Brussels for you

A Unique Introduction to the Capital City

'Come and Discover Brussels!'

4 critical clichés: Are they correct?
Criss-cross through districts and neighbourhoods
How rich is Brussels?
Learn Dutch? Of course!
Regions? Communities? Language laws?

101 cultural tips!
Welcome to Brussels

Modern-day Brussels is a patchwork of people and cultures. A city with enormous opportunities, yet facing great challenges. Everyone must therefore work closely together to make Brussels an even more attractive and pleasant city and a better place to live in.

Flanders is firmly committed to collaboration and partnership in Brussels. Working hand in hand with other communities we are building an intercultural city, in which the various communities understand and respect each other’s differences.

In this brochure you will clearly see that Brussels bubbles and sparkles, lives and pulsates. It is an exciting laboratory of coexistence, in which Flanders wants to continue to play a major role.

Enjoy your journey of discovery!

Pascal Smet
Flemish Minister for Education, Youth, Equal Opportunities and Brussels Affairs

For more information on this brochure, contact the Flemish Government, Coordination Brussels, Boudewijnlaan 30, bus 20, 1000 Brussel, T 02 553 56 28, brussel@vlaanderen.be, www.vlaanderen.be/brussel

Colophon
The inhabitants of Brussels are sometimes called Zinnekes, which is the Brussels dialect for a street dog. Long ago, such mongrels were thrown into the filthy water of the Zenne to drown. Many dogs survived: a Zinneke is thus a survivor, the symbol of the Brussels identity, a cross between Flemish, Walloon, Italian, Spanish, Arabic, English, German or any blood whatsoever.

The Zinneke Parade, which since 2000 has taken place every two years in May, brings together all 19 Brussels municipalities in a carnival atmosphere. The spectacular parade is the culmination of a long creative process involving residents, schools, associations and artists from every district working together. It is not to be missed!

The iris?

The Brussels emblem is the iris, a marsh flower, and refers to the history of the city on the marshy banks of the Zenne. In medieval times, Brussels was surrounded by swamps filled with bright yellow irises. The iris is the emblem of the Brussels Capital Region, and of the Flemish Community Commission, which has incorporated the flower in its coat of arms alongside the lion of Flanders.

Tough zinnekes

This is the number of languages spoken in Brussels. Not bad for a city of 1,048,000 inhabitants. It’s therefore no surprise that 41 percent of families speak a variety of languages. Moreover, 45 different nationalities in Brussels have more than 1000 inhabitants – at least according to the latest census (2001). Since then the number has surely risen above 45.
TONY MARY ON ‘HIS’ BRUSSELS

‘Brussels

1 Brussels
2 Sint-Joost-ten-Node
3 Schaarbeek
4 Evere
5 Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe
6 Sint-Pieters-Woluwe
7 Oudergem
8 Etterbeek
9 Watermaal-Bosvoorde
10 Elsene
Tony Mary has a successful career behind him as a top executive at IBM, Belgacom and KPMG, and was managing director of Flemish Radio and Television (VRT). He is a passionate ambassador for Brussels, now more than ever. ‘During my career I have left Belgium five times’, he says. ‘And I have returned five times – simply and solely for Brussels. It has the advantages of global cities like London and Paris, but is more compact, more agreeable.’

Tony Mary lives in Elsene – a municipality of 6 square kilometres with as many as 169 different nationalities on its books. ‘Brussels has become a multilingual and multicultural city. If you look at the composition of its population, you see a unique mixture. ‘Native’ Belgians still account for 44 percent. The rest fall into two groups. On one hand are what you might call the traditional immigrants: Spanish, Portuguese, North Africans, Turks and Eastern Europeans who arrived in Brussels in the 1950s looking for jobs – often poorly paid. Some integrated better than others.’

‘On the other hand are the immigrants associated with the international role of Brussels: civil servants of the European Union and NATO, lobbyists, lawyers, journalists, amongst others. Thanks to its international role, Brussels is our economic engine and has a unique brand – Brussels is known worldwide, which you can’t say about Flanders. As the capital of Europe, it attracts highly educated and affluent people. They breathe tremendous life into the city. The cultural offering of Brussels compares favourably to that of the world’s biggest cities. The Munt Theatre is really one of the best opera houses in the world. And Bozar – the Palace of Fine Arts – attracts over one million visitors per year.’

Dutch-speakers certainly make a huge contribution to this offering. Just think of the Kaaitheater and the Royal Flemish Theatre (KVS), which builds bridges both to multicultural Brussels and French-speakers. Or the Ancienne Belgique (AB), a legendary concert hall for international pop and rock. The Dutch-language culture in Brussels is so strong and attractive because it’s open. It’s fully submerged in the intercultural mosaic that is Brussels. And that’s where it should be.’

‘The world is becoming increasingly intercultural. You notice this in Antwerp and Ghent, and soon, the rest of Flanders will follow. In Brussels, you cannot ignore this. To move smoothly through Brussels, you have to be trilingual. Personally I think education has to adapt to this new reality. It’s the only way to prepare our children for the multicultural world ahead.’
Ask Flemish people from Hasselt or Bruges what they think about Brussels, and you'll get a wide variety of opinions. Brussels is dirty and unsafe, for example, or nobody understands Dutch. Clichés galore, but are they true? We put four to Tony Mary.

ARE THEY RIGHT?

Four critical clichés

1 Brussels is a dirty city.
‘The sanitation service, Net Brussels, works hard to do a thorough job. On the whole it succeeds – although not in every neighbourhood. Poverty brings with it a certain neglect. And litter is still a major problem. Why do people leave mess lying around? It probably has something to do with a lack of respect, citizenship and education. Personally I think the state of the roads in Brussels is a bigger problem. In some neighbourhoods you could imagine you are in a developing country!’

2 Brussels is not worth a second glance; it's ugly.
‘I’m fully aware that wonderful neighbourhoods have been flattened, and derelict areas still exist. But you should really take time to stroll around Brussels. And look upwards so you can admire all the façades. You can find gorgeous examples of all styles, including the Renaissance. You simply have to keep your eyes open and know what to look for. A tip is to go on one of the city walks organised by Brukelbinnenstebuiten, such as Horta’s Spectacles. It’s a historical, architectural walk with an emphasis on Art Nouveau: classicism, eclecticism, Art Deco, Expo 58 style etc. You’ll be blown away.’

3 Brussels is unsafe.
‘Brussels is a 21st century cosmopolitan city. All things considered, it’s a very safe city. I frequently travel by tram and metro and feel perfectly safe. Of course you have to be sensible. Don’t leave valuables in your car in certain neighbourhoods, and stay on your guard in some districts and subway stations. But you’ll soon learn that. Of course, crime exists in Brussels, and is surely linked with unemployment and grinding poverty. In the poor neighbourhoods – Sint-Jans-Molenbeek, Kuregem, Schaarbeek – many young people are unemployed. So they hang around the streets, which of course has its consequences. They become disillusioned, or drift into illegal and criminal practices. Something needs to be done if the birth rate in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods continues to increase.’
You can’t go anywhere in Brussels with your Dutch. ‘That’s just not true. If you speak Dutch, you are treated correctly. The time has passed when French-speaking residents of Brussels used to call Dutch-speakers farmers. You have to realise that Brussels is a multilingual city, where dozens of languages are spoken. You’ll only annoy people if you stubbornly expect that everyone talks to you in fluent Dutch. I always address people in Dutch, and I’m pleased if the person I’m talking to makes an effort to understand me. But I won’t insist that a Polish waiter or a Turkish shop assistant reply to me in Dutch.’

Beyond the clichés with Brio

Looking for reliable and up-to-date information about Brussels? It can all be found at the Brussels Centre for Information, Documentation and Research: www.briobrussel.be

Where does Tony Mary take foreign visitors who want to get to know Brussels? ‘If it’s their first time in Brussels, I try to give them some historical background. We start at the Archaeological Museum on the Coudenberg, near the Warandepark. It was the site of the residential palace of the Dukes of Burgundy until the abdication of Charles V. The Order of the Golden Fleece also met there. Even then, Brussels was undeniably the capital of Europe. Unfortunately the palace later burnt down. Archaeologists have uncovered the remains of the Aula Magna, the State Rooms. Impressive!’

