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Disclaimer
This Welcome Booklet is designed to answer some of the questions that may arise when you first arrive here, particularly if it is your first posting to Belgium. We make every effort to ensure that our information is current and correct. Your help is invaluable in keeping our records up to date by informing me (EXCO) of any changes to it, by sharing any additional information, which may be of interest to others. However, the content of this Welcome Booklet does not necessarily reflect the policies or opinions of NATO. The accuracy of the Welcome Booklet is not guaranteed but I have done my best!
1. Welcome to NATO HQ and to the International Military Staff (IMS). We are looking forward to you joining our team. You will find the HQ a challenging and dynamic work environment. As coming here will likely mean you are moving to Belgium, we will try to offer some advice and guidelines on how to best prepare for your time with us.

2. It is important that, as a new staff member, you make the strongest possible start and that you are fully, and seamlessly, inducted into our unique organisation as quickly as possible. All in the IMS will be happy to do our best to ease your arrival and offer you a rewarding time.

3. The aim of this Welcome Booklet is to introduce you to your new environment so that you may become useful members of the IMS as smoothly as possible. It also ensures that, together with your fellow newcomers, everyone starts from a common base of knowledge. This Booklet will be supplemented by advice from your National authorities both at home and at NATO HQ; early and regular correspondence with the person you are relieving; the use of the internet; and, finally, a comprehensive handover and training programme on arrival.
2 - Who We Are and What We Do

1. The IMS comprises some 500 military personnel and international civilians who work exclusively in an international capacity.

2. The main role of the IMS is to support the NATO Military Committee (MC) which is the senior military authority in NATO. The MC is responsible to the North Atlantic Council (NAC), NATO’s senior political authority, for the overall conduct of the military affairs of the Alliance. The MC is the NAC’s primary source of military advice and also interprets political guidance to NATO’s two Strategic Commands (see below).
3. The IMS, in providing support to the MC, is responsible for the preparation of the assessments, studies and the other documents that the MC uses to discharge its peacetime and operational responsibilities. Implicit in the IMS’ duties is a responsibility to also provide staff support to the Chairman of the MC (CMC) and his Deputy (DCMC). In his capacity as Chairman of the MC, CMC chairs the meetings of the MC that are usually held in the HQ at least once a week.

4. The Director General International Military Staff (DGIMS), as the head of the IMS, is responsible for leading the personnel of the IMS and for orchestrating their activities. The current DG is Air Marshal Sir Christopher Harper from the United Kingdom. He is supported by a number of (two-star) Directors and (one-star) Deputy Directors (see below). The organization might well change as a result of a Review that is under way.
1. Firstly, a very big welcome to the IMS. Many congratulations on being appointed to our team. You are joining a vibrant and busy staff that operates at the highest level of NATO’s business. I know that you will find your time with us demanding, professionally satisfying and personally hugely rewarding.

2. Like any successful team, the IMS can only be as good as the people within it and I see it as my personal responsibility to ensure that each and every individual is given the time, training, encouragement and responsibility to make the maximum contribution to, and to get the maximum value from, their time in the NATO HQ. Our Mantra is People First - Mission Always and we must all work together to ensure that these words reflect reality.

3. I am determined to ensure that your time spent within the IMS represents a career highlight; I want you to play your part in ensuring that you give your best and get the maximum possible benefit from your tour. It is important that you leave the IMS more strategically aware, more professionally able and ultimately, more employable for your future career. If you do not, then I will have failed in my responsibilities.

4. You join NATO HQ at a time of transition. The last decade has seen NATO involved in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Libya where operations have been our focus and the safety and security of our forces our absolute priority. As security and political environments move forward, we can expect NATO to move from a deployed, operational posture to a contingency based, readiness posture. This will bring new tasks and will require us to think differently about the potential challenges of the future. Meeting these challenges will require an open mind, innovative thought and a willingness to work across all domains to produce flexible, realistic and affordable options.

5. The early stages of any new job are never easy but I strongly recommend that you read everything you can get your hands on, ask every question that you face and get involved as widely as your Division will allow. Talk to your colleagues, both in the IMS and the International Staff and do engage with the delegations. We must never forget why we are here and the delegations play a pivotal role in our work. Set yourself targets, perhaps finally getting to do the course at Ober'gau you have always wanted to do. On a personal front, enjoy Brussels and set yourself a non-work related goal, maybe as simple as learning to play the guitar. Personal development and professional development go hand-
in-hand and I expect every member of the IMS team to get every ounce of value out of their time with us.

6. I look forward to welcoming you personally during the coming weeks.

Air Marshal Sir Christopher Harper became DGIMS in July 2013. He has served in the RAF since 1976 as a fighter pilot and in the full spectrum of tactical, operational, and strategic leadership. Prior to assuming duties as DGIMS he was the United Kingdom’s Military Representative to NATO and the European Union.
4 - Key Administrative Formalities for Consideration

1. **Introduction.** You probably imagine NATO HQ to be some sort of ‘military fortress’. Well, it isn’t, although security does obviously play a very important role. The general atmosphere is professional but relaxed in the sense that NATO HQ, being a rather small organization (though there can be anything up to 5,000 working on the site on any one day) has, to some extent, a ‘family feel’. New members of staff usually feel very welcome from their first day onwards.

2. **What You Need to Bring With You on Your First Day.** In order to register with the Belgian authorities through our Privileges and Immunities Office, please bring the documentation listed at Section 5 Paragraphs 2 and 3. Please also bring any relevant security accreditation documents with you to help support the issue of a NATO HQ Security Pass and, where applicable, a SHAPE Identify Card (see Section 5 Paragraph 2).

3. **Security.** NATO HQ is a secure environment. Based on the security clearance issued by your national authorities, the NATO Office of Security will provide you with a Security Pass which you have to wear at all times while on site (Pass holders are provided). The Security Pass allows you to access the different security zones at HQ. You will receive a formal security briefing once you are here. You can also apply for a Family Pass for your spouse and dependent family members living at the same home address. This Family Pass will allow family members to enter the NATO HQ site by car (if they have the relevant car pass), non-secure areas of buildings and the NATO Staff Centre (see Section 6 Paragraph 2) without you escorting them.

4. **Arriving at NATO HQ.** NATO HQ is located on Boulevard Leopold III, 1110 Evere, Brussels situated between the airport (Zaventem) and the city centre. New personnel arriving will need to proceed to the Main Entrance to be escorted into the facilities. Visitor parking is located directly outside the Main Entrance (see Paragraph 5 below). The main bus routes catering NATO HQ are numbers 12, 21 and 65. Number 12, the Airport Express, runs between Place du Luxembourg, Schumann, NATO HQ and Zaventem Airport; Number 21, NATO, starts at Ducale/Metro Trone and ends at NATO HQ during working hours; and Number 65 ‘Bourget’ services Gare Centrale, Madou, Schaerbeek and NATO HQ. A Tram also runs from Rogier in central Brussels to Da Vinci which is then only a 5 min walk to NATO HQ.
5. **Parking.** If you come to NATO by car you will, at least on the first day, park in the Visitor’s Car Park at the front of NATO, the security guard will show you where to go. When you get your NATO HQ Security Pass you will also receive a Car Pass which will enable you to enter the NATO HQ site on your next visit and to use the NATO HQ car parks (they are zoned so be careful when you first park - there are many signs to advise you).

6. **What Happens on Your First Day?** You will have been in contact with both your Nation’s Delegation in the IMS and with the person you are relieving - these people will arrange a sponsor for you to guide and give practical assistance during your first few days at NATO. You should aim to arrive at the Main Entrance to NATO HQ at about 0900 on your first day with the person you have arranged to see you in. Please allow time for passing through the Main Entrance security as NATO receives many visitors and you may have to queue. Once your sponsor has been informed by security that you have arrived, they will meet you in the Main Reception. Your sponsor will take you to get your Security Pass and you will also be given your Car Pass. Once you have your Security Pass you will be taken to the IMS HR to start the check-in process. This process is a long but necessary one in order to complete the administrative requirements for starting your employment with the IMS at NATO HQ. It also gives you the opportunity to ask important questions and get to know people in the various areas.

7. **Induction Training Course.** The IMS holds an Induction Course for new staff members 2-3 times a year. It is strongly recommended that you attend this Induction Course (at the earliest opportunity) as not only will it help you to understand more about NATO and the IMS but it will give you the chance to make new friends.

8. **Uniform.** Personnel in the IMS wear their appropriate national duty uniform on a daily basis.

9. **Smoking**. With the exception of a few designated outside areas, smoking is banned in all public areas of NATO HQ.

