

# DO'S AND DON'TS IN BELGIUM



## DO'S

■ Do ask questions that show that you are interested in the country, but watch out for joke answers. A Belgian (especially in Flanders) either grumbles or makes jokes about his own **government**. Tax avoidance is a national sport and the law is there to be broken. Through the ages Romans, Vikings, Burgundians, Spaniards, Austrians, French and Dutchmen have occupied Belgian territory. When Belgium finally got independent (1830) it was governed by a French speaking upper class. It took more than 100 years before Dutch was accepted in education, justice and state affairs. So it's logical that Flanders wanted more autonomy (its economy is prospering more than that of Wallonia) and Belgium is considered a miraculous compromise, not to be very proud of...

■ Do taste **Belgian chocolates**, they are a national pride: a plain bar of Côte d'Or or a box of '*pralines*'; which you can buy in every bakery. They are very tasty because they are made of 100 % super ground cocoa butter. Which brands? Leonidas is "good value for money". For Godiva and Neuhaus you have to pay almost double.



■ Do eat a cone of **Belgian fries** at a chip stand (*frietkot*) with your choice of sauce (originally with mayonnaise) as they are simply the best in the world. Don't tell anyone else, the secret is that they are double fried. In a restaurant you eat them with steak, mussels (big and succulent) or grey North Sea shrimps; usually in a restaurant the fries are '*à volonté*', which means you get as much of them as you like!

■ Do your **shopping** on Saturday as most shops are closed on Sundays. Some bakers and butchers are open on Sunday morning. In cities you often have night shops, run by immigrants.

## DONT'S

■ Don't try and taste all **Belgian beers** in one internship period – there are 1000 of them! Don't drink several Trappist beers or Duvels in one evening unless you want to experience a typical Belgian hangover... But don't drink raspberry or cherry beer if you are a man. They are considered women's drinks. (<http://www.beerparadise.be/>)

■ Don't trust **pedestrian crossings** which are not at traffic lights. Some drivers are addicted to speeding, drink-driving and bullying pedestrians. Despite this, riding a bike is very common and safe on cycle paths. But beware: like in France we also have the '*priorité à droite*' rule. When there is no other priority traffic sign this gives the right of way to a vehicle coming from the right. Note that on most roads traffic signs give priority to the main stream of traffic.



■ Don't exclaim "How did you know?" if a regular in a pub asks you "**Are you Bob?**" Bob refers to the person in a group of drinkers who chooses not to drink alcohol in order to drive home safely. This is a result of a publicity campaign to persuade a 'Bob' or (usually) a 'Bobette' to stay sober to drive the rest of his or her friends home. Fines for those over the blood alcohol limit of 0,5 '*promille*' vary from € 137,50 to € 700.

■ Don't pay **tips** in restaurants or pubs, as they are almost always included in the price.