‘Then we walk to the Kleine Zavel, where you can explain the conflict between liberals and Catholics that tore 19th century Belgium apart. Opposite the church the liberal Mayor Buls allowed a sort of anti-church structure to be built, with 48 bronze statues of ancient crafts. From the Vossenplein – just outside the old city walls – we continue to the Justice Palace for a panoramic view of Brussels. Then it’s time for a pint in the Goudenblommeke in Papier, once the favourite pub of surrealists such as Magritte. Of course I let them visit the Grote Markt and the beautiful, glass-covered Saint-Hubert Galleries, the oldest and finest malls in Europe. And then we dine in a genuine Brussels restaurant, Aux Armes de Bruxelles. What do I eat there? Calf brains with tartar (raw mince), and then vol-au-vent. Of course, my guests are free to choose something else …’
Downtown
Brussels was initially established on the marshy banks of the River Zenne, near what is now Sint-Goriksplein, close to the busy trade route that linked Bruges and England with the Rhineland. The result was a trading post, Bruocsella, literally ‘the settlement in the marsh’. Artisans and merchants lived in mud houses.

This is now the neighbourhood around the Oude Graanmarkt and Nieuwe Graanmarkt and the fashionable Dansaertstraat, with its many trendy retail outlets, art galleries, antique shops and designer shops. Here too is the Vlaamsesteenweg, which is all that remains of the ancient trade route to Ghent and Bruges.

In recent years this street – with its quaint alleyways – has become a flourishing shopping street, with friendly pubs such as Daringman, Roskam or Monk, or restaurants like Viva M’Boma and Le Pré Salé, where you can still enjoy traditional Brussels cuisine. Many consider Dansaerstraat and the surrounding area to be the most Flemish part of Brussels.

Uptown
Whoever occupied the hills, held the power.
In about 1100, a stone castle arose on the Coudenberg, and expanded in the following centuries to become an impressive palatial complex. The palace burnt down in 1731, but the princes who ruled Brussels continued to reside on the Coudenberg. Here today are the classic Koningsplein, the Warandepark and the Royal Palace, with next to it the BELvue Museum, which gives an overview of the (royal) history of Belgium. A little further is Wetstraat. The mansions that the elite built around the park are now ministries, embassies, banks: thus uptown Brussels remains a place of prosperity, prestige and power.

The Zenne
In 1860 the Zenne was basically an open sewer flowing through the city, with filthy working-class hovels along its banks. When a cholera epidemic killed 3,500 people, Mayor Anspach decided to cover the river. The slums were replaced by mansions, hotels and offices. Wide, dead-straight boulevards, such as the Anspachlaan, connected the north and south stations. A new city grew up around these boulevards, including the Stock Exchange and Brouckèreplein, still one of the most popular entertainment districts of the city.
Leopold II

Around that time the ambitious King Leopold II stamped his mark on Brussels. He wanted to turn Brussels into a metropolis to match Paris. Leopold II created a city with grand vistas and monumental buildings. Constructed during his reign were the Jubelpark, the majestic Tervurenlaan, Josaphat Park in Schaerbeek, the Koekelberg Basilica and Louizalaan, still one of the country’s most luxurious shopping streets. At the bottom of the Koningsplein is the Kunstberg, where you can find the Royal Museums of Fine Arts, the Palace of Fine Arts (Bozar) and the Royal Library of Belgium.

The Palace of Justice was also built during Leopold’s reign, which involved flattening part of the feisty Marolles district. Fortunately, the Vossenplein was preserved, so you can still browse the fascinating flea market that is held there every day.

To the west

The covering of the Zenne diverted shipping traffic along the canal to the west of Brussels. Industry grew up on either side of the canal. This marked the expansion of the city beyond its ancient walls. In the west, rural villages like Sint-Jans-Molenbeek and Anderlecht developed into densely populated industrial suburbs. Tens of thousands of poor Flemings and Walloons trekked to the canal zone to toil in the factories. Their children and grandchildren became more affluent and settled in Laken, Jette, Ganshoren, Sint-Agatha-Berchem or further afield. They left the run-down working-class neighbourhoods for the immigrants who followed them.

The mainstream migrations occurred in the 1950s and 1960s. Large-scale construction projects such as Expo 58 and the metro required cheap labour. It came mainly from the south Mediterranean: Spaniards, Italians, Portuguese, Greeks, Turks, North Africans. The fall of the Iron Curtain led to tens of thousands of Eastern Europeans arriving in Brussels. All these groups have left their mark on Brussels: Turks in Schaerbeek and Sint-Joost-ten-Node, Portuguese in Sint-Gillis and Elsene (where you can find a statue of the poet Pessoa), Greeks around the South Station, Moroccans in Sint-Jans-Molenbeek and Anderlecht.

People from all corners of the world come to these densely populated working-class neighbourhoods. The result is a kaleidoscope of scents and colours. The Matonge district, with its exotic shops selling African products, grew up around the Naamsepoort in Elsene. On the outskirts of the area is L’Horloge du Sud, a brasserie that also organises film screenings and debates. In Etterbeek, the cafés on the Jourdanplein – with its border of plane trees – gradually gave way to expensive restaurants. A pleasant multicultural district developed around the Hallopoort, while a little further on in Sint-Gillis the former socialist meeting house, the Maison du Peuple, became a culture café. Vibrant Moroccan neighbourhoods developed in the densely populated Sint-Jans-Molenbeek where you can buy fresh vegetables, herbs and meat. Brabantstraat close to the North Station is the most famous Moroccan shopping street in Brussels.

In and around the European institutions, about 55,000 highly skilled staff, consultants and business people find employment.

Canal zone

Industry in the canal zone did decline but is once again flourishing on both banks. Vitality is provided by the important cultural centre the Kaaithetector: its buildings retain their rather rugged industrial charm but now have a different use. Thurn & Taxis, a huge, old freight station with giant storehouses is listed as an international monument and is now a prime location for major events. A nearby warehouse has been transformed into a trendy venue -

10
Ideas and marked trails can be found at www.uitinbrussel.be which will shortly be in French and English too. A handy English-language site – especially for young people – is www.use-it.be/brussels. Here you can find the address of the Use-it in Brussels information desk.

South and south-east

The city also expanded towards the south and south-east, not with working-class neighbourhoods but with stately homes for aristocrats. By the late 19th century Belgium had grown into the world’s fourth largest trading power. The bourgeoisie celebrated this status with elegance and grandeur. Outside the old city boundaries they constructed imposing boulevards, parks and squares: Dudenpark, Maria-Louizasquare, Leopoldpark. They built elegant homes in eclectic style or lavish Art Nouveau, with a bel-etage and a servants’ attic. Expansion continued into the 20th century in the same direction: Ukkel, Elsene, Etterbeek, Evere (where NATO’s headquarters are located), and municipalities that a few generations ago were merely rural villages: Watermaal-Bosvoorde and the two villages on the River Woluwe – Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe and Sint-Pieters-Woluwe. Typically the new neighbourhoods were even more splendid than in the west, with an emphasis on greenery and detached houses. Nineteenth century grandeur gave way to a more functional and pragmatic style.

The Leopoldswijk district, east of the Warandepark, was built around 1840 for aristocrats and wealthy citizens. It’s a prime area with majestic avenues, public gardens and carriage entrances. During the 1960s the district was largely demolished to make way for the buildings of the European institutions, including the Berlaymont building (the headquarters of the European Commission), the Justus Lipsius building (where the European Council is held) and the European Parliament.

In and around the European institutions, about 55,000 highly skilled staff, consultants and business people find employment. They come from the European Union but also from the United States or Japan. Most of them live in the neighbourhood or close by in the residential communities of the east and south-east.