10. **Duty Hours.** The standard duty hours in the IMS are (Monday to Thursday) 0830-1730 (on Friday you finish at 1600 throughout the year) during the Autumn, Winter and Spring and 0830-1700 in the Summer; some duties may require alternate hours. Your

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1. ON(2005)0062, Smoking at NATO HQ - Increased Restrictions, 26 Jul 05.
weekends will normally be free of duty unless an emergency arises (and, in which case, we have an Emergency Notification and/or Recall Plan we activate).

11. **Holidays.** In addition to the leave you accrue under your national regulations, NATO HQ observes the following official holidays (if they fall on a Saturday or Sunday, the holiday will be moved to the closest Friday or Monday):

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<td>Good Friday</td>
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<td>Easter Monday</td>
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<td>Labour Day/Ascension Day</td>
<td>1 May</td>
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<td>Whit Monday</td>
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<td>Belgian National Day</td>
<td>21 July</td>
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<td>Assumption Day</td>
<td>15 August</td>
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<td>All Saints’ Day</td>
<td>1 November</td>
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<td>Extra days</td>
<td>22 December</td>
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<td>(22 and 23 are not always free, official holidays 2014 does not have either of these days as holidays)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>24 December</td>
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<td>25 December</td>
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<td>26 December</td>
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<td>30 December</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Year</td>
<td>31 December</td>
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<td>1 January</td>
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5 - Privileges and Immunities for the Military

1. Introduction. Detailed instructions on all aspects of privileges and immunities available to you during your time in the IMS will be provided on arrival. In addition, the Privileges and Immunities website is available through the IMS Portal when you log-in to the NATO HQ IT system for the first time. If you have any concerns or questions, please contact the Privileges and Immunities Office (see Section 10 for contact details) to clarify your questions/entitlements before committing to a purchase.

2. Identification Documents.
   a. Military Personnel. Persons resident in Belgium are required by law to carry an identification card (ID) at all times. General and Flag Officers (>OF5) are requested to, and lower ranks might, apply for a ‘Special Identity Card’ issued by the Belgian Protocol Office, FPS Foreign Affairs. Documents required for registration are: the Application Form (provided by the Privileges and Immunities Office); 4 passport photographs of the applicant; 2 colour copies of the national passport; and copy of birth certificate and marriage certificate if applicable.

   b. Dependents (Wife/Husband/Children). Dependents residing in Belgium for more than 90 consecutive days have to be registered through the Belgian Protocol Office. Documents required for registration are: the Application Form (provided by Privileges and Immunities Office); 4 passport photographs of the applicant; 2 colour copies of the national passport; copy of birth certificate; copy of marriage certificate, if possible in an international format. In the case of dependants, intend to take up an employment they should register themselves at the local commune as local residents.

   c. Permanent SHAPE ID Cards. All military IMS members, their spouses and dependants older than 9 years, residing in Belgium, are entitled to a SHAPE (Mons - 60 km away from NATO HQ) ID to allow them entry on to the base (in addition to a car sticker).

3. Ration Cards.
   a. Duty Free Spirits, Liqueurs and Tobacco. Ration Cards will be issued to IMS military members and their spouses. Dependent children over 18, only receive tobacco rations. The dependants of Belgian nationals are not entitled to Ration Cards. The standard monthly entitlement is:
The exact allowance will vary each month and members should verify their Ration Cards before placing an order.

b. Purchase of Duty Free Spirits, Liqueurs and Tobacco. There are two ways to purchase your duty free items: at the Rationed Items Store at SHAPE in Mons; or through the IMS Privileges and Immunities Office by completing an order form which is then submitted through your Divisional Representative.

c. Duty Free Fuel Cards. The Duty Free Fuel Allowance varies according to the size of engine of the car:

- 200 L for a vehicle with engine size less than 1751 cc (<9cv)
- 400 L for a vehicle with engine size more than 1751 cc (>10cv)

A Fuel Allowance is issued for one vehicle only. If more than one car is owned, the allowance is based on the largest engine and no extra entitlement is permitted. All vehicles must be registered with the Privileges and Immunities office and are subject to the following:

- to be registered in name of the sponsor within 30 days after arrival (car registrations are handled by SHAPE via the Privileges and Immunities Office);
- to hold a valid Insurance Green Card showing chassis number and issued in the sponsor’s name and Belgian address; and
- to hold a valid Control Technique Certificate (for cars older than 4 years).

4. Belgian Tax System. There is no VAT exemption on any goods, services and/or work rendered in Belgium, except:

a. When purchasing a motor vehicle: check procedure with the Privileges and Immunities Office before committing to an order or a purchase.

b. When buying some durable household goods, though not in the last six months of your stay.

5. NATO Civilians. For those civilians serving in the IMS, there are separate Privileges and Immunities which will be briefed separately by the Head of Civilian HR in the IMS.
6 - A Little Bit About Life at NATO HQ

1. **Introduction.** The NATO HQ site is like a little town with much to see and do on a daily basis to occupy your time (other than work).

2. **Main Site Facilities.** The Main NATO HQ building has a post office, newsagent, insurance brokers, dry cleaners, mens/ladies hairdresser as well as a travel agent.

3. **Refreshments.** The NATO HQ site has several facilities available for breaks - a self service cafeteria (hot meals/salads), a restaurant (advisable to make a reservation given it is waiter service), a coffee bar (sandwiches) and the Staff Centre restaurant (see Paragraph 4 below). Your family is welcome to join you at any of these facilities.

4. **NATO Staff Centre.** The Staff Centre and its restaurant are central to NATO’s social life. A wide range of facilities are available to you and your family and offers services such as:

   - a mini supermarket;
   - an optician;
   - a medical centre offering the services of general practitioners, dentists, a cardiologist and alternative therapies e.g. reflexology, massage, physiotherapy and osteopathy are all available;
   - a beauty centre;
   - a pharmacy (coming soon);
   - Banca Monte Paschi Belgio;
   - a jewellery shop; and
   - a perfume shop.

The Staff Centre offers classes such as aerobics and yoga and has sporting facilities including a well equipped gym, swimming pool, squash and tennis courts and football grounds. There are a variety of clubs run by the NATO Cultural and Sports Clubs ranging from Aikido or Aviation to tennis or football. If sport isn’t for you why not bring the family for a game of bowling or to enjoy the restaurant and bar? There are also rooms to hire for your children’s parties or even wedding reception and themed dinner/dance evenings are frequently organized in the restaurant area. Ask at the Staff Centre Reception (at (+32)02 707 4604) for more information.
Annual membership fees depend on your grade and the facilities you would like to use. The Staff Centre is also responsible for the Community Service Area in the main NATO HQ building which includes the (ING) bank, press shop, hairdressers, travel agents, dry cleaners and an insurance brokers.

5. **Holiday Activities for Children at NATO Staff Centre.** During school holidays, the Personnel Support Service organizes the ‘Colonies des Vacances’ at the NATO Staff Centre which provides day-care for children between 3 and 14 years. Children of members of the International Staff, International Military Staff and NATO Agencies situated in Brussels have the opportunity to enjoy a number of activities including sports, excursions and exhibitions. For further information, please contact Mrs. Cathy de Saedeleer (+32)02 707 4189). If you are interested in registering your children for a football or tennis camp, please contact the Staff Centre Reception. Alternatively, various organizations offer summer camps and playgroups and many activities to entertain your children can be found on www.quefaire.be. More information is available at www.centres-de-vacances.be. For youth activities in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, the Commission of the Flemish Community VGC, www.vgc.be, is the best source of information on youth centres, workshops, summer camps, sports associations and adventure playgrounds. Most schools offer after-school supervision between 16:00 and 18:00 but there are about 150 officially-approved **homework schools** in the French-speaking sector of Brussels. They offer education support and cultural activities after school to children aged 6 to 18. Further information is available at www.cedd-bxl.be and www.paluche.org. ‘The Little Gym’ (www.thelittlegym.com) offers a combination of gymnastics, games and music while demonstrating that fun and sportsmanship go hand-in-hand. There are mother and baby courses, primary school gymnastics or karate classes. Les Ateliers de la Chaise Musicale at 224, Chaussée d'Ixelles, 1050 Ixelles (Bruxelles) (+32)02 640 0103), is a music school that invites young “musicians” from nine months to 6 years of age to learn explore music in all its variety, including learning to play the piano, flute, violin, guitar or percussions in small groups. Many interesting outings for you and your child can be found on Le Petit Moutard (www.lepetitmoutard.com).

6. **Language Training.** The IMS contracts language instructors to provide language training to IMS members in English and French (NATO’s two official languages). See Section 7 Paragraph 8 for information on family language courses.
7 - Achieving Domestic Happiness!

