

Filip de Sagher

Belgium: A European Cocktail



Each beer is served in its own glass. Here I am sampling a Triple Karmeliet, brewed from an authentic 1679 recipe.

Of all people, the Belgians are the bravest.

So said the great Roman Emperor Julius Caesar himself and if you don't believe me, just look it up in *The Adventures of Asterix*, a wildly popular comics series in our country.

Or you might want to read up on the globetrotting reporter Tintin, another one of our many heroes. Brussels even offers a specific tour to discover the great Belgian comics—but why start in our capital with its many global and European institutions and headquarters when we can offer you Bruges, the unique medieval UNESCO World Heritage Site, also called the Venice of the North.



An example of the heritage left to Belgium through the ages. This could be in any Flemish city.

Another emperor met his Waterloo in . . . Waterloo, just south of Brussels.

Don't rent and watch the movie *If it's Tuesday, this must be Belgium*. Rent *In Bruges*, to give you an idea of the spectacular attractions that await you in the trilingual Kingdom of Belgium. Although many North American tourists prefer to go to France or Germany, you should know that throughout history, Belgium has been jealously fought over and conquered by just about every other major European power. No wonder we are known to be self-effacing, but we take pride in our rich heritage and love to celebrate.

And eat.

And drink.



Ah, my kingdom for a portion of Belgian fries. Where is the mayonnaise?

There's a reason we are equated with genuine chocolate and beer. We brew hundreds of different beers, some of them in abbeys and monasteries that go back—way back—and that are offered in thousands of cafes, happily drunk together with the ubiquitous Belgian fries and mayonnaise.

I am sure you have also heard about our mussels; you should them eat at our coast with music from Jacques Brel playing in the background. From the coast, you should head south to visit Flanders Fields to honour the fallen from The Great War. Take a left from there and drive to the wonderful city of Gent, where Emperor Charles V was born in 1500 and started Flanders Golden Age.

Another emperor met his Waterloo in . . . Waterloo, just south



Hilde is happily sipping a Picon, an old-fashioned Flemish/French aperitif.



Two delicious Belgian dishes: White asparagus with eggs and butter, and tomatoes with shrimp and mayonnaise

of Brussels. Close by is one of the oldest universities in the world, in Leuven, although while there, you might prefer to check out the headquarters of Stella Artois . . .

And why not head north to the huge port city of Antwerp, also known for being the diamond centre of the world? There you will also find museums that honour painter Rubens and cartographer Mercator, the predecessor of Google Maps.

By the way, painter Magritte is Belgian and so is Father Damien, who



One of the many churches and cathedrals scattered all over our country

died in Hawaii amongst his lepers, and Toots Thielemans, the well-known jazz musician. Talking about music, the saxophone was invented by Belgian Adolphe Sax and Kim Clijsters sure plays tennis to a fine note.

Yes, there is more to Belgians than meets the eye and although it is seldom love at first sight, in love you will fall.



Orval, a typical abbey beer, originally brewed back in the 1500s

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