Zoniënwoud

South-east of Brussels is the 4,500-hectare Zoniënwoud. It was once much larger, but development and deforestation have taken their toll. Some of the deforested areas were replanted with stately beech trees, leading to the famous cathedral effect: dead-straight aisles between tall pillars of beech. An offshoot of the Zoniënwoud, the Terkamerenbos, is connected to Brussels by the Louizalaan. Here too are footpaths, cycle routes, bridle paths, playing areas and picnic places.

It’s not only the Zoniënwoud that makes Brussels the greenest capital in Europe. Dozens of frequently well-hidden city parks and gardens can be found everywhere, from the Josaphat Park in Schaarbeek to two of Leopold II’s ornamental gardens in Laken, the Colonial Garden and the Florist’s Garden. Thanks to the Green Walk – more than 60 km of footpaths and cycle routes – you can easily discover the amazing diversity of parks, woods, marshes and protected natural areas on the outskirts of the Brussels Capital Region.
FLEMISH FLAVOURS IN THE CULTURAL MOSAIC

Openness which inspires
Brussels overflows with large and small concert halls and theatres, studios, podiums, sports clubs and film clubs – each one providing an opportunity for an exciting cross-cultural encounter. The result is a stimulating melting pot, with Flemish ingredients adding extra spice.

Mention art and culture in Brussels and the Munt Theatre immediately springs to mind. Or the Royal Museums of Fine Arts, where you can admire famous works by Bruegel, Memling, Van Dyck and Ensor. But Brussels has many other influential cultural venues. Some of them grow and flourish thanks to the Flemish community. In recent decades Flanders has invested in a network of Flemish initiatives that give an extra sparkle to Brussels city life and cultural life.

Building bridges
In Brussels, Flanders meets the world with open minds and arms. Influential Flemish cultural houses as well as small-scale initiatives have been profoundly inspired by what the city has to offer. They are curious, daring and focus on dialogue and cooperation with other communities. For example, the Royal Flemish Theatre (KVS) has expanded from being a meeting place for Flemish people in Brussels into a multicultural venue. The KVS builds bridges with the National Theatre, provides a platform for African and Moroccan artists, and even runs workshops in Congo.

The Kaaitheater also breaks down barriers. It presents its own dance and theatre productions and welcomes home- and foreign-based troupes. The legendary concert hall Ancienne Belgique (AB) attracts top international acts as well as newcomers, Flemish rock, world music and other genres. Its French-speaking counterpart, the Botanique, works closely with the AB: the two concert halls combine to put on the ABBota festival. Events and festivals such as the Zinneke Parade or Couleur Café also have a significant Flemish contribution.

Smaller Flemish initiatives are also bringing different communities together. Examples include Daarkom, the Flemish-Moroccan Culture House, and the Flemish-African company Kuumba. Or the 22 Flemish community centres that are located in the 19 municipalities where all the inhabitants of Brussels can enjoy the shows, concerts, workshops and courses that take place there.
Illustrator and children’s author Leo Timmers says he certainly needs the city’s inspirations. His style of art absorbs and transcends all cultural differences. Maybe like Brussels itself?

In 2009 Leo Timmers won his fourth Child and Youth Jury Prize, this time for Diep-zeedoktor Diederik. His work is translated into sixteen languages – Doktor Diederick is Doctor Dean in English, Docteur Alphonse in French and Il dottor Curatutto in Italian. Leo lives in Jette with his wife Gina Riti and their two daughters.

‘I live near the house where Rene Magritte had a studio for a long time. Almost all of his masterpieces were created there. That’s important to me: Magritte is a hero of mine, as is Hergé. But they are not the reason why I moved to Brussels to live. Gina and I originate from Houthalen in Limburg. Because we both really love film and theatre, we sometimes went to Cinematek, the Kaaitheater or the KVS. We began to wonder what it would be like to live in Brussels.’

‘At first we lived in Schaerbeek for three years. That was perfectly fine, but buying a house there was out of the question. In Jette it was more feasible. At that time we didn’t have the children, although we did wonder if we would want our kids to grow up in Brussels. Many of our friends moved to the outskirts of Brussels as soon as children arrived. But for now it’s OK.’

‘With young children at home our diet of culture is naturally fairly sparse. Sometimes the kids sleep over at friends for a weekend, and then we watch two movies one after another, snatch an evening at the theatre and a restaurant, stroll around the Marolles looking for vintage furniture...’

‘Would my work look any different if I didn’t live in Brussels? It’s hard to say. What’s certain is that I need the inspiration of the city; that incredible potpourri of experiences – both positive and negative – that you get from a multilingual city. Brussels never ceases to amaze: you turn a corner and you’re in a completely different world.’

‘My work is clearly very international. The children’s book market is highly segmented – for example, French children’s books don’t easily cross the border. That’s no problem for my work: it appears in nearly 20 countries, without local adaptations. It seems my style very easily transcends all cultural differences. Could this perhaps be a consequence of Brussels? In the many international bookstores here you can find children’s books in every possible style and from every corner of the world. Maybe all these influences seep into my work?’
Jonas Helseth works for the Norwegian Mission to the European Union and lives in Elsene. He learned his excellent Dutch in the Netherlands, where he studied at university.

I have Flemish and Dutch friends in Brussels, so I have great opportunities to brush up my Dutch. In Brussels, French is the most commonly used official language, but I notice that English is increasingly spoken, especially between young international people.

‘I have lived in Brussels since 2008; currently in Elsene, near the ponds. It’s a lovely area. I particularly enjoy the Flageyplein, especially in summer with its electrifying concerts. If you like culture, you’re well looked after in Brussels. I regularly go to jazz concerts, music festivals and the movies – in Brussels, the range of movies is fortunately extremely wide, and is not limited to commercial ones.’

‘Of course the great charm of Brussels is that it’s so international. You can meet people from all corners of the world, and certainly not just from the European Union. It is also a very pleasant city – personally I haven’t experienced any unsafe situations. As a Norwegian I admit I miss the water and the coast. The only big problem with Brussels is the traffic. There are far too many cars. Buses get stuck in traffic jams, and cars are parked all over the place. Beautiful streets and elegant squares like Jourdanplein are ruined. Efforts have been made to make it easier for cyclists, but unfortunately the car remains king.’

‘A city for culture lovers’
TIPS FOR CULTURAL DISCOVERIES

Sample

an endless supply

If you love art, culture and sport, you can indulge yourself in Brussels, all year round. Here’s a short list of tips – unfortunately far too short. Looking for an adventure.

Of course you just have to visit the Magritte Museum on the Kunstberg, which is dedicated to the master of Belgian surrealism. And you can’t ignore the great museums of the Jubelpark. But why not try something more adventurous? For example, close to the Magritte Museum is a magnificent Art Nouveau building – an old warehouse – which is the Musical Instruments Museum, where you can discover the world of instruments. Also highly recommended is the Museum of Elsene: it provides a superb overview of Belgian art from the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as a wonderful collection of posters from the turn of the century, including a complete collection of original Toulouse-Lautrec posters.

Definitely worth a visit is the curious Antoine Wiertz Museum, devoted to the often extraordinarily bizarre work of this 19th century painter. For exhibitions of contemporary art, close to the Sint-Katelijneplein is the European Center for Contemporary Art. In the heart of Brussels is the Beurschouwburg art centre. Wiels, a laboratory for contemporary art, is located in a former brewery in Vorst. But Brussels has many other amazing museums. A good opportunity to get to know them is during the Nocturnes of the Brussels Museums or Museum Night Fever.

Music city

Bozar – the Palace of Fine Arts – is the largest arts centre in Brussels, attracting one million visitors per year. It is housed in a magnificent and completely renovated Art Deco building of Victor Horta. Bozar is a warren of exhibition halls, theatres, multimedia rooms and a 2200-seat concert hall. It’s renowned for its world-famous Queen Elisabeth Competition which alternates between violin, piano and vocals. Every year Bozar holds more than 250 concerts and 20 exhibitions. As a centre for the arts it promotes partnerships, such as with the classical music radio station Klara, with which it teams up as its special guest during Klara in the Palace.

