

Living in Brussels

If you have never visited Brussels, you will be surprised at how varied, and well-connected it is. The following description is shamelessly adapted from a BBC article. It omits to mention the wonderful food and drink you will savour in Belgium!

Brussels is many cities in one. It is the bilingual capital of Belgium, where the official languages are French and Dutch; it calls itself the Capital of Europe, home to both the EU and NATO headquarters; medieval and modern architecture are only blocks apart; and visitors may experience two widely different cities: a grey, bureaucratic town and a culturally rich city with spots of charm. Drawing a diverse European and international resident population, Brussels is a multinational gem in the heart of the continent.

Today, thousands of EU and NATO employees from all over the world live and work in Brussels, not to mention those employed at the attendant institutions, organisations, lobbying groups and media that round out the city's political universe. It makes for a diverse cultural scene overlaid onto a seemingly staid bourgeois city.

Brussels is made up of 19 communes, including the city centre, which date back to the 13th Century. The communes of Ixelles and Etterbeek, just south of the centre, are popular with internationals and their families. Just further south, the districts of Uccle and Woluwe are affluent residential areas with a mix of apartment buildings, single-family homes, villas and abundant green spaces.

Other communes that are gaining popularity include multicultural St-Josse and diverse Schaerbeek, just north of the city centre. In addition, expats are also drawn to suburbs such as Waterloo, about 15km south of Brussels, as well as peaceful Wezembeek-Oppeem and family-friendly Kraainem, about 10km to the east.

Brussels is located in the middle of Belgium, so on the weekends many Bruxellois head north to coastal towns such as Oostende and De Haan, or Cadzand in Dutch Zeeland in the Netherlands. They also travel south to the forests, valleys and enchanting villages of the French-speaking Ardennes region, such as Dinant, La-Roche-en-Ardenne and Spa. There are frequent connections to Belgium's other major cities of Antwerp and Ghent, as well as to canal-laced Bruges.

The Eurostar connects Brussels to Paris in 90 minutes and to London in two hours, while Amsterdam and Luxembourg are both about two hours away by rail. Many German towns are also within easy driving distance, including Aachen and Cologne, a popular winter destination for its superb Christmas market. There are direct flights to most European cities and many international destinations from Brussels Airport.

<http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20130910-living-in-brussels>

