

Module 5: Au restaurant

Topic 4 Content: Belgium

Belgium



Bruxelles, or Brussels, is the capital of Belgium. Brussels also serves as the capital for the European Union. Belgium is one of 27 countries that belong to the EU. Two other well-known cities are Bruges and Liège. Belgium has 3 official languages: French, Dutch, and German. A little more than one-third of the population speaks French as their first language. Dutch is the first language for roughly half of the population, while only a small percentage of Belgians speak German as their first language.

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Flag and National Anthem



The flag of Belgium, consists of vertical stripes of black, yellow, and red. These colors come from the Duchy of Brabant's coat of arms. The Duchy of Brabant was originally part of the Holy Roman Empire. The Belgian national anthem, *La Brabançonne*, went through several versions. The modern version is trilingual to include all 3 of the country's official languages.

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Government



Prime Minister of Belgium Elio Di Rupo (left) and King Philippe of Belgium (right) with President Barack Obama in 2014.

The government in Belgium is a Federal Parliamentary Constitutional Monarchy. That means there is a king or queen as the head of state. The king or queen reigns, but does not actually govern. That responsibility is left to the Federal Parliament and the Prime Minister. Like Switzerland, Belgium takes a neutral stance when it comes to world politics. This led to problems during World War II, when Germany used Belgium as the path for invading France.

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Geography



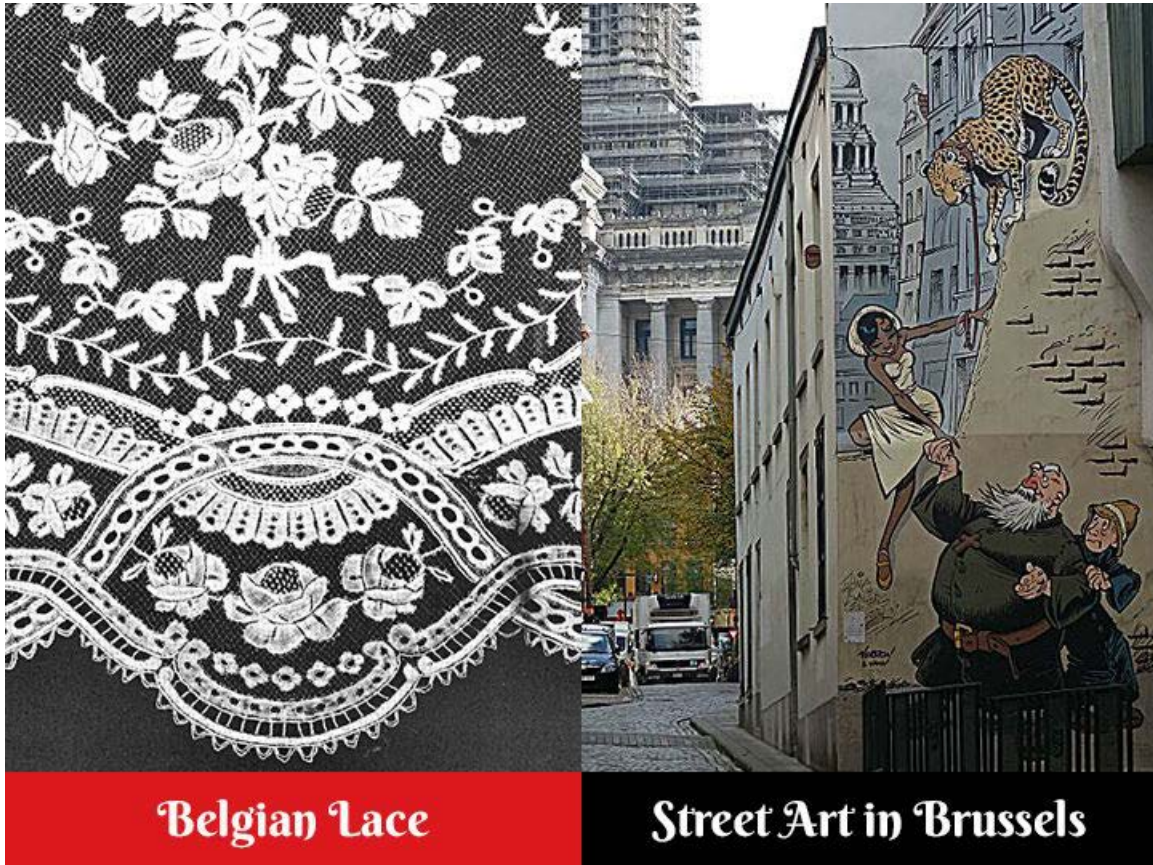
As previously stated, Belgium has 3 official languages: French, Dutch, and German. Therefore, it shouldn't be too surprising that the country borders, France, the Netherlands, and Germany. Its other borders are Luxembourg, which is also a francophone country, and the English Channel and North Sea.

The Ardennes is a mountain chain that passes through Belgium and has very dense forests. It is currently a very popular camping destination, but it is also the pathway that Hitler used to invade France during World War II because it was deemed to be indefensible. One of Napoleon's most famous campaigns, Waterloo, also took place on Belgian soil.

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Products



Belgian Lace

Street Art in Brussels

Belgium is known for high quality chocolate, waffles, and believe it or not, french fries. They often eat french fries with mayonnaise or mustard, as opposed to Americans who tend to prefer ketchup. Belgian lace is also quite popular and is still hand made in Bruges and in Brussels. Classic comic strips like Tintin and Asterix have their origins in Belgium. There is even a comic strip museum in Brussels.

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School and Activities

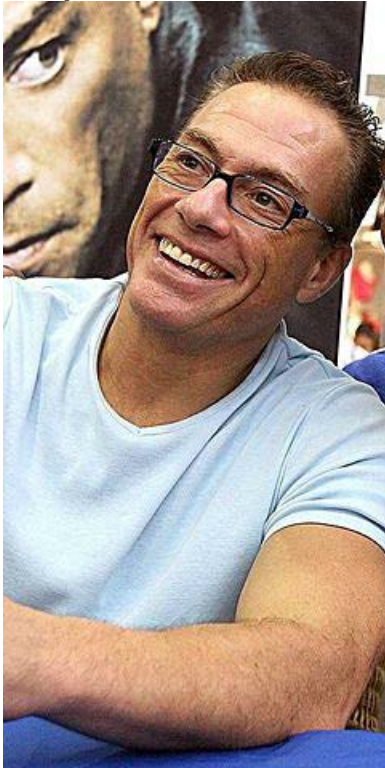


School is required from age 6 to 18. Here in the U.S., it is only required until age 16 in some states. Soccer is very popular in Belgium, as it is in many francophone countries. Competitive bike riding and fishing are also popular. Many Americans may find this a bit unusual, but raising homing pigeons is a popular pastime. The Ardennes offers beautiful scenery for camping, which is another activity enjoyed by many Belgians.

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People



**Jean-Claude
van Damme**



Audrey Hepburn



Liz Claiborne

Actor Jean-Claude van Damme and actress Audrey Hepburn are both Belgian. The fashion designer Liz Claiborne was also born in Belgium.