Musical discoveries continue in the Minimes Church with its intimate afternoon summer concerts (Midi-Minimes). Here you can listen to a Bach cantata every last Sunday of the month. And after its renovation, the Art Deco Flagey, nicknamed the ‘package steamer’, looks resplendent again as it cruises through its programme of jazz, classical music, world music and film.

Neighbours

Promoting the Dutch language and culture throughout Europe and the world is the mission of DeBuren, the Flemish-Dutch House next to the Munt Theatre. A joint initiative between
Flanders and the Netherlands, it provides a platform for debate on culture, science, politics and society in Flanders, the Netherlands and Europe.

**Film city**
Did you know that Audrey Hepburn (*Breakfast at Tiffany’s*) was born in Elsene in 1929? There used to be many beautiful cinemas in Brussels, but Brussels is still a film city. The treasures of the world-renowned Film Archive (41,000 titles) are on display at Cinematek (Bozar), where you can visit the movies every day, for free. In Cinema Nova you can watch movies that are not normally available on the commercial circuit. In addition, dozens of small and large film festivals are organised in Brussels. The best known are the Brussels Film Festival (specialising in European cinema), the unique Festival of Fantastic Film and Animafest, the animated film festival held in Flagey. Movie fans will also love the Rits Café in Dansaertstraat: the film and theatre school of the same name presents concerts, debates and movies in its café.

**Comic strip city**
Brussels is big on comic strips: famous artists like Hergé (Tintin), Edgar P. Jacobs (Blake and Mortimer) and Willy Vandersteen (Suske and Wiske) were born in Brussels or worked here. It’s a tradition that continues to thrive. The Belgian Comic Strip Centre – housed in a magnificent Art Nouveau building of Victor Horta – attracts thousands of tourists every year. A Comic Strip Tour leads you to life-size murals of comic book heroes colourfully drawn on forty or so blank walls.

**Jazz city**
It’s no coincidence that Brussels is the city of jazz legend Toots Thielemans. Late into the night, the city buzzes with jazz, for example in L’archiduc, an Art Deco café in Dansaertstraat, or The Music Village near the Grote Markt. Jazz Station is a jazz club housed in a renovated railway station on Leuvensesteenweg. In July Brosella organises a free folk and jazz festival. At the end of May the Brussels Jazz Marathon takes over the city: all weekend hundreds of musicians play in cafés, on squares and on stages – and not only jazz but also Latino, funk, rock and the blues.

**Brussels is the max!**
Want to discover Brussels with your children? That’s possible, with the children’s walking book called Op vandroei door Brussel (dialect for On Foot Through Brussels). If it’s raining, then simply dive into a museum. Most museums are child-friendly: they offer workshops, courses and other activities. Designed especially for children of course is the Children’s Museum in Elsene. Here kids can steer a submarine, build a flying machine and be the hero in their own fairy tale. In the Scientastic Museum, budding scientists can experiment with the laws of physics and chemistry. Pretend you’re a fakir? Make a rainbow? Anything is possible.

If you want to take the kids to a good show, Bronks is a must: no corny plays, but fresh, contemporary children’s theatre. Youth and Music Brussels puts on workshops, holiday camps, concerts and performances so that children and young people can sample a range of musical tastes.

During school holidays the Kids Factory (Sint-Gillis) puts on a children’s workshop, homework classes and play weeks. In the Noordwijk, the ABC House – Art Basics for Children – is a multifunctional playground where you can experiment with image, sound and various materials. Another recommendation is Aximax, which organises sporting, creative, fun and language-stimulating activities for anyone between 3 and 18 years.

Older children will enjoy Brussels’ twelve youth hostels and its vibrant youth centres. These are also regularly heard on the Dutch city radio FM Brussel. Every summer the Brussels youth centres work together to put on the Bruksellive music festival. The organisation JES also works in Brussels with education, outreach and various projects like the Rock Factory, where young rockers can find workshops and rehearsal rooms and even record demos. And at the Piano Factory you can breakdance, rap and learn scratching in the Skool of HipHop.

**Local and social**
The 22 community centres form the hub of Flemish social and
cultural life at a local level. All the 19 municipalities of Brussels have one, while Brussels Capital also has centres in the municipalities of Haren, Laken and Neder-Over-Heembeek. The community centres organise performances, exhibitions, Dutch language courses etc. They act as a meeting place and often also perform a social service, both for Flemish people and for non-Dutch-speakers. Well-known ones include the Vaartkapoen (Sint-Jans-Molenbeek), that organises alternative concerts, De Markten, near the city centre, and the renovated De Pianofabriek (Sint-Gillis), that is set up as an arts workshop and intercultural laboratory.

Sport, active and passive
In the late 80s you had to be a daredevil to cycle through the city centre. Since then the number of cyclists has increased noticeably: you even see them in Wetstraat. At the same time the government has created a viable cycling infrastructure, with cycling paths and marked cycle routes.

Sports clubs abound in Brussels. Scuba diving, handball, ice skating, hockey: there’s a club for everything. If you want to get to know the clubs, you should participate in Stadskriebels, an annual sports event organised by the sports department of the Flemish Community and BLOSO. If you prefer mind games, visit the charming chess café Greenwich.

Participation in the Brussels 20 km (in May) is so popular that the 30,000 numbers are snapped up in a single day: the start under the Jubelpark’s arch is truly memorable. The Brussels marathon (in October) is open to both elite and recreational runners. The annual Memorial Van Damme athletics event takes place in the King Baudouin Stadium and has been voted best athletics event in the world on numerous occasions.

An overflowing agenda
You’ll soon notice that there’s always something going on in Brussels. We have already mentioned some events, but there are hundreds more. Music festivals include the classical Klara Festival, the festival of contemporary music: Ars Musica, the exciting world music festival Couleur Café at Thurn & Taxis, the free lunchtime concerts Boterhammen in het Park (with free sandwiches) and the family festival Plazey in the Koekelberg Basilica. At Les Nuits Botanique you can enjoy chanson, rock and world music. The bilingual city festival KunstenaarsFESTIVALdesArts offers theatre, music, dance, film, graphic arts, multimedia and performances. On 11 July Brussels celebrates the Flemish National Day with De Gulden Ontsporing, with diverse activities in the city and a festive closing ceremony on the Grote Markt. In May each year the Iris Festival is celebrated.

If you want to experience the summer in Brussels, visit the authentic beach of Brussel Bad in the canal zone. The Brussels Summer Festival (August) has evolved into a popular multicultural summer festival. One fun way to explore Brussels is the summertime Stadapero’s / Les Aperos Urbains: aperitifs are served every Friday evening at a different location in Brussels.

During winter you can experience Winterpret, a fairy-tale trail from the Grote Markt to the Vismarkt, with Christmas stalls and entertainment. A different view of Brussels is possible during Car-free Sunday in September, when the busy traffic comes to a halt to create Europe’s biggest car-free zone. Also in September is Open Monument Day: over the weekend monuments and notable buildings and residences are open for free.

The multilingual literary festival Passa Porta is organised every two years by the international literature house Passa Porta and the literary associations Het Beschrijf and Entrez Lire. Also occurring biennially are the spectacular Zinneke Parade and Brxl-bravo, an arts festival that puts well-known and lesser known artistic turns in the spotlight. And every two years the international festival Europalia draws attention to a country and its cultural heritage.

Do you feel like getting to know Brussels better during your lunch break and sample some culture at the same time? Every month Broodje Brussel offers an extensive menu of concerts, guided city sightseeing, museum tours, workshops, lectures, etc.

www.uitinbrussel.be

The weekly city newspaper Brussel Deze Week distributes a trilingual events magazine, Agenda.
Brussels is undoubtedly the economic engine of Belgium. It is an international business centre and a world-class convention city. Of concern are high unemployment and the widening gap between rich and poor. Here is a socio-economic profile of Brussels in five key phrases.