1. **Introduction.** The first few months can be a bit of a struggle as even the simplest things are a challenge: driving, shopping, vets, hairdressers, doctors/dentists, schools etc. All new arrivals have a lot of work and frustration to cope with initially. However, life here can be extremely enjoyable.

2. **Language.** There are two languages generally spoken in Belgium: Dutch (Flemish) in the northern half, and French and Flemish in Brussels and French in the southern half. Antwerpen (Dutch) is Anvers (French); Brugge is Bruges; Brussel is Bruxelles; Gent is Gand; Luik is Liège; Leuven is Louvain; Namen is Namur; Bergen is Mons; and Doornik is Tournai. Try to understand the linguistic problems, or at least be aware of them, as quickly as possible. If you know someone is Flemish, don’t insist on speaking French with him or her unless that person cannot speak English. In the same way, if you go into the Flemish part of the country, speak first in English, if you cannot speak Dutch. If the person you are speaking to does not understand you, then try in French. The person will probably speak the language, but you will have established the fact that you are not Belgian as opposed to a Walloon who does not necessarily like to learn the other national language.

3. **Commune Information.**

   a. **Commune Offices.** Each area of Brussels and the surrounding districts has a Commune Office. Depending on your status in Belgium (see Section 5 Paragraph 2), you may have to register with the Commune, but you will certainly find yourself needing to visit the Commune Office for information from time-to-time. Be aware that in Flemish areas, Communes have strict rules about the language of communication. Commune employees are often forbidden from speaking any language other than Flemish, so it might be helpful to take along a Flemish speaker with you.

   b. **Sundays.** Rules do vary from commune-to-commune but, in general, Sundays are still regarded as a quiet day. Unless you see your neighbours mowing lawns or hanging out washing, it is fair to assume that these activities are forbidden!
c. **Refuse.** Your local commune will be able to give you a chart with a refuse collection timetable. Refuse must be sorted into separate bags for general rubbish and recyclables, and bins for paper and cardboard, and for glass. Garden waste is collected from wheelie bins. Refuse is taxed via a ‘pay as you throw’ system and you must put your rubbish in a bag that has been bought from a shop within your commune. Refuse bags carry your commune’s logo in large writing, and the ‘wrong’ bag will not be collected. Systems do vary slightly from one commune to another.

4. **Banking.** Most people open an account with either ING (www.ing.be) or Banca Monte Paschi Belgio (www.montepaschi.be/en/index.htm) as both have a branch at NATO HQ. For opening an account, you only need to bring an ID, a letter of introduction from NATO (the Privileges and Immunities Office can advise), and an address which may be the one in your home country if you do not yet have an address in Belgium. Payments in Belgium are generally made by electronic debit or credit card. You can pay monthly or annual bills by ‘direct debit’ (the authorised organisation deducts money automatically from your account) or standing order (the bank is authorised to transfer a fixed sum at regular intervals).

5. **Telephones and Internet Connection.** Phone, broadband and cable connections are Belgacom www.belgacom.be and Telenet www.telenet.be. Details of their offerings are provided in English on their websites. Invoices are sent out monthly and can be paid over the internet or via your bank. Belgacom have a dedicated English language help line, but waiting time for connection can be longer than you are accustomed to, up to 6 weeks in some cases, 6 months!

6. **Housing.** Arranged on a national basis. Refer to your Military Delegation.

7. **Medical Care.** Arranged on a national basis. Refer to your Military Delegation.

8. **Education and Child Care.** Arranged on a national basis. Refer to your Military Delegation.

9. **Family Language Courses.** These are offered by private schools, local Communes, universities as well as the Chamber of Commerce. To find out more about the courses on offer, try the following sources: Dutch Language House of Brussels (www.huisnederlandsbrussel.be), Maison de la Francité (www.maisondelafancite.be) and the Brussels Chamber of Commerce in co-operation with VUB and ULB universities (www.vub.ac.be/khnb). Well-known language institutions are the Alliance Française (www.alliancefr.be), Amira Language School (www.amira.be), Berlitz (www.berlitz.be) and Ceran (www.ceran-us.com/junior-belgium/ceran_learn_belgium.php?ql=nl).

10. **Eating Out.**

a. Eating out can produce some surprises from what you are used to. You may find that your chosen restaurant does not lay the table with bread plates and knives. Sometimes, Belgians will put their bread on the table beside their plate and use the one knife offered for the meal to butter it with. Beer will be drunk more at lunch time than in the evening with food, but wine is drunk with both meals. Beer will sometimes be considered the best accompaniment for a meal.

b. Fingers are used for eating frog’s legs, quails and other birds, and for shelling any crustacean that is served unpeeled. If you try to eat mussels with a
fork you will probably find yourself in difficulties by the end. It is better to take the shell containing the mussel in one hand (left if you are right-handed) and an empty shell in your right that you use as a pincer to take the mussel out. Lobsters will come with crackers and a special fork so that you can extract every delicious scrap of flesh from the claw. Snails will also be served with their own utensils: a special instrument that fits around the shell and small fork for extracting the meat.

c. If you want to eat quickly at lunch time, select the menu or dish of the day (plat du jour). This will have been made in quantity and should be served relatively quickly. If you don’t fancy it, you can also ask the waiter for a recommendation as to what can be served quickly. This way he or she should register that you haven’t five hours to eat. Otherwise, expect to take two or three hours for lunch. There is nowhere in Belgium, except at a fast food outlet, where eating is not considered as one of the greatest pleasures in life. You will be expected to respect and enjoy this tradition. If you have a dog with you, ask the restaurant owner for permission to bring it in. In many cases, particularly in the country, this will be tolerated. While we are on the subject of dogs, “doggy bags” are not generally indulged in; in fact, asking for one is considered rude.

d. You will be expected to tip the person keeping the lavatories clean in a restaurant, public place or hotel. Sometimes you will find a saucer on which you are expected to place a few coins; the norm is usually 30 Euro Cents unless a sign indicates otherwise.

e. It is quite usual to stop for coffee and some delicious cream cake or a piece of tart if you are out in the afternoon. This is known as the quatre heures. Unfortunately, many of the old teashops have disappeared, but you will sometimes find a bakery which still has a salle de degustation attached. In the more touristic areas you will find numerous cafés or tea-rooms, well equipped with a variety of pastries to sample.

f. If you are invited for a meal to a Belgian’s home, never go empty handed. Belgians who are not used to mixing with foreigners would not really understand if you took a bottle of wine or alcohol. Flowers and chocolates are best and safest; flowers fit any occasion. However, do let the florist guide you with numbers and variety. Don’t, for example, offer those football size chrysanthemums that you see in the Autumn, especially the white variety. These are taken to the cemetery on or around November 1 (All Saints Day, commemorated more as All Souls) and put on graves. For a large reception where you might feel awkward arriving with something in your hand, send the flowers either before or later. It is quite usual to send a bride flowers for her wedding.

g. If you are invited into a Belgian’s home, consider it a privilege. This honour is normally reserved for family and very close friends. If you are invited to lunch on a Sunday, be prepared for it to last all day. The programme could start with drinks, then move on to a three or four course meal. Around four o’clock, coffee and tarts might be served and then about six, a cold supper laid out. If your hosts protest fairly strongly to your going earlier, you will know that you are expected to stay. They have probably bought all the food especially, so don’t walk away and leave them with meals for a week. When you return their hospitality, the Belgians are open to new ideas and will enjoy tasting the cuisine of another country, particularly if it is one with which they are not familiar.
11. **Mobile Phones.** These are sold independently of contracts in Belgium, making them expensive. However, this is changing. You may wish to get your current handset unlocked before arrival. Packages, whether contract or Pay as You Go are available from providers such as Telenet, Mobistar and Proximus. All of these have outlets in Brussels, Leuven and Woluwe, where advisors speak excellent English. Top-Up Cards for SIM cards can be purchased in supermarkets.

12. **Post.** This is delivered to houses daily Monday to Friday. If the postman tries to deliver a parcel and you are not at home, a note will be left for you telling you where you can collect it and how long they will keep it. But, be aware that you will need photo ID to collect your parcel, and that it will not be held for long before it is returned to the sender. You may also find that De Post employees are only allowed to speak Flemish in certain areas! There is a Belgium Post Office inside NATO HQ (Community Services Area close to the Newsagent) although there is a possibility that this will disappear in the near future.

