

encarta | greeting_cards | more ▾

MSN home | Mail | My MSN | Sign out



encarta®

Home | Encyclopedia | Dictionary | Atlas | K-12 Success | College & Grad School | Degrees & Training | Quizzes | More

Belgium

Encyclopedia Article

[Find](#) | [Print](#) | [E-mail](#) | [Blog It](#)

Multimedia

Dynamic Map



48 items



Map of Belgium

Article Outline

[Introduction; Land and Resources of Belgium;](#)
[People of Belgium; Economy of Belgium;](#)
[Government of Belgium; History of Belgium](#)

I INTRODUCTION

[Print this section](#)

Belgium (French *Belgique*; Dutch *België*), constitutional monarchy in northwestern [Europe](#). Belgium is one of the smallest and most densely populated European countries. It is also the most urbanized; 97 percent of its people live in urban areas. Together with [Netherlands](#) and [Luxembourg](#), Belgium forms the Low, or Benelux, Countries. The country's name comes from the [Belgae](#), a Celtic people who lived in the region and were conquered by Roman general [Julius Caesar](#) in 57 BC. Its capital and largest city is [Brussels](#).

Belgium is situated between [France](#) and the plains of northern Europe, and it borders the [North Sea](#). Because of its geographic position as a crossroads of Europe, Belgium

Advertisement

Editors' Picks

Great books about your topic, [Belgium](#), selected by Encarta editors

Related Items

- [Benelux](#)
- [Brussels, capital](#)
- [more...](#)

Facts and Figures

[Quick information and statistics for Belgium](#)

Encarta Search

[Search Encarta about Belgium](#)

[Give us feedback](#)

[View recently updated articles](#)

Windows Live® Search Results

[Belgium - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

The Kingdom of Belgium / b ɪdʒəm/ (help · info) is a country in northwest Europe. It is a founding member of the European Union and hosts its headquarters, as well as those of ...

[Belgian Tourist Office - official website - Front Page](#)

Belgium (VisitBelgium) is the only official site of the Belgian Tourist offices in the Americas. Everything you want to know about Belgium when planning a trip such as hotel ...

[Belgium: Definition from Answers.com](#)

Click to enlarge) Belgium (Mapping Specialists, Ltd.) Belgium A country of northwest Europe on the North Sea

[See all search results in Windows Live® Search Results](#)

Also on Encarta

- [Important Notice: MSN Encarta to be discontinued. Learn more.](#)
- [Presidential Myths Quiz](#)

has been a major commercial center since the [Middle Ages](#). The North Sea has been the country's outlet for trade with the rest of the world. Belgium's geographic location has also given it strategic importance, and many battles have been fought for control of the area. Belgium became an independent country in 1830.

Belgium is divided into three regions—[Flanders](#), [Wallonia](#), and [Brussels](#). In Flanders, which consists of the provinces to the north and west of Brussels, most of the people speak [Dutch](#) (Flemish) and are known as Flemings. In Wallonia, the provinces south and east of Brussels, most of the people speak [French](#) and are known as Walloons. The population of the Brussels region comes from both language groups. Each region has a great deal of autonomy (self-rule), but friction between Flemings and Walloons continues to the present day.

II LAND AND RESOURCES OF BELGIUM

[Print this section](#)

Belgium is roughly triangular in shape. It is bounded on the north by [Netherlands](#) and the [North Sea](#), on the east by [Germany](#) and [Luxembourg](#), and on the south and southwest by [France](#). Belgium has an area of 30,528 sq km (11,787 sq mi), which makes it slightly smaller than the state of Maryland. The country is about 280 km (about 175 mi) long, measured in a southeast-northwest direction, and about 145 km (about 90 mi) wide.

More from Encarta

College degrees and career training

Explore online and on-campus programs.
[Learn how to get that degree!](#)

Recharge your brain

We serve up a heady brew of Encarta's best.
[Check out Coffee Break.](#)

Are you a somniphobe?

Fear of sleep keeps some people awake.
[Check out our list of 20 things you didn't know about sleep.](#)

A Natural Regions

Belgium has three main geographic regions: the coastal plain, the central plateau, and the [Ardennes](#) highlands.

Belgium's coastline, in the northwest, stretches 66 km (41 mi) along the North Sea. A

low coastal plain extends inland 16 to 48 km (10 to 30 mi). Nearest the North Sea is a low-lying area consisting mainly of sand dunes and polders. The polders, sections of land reclaimed from the sea and protected by dikes, were developed between the 13th and 15th centuries. Lying farther inland is a flat pastureland drained by canals. The coastal plain's elevation ranges from sea level to about 20 m (65 ft).

The central plateau is a gently rolling, slightly elevated area. Irrigated by many waterways, it contains a number of wide, fertile valleys with a rich, alluvial soil. Caves, grottoes, and ravines are found in parts of this area.

The Ardennes highlands, a densely wooded plateau, extends across southeastern Belgium and into northeastern France. Located here is Botrange, the highest peak in Belgium, with an elevation of 694 m (2,277 ft). The average elevation of the Ardennes highlands is 460 m (1,500 ft). The area is generally rocky and poorly suited to agriculture.

B Rivers

The chief rivers are the [Schelde](#) (known as the Escaut in French) and the Maas (most commonly known by its French name, [Meuse](#)). The Schelde and Meuse and their tributaries run slowly through the central plateau to the sea in a generally southwest to northeast direction. Both rise in France and are for the most part navigable throughout Belgium. On the Schelde, the principal waterway of Belgium, are the ports of [Antwerp](#) and Ghent. Although the Schelde flows through Belgium, the river meets the sea in Netherlands. The chief tributaries of the Schelde are the Leie (Lys), Dender (Dendre), Zenne (Senne), and Rupel rivers. The [Sambre](#) and Ourthe rivers are the main tributaries of the Meuse.

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9

[Next >](#)



Rate this article



(low)

(high)

[How to cite this article](#)

More from Encarta

- [Important Notice: MSN Encarta to be discontinued. Learn more.](#)
- [Presidential Myths Quiz](#)
- [Coffee break: Recharge your brain](#)

Feedback

At Encarta, we welcome feedback from our customers. You can send general comments in the box below.