1. **Service economy**
   Brussels is a capital in at least four respects: of Europe, Belgium, the Flemish Community and the French Community. The bulk of governmental administrations are therefore brought together in the city. This central function attracts many international and domestic institutions and companies, which consider it important to be located close to the decision-makers. It’s the reason why Brussels has many highly qualified and well-paid jobs in the service sector. The
Brussels economy is therefore primarily a service economy: over 85 percent of jobs are in that sector.

Around 1900, Brussels was still the country’s foremost industrial city. The slow decline of industry started in the late 1960s, in parallel with the rise of Brussels as a world capital. Jobs in industry still only account for less than 5 percent of total employment. Much industrial activity has moved away from Brussels and is situated in the outskirts – Vilvoorde, Nijvel, Zaventem.

2 International workforce

The diversity and multicultural nature of Brussels is of course linked with the economy. People came from all corners of the world to find work in Brussels. This migration was in full swing between 1950 and 1975, when large groups of workers from southern Europe, North Africa and Turkey came to settle in and around Brussels. Generally they found low-paid jobs in catering, construction and industry.

The fact that Brussels was Europe’s principal city attracted many international and European institutions, as well as headquarters of multinationals, consultancies, lobbyists, law firms, media experts and consultants. The need for highly trained and multilingual staff continues to grow. According to the latest European Cities Monitor (2009) – based on surveys of the 500 largest European companies – Brussels is the fifth most attractive business location, behind London, Paris, Frankfurt and Barcelona. Second only to New York, Brussels is the world’s most important diplomatic
centre. This strong international position also has implications for tourism. Three-quarters of business tourism is linked to Brussels’ role as capital of Europe. With leisure tourism that’s a third. In the meantime, Brussels has grown into one of the largest convention cities in the world.

3 Commuters
Of the estimated 650,000 jobs in Brussels, less than half are occupied by residents of Brussels. Approximately 56 percent of jobs are filled by commuters; two-thirds of these come from Flanders. Every day about a quarter of a million people stream out of the north, central and south stations or creep at snail’s pace in kilometres of traffic jams on the motorways to Brussels. They contribute to the economic growth of Brussels, but they live in Flanders – where they pay their taxes. It’s a bone of contention to some residents of Brussels that the wealth generated in Brussels drains away from the city.

4 Unemployment
The economic importance of Brussels is huge: the Brussels-Capital Region contributes 20 percent of Belgium’s added value. At the same time the average income of the inhabitants of Brussels is low and the region has the highest level of unemployment in the country. The paradox of Brussels is that it is economically rich but socially poor.

In 2008 the level of unemployment was 19.5 percent while the national average was 10.6 percent. High unemployment has serious social consequences. 32 percent of children under 17 live in households without any income from a job. Unemployment is particularly high among the young and the poorly educated: 32 percent of -25 year olds were unemployed in 2008.

Over 30 percent of job seekers are from ethnic minorities. Unemployed immigrants – mostly from North Africa and Turkey – are especially poorly educated and still face discrimination when applying for a job. Jobs for the poorly educated in Brussels are few and far between. They do exist in the Flemish periphery around Brussels, but people from Brussels seeking jobs are handicapped by their lack of knowledge of Dutch. Barely 5% of the unemployed understand Dutch, while – even in Brussels – knowledge of French and Dutch is required for 45 percent of vacancies. The lack of a transport network between Brussels and the outskirts is a further obstacle.

5 The gap
In 2006, 28 percent of the population of Brussels was living below the poverty line. The figure for Flanders was 10.9 percent. Moreover, enormous differences exist between the municipalities of Brussels. The richest municipalities are in the south-east: Ukkel, Watermaal-Bosvoorde, Oudergem, Sint-Pieters-Woluwe, Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe. The more
wealthy foreigners reside in these residential municipalities. The poorest municipalities lie in the west and closer to the city: Sint-Joostten-Node, Sint-Jans-Molenbeek and Sint-Gillis. Actually these are the three poorest municipalities in Belgium. People also face hardship in Anderlecht and Schaarbeek.

In the poorer municipalities, the population is generally younger and is growing explosively. Among the young the number of school dropouts is relatively high; they can’t find work and often live in dire circumstances. Various governments are trying to find solutions. Slum areas are being renovated and are once again attracting more prosperous residents – with the unintended side-effect that often the original, poorer residents are displaced. The governments and institutions of Brussels and Flanders have taken steps to combat unemployment, for example with targeted vocational training.

*Intertwined with Flanders*

The political and administrative boundaries of Brussels are fixed. At the same time, at a socio-economic level Brussels is increasingly intertwined with Flanders and Wallonia. According to a study by KU Leuven, in addition to the 19 Brussels municipalities a further 43 municipalities around Brussels should be considered as part of the Brussels metropolis. People from here enter Brussels to go to work or school, experience the culture, indulge themselves and go shopping. Conversely, many young Brussels families move out to live in the green outskirts surrounding the city.

Brussels is thus closely interlinked with the surrounding regions. The Flemish government realises this: the prosperity of the periphery and the rest of Flanders is closely connected to the vitality of Brussels. That’s why it works in close collaboration with Brussels, particularly in areas such as mobility, and town and country planning. In this respect, employment offices in Brussels, Wallonia and Flanders have taken steps to fill the vacancies in the Flemish area around Zaventem close to Brussels airport. The area is crying out for educated and uneducated labour, while in Brussels almost 20 percent of the active population is unemployed. Poor knowledge of Dutch remains the biggest obstacle. Therefore the Brussels employment service is investing heavily in Dutch-language courses. Its Flemish counterpart offers a basic Dutch course and mediates with vacancies, and the Flemish transport company De Lijn has laid on extra buses from Brussels to Zaventem.
RESIDENTIAL BRUSSELS

Wake up in Brussels?

Brussels remains an attractive residential city. Dilapidated areas have been restored and derelict factories transformed into beautiful lofts. Is it time to dream of living in Brussels?

Maybe you are fed up with the daily rush-hour queues and you want to live where you work? Or do you simply want to enjoy the bustling city? Have you discovered that Brussels is much greener than you expected or are you curious about the cosmopolitan nature of the big city? These are all good reasons to live in Brussels.

Housing Tours
There’s just one over-riding question – where do you find a home? Brussels is extremely diverse, and real estate prices vary considerably. The quality of life also has an influence: are there playgroups and schools nearby? What about public transport?

To help you, every year Living in Brussels (Wonen in Brussel) organises five Housing Tours. These bring you up-to-date with the housing opportunities in the region, from villas to affordable new construction projects. You and your guide can explore community life, shopping possibilities, public transport and Dutch-language education. You will come face-to-face with people who have opted to live in Brussels, and can hear their experiences.

A Dutch-language network
For Dutch-speakers who come to live in Brussels, the proximity of Dutch-language schools and facilities is often important. In recent decades the Flemish government has developed its own network of organisations and institutions so that Dutch-speaking inhabitants of Brussels can be taught, cared for and supported in their own language. The network includes a university hospital, schools at every level of education, service centres and other facilities for the elderly, childcare centres, playgrounds, youth clubs and youth associations.

Worthy of mention is the new website zorgzoeker.be, which allows people to search for Dutch-speaking primary care specialists in Brussels, from dieticians to ophthalmologists and midwives. Dutch-language health organisations in Brussels have established the House of Health (Huis voor Gezondheid), a partnership that supports carers. In the heart of Brussels, seniors are welcome to attend the Seniors’ Centre. In addition, a dense network of 33 sheltered housing areas has been expanded, focusing on home care and care for the elderly.

www.woneninbrussel.be
www.zorgzoeker.be
‘It’s a delight to work from home’

Anouk De Vroey and Levi Wijns live with their two children in a converted former printing office in Sint-Jans-Molenbeek, which suits them perfectly.

For a while we lived in an old house in Hoeilaart. It was idyllic; we even had a goat and a donkey. But we realised that a house in the Flemish periphery around Brussels was not affordable. During our studies at the VUB in Brussels, we had come to know and love Brussels. We moved to the highest tower in Brussels, the Brusilia-tower in Schaarbeek. We had a nice apartment on the 32nd floor with a magnificent view over the city.