13. **Shopping.** This is a very personal matter, but we thought it might be helpful to give you some basic information:

   Milk - fresh milk is not widely available except in supermarkets;

   Bread - is normally freshly baked, and you can slice it at the machines close by. Many of the local bakers are open on Sunday mornings;

   Mondays - many businesses are closed; and

   **Supermarkets:**

   - Delhaize - Best quality - choice and prices vary widely between branches;
   - GB/Carrefour/Carrefour Planet - These are the same company. There is more opportunity to buy in bulk here and the Carrefour Planets have quite a lot of non-food items also available;
   - Cora - Similar to Carrefour Planet, very large with electrical/garden choices (can be cheaper);
   - Colruyt - Open to everyone, but has more of a cash and carry feel. It’s a good value place to shop, but not very attractive. Usually have freshly cooked meats to taste on a Saturday morning; and
   - You will probably find that your village has a local supermarket too. Be aware that plastic carrier bags need to be bought, so take your ‘bags for life’ along whenever you shop!

14. **Clothes.** C&A, Zara, Promod, Mexx, Esprit, Body Shop, H&M etc are all here, so you will have plenty to choose from. There are shopping centres in Stockel, Louvain la Neuve, Anderlecht and Waterloo. The largest is the Woluwe Centre, an indoor shopping centre in Woluwe St Pierre, next to Roodebeek Metro. Parking at shopping centres is generally underground and there is plenty of it. The main shopping areas in Brussels are Rue Neuve (chain stores) and Avenue Louise (luxury shopping). Innovation (INNO) is the department store that you’ll find in most malls. Clothes can be expensive in Belgium, but the sales are excellent and genuine.

15. **Pharmacies.** Virtually all villages have at least one pharmacy, recognised by its green cross, generally illuminated when the pharmacy is open. They are normally all open Monday to Saturday 0900 to 1800 (with an hour’s closure for lunch). A list of ‘On Duty’ pharmacies in the local area will be prominently displayed on the doors of most pharmacies. Supermarkets do not sell medication of any kind.
16. Local Customs, Law and Every Day Habits.

a. **Greetings.** At a conference with as many as 15 or so people, where you are all going to sit round the table, you have to go round each one and shake hands. It can be embarrassing to be one of the last there! No chance for late-comers to sneak in unnoticed, as you are expected to shake hands with at least your near and not-so-near neighbours. The same goes for leaving early. Belgians tend to kiss a lot too. Not full on the lips but a peck, called a bise, on each cheek. The French are content to do this action on each cheek, but the Belgians distinguish themselves by doing it three times, hence the expression, les trois bises. It does not come easily to Belgians to call casual acquaintances or even work colleagues by their first name. You will really need to know someone quite well before doing this and it is best that the Belgian makes the first move.

b. **Dog Walking.** You are not permitted to walk your dog into open fields or forestry unless there is a clear sign stating you may do so. All dogs must be kept on a lead unless you are on private ground.

c. **Queuing.** This is not generally done. At one time, every public building you went into had a pack of numbers put up somewhere and you took the top number on arrival. When your number was called, it was your turn. This custom has virtually died out except in the very popular food shops, and there is a certain amount of order. However, you should watch carefully in shops and check who is in front of you; otherwise you might wait a long time. Bus, tram and train queues don’t exist.

17. **Helpful Phrases in Dutch and French.** In Dutch (Flemish) speaking areas, English is widely spoken. It is not a good idea to speak French in Flemish areas as this is regarded as culturally insensitive and will not get a good reception! Much better to either attempt Dutch, or simply speak English. Brussels itself is nominally bilingual, but is, in fact, largely French speaking. The communes of Kraainem and Wezembeek-Oppem are also bilingual.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Dutch</th>
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<td>Monday</td>
<td>Lundi</td>
<td>Maandag</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Mecredi</td>
<td>Woensdag</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
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<td>Sunday</td>
<td>Dimanche</td>
<td>Zondag</td>
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<td>Neuf</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>Dix</td>
<td>Tien</td>
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<td>Doctor</td>
<td>le Docteur</td>
<td>Dokter</td>
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<td>Dentist</td>
<td>le Dentiste</td>
<td>Tandarts</td>
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<td>Gendarme</td>
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<td>Bureau de Poste</td>
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<td>English</td>
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<td>Volwassenen</td>
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<td>Heren</td>
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<td>Dames</td>
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<td>Children</td>
<td>Enfants</td>
<td>Kinderen</td>
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<td>In/Entrance</td>
<td>Entrée</td>
<td>Ingang</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out/Exit</td>
<td>Sortie</td>
<td>Uitgang</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goodbye</td>
<td>Au revoir</td>
<td>Tot ziens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you</td>
<td>Merci</td>
<td>Dank U</td>
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<tr>
<td>Please</td>
<td>S’il vous plait</td>
<td>Alstublief</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Oui</td>
<td>Ja</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>Nee</td>
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<td>Open</td>
<td>Ouvert</td>
<td>Open</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Fermee</td>
<td>Gesloten</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pardon</td>
<td>Comment</td>
<td>Pardon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hello</td>
<td>Bonjour</td>
<td>Hallo</td>
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<tr>
<td>My name is</td>
<td>Je m’appelle</td>
<td>Ik heet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you speak English?</td>
<td>Vous parlez anglais?</td>
<td>Spreekt U Engels?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>The</td>
<td>Thee</td>
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<td>Coffee</td>
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<td>Milk</td>
<td>Lait</td>
<td>Melk</td>
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<td>Beer</td>
<td>Biere</td>
<td>Bier</td>
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<td>Is there?</td>
<td>Il y a?</td>
<td>Is er?</td>
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<td>Near here</td>
<td>Pres d’ici</td>
<td>Dicht bij</td>
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<td>Bakery</td>
<td>Boulangerie</td>
<td>Bakker</td>
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<td>Grocer</td>
<td>Epicerie</td>
<td>Kruidenier</td>
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<td>Chemist</td>
<td>Pharmacie</td>
<td>Apotheek</td>
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<tr>
<td>I would like</td>
<td>Je voudrais</td>
<td>I had graag</td>
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<tr>
<td>How much is it?</td>
<td>C’est combine?</td>
<td>Hoeveel kost dit?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s all</td>
<td>C’est tout</td>
<td>Dat is alles</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Introduction. If you’ve not been to Brussels before, prepare yourself for a completely unique experience. The secret is to take time exploring and then gently immerse yourself in its unique and multi-faceted character. The restaurants and café culture more than adequately compensate for any challenges you may encounter and there are so many things to do, places to visit, new things to learn. This Section outlines just a few ideas of where you might like to make a start.

Cultural Options

For a general overview as well as thematic walks try the website of the Tourist Information: www.brusselsinternational.be. For events around town have a look at ‘Agenda’: it is a free tri-lingual city magazine that is widely available in yellow boxes at stations, bus stops, cinemas, theatres etc. Another option is the Brussels Life newsletter - to subscribe go to www.brusselslife.be. The websites www.agenda.be, www.quefaire.be, www.atraxions.be, www.bruxelles.irisnet.be and www.mosquionet.be are valuable sources for information on things to do in Belgium. A great place for cinema, concerts and other cultural events is Flagey (www.flagey.be). For classical music and art exhibitions try Bozar (www.bozar.be). Also, do not skip the Brussels Liaison Office website (www.blbe.be; look under ‘Brussels, my city - cultural city”) where you can find links to the websites of the main cultural organisations in the city. Last minute tickets for shows the same evening can be reserved on the internet at Arsene50 (www.arsene50.be), and are sold on average at half price.

Cinema

Cinema listings can be found on www.cinebel.be. Besides Kinepolis (www.kinepolis.be), Brussels’ largest cinema that also boasts having the capital’s only Imax screen, you can find multi-screens in the two UGC complexes (Place de Brouckere and Avenue de la Toison d’Or, www.ugc.be). For more adventurous programming, try the Arenberg in the Galerie de la Reine (www.arenberg.be) and Actor’s Studio (Petite Rue des Bouchers 16), two art-house cinemas very close to the Grand Place.

The Film Museum (www.ledoux.be) proposes classics of world cinema, with a daily changing programme. It is said to be the only cinema in the world where you can still watch a silent film with live piano accompaniment every night.
Theatre & Music

**Theatre:** The theatre scene is vibrant. As most things in Brussels it is split between the French- and Dutch-speaking communities. The main French-speaking theatres are the National Theatre ([www.theatrenational.be](http://www.theatrenational.be)), Rideau ([www.rideaubruxelles.be](http://www.rideaubruxelles.be)), Theatre des Martyrs ([www.theatredesmartyrs.be](http://www.theatredesmartyrs.be)) and the Theatre Public ([www.theatrelepublic.be](http://www.theatrelepublic.be)). For contemporary productions, check out the Halles de Schaerbeek ([www.halles.be](http://www.halles.be)), Chapelle Brigittines ([www.brigittines.be](http://www.brigittines.be)), Varia ([www.varia.be](http://www.varia.be)) or Les Tanneurs ([www.lestanneurs.be](http://www.lestanneurs.be)). For Dutch-language theatres, try KVS ([www.kvs.be](http://www.kvs.be)) and Kaaitheater ([www.kaaitheater.be](http://www.kaaitheater.be)) - in addition to Dutch-language productions, both host world-renowned performances of both plays (occasionally in English) and dance. Theatre 140 Stages ([www.theatre140.be](http://www.theatre140.be)) has occasional productions in English. In May, watch out for the KunstenFestival des Arts ([www.kunstenfestivaldesarts.be/en/home](http://www.kunstenfestivaldesarts.be/en/home)), which brings a wide choice of international theatre to venues across the city. Further afield, DeSingel ([www.desingel.be](http://www.desingel.be)) in Antwerp hosts cutting-edge theatre and dance.

