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## Belgium/Hasselt-Brussels

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Belgium is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and it has lots of beauty, culture and elegance. It is also a tiny country which has the additional advantage for tourists that they can see most of it in a very short time. Hasselt, in itself a very attractive city, is very centrally located and close to both major Belgium cities: Antwerp (81 km) and Brussels (77 km). (If you like the idea of crossing borders, it is even closer to the Dutch cities of Eindhoven and Maastricht, 58 and 27 km and the German city of Aachen 75 km). Hasselt has everything, and more, that any reasonably sized town has to offer; it has monuments, culture, history, art treasures, fashion, outdoor cafes, flowers, lots of sports facilities, and a very attractive shopping center.

If this is not enough, there is Antwerp practically just around the corner, one of the greatest ports on the European continent and the world centre for the Diamond trade. Equally close is Brussels, the centre of government, industry, business and culture. As the headquarters of NATO, the Common Market, the Benelux, and the European Atomic Energy Community, Brussels is not only the capital of Belgium and of the Belgium province of Brabant, in many ways it is the capital of all of Europe. It is also becoming headquarters for virtually every multi-national firm of importance needing a base on the continent. The city itself is a living museum, and its own museums are amongst the finest in Europe.

### Telephone and time difference

Access code to USA: 00. To phone Belgium: 32; time difference (Eastern Daylight) plus 6 hours.

### Climate

The sea is the predominant influence on the weather and the gently undulating hills that cover a good part of the country's interior don't stop the prevailing westerlies. The climate is temperate with few extremes. Temperatures reach 70°F (21°C) in summer and drop to the low 40s F (near 0°C) in winter.

### Sights and Museums

Hasselt has several attractive buildings to visit such as: the Quintinus cathedral, Herkenrode Abbey and the Provincial Museum. On top of that, it also has a unique fashion museum showing the development of fashion from 1830 to the present day, and last but not least a Gin Museum. In Brussels, a monument not to be missed is the Palais de Justice which is on a hill from which you have a view of the city, especially the older section of town. The Palais was built during the 19th century. Other sights in Brussels are the Grand'Place, reputed to be Europe's most beautiful square. It is the historic heart of Brussels and a magnet to everyone. The Brewery Museum, on the Grand'Place and set in the building of an old Brewers' guild. Manneke -Pis this small bronze statue of a boy making water is said to be the symbol of the city's irreverent spirit. Museum of old masters, a very large collection of paintings, mostly Flemish from the 14th to the 17th centuries, included are the works of Rubens, the Breughels and Van Dijck.

### Theatre and Nightlife

Hasselt has the biggest cultural centre of Belgium, at which daily performances are given, some of which might be able to cross the language barrier. The best way to spend an evening in Hasselt is probably just to sit at one of the many outdoor cafes in the attractive centre and watch the crowd.

Another possibility is to go to Brussels where you will find more entertainment in the way of nightclubs and such. These, however, are quite expensive. Cheaper and closer is the Dutch town of Maastricht, which has a historic centre a bit like Hasselt, and many bars and cafes.

### Shopping

Shopping hours are from 9 am to 6 pm every day except Sundays. In Brussels most shops remain open till 8 pm on Fridays. In Hasselt market days are Tuesdays and Friday mornings. The things to look for is first of all chocolate, beautiful to look at, tasty, and very, very fattening, Belgian chocolate is absolutely gorgeous. Other longer lasting items to take home are: pewter and crystal, linen and lace. Hasselt is one of Belgium's best cities for shopping.

The town centre is full of shops and boutiques and people come from all over Belgium (and Holland) to do their shopping in Hasselt. Brussels is great for window shopping as everything there is a lot more expensive. Of course, if you insist on buying diamonds, Antwerp is the place to go.

### **Excursions**

City tour of Brussels. Sights that should feature on your programme are; The Grand'Place, the beautiful market with guild halls that testify to a rich past, the Town Hall, Manneke -pis. The Atomium built for the world exhibition of 1958. Or a city tour of Antwerp which should include the Grote Markt, the long and beautiful shopping street and Antwerps port.

Antwerp Birdmarket and Zoo. Every Sunday morning from 8.30 am to 1 pm the Antwerp Birdmarket takes place on the vaartplaats. Here you can buy everything from birds to puppy dogs, antiques and rarities, flowers and plants. After this you might visit the Antwerp Zoo, In this Zoo new exhibition techniques are used to show the animals as much as possible in their natural surroundings. You could also visit the Diamond museum, Jezusstraat 28-30 where you can watch the diamond cutters at work; The Rubenshuis, Wapper 9-11, where the diplomat and painter Peter Paul Rubens used to live and work; and the Plantin Moretus Museum, Vrijdagmarkt 22, site of the Plantin printing shop famous all over Europe in the 16th century.

Maastricht in the Netherlands, just across the border from Hasselt dates from pre-Roman times. The heart of Maastricht is its central square 't Vrijthof, ringed by numerous cafes and monuments including the 10th century St. Servaas Church, and In Den Ouden Volgelstruys, a cafe opened in 1312. The stone bridge spanning the river Maas is even older (1298). A unique sight nearby is the 120 mile network of manmade tunnels beneath St Pietersberg hill, 2 miles south of the city. Begun by the Romans, the tunnels have provided a handy refuge during the city's times of trial. Parts of them date from the time of the French occupation of 1794, and there is also a World War II treasure room, where Rembrandts Nightwatch was preserved from the Nazis.