‘An architect friend told us that an old print shop was for sale in the canal zone in Sint-Jans-Molenbeek. We thought about it and a few days later went to talk with the bank. It was a unique opportunity. We didn’t know Sint-Jans-Molenbeek particularly well, although we had frequently cycled along the canal.’

‘We have completely renovated and rebuilt the print shop. Part of it we rent out as a loft. It is very spacious and light – it’s a delight to work from home, especially when the sun streams in. We have a roof terrace, and a courtyard where the children can romp to their heart’s delight.’

‘We are aware that Sint-Jans-Molenbeek has a negative image, but it’s actually a friendly village. OK, if you leave something in your car, don’t be surprised if a window is smashed. But at the same time there is a lot of social surveillance here. Everybody knows everybody. When I visit the fish shop, I’m offered a cup of mint tea. Contacts with shopkeepers are much warmer and more personal than elsewhere.’

‘The children are now 2 and 4. They go to a Dutch-language school in Koekelberg, which has a crèche attached to it. In Pauline’s class only two other children have parents who both speak Dutch. But it’s not a problem. Pauline is extremely proficient at languages and has already picked up a quite a bit of French. I think it can only be enriching that they learn to communicate with children speaking other languages.’

‘Meanwhile, we have got to know Sint-Jans-Molenbeek better and have discovered many lovely places. The Scheutbospark, for example, in Mettevieleaen. It’s a natural park of 6 hectares, with a playground and a pasture where Scottish Galloway cows roam. It is peaceful, yet surreal – you’re sitting watching cows graze while in the background is the Brussels skyline with the South Tower...’
Brussels is multilingual.
In what language do children follow lessons?
Brussels is indeed multilingual, although officially it's bilingual. Yet it has no bilingual education. According to the legislation, education must be provided in one of the two official languages: either in Dutch or in French. Consequently, in Brussels there are two independent education structures. One of these is the Dutch education stream, for which the Flemish Community is responsible.

In Dutch-language schools, should other languages still be taught?
Of course. In the primary schools, children learn French earlier than in Flanders; right from first grade. By the fifth and sixth grades they receive up to five hours per week. In secondary education English, German and Spanish are on the curriculum. But the general subjects – mathematics, history, biology and so on – must be taught in Dutch.

Dutch-speakers in Brussels are a small minority. So surely there aren't many Dutch-language schools?
For Flemish people in Brussels it's very important that their children can follow lessons in Dutch, preferably in their own neighbourhoods. Considerable investments have therefore been made in an extensive network of schools. Currently it includes 118 primary schools and 35 secondary schools, offering about 80 courses. What's more, these schools are easily accessible by public transport, even for students commuting from outside Brussels. The network also includes schools for special education, boarding schools, centres for student guidance, adult education centres etc.

Do these schools also attract non-Dutch-speaking children?
Increasingly. The number of pupils in Dutch-language primary schools in Brussels almost doubled between 1980 and 2000. The vast majority of these additional students come from non-Dutch-speaking or mixed-language families. Currently Dutch-language education attracts about 22 percent of Brussels preschoolers and 17 percent of primary school children. In Dutch-language schools a small minority (10 percent pre-schoolers and 12 percent primary school children) comes from homogenous Dutch-speaking families. One in three primary school children speak only French at home, and for one in three children another language is dominant in family life. In short, at the school gates of Dutch-language schools you'll find plenty of the language diversity that is increasingly colouring everyday life.

Why do non-Dutch-speaking children go to a Dutch-speaking school?
More and more parents are realising that you are better off in Brussels if you speak two or three languages. Knowing Dutch increases your prospects on the job market. Other reasons also play a role. French-language education is currently experiencing difficulties and
the success of dutch-lAnguAge educAtion
no
rose
without thorns?
thorns?
Dutch-speaking parents to get together and send their children to the same school. Other parents send their children to schools in the outskirts of Brussels or beyond.

And the future?
According to population projections, the number of pre-schoolers and children in primary education in Brussels is expected to increase significantly in the coming years. Naturally this also applies to the number of students in Dutch-language schools. Existing schools will not be able to cope with this influx. Should the Flemish government build extra Dutch-language schools for thousands of additional students, when only a small percentage of them are Dutch-speaking? Even though it could reduce the risk of dropping out and language deficiencies? Should education in Brussels be wholly transformed towards multilingual education? There is likely to be much debate over these issues in the coming years.

Easier said than done. Do they get extra support?
Definitely. Teachers can go to an in-service training centre, where the programme is focused specifically on the situation in Brussels. For example, most primary schools make use of the provisions of the Brussels Educational Priority Policy and the Brussels Education Centre. Under the guidance of experts they can use innovative teaching methods to enhance the language proficiency of their pupils step by step. They also learn to relate better to the different customs and cultures, which also improves contacts with parents. After all, cooperation with parents is absolutely essential: for children to really master the Dutch language they have to come into contact with Dutch outside the school, through books, TV programmes etc.

And how do Dutch-speaking parents react to this evolution?
Many parents consider classroom diversity to be enriching as it teaches their child respect, openness and tolerance – values of great importance in a multicultural world. Other parents worry whether their child might have a language deficiency. That encourages some Dutch-speaking parents to get together and send their children to the same school. Other parents send their children to schools in the outskirts of Brussels or beyond.

It can't be easy to teach in a classroom where Dutch is the mother-tongue of only a small proportion of pupils.
Not necessarily. Teachers are highly motivated and rise to the challenge. In a typical class you might have a couple of Dutch-speaking pupils, a few from families where both Dutch and another language is spoken, and a majority who do not speak Dutch at home – French, Arabic, Turkish, Albanian, Polish, Russian or some other language. In some classes there may not be a single Dutch-speaking child. Yet the whole class will still be taught in Dutch. As a teacher you naturally learn to take this diversity into account: every child should be given an equal chance.

In recent decades the Flemish have invested heavily in the development of their educational system. Moreover, in recent decades the Flemish have invested heavily in the development of their educational system. Nursery schools and kindergartens have been built in many primary schools, and school buildings revamped. These investments have led to the blue-green logo with the N – the logo of Dutch-language schools in Brussels – becoming a sign of quality, even among foreign-language speakers.
In the Dutch Language House you can get information on all Dutch-language courses in Brussels. It possesses an up-to-date overview of language courses from all its partners: welcome desks, private language schools and other language providers. You can learn Dutch at various levels – basic to specialist – as well as for specific applications, like legal Dutch or business writing.

Tailor-made
Together with you a decision is made as to which course best suits you. Once your language skills and academic achievements have been assessed, you will be referred to the most suitable language class. This involves an individual interview reflecting your learning requirements, place of residence, practicalities and so on. You may then enrol with a language institute where you can decide the start and duration of the lessons.

Furthermore, the Dutch Language House is keen to improve the quality of courses so they meet your needs even better. This has included the establishment of a Taalgarage. This is an advice centre for Dutch self-tuition, where non-Dutch-speakers can get all sorts of advice about self-tuition material.

Patati
The Dutch Language House also carries out active promotion to non-Dutch-speaking inhabitants of Brussels to encourage them to learn Dutch. This includes direct actions for specific target groups such as traders, retailers and shopping centres. And to give students more opportunities to speak Dutch in everyday life, Patati Patata has been set up. On its website you can look for someone who wants to talk Dutch with you. You can go and have a drink together, visit a museum or a football match and agree that at least part of the time you will talk Dutch with each other.

A Dutch Language House
A single address for Dutch lessons!

More and more non-Dutch-speakers want to learn Dutch.

The Dutch Language House in Brussels can give them all the information, guidance and support they need.
Over 18,000 people approach the Dutch Language House each year; two-thirds of them do so to enhance their professional career. They want to increase their prospects of finding a good job, perform better in their current job, broaden their basic knowledge of Dutch. The rest want to learn Dutch for social reasons: because their children go to a Dutch school or youth group, for example. Or because they have Dutch-speaking friends.