Many amateur dramatic groups address English-speaking audiences, for example the American Theatre, Brussels Shakespeare Society, English Comedy Club or Irish Theatre Group and if you prefer to get involved rather than to watch they are always looking for new members.

**Music:** For classical music buffs, Bozar ([www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)) is the place to be. It is a fully integrated arts centre with music, films, exhibitions and talks all under the same roof. Throughout the year, there are classical concert cycles and festivals in Brussels: musical talent competes at the Queen Elisabeth International Music Competition that is held annually in May ([www.concours-reine-elisabeth.be](http://www.concours-reine-elisabeth.be)), Ars Musica ([www.arsmusica.be/cms/festival_en.php](http://www.arsmusica.be/cms/festival_en.php)) a festival of contemporary music takes place in April. The Sablon’s Printemps Baroque, as well as the Festival of Flanders ([www.festival-van-vlaanderen.be](http://www.festival-van-vlaanderen.be)) and the Festival of Wallonia ([www.festivaldewallonie.be](http://www.festivaldewallonie.be)), are all major fixtures on the spring, summer and autumn calendars respectively.

Major acts tend to play at the Forest-National ([www.forestnational.be](http://www.forestnational.be)) or at Ancienne Belgique ([www.abconcerts.be](http://www.abconcerts.be)). Botanique ([www.botanique.be](http://www.botanique.be)) hosts jazz, pop, rock and more experimental acts. The Nuits Botanique festival in May features strongly on all music lovers’ calendars as does the Brussels Jazz Marathon held annually ([www.brusselsjazzmarathon.be](http://www.brusselsjazzmarathon.be)). Autumn welcomes the good and the great of the international jazz scene at the Audi Jazz Festival ([www.audijazz.be](http://www.audijazz.be)). Tickets for all types of events are available at [www.sherpa.be](http://www.sherpa.be), [www.fnac.be](http://www.fnac.be) and [www.goformusic.be](http://www.goformusic.be).

**Opera & Dance**

**Opera:** Opera fans’ second home is La Monnaie/De Munt ([www.lamonnaie.be](http://www.lamonnaie.be)), an opera centre located in the historic heart of Brussels.

**Dance:** Apart from La Monnaie/De Munt which is home to Anna de Keersmaker's compagnie Rosas, Belgium is home to many of contemporary dance’s most
innovative acts like Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Alain Platel and his Ballets C de la B, Jan Fabre or Jan Lauwers. If they do not perform at La Monnaie/De Munt, you might be able to catch them at KVS (www.kvs.be), Kaaitheater (www.kaaitheater.be) or the National Theatre (www.theatrenational.be). Many of Brussels’ cultural venues, such as Beursschouwburg (www.beursschouwburg.be), Chapelle Brigittines (www brigittines.be), Varia (www.varia.be) and Les Tanneurs (www lestanneurs.be) put on contemporary dance programmes throughout the year. As Brussels does not have a classical ballet of its own, the closest option is to visit the Royal Ballet of Flanders (www.kbv.be) in Antwerp.

Museums & Exhibitions

Museums in Brussels Something for every taste. Both www.bruxelles.irisnet.be and www.museesdebruxelles.be provide extensive lists with direct links to over 80 institutions. Generally, museums are open on Sundays and closed on Mondays.

Major art exhibitions are on show at Bozar (www.bozar.be) and the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (www.fine-arts-museum.be). Tour & Taxis (www.tourtaxis.be) is an impressive industrial redevelopment that houses exhibitions, shops, and restaurants. In Cinquantenaire Park you will find the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and Military History (www.klm-mra.be) and Autoworld (www.autoworld.be). Music fans will probably enjoy best the Museum of Musical Instruments (www.mim.fgov.be) and for architecture aficionados the Museum of Modern Architecture, Rue de l'Ermitage, Kluisstraat 86, 1050 Brussels might be the first stop.

Restaurants & Bars

Brussels’ restaurant scene is as vibrant and enticing as Paris. Given its international mix of inhabitants, the city offers options for all tastes. www.resto.be is an excellent first source of information. Agenda (www.agenda.be) also includes a section on recommended restaurants and bars or you can buy the Delta Guide. For socialising with friends there are innumerable places to choose from. The Schumann area and Place Luxembourg is popular with people from the EU Institutions but also try the area around the Bourse or Place Flagey.

Bookshops

FNAC (books in Dutch, English, French), Shopping Centre City 2, rue Neuve, 1000 Brussels; Metro Rogier
Waterstones (books in English), Blvd Adolphe Max 71-75, 1000 Brussels; Metro de Brouckere
Filigranes (books in English, French), Avenue des Arts 39-40, 1000 Brussels; Metro Trone
Cook & Book (books in English, French), Avenue Paul Hymans, Woluwe, opposite Woluwe Shopping Centre
Sterling (books in English), Fossé aux Loups 38, 1000 Brussels; Metro de Brouckère
Sports

Most sports are being offered at the NATO HQ Staff Centre. Here are some additional ideas for outdoor activities:

**Horse Riding**

In Bois de la Cambre or Ter Kamerenbos you can go horse riding for a day. The riding centre, Centre Equestre de la Cambre (Chaussée de Waterloo 872 (+32)02 375 3408), is situated on the edge of the woods and qualified instructors take you on various routes around the woods.

Other riding clubs and centres in and around Brussels are Les Drags (www.drags.be/index2.html), Lord Newcastle Stables (www.lordnewcastlestables.com/default.htm) and Royal Etier Belge (www.royaletrierbelge.be/present.htm). For more information on riding stables, contact the Federation Royale Belge des Sports Equestres (Avenue Houba de Strooper 156 (+32)02 478 5056).

**Skiing and Snowboarding**

Europe’s top resorts are easily accessible by plane and fast train. To get some practice before hitting the slopes, Yeti Ski and Snowboard (www.yetiski.be) has an artificial ski slope and rents out equipment.

**Brussels with Kids**

Brussels is a “family city”. There are plenty of activities to explore, both outdoors and indoors.

**Sightseeing**

If this might not sound the most magical of words, there actually are a great variety of options that are both interesting and fun.

The ‘classic’ tour of Brussels centres around the Grand Place - Grote Markt, where you can admire the flower carpet in August (every 2 years: 2008, 2010, etc.), or discover little narrow streets that embrace the main town square. Manneken-Pis is at the corner of rue de l’Etuve and rue du Chene - just follow the crowds from the Grand Place. For a theme-oriented excursion follow the ‘Comic Strip Murals Walk’ as suggested by the Brussels Tourism Office: a map can be obtained at the Town Hall, Grand’ Place (+32)02 513 8940).

A bit further afield is the famous battleground of Waterloo (Waterloo Visitors’ Centre, Route du Lion 254, www.waterloo.org (+32)02 385 1912).

**Parks**

Most parks in Brussels have playgrounds with safe, modern equipment. Close to the city centre, the Parc de Bruxelles has a good playground and a café selling ice cream. The Bois de la Cambre / Ter Kamerenbos at the end of Avenue Louise
(entrances on Chaussée de Waterloo and Avenues Louise and Roosevelt) is a huge landscaped park with a lake, lawns, and woodland rambles. For a break, there are two cafés with one of them close to a playground and the other next to a roller-skating ring (La Patinoire). As roads through the Park are closed to traffic on weekends, they have become favourite cycling and rollerblading pistes. Parc Tenbosch in Ixelles (entrances on Chaussée de Vleurgat and Place Tenbosch) is a smaller park that offers a safe playground with wooden equipment, a sandpit, football pitch and pond.

More adventurous options are the Sauvagère nature reserve (entrance on Avenue de la Chenaie) and Parc de Wolvendale (entrances on Avenues de Fré and Paul Stroobant) in Uccle. Whereas Sauvagère has an outdoor playground ideal for small children, a picnic area, basketball court, duck pond and farm animals, Parc de Wolvendale offers an outdoor café, mini golf and a playground. In the rare event of Brussels seeing some snow, both the Parc de Wolvendale and Parc de Woluwe (entrance on Avenue de Tervuren) are prime spots for sledding. The Rouge Cloître on the edge of the Forêt de Soignes has two new playgrounds with great climbing equipment.

