

Belgium: For better and for worse

A national conflict between north and south

Officially the kingdom of Belgium is a federal state situated in Western Europe. It is a founding member of the European Union since 1973. Belgium covers over 30,528 square kilometres and its population is about 11 million people. Belgium was created in 1830. It is a combination of French speaking people (called the Walloons) and “dutch” speaking people (called the Flemish). There are two main languages in Belgium: Flemish (60% of population) and French (40% of population). Flemish is an official language since 1829. Flemish isn't really Dutch, it is a

popular language. Throughout the 20th century, economic and linguistic conflicts increase. The Flemish are richer than Walloons. Some Flemish say that Walloons are lazy-bones; but the bigger conflict is about the language. There

is a lot of animosity and rivalry between them. In some Flemish villages, patches of French street names have been removed. In Grimbergen, if a storekeeper speaks French in his shop, he is liable to be fined.

Brussels and politics

There is another particular city, the capital: Brussels (Home to the European Commission). Brussels is in Flanders but most people speak French. Belgium is a modern country in many aspects. The linguistic diversity often provokes political conflicts and has engendered a complex

governance system. Belgium has even been without a government for several years. They have a prime minister only since the end of 2011. Jacques Brel (a Walloon singer) wrote the song: “Les Flamandes” which can be seen as making fun of the Flemish.



Culture and Food

Belgian cultural life has tended to develop in each community, but it is culturally known for its fine art and architecture.

It was very influential in European art. Flemish painting of the Renaissance, Baroque painting, the Gothic architecture and classical music of the Renaissance are major elements of art history.

Flemish art gradually declined from the second half of the seventeenth century. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the emergence of famous musicians such as Adolphe Sax, inventor of the saxophone for the French army, or later the singer and songwriter Jacques Brel.

Belgium is also the nation of romantic painters, expressionists and surrealists. The poet Emile Verhaeren and the novelist Georges

Simenon have enriched literature with their writings. In Belgium, there are a variety of foods, although gastronomy in France is more renowned. However there are a lots a small and delicious things to eat.

First of all, the Chocolate, more precisely "Praline", are the most famous specialties in Belgium. Belgians eat on average 8 kilos of chocolate per person per year. The only company which produces 100% Belgian chocolate is Belcolade, which is situated in

Erembodegem.

Another speciality is "Moules Frites". However they are very expensive in restaurants, nearly 20 €, yet at that price, you get nearly 1,5 kg in your plate per person!

On every street corner, or almost, we find waffles. In fact, the local food is not always well-balanced, some may even find it slightly Americanised. One thing is for sure, Belgium hosts many of the best beers in the world.



Belgian comics

In Belgium, comic books are considered an art.

In the thirties, with Hergé, the creator of *Tintin*, it was the beginning of comics as we know them today. We can distinguish two types of Belgian comics; Franco-Belgian comics and Belgian-Flemish comics.

Comics have really big place in Belgium, there is even a museum called the Belgium centre of comics, situated in the heart of Brussels, the museum opened its doors in 1989 and has become one of the most important attractions in Brussels.

All in all, Belgium

totals around 700 authors of comics and *that* is what makes this country, the country with the highest number of cartoonists.

The most famous comic book authors are: Hergé with *Tintin*, Peyo with *the Smurfs*, and of course all the other “heroes” such as *Lucky Luke*, *Gaston Lagaffe*, *Largo Winch*, *XIII* and many more.

Humour is one of Belgium's strengths. They have a particular know-how when it comes to self derision and of course, making fun of their “big sister” country, France.