‘In recent years our target group has expanded and diversified. Initially we got mainly people from disadvantaged socio-economic groups through the doors: non-native inhabitants of Brussels from the canal zone. For a few years we are attracting people from the European Union who work for various European institutions. That’s why we advertise in French and English language media and in expatriate magazines. For that audience we profile ourselves as a centre for self-tuition. People can come to us for guidance and tailor-made courses – a Romanian nurse needs a different package than a lawyer in the European Union.’

Non-Dutch-speakers learning Dutch sometimes complain that there are far too few opportunities to speak Dutch in Brussels. Flemish commuters in particular move quickly into French or English. Actually we should launch a campaign to convince them not to do this: if a non-Dutch-speaker tries to speak Dutch in Brussels, you have to give him or her the opportunity to do so and make a mistake – you can only learn a language if you are brave enough to make mistakes.

‘That’s why at the Dutch Language House we try to create opportunities for practice. So we work with the Dutch-language leisure groups in Brussels – community centres, youth associations, socio-cultural organisations, libraries and so on. For that, we have set up Bijt in Brussel. This project bridges the gap between students of Dutch and the Brussels leisure sector. Each year we organise a Bijt in Brussel day, at which many cultural organisations give non-Dutch-speakers a taste of their activities for free. Last year it attracted around 3,000 visitors!’

‘Another great success is Patati Patata. On the multi-language website www.patati.be individual non-Dutch-speakers can find a person with whom they can practice Dutch. It also allows them to expand their circle of friends at the same time. We launched Patati Patata launched in March 2009 and a year later already had over 800 participants.’
Did you know that Brussels is the largest student city in Belgium? Of course, in a big city these 75,000 students are less noticeable than in Leuven and Ghent. You could therefore easily forget that Brussels offers an almost infinite range of courses – also in the Dutch language.

Each year 23,000 young people study at a Dutch-language university or other institute of higher education in Brussels. In recent years most Dutch-speaking universities and institutes of higher education have grouped themselves into two associations, both of which offer a complete range of courses, at bachelor’s and master’s levels. These are explained in detail at the information days organised by the various educational establishments.

The Brussels University Association is a collaboration between the Free University of Brussels (VUB) and the Erasmus University College.

The Hogeschool-Universiteit Brussel (HUB) brings together the Catholic University of Brussels (KUB) with a number of institutes of higher education: for some subjects students from the various educational establishments follow joint lessons.

In addition, in Brussels you can also attend the Sint-Lukas University College of Art and Design and the University College for Sciences and Arts. At both you can follow creative or artistic education, from design and photography to music and drama.

And student rooms?
Are you looking for student accommodation in Brussels but getting rather confused? Then check out Quartier Latin. A joint initiative of all the Dutch-language higher educational establishments in Brussels, this association seeks to improve the image of Brussels as a student city. At Quartier Latin you will find a complete overview of all student accommodation on the private market – more than 3,600 rooms. Potential tenants can go there for information and mediation. Furthermore, the association has almost 500 comfortable and affordable student rooms under its own management, right in the centre of town, in the bustling district between the Stock Exchange and the canal.

Afraid of the big city?
Student Day takes place at the beginning of the academic year in early October. It’s a lively event full of workshops, tours, concerts and parties. It helps new students find their feet, although existing students seem to appreciate it too: together they turn Brussels upside-down.
DUTCH IN BRUSSELS

A bilingual
On a map of Belgium you immediately see that Brussels is like an island in Flanders. The Brussels dialect and names of the Brussels municipalities – Schaerbeek, Anderlecht, Watermael-Boitsfort, Oudergem – still clearly reveal the Flemish character of the city.

**Becoming more French**

Until the end of the 18th century Brussels was predominately Dutch-speaking. Obviously French was spoken at the court, but the same thing applied for St. Petersburg and The Hague. Most inhabitants of Brussels used the vernacular Brabantian, a Dutch dialect. It was only after the independence of Belgium in 1830 that language relations changed. The new kingdom had a government that was strictly centralised in Brussels, and chose French as the official language. French became the language of law, the administration, the army, culture, and the media. As the language of the political and economic elite, French developed to become a status symbol – even in Flanders. In 1860, approximately 95% of the people in Flanders spoke Dutch but these people had hardly any political or economic power. They were governed, educated and tried in court in a language which most people did not understand.

Belgium was governed from the centrally situated capital of Brussels. Gradually a financial-economic elite also developed around this political centre. Brussels gained a French-speaking upper and middle class incredibly quickly. Primary and secondary education could be followed virtually only in French, so that French gradually also permeated the lower social classes.

In the same period, Brussels also attracted large numbers of newcomers, most of whom came from Flanders, which in the 19th century was suffering a period of economic decline and famine. These newcomers also became more French: anyone who spoke only Dutch had no chance at all of advancing. If Flemish parents were able to afford it, they sent their children to French-language schools. The result was that their children became bilingual but their grandchildren often spoke only French. This spread of the French language also took place outside the historical centre: surrounding municipalities such as Elsene, Schaerbeek, Sint-Jans-Molenbeek and Anderlecht gradually became more and more French.

**Bilingual Brussels**

At the end of the 19th century a broad Flemish emancipation movement got underway. This insisted for the first time that Dutch should be considered on an equal par with French and that both languages should become the official languages of government throughout Belgium. This was inconceivable for the French speakers: Wallonia must stay French speaking. The Flemish people then adjusted their demands: Flanders should also become monolingual. This demand was met in the early 1960s. Meanwhile, Brussels had continued to become more and more French. In the 1950s Brussels had already expanded to 19 – formerly largely Flemish – municipalities. The Flemish realised that measures were needed to prevent even more Flemish municipalities from becoming French-speaking. Furthermore, they wished to prevent Brussels, the capital of a bilingual country, from becoming solely French-speaking. The first step was to limit Brussels to the nineteen municipalities. Brussels was then given a bilingual status and the Flemish people had to be properly represented in government and administration. Many of these demands were achieved in 1963 when the Belgian parliament – with a two-thirds majority of French-speakers and Dutch-speakers – approved the language legislation.

Since the 1960s, Belgium has been firmly divided into four language areas: the Dutch, French and German language areas and the bilingual
French-Dutch area of the Brussels Capital Region. This division is based on the principle of territoriality. In accordance with this principle the language of the region must be used as the official language for certain matters.

In the Brussels Capital Region, which comprises the 19 Brussels municipalities, there are two official languages, Dutch and French, which have equal status. This means, amongst other things, that you can use either French or Dutch in all the Brussels public institutions – including the OCMW and IRIS hospitals, the emergency services, and the fire brigade. If you speak Dutch in a post office, or in the town hall, the person helping you at the counter must also speak to you in Dutch. Although this right is guaranteed by law, it is not always respected in practice.

**A multilingual city**

In the meantime the population has diversified. An increasing number of inhabitants of Brussels use other languages at home rather than French or Dutch. Brussels has become multilingual. In everyday reality French remains the main official language, although among the young generation English is advancing. At the same time many inhabitants of Brussels are deciding to learn Dutch as a second, third or fourth language: they realise it can improve their employment opportunities. There are of course other explanations: perhaps their children go to a Dutch school, they have Dutch-speaking friends or they realise that without Dutch they are missing part of the bustling city life.

**Language legislation help**

Language legislation is fairly complicated, particularly in Brussels. If you have any problems and questions you can go to the Language Legislation Support Centre (Steunpunt Taalwetwijzer). You can also order or download a brochure to clarify these matters: www.taalwetwijzer.be
Madeleine Ki Shi has lived in Brussels since 1999. ‘If like me you come from Congo, it’s difficult to understand the education system. I did not know where I could learn Dutch. On one occasion – at a French evening class – I gave a book to a fellow student and said “Alstublieft!” – I had somehow accidentally picked up that word. “You know Dutch?” she said. “Not at all”, I replied. “But I want to learn it. I just don’t know where to!”’