La Ferme Nos Pilifs (Trassersweg 347, Brussels, www.fermenospilifs.be, (+32)02 262 1106) is paradise for kids and gardeners alike. It offers plenty of activities linked to the plantations and the farm.

A highlight of the spring season is the opening of the Royal Greenhouses of Laeken from late April to early May (Royal Castle of Laeken, Avenue de la Dynastie, www.visitbelgium.com/mediaroom/royalgreenhouses.htm).

Bruparck (Avenue du Football 1, www.bruparck.com) is located at the foot of the Atomium (Boulevard du Centenaire, www.atomium.be (+32)02 475 4748), it offers fairground attractions, a water-park (www.oceade.be), Mini-Europe (a theme park with miniature replicas of famous European buildings), restaurants and bars and the Kinepolis cinema complex comprising 24 modern auditoriums.

Museums

The Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles (29, rue Vautier, www.naturalsciences.be (+32)02 627 4238) fascinates kids with its Iguanadon dinosaur skeletons and other remains of mammals. It also runs nature workshops in French and Dutch (for children above 5), animations on the subject of natural sciences (kids above 12) and educational field-explorations. For the more musically-inclined, the Musée des Instruments de Musique (rue Montagne de la Cour 2, www.mim.fgov.be (+32)02 545 0130) has it all: cool headphones, the world’s largest collection of instruments, and a top-floor restaurant with panoramic views of the city. Cartoon fans should enjoy the Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée (rue des Sables 20, www.brusselsbdtour.com/cbbd.htm (+32)02 219 1980) as they can find out how animated films work and become part of life-size replicas of comic book scenes. The Musée des Enfants (rue du Bourgmestre 15, www.museedesenfants.be, tel.: (+32)02 640 0107) is a rambling townhouse in Ixelles that has been transformed into an excellent children’s museum, including rooms for theatre, dressing up, giant interactive puzzles, games, painting and clay modelling as well as a kitchen with baking classes. The Scientastic Museum (Underground level 1, Bourse, boulevard Anspach, www.scientastic.com (+32)02 732 1336) envelopes you with magical interactive experiments.
Many museums run workshops for children on weekends, Wednesday afternoons and during school holidays. Just a few ideas:

**Art Basic for Children** (ABC, [www.abc-web.be](http://www.abc-web.be)) introduces children over 4 to multiple art disciplines in a playful and creative way. Their creativity centre houses a cinema and theatre, several workshops, as well as an all-size kitchen where children are invited with their parents and friends to explore their cooking abilities in a fun environment. There is also a crèche-café for the youngest and a library. During toy workshops participants can identify their “creative vibes” and make their own toy.

**Bozar** ([www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)) organises “Bozar Sundays” for families with children (over 6), with fun artistic programmes. The programme starts with breakfast and continues with concerts for parents and older children, or a musical workshop for smaller children. Why not sign up for the Young Film Fans where parents and children can (re)discover some classic 35mm movies?

**Filigranes** ([www.filigranes.be](http://www.filigranes.be), Avenue des Arts 39-40 (+32)02 511 9015) and **Cook & Book** ([www.cookandbook.be](http://www.cookandbook.be), Avenue Paul Hymans, opposite Woluwe Shopping Centre) run ‘story-time’ sessions for children and both have a café (with Cook & Book even offering lots of different restaurant options) as well as plenty of books to browse in Dutch, English and French.

**Cinema & Theatre**

**Anima** is an annual festival of cartoon animated films ([www.anima2008.be](http://www.anima2008.be)) that takes place in Brussels (at Flagey), Ghent, Charleroi and Liege. For regular screenings of movies for children, try **Arenberg** ([www.arenberg.be](http://www.arenberg.be)), as well as **Kinepolis** ([www.kinepolis.com](http://www.kinepolis.com)) or **UGC** ([www.ugc.be](http://www.ugc.be)) for blockbusters.

**Ice-cream**

To keep up spirits and “make sightseeing worthwhile”, options for ice-cream stops are invaluable… In summer, there are plenty of ice-cream vans all around town but the following are Brussels ‘time-tested-ice-cream-tips’: **Il Gelato** (rue Vanderkindere 168 in Uccle (+32)02.344.3495), **Zizi** (rue de la Mutualité 57 in Uccle (+32)02 344 7081), **Capoue** (Avenue des Celtes, Etterbek (+32)02 733 3833); Chaussée de Boondael 395, Ixelles (+32)02 647 0798 or **Mont Blanc** (Markt 3, Tervuren (+32)02 767 4364).

**Sports Centres for Children**

**Swimming**: Apart from the pool at the NATO staff centre, there are a variety of swimming pools in and around Brussels. Poséidon of Woluwe (Avenue des Vaillants 2, Woluwé Saint-Lambert, 1200 Brussels) and Calypso (Avenue Léopold Wiener 60, 1170 Bruxelles, [www.calypso2000.be](http://www.calypso2000.be)) are family destinations. If you wish to dive: Nemo 33 (Rue de Stalle 333, Uccle) is there for you. For fun and relaxation take Océade or Aqualibi (9 rue Joseph Deschamps, Wavre (+32)010 42 1500). **Oceade** is a family water-park with water slides, wavepools, saunas, Jacuzzis, log flumes, toboggans and more ([www.oceade.be](http://www.oceade.be), Bruparck (+32)02 478 4320). Please note that most pools require bathing caps for everyone.
Woluwe Sports Centre (www.centresportifdelawoluwe.be) has over 2,300 square metres of sports fields indoors and outdoors for dozens of sports, including squash, badminton and a climbing wall.

Indoor Playgrounds

Planet Kid’s (www.planetkids.be/uk/index.htm) is an extensive indoor and outdoor playground located in Sterrebeek. Kid’s factory (www.kidsfactory.be) has two playgrounds, one in Brussels and the other one in Waterloo. The Funny Club (www.funnyclub.be) is located in Woluwe St Lambert. These playgrounds also house restaurants and they organise birthday parties for children.

Trips Out Of Town

Belgium has lots of corners and sites to discover, explore and simply enjoy and almost all are within a 1-2 hour drive or train journey from Brussels. And even if you are more drawn towards ‘foreign shores’, there are endless options for weekend trips.

Trips with Kids

Domaine de Chevetogne (5590 Chevetogne, Namur Province, www.province.namur.be/sections/culture/loisirs (+32)083 68 7211) is an “open-air playground” for all ages, including the Extraordinary Nature Museum, ten different gardens and open air games, a swimming pool, sports grounds, canoes, picnic areas, horse riding, options for extensive walks as well as accommodation.

Domaine Provincial de Huizingen (100 H. Torleylaan, 1650 Beersel (+32)02 383 0020) is a family nature reserve that offers lots of different activities including a playground, trampolines, an open air swimming pool, a boating lake, forest paths and cafés.

Nausicaà (Boulevard Sainte Beuve, Boulogne-sur-Mer, in France but very close to the Belgian border, www.nausicaa.fr (+33)03 2130 9898) is not only a giant aquarium but a real centre dedicated to explaining the entire maritime world to kids. It even includes a pacific island and a tropical rainforest to explain the frailties of the global ecosystem.

Parc d’Aventures Scientifiques (PASS) is an interactive science centre located in a former coal mine near Mons that has been redesigned by Jean Nouvel (rue de Mons 3, Frameris, www.pass.be (+32)070 22 2252).

Parc Paradisio (Domaine de Cambron, Cambron-Casteau, www.paradisio.be (+32)068 45 4653) is located on the grounds of an old abbey that has been transformed into an exotic bird sanctuary and includes a river, lakes, water gardens, flower beds, a petting farm, a restaurant and - most importantly for children - an adventure playground.

Planckendael (Leuvenensesteenweg 582, Muizen, near Mechelen, easily accessible via E19 from Brussels in direction of Antwerp, www.planckendael.be, tel.: (+32)015 41 4921) is a wildlife park with wide-open spaces for rhinos, giraffes, deer, antelope, wolves, birds and cranes. The estate also includes an adventure playground and rope bridges.
Provincial Recreation Park Kessel-Lo in Leuven (entrances Beemdenstraat and Holsbeeksesteenweg 55 (+32)016 25 1392) is a family park for recreation, sports and education with a lake with boats, adventure playgrounds, a splashing pool, sports grounds and extensive lanes for cycling.

Technopolis (Technologielaan, Mechelen, www.technopolis.be (+32)015 34 2000) is rated as one of the best science museums in Europe. Children can ride bikes along a hire wire, experience a flight simulator, lie on a bed of nails or star in their own pop video.

