However, the security forces' response and capabilities considerably mitigate such risks.

The most notable attack took place in March 2016, when the capital Brussels was targeted in a triple bombing. In total, 32 people were killed and 340 injured in the attack, which was claimed by the extremist Islamic State group. The scale of the incident, the use of complex explosives and the number of locations targeted pointed to a relatively significant degree of co-ordination and sophistication. Most recently, a gunman killed two Swedish nationals and injured another on 16 October 2023 in the capital Brussels. The perpetrator was suspected of having criminal and extremist affiliations. Brussels is home to the EU and several other high-profile institutions, such as the NATO headquarters. These are attractive targets and so are transport infrastructure and crowded public areas. The security forces are visibly present at key locations (transport hubs, government buildings, tourist attractions, etc.) and also patrol the streets in urban centres. People may encounter disruption caused by security operations, as well as false alarms resulting from security hoaxes or suspect packages.

# **Social Unrest**

#### SOCIAL UNREST

Public sector workers occasionally stage protests over job cuts, pension reductions and

the withdrawal of welfare benefits. Farmers, truck drivers, rail workers and taxi drivers have occasionally blocked major road routes in and around Brussels to protest against government policies. Such demonstrations can cause major travel disruption, but they generally remain peaceful. National strikes have led to disruption and are likely to occur in December before Christmas.

Environmentalists, anti-capitalists and other activists stage occasional protests against EU policies outside EU institutions in central Brussels, particularly during EU summits. Such protests have occasionally led to clashes between activists and the riot police.

# Conflict

### CONFLICT

Belgium is involved in international military operations abroad, including in Mali, Congo (DRC) and the Middle East. However, the country does not face any serious external risks.