‘So I ended up at Lethas, an adult education centre on Rouppeplein. Learning Dutch was pretty easy. If necessary, I repeated a module. I also participated in the “conversation corners.” They allow you to practice Dutch, with Dutch volunteers. That is very helpful. Once during a conversation corner someone talked about BON, the Brussels welcome desk that helps newcomers integrate. I wasn’t there at the time but a friend said to me afterwards: “This is really something for you!” She was right. At BON I followed a social orientation course in Dutch. The course gave me very practical information about the labour market, housing, healthcare, how the government works and so on. All very useful, although some topics could have been covered in more depth. For example, what are your rights if a policeman knocks at your door? I ask this because I’ve had to deal with phoney policemen, you see...’

‘Later I trained as an administrative assistant at the VDAB. And now I’m on a course covering social legislation. Yes, in Dutch. Finally I got an identity card that’s valid for at least 5 years, so I can put all my time and effort into looking for a job. Next week I have an appointment with a VDAB consultant. Meanwhile, I work as a volunteer for Child & Prevention – I help little kids weigh and measure. It’s a great opportunity to brush up my Dutch!’

‘Why did I want to learn Dutch? In every vacancy I saw bilingual as a condition’, says Madeleine Ki Shi.

‘It’s difficult to find a good job without Dutch.’

Alstublieft!

The Dutch Language House informs you of the range of Dutch courses in Brussels. It also monitors the quality of the courses. BON, the Brussels welcome desk, guides people of a foreign origin towards citizenship in Belgium.

www.huisnederlandsbrussel.be
www.bonvzw.be
In order to understand how Brussels is governed today, it is necessary to look at the recent history of Belgium.

**THE MAZE THAT IS BRUSSELS**

A crash course in the

Up to 1970, Belgium was a single state with one parliament and one government. From 1970 the Belgian state was gradually transformed into a federal state consisting of a number of federated states.

**Federated states**

In a federal state the citizens are governed simultaneously by the federal government and the government of their federated state. These governments have equal status and have their own powers. The federal state is responsible for justice in all the federated states, but not for the media. In the federated state of Flanders it is the Government of Flanders which decides which television companies can use the cable and what the teaching of history entails.

This seems a simple principle, but in practice it is more complicated. In fact, Belgium has two sorts of federated states which partly overlap: communities and regions.

**Communities**

Belgium has three communities: the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-language Community. These communities primarily have jurisdiction in their own language area. However, the Flemish and French Communities also have jurisdiction in the bilingual Brussels Capital Region, because Brussels does not form a separate fourth community.
The communities are responsible for language, culture, education, welfare and healthcare.

**Regions**
Belgium also has three regions. The regions exercise their powers in well-defined territorial areas. The territory of the Flemish Region corresponds with the Dutch-language area. The Brussels Capital Region comprises the bilingual area of the Brussels Capital – the 19 municipalities of Brussels. The territory of the Walloon Region corresponds to the territory of the French and German language areas.

The regions are responsible for matters such as the economy, employment, agriculture, roads, town and country planning, and the environment.

**Brussels, capital of Flanders**
Every region and every community has its own government and its own parliament. In 1980 Flanders decided to combine the governments of the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region. This means there is only one Flemish Parliament and one Flemish Government. Both are located in Brussels. The Flemish Parliament meets in its own parliament building. The seat of the Flemish Government is on Martelarenplein. A large part of Flemish administration is based in the heart of Brussels.

**Brussels: one region, two communities**
A special arrangement was worked out for Brussels in the 1980s. After all, there are Dutch-speaking as well as French-speaking inhabitants of Brussels, and the capital of Belgium could not simply be classified under Flanders or Wallonia. Since 1989, the 19 municipalities of Brussels have jointly formed a separate region: the Brussels Capital Region.

Since 1989, the 19 municipalities of Brussels have jointly formed a separate region: the Brussels Capital Region.

At the same time, both the French Community and the Flemish Community have powers in Brussels.

**Brussels Capital Region**
The Brussels Capital Region is the most important policy level in Brussels. It is responsible for so-called territorial matters such as traffic, the environment, urban development, public works.
housing, the economy and infrastructure.

The Brussels Capital Region has its own parliament, its own government and its own administration. The Brussels Parliament is the parliament of the Brussels Capital Region. It consists of 89 directly elected members. Of these, 17 seats are reserved for the Dutch language group. The Brussels Parliament exercises its powers through ordinances. They must be approved by a majority in both language groups.

The Brussels Capital Region has five ministers: two are French-speaking, two are Dutch-speaking, and one is the minister-president. It also contains a number of secretaries of state, where the parity between the language groups does not apply.

The Flemish and French Communities also have powers in Brussels for subjects related to personal matters such as welfare, education and cultural affairs. Therefore both Communities can take direct decisions in Brussels. For example, if the Flemish Parliament approves a decree pertaining to education, that decree also applies for the Dutch-language schools in Brussels.
Community Committees
Sometimes the Communities do not act directly, but through their Community Commissions in Brussels: the Flemish Community Commission (VGC) and the French Community Commission (Cocof). The VGC and Cocof are like the branches of the two communities in Brussels.

The Joint Community Commission (GGC), in which both language groups are represented, was established in order to regulate matters which are not exclusively the responsibility of one Community or the other, such as, for example, the OCMWs (public welfare centres).

The VGC also has a board and a committee: there are seventeen Dutch-speaking members of the Brussels Parliament on the board of the VGC. There are Dutch-speaking Brussels ministers and a secretary of state in the committee.

Open to everyone
The Flemish Community and the Flemish Community Commission have established a dense network of Dutch organisations and facilities in Brussels: schools, community centres, facilities for the elderly, the media, a university hospital, libraries etc. This network provides sufficient backing for Dutch-speaking inhabitants in Brussels to function fully in the city. It is also emphatically open to non-Dutch-speakers.

Flemish Community in Brussels
The Flemish Community does not always act directly in Brussels: sometimes it does so through the local administrative levels of the provinces or municipalities. In Brussels this local administrative level is carried out by the Flemish Community Commission (VGC). The VGC supports the Dutch-language provisions in Brussels in the fields of culture, education, welfare and healthcare. In addition, the VGC helps to ensure that the Flemish decrees are implemented in Brussels.
Muntpunt is a multilingual information centre with a modern, metropolitan library and meeting place. It is the flagship for the promotion of Dutch-language and Brussels-based initiatives and organisations. It is a hot spot for residents, commuters, visitors and others. Muntpunt is due to open in 2012, but the website is already online.

The centre will get a reading corner, meeting rooms, a bar, a sitting area and an information desk. On www.muntpunt.be you can find all sorts of information on entertainment, living and working in Brussels, as well as books, CDs, workshops, events and so on. It’s the intention that the website will later be made available in French and English.

Muntpunt is an initiative of the Flemish government and the Flemish Community Commission (VGC). The two main partners of Muntpunt are the Flemish Metropolitan Public Library (HOB) and the Brussels Welcome and Promotion Board (OPB, Onthaal en Promotie Brussel).

City newspaper.
Brussel Deze Week is a weekly information sheet, distributed for free through displays, with an agenda in three languages as a supplement. One can also subscribe to the newspaper: www.brusseldezeweek.be

City radio.
fm brussel is a professional Dutch-language city radio station that broadcasts 24 hours a day on 98.8 MHz: www.fmbrussel.be. Its programme called fmworld is aimed specifically at non-Dutch-speakers.

City television.
The Dutch-language city television station is tvbrussel. The station is accessible by cable across the whole Brussels-Capital Region and is also digitally viewable: www.tvbrussel.be. Subtitles in French or English can be obtained via teletext. The programme called Brussels International is aimed specifically at non-Dutch-speakers.

News site.
Brusselnieuws.be is the Internet news site. It combines news from Brussel Deze Week, fm brussel and tvbrussel and also presents its own news. Flanders Today. English-language news concerning Brussels and Flanders is available at www.flanderstoday.eu. Here you can also download the Flanders Today newspaper.