Walibi (9 rue Joseph Deschamps, Wavre, www.walibi.be (+32)010 421500) is Belgium’s biggest and oldest theme park. Also home to Aqualibi which has several water rides. Reduced tickets are available at the NATO Staff Centre.

Hiking, Cycling, Kayaking, River Tours

Belgium has many different natural delights to explore. There is a network of walking and cycling routes known as RAVeL. They are at the exclusive use of hikers, cyclists and in some cases horse riders. They follow old canal embankments and disused railway tracks in Wallonia. The TARPAN (www.tarpan.be) network follows a similar approach but their paths are rougher and more suitable to mountain bikes and serious walkers. For more information see www.belgiumtheplace.to.be

To stretch your legs, if you are into hilly terrain your best bet is probably the Ardennes in the southern part of Belgium but pleasant walks and cycling paths are criss-crossing the entire country. You can hire bicycles, kayaks (www.visitbelgium.com/canoeingkayaking.htm), go fishing (www.maisondelapeche.be), or play golf. For more information about hiking see the official walking associations in Belgium, Les Sentiers de Grande Randonnee (www.grsentiers.org) and VZW Grote Routepaden (www.groteroutepaden.be). Cyclists may find the webpage of Cycling in Brussels (www.velo.irisnet.be) useful. Another way of discovering Belgium is by river cruise (www.rivertours.be).

The Coast

The 65 km of Belgian coastline consists of 14 resorts (all are linked by a coastal tram that runs from De Panne to Knokke-Heist) with sandy beaches and plenty of apartments to rent. Considering the more well-known resorts, Ostend is the biggest, Blankenberge has probably most for kids (including the modern Sea Life Centre, www.sealifeeurope.com) and Knokke-Heist the reputation of being the most fashionable.

If you are in the mood for something just a bit further afield, try the Dutch coast (www.holland.com/global/discover/coast/nicetoknow/index.html) which is characterised by dunes, long beaches, and easily accessible islands.
Cities - Belgium and Beyond

Antwerp, Bruges, Ghent, Namur, Dinant and Leuven are beautifully-preserved and lively old towns that are perfect for a day trip. They are all easily accessible by car and train.

Exploring Europe? Fast trains link Brussels with Amsterdam, Cologne, London, and Paris as well as many cities in between. And by plane all of Europe is only a stone’s throw away. For travel options, please see section 3.1.2 above.
9 - Survivor’s Guide to Driving in Belgium

1. **Driving Habits.** One of the most important places to follow Belgian customs is behind the steering wheel of your car: the old maxim of ‘he who hesitates is lost’ could, at the worst, mean dead. Do take your priority, otherwise you will upset the other driver. Should you decide to relinquish it, let him know you are doing so. There have been some terrible accidents with internationals here, caused by the flashing of headlights in broad daylight. Of course, if the car signalling is behind you, it generally means you are in his way. Belgians are particularly good motorway drivers: mostly they keep well to the right (and that means in the inside lane) and leave the way clear for overtaking traffic. You will soon become unpopular if you hog the middle or the outside lanes and you won’t do much for our public relations image if you have a SHAPE licence plate or a country sticker on the back of your car. If you should have an accident and it doesn’t look as though a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ can be organised early, or if someone is hurt, call the Federal Police. Do not drive on parking lights, whatever the time of day. They have no legal status here. If the weather is bad or if you are driving at night, drive on dipped headlights. Beware of parking in front of garages and entrances. You will be surprised how small some of these can be and how they can be dressed up to look like something else. A garage or entrance does not have to have a miniature car number plate with the owner’s car number attached to it, although wise residents will make sure this information can be seen clearly. If you park across someone’s entrance or garage he has the right to ring the police and have your vehicle towed away. Besides the inconvenience of finding out where your vehicle is, getting there and paying for it being towed away, you will also be fined.

2. **Spot Checks.** In Belgium the police frequently stop cars in order to carry out spot checks. At these checks the police will want to see that you are wearing seat belts and that you have with you all the essential documents. These include all the registration documents for the car, your insurance certificate and your driving licence. The police are empowered to make very heavy fines via the SHAPE Gendarmeries if you are not carrying your motor documents. It is advisable, therefore, to keep the relevant documents in the car at all times. The police will also examine the car to make sure the tyres, lights, windscreen wipers etc are working and in good condition. The number of checks is increasing every year with the increase in motor regulations.

3. **Drinking and Driving.** The blood/alcohol limit in Belgium is 0.5 grams of alcohol per litre of blood. The police have the power to carry out random alcohol tests on drivers at any time and a blood sample will be taken if a driver refuses a breathalyser test. Drivers can request to wait 30 minutes before taking a breath test. A driver found to have more
than the legal limit of alcohol is fined an amount that depends on the blood alcohol level. In some cases the driver's licence may be confiscated immediately or for a period of a few hours. In the small print, many policies render the insurance null and void if an accident occurs when under the influence of alcohol.

4. **What to Carry in the Car.** It is compulsory to carry the following documents in the car at all times:

   - Driving Licence;
   - Insurance Certificate;
   - Vehicle Registration documents;
   - Passport/Proof of Identity; and

   All vehicles must also carry:

   - a warning triangle. In the event of an accident or breakdown the triangle must be placed 30 metres behind the vehicle on ordinary roads and 100 metres on motorways to warn following traffic. It must be visible at a distance of 50 metres.
   - a first aid kit.
   - a fire extinguisher, which must be accessible from the driver's seat.
   - a reflective vest which must be put on before getting out of the car in the event of an accident or breakdown on any road.

5. **Roads And Speed Limits.**

   a. **Types of Roads.** Most Belgian roads are in a relatively good condition with satisfactory lighting; some motorways /autoroutes are very well lit.

   b. **Motorways (Autoroute/Auto Snelweg).**

      - Motorways are signposted with a white E on a green background.
      - Motorways have services stations with fuel, snack shops and washrooms available. Some also have information points and repair garages.
      - Passing on the right is illegal.
      - Orange SOS phones are provided at regular intervals to call for assistance

   c. **National Roads.**

      - Main roads have a speed limit of between 70 Km/h and 90 Km/h.
      - Passing on the right (the inside) is illegal
      - National roads are marked with the letter N and a number.

   d. **Built-up Areas.** On entering any town or village, the speed limit comes into effect at the white background signboard bearing the community's name. Radar speed traps are common.

      - Speed limits are generally 50 Km/h in built-up areas; any additional restrictions will be signposted.
      - There is a speed restriction of 30 Km/h in school areas, valid all day.
      - Speed traps, cameras and unmarked police vehicles are used throughout the country to catch speeding motorists. Belgium has a high accident rate,
mainly due to speeding. Traffic control authorities (autorités de contrôle du traffic/verkeersinspectie) are strict, issuing heavy speeding fines on the spot.

6. **Rules and Regulations.** Many of the basic rules of the road in Belgium are very similar to those across the rest of Europe. Road signs are either in Dutch or French.

   - Drive on the right in Belgium, overtake on the left.
   - Priority is given to the right; drivers must stop for traffic joining from the right. Marked by an inverted "yield" sign with a red "X" in the middle, the "priority from the right" rule means that cars coming from the right always have priority unless a yellow diamond sign or other priority road sign has been posted. This does not apply on motorways, roundabouts, and roads sign-posted with an orange diamond within a white background.
   - The legal minimum age for driving is 18 years.
   - Trams have priority in Belgium, as do their passengers getting on and off.
   - Valid Belgian, other EU country and International driving licences (accompanied by a valid foreign driving licence) are accepted in Belgium
   - Mobile cellular telephones may only be used with a 'hands-free' system
   - It's compulsory to wear a seat belt including in the back seats if belts are fitted. It is the driver's responsibility to ensure all passengers wear their belts (and the driver will be fined if passengers are not belted in).
   - Children under three may not travel in the front unless carried in a suitable car seat. Children over 3 and 12 or measuring less than 1.35m must use appropriate restraints front and rear.
   - Headlights must be used in tunnels, even during the day.
   - Headlamps must be used when visibility is poor. Rear fog lamps may only be used in fog, heavy rain or snowfall, and only when visibility is less than 100 metres. Front fog headlights can only be used in conjunction with the rear ones.
   - Drivers involved in an accident must stop and help injured people, collaborate in avoiding danger and other possible accidents and call the police if there are injured people or if the road cannot be cleared (Call Police on 101).

7. **Equipment - A Few Things To Consider.**

   **Compulsory Lights.** Lights installed by a manufacturer or by the owner must be maintained in proper working order. Exterior lights with broken or missing lenses are not considered to be in proper working order.

   **Parking Lights.** Two white lights on the front of the vehicle separate from the headlights.

   **Headlights.** Two high (main) or two low (dipped) beam highlights, correctly adjusted. They may be white or yellow but both lights must be of the same colour. You are strongly advised to purchase European Headlights as the stickers are only a temporary measure.

   **Directional Signal Lights.** Left and right turn signal lights at the front and rear of the vehicle. The front lights may be white or yellow and the rear lights yellow or red, but in both cases each pair must be of the same colour.

   **Tail and Stop Lights.** Two red tail lights and two red stoplights on the rear.
Licence Plate Light. A lamp must be so placed as to illuminate the rear licence plate and make it clearly visible at night.

Rear Fog Light. At least one red rear fog light must be fitted. This light must be of an approved type and marked ‘B1’. It must be fitted at the middle or between the middle and left of the rear of the vehicle. Two red fog lights may be fitted; in this case the lights must be marked ‘B2’.

Red Reflectors. Two red reflectors of any shape, except triangular must be fitted at the rear of the vehicle.

Optional Lights. Two white or yellow fog lights may be fitted at the front of the vehicle but they must work in conjunction with the headlights. One searchlight may be fitted on the front of the vehicle and one or two reversing lights may be fitted at the rear of the vehicles. These must function only when reverse gear is selected.

Seat Belts. Vehicles registered from 15 June 1968 onwards must have seat belts for the driver and front seat passenger.

Shock Absorbers. The shock absorbers must be in good working order.

Speedometer. The speedometer must be in good working condition and show the speed in kilometres per hour.

Windscreen Wipers. The wiper(s) must be efficient and capable of operating without the continual intervention of the driver.

Brakes. The vehicle must have 2 means of applying brakes. If connected, they must be so constructed that the failure of one will not affect the other. They must be able to bring the vehicle to a smooth stop within a certain distance, which may vary according to the type of vehicle, with no evidence of side pull.

Tyres. The tyres of all vehicles capable of exceeding 25 kph must be in good condition and must show sculptures of at least 1.6mm deep all over the tread. Tyres fitted on an axle must be of the same type. When radial tyres are fitted on the front of the vehicle radial tyres must be fitted on rear. Retread and studded tyres are not permitted.

Fire Extinguisher. An approved fire extinguisher must be placed so as to be accessible to the driver.

Reflective Vests. In Belgium the driver is required to have a reflective vest to be worn in case of breakdown.

First Aid Kit. An approved First Aid Kit must be carried at all times.

Warning Triangle. An approved Warning Triangle must be carried at all times.

8. Parking in Belgium (Parking/Parkeerplaats). In Belgium parking restrictions are made fairly obvious to drivers. Most parking is on a fee-basis and parking meters can be found on the majority of streets. Most cities operate the so-called Blue-Zone parking system, which means drivers must display a cardboard display clock set to their time of
arrival. The blue clock is available from petrol stations, newsagents and police stations. Parking is forbidden within 15 metres of a tram, bus or rail stop or near where tram or rail lines cross the road whilst a yellow line on the curb indicates no parking. Be aware that there may be temporary signs left by the commune to indicate that the road needs to be kept clear for road works or similar. Drivers who ignore these risk having their vehicle towed away. Certain very busy streets are marked with a red triangle stating (Axe Rouge/Ax Rode) which means that parking is not permitted from 0700-0930 and 1600-1800. If you receive a parking fine then they can be paid at the Town Hall (Maison Communale/Stadhuis) or at the Post Office.

9. **Road Traffic Signs.** Road signs in Belgium are normally only in the local language and signs can change language abruptly when travelling through Belgium. Here are translations of the most common road traffic signs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Flemish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exit</td>
<td>Sortie</td>
<td>Uitrit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrance</td>
<td>Entrée</td>
<td>Toegang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversion</td>
<td>Déviation</td>
<td>Wegomlegging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorway</td>
<td>Autoroute</td>
<td>Verkeersweg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No entry</td>
<td>Défense d'entrer</td>
<td>Verboden toegang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One way street</td>
<td>Sens unique</td>
<td>Eenrichtingsverkeer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level Crossing</td>
<td>Passage à niveau</td>
<td>Overweg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus lane</td>
<td>Couloir pour autobus</td>
<td>Busstroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed restriction</td>
<td>Ralentissement</td>
<td>Snelheidsverminderen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roundabout</td>
<td>Rondpoint</td>
<td>Verkeersplein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disc parking</td>
<td>Disque obligatoire</td>
<td>Schijf Verplicht</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. **Fuel.** Most fuel stations are closed from 8pm to 8am, and all day Sunday, but stations along expressways are open 24 hours, seven days a week. Major credit cards are accepted at stations in large towns and along the expressways. Leaded super fuel has an octane rating of 98 or 99. Unleaded fuel is known as normale sans plomb, essence sans plomb, ongeloed, unverbleit, or loodvrije benzine. Unleaded regular has an octane rating of 92; the octane rating of super is 95.

11. **What to Do at the Scene of an Accident.**

a. **General.**

- Stop immediately.
- Put on the reflective jacket before leaving the car in dark conditions, bad weather or at night.
- Switch on the hazard lights and place a red reflecting warning triangle. The triangle must be placed 30 metres behind the vehicle on ordinary roads and 100 metres on motorways to warn following traffic. It must be visible at a distance of 50 metres.
- All drivers involved must exchange details: registration number, insurance details, name and address.
- Never sign any paperwork unless certain it's understood and agreed with.
- If damage is caused and the owner is not there to report it (a crash with a parked car or into someone’s property), it must be reported to the nearest police station so that they can make contact.

b. **In the Event of a Minor Accident.** In the event of a minor accident with no injuries the parties involved must exchange details and fill in an Accident Report Form at the scene of the accident. The form should be provided by the motor insurer. All parties must sign this form: if the accident has involved more than two drivers, forms should be completed between each of the involved. If the parties involved do not agree on a version of events, do not sign any documentation. The accident report form should be sent to the insurance company within one week. The details as written and signed to on the document can be binding in the event of a dispute.

c. **In the Event of a Serious Car Accident.** If there have been injuries or fatalities call for the police and ambulance:

- **Police Tel:** 101
- **Ambulance or Fire Tel:** 100

The vehicles must not be moved until the police have arrived. In accordance with basic first aid rules, keep the injured person warm and do not move a casualty unless they are in danger of further injury. If the police attend the scene of an accident they will make an Accident Report. They may make charges of driving offences. If you suspect the other driver has been drinking or taking drugs inform the police.

- remain at the scene but move to a safe place and alert oncoming traffic with the warning triangle. This is compulsory in Belgium;
- if you are forced to walk on the motorway, use the visibility vest (also obligatory in Belgium);
- fill out the Accident Report Form. If this is not possible due to driver injury, passengers or witnesses may do it;
- take the name, address and insurance details of all parties involved and the registration numbers of the vehicles;
- take the name and address of any witnesses. Try to obtain as many as possible;
- if the parties are hospitalised the authorities will deal with the paperwork on their behalf;
- if the parties are not hospitalised, they must obtain a medical certificate stating their injuries; and
- if the parties are not injured but have suffered a shock, (loss of consciousness, nose bleed) they should seek medical advice after the accident and send the report to the insurance company, the social security and the medical insurers.

d. **The Accident Report Form.** The Accident Report should contain the following details:

- date and place of the accident (full address);
- vehicle information: make, model numbers and vehicle registration numbers;
- drivers’ information: full names, addresses, driving licence details (number, category, date and place of issue);
- details of insurers and policies of all drivers;
- witnesses names and addresses;
- any injuries; and
- an illustration and explanation of the accident including details of damage caused, with photographs or a sketch.

The form should be sent to the insurers within one week.
10 - Useful Contacts

1. General. Each Nation maintains a Support Cell for their personnel assigned to the NATO HQ. For additional information concerning the international aspects of your appointment, please contact the following:

IMS

IMS Human Resources Office
Phone: +32 (0)2 707 98 42
Fax: +32 (0)27 07 98 08
E-Mail: imshr@hq.nato.int

IMS Privileges and Immunities Office
Phone: +32 (0)27 07 52 53

NATO HQ

ING Bank +32 (0)2 707 4975
Monte Paschi Belgio Bank +32 (0)2 220 7470
NATO Office of Security +32 (0)2 707 4893

2. Emergency Contact Numbers.

Police 101
Ambulance 100
Fire Brigade 100
Accident EU-wide Emergency Line, all services 112
Pharmacies on duty 0900 10 500 (www.pharmacie.be)
Doctors on duty 02 479 18 18
Bank card lost or stolen 070 344 344