

Brussels | City Report

21 Dec 2011

Introduction

CITY SECURITY OVERVIEW

Brussels is a major centre of business and government, though it retains the feel of a provincial city. It is the capital of Belgium and home to the headquarters of the EU and NATO. The city is a relatively safe destination for business travellers; the crime rate is relatively low compared with other European cities.

ORIENTATION

The heart of Brussels is the Grand Place. Quality restaurants, hotels and conference centres are situated around the Parc D'Egmont and Palais Du Roi areas, which lie south of the centre.

City security guide

CRIME

Business travellers should be vigilant against theft while using public transport and in shopping areas. Visitors should exercise particular caution around train stations, particularly Noordstation (Gare du Nord), the Centraal Station (Gare Central) and Zuidstation or Gare du Midi. Thieves also operate at airports; a US national in November 2011 was shot and injured by robbers just outside Brussels' Zaventem Airport.

Robbers have been known to target personnel getting in and out of taxis at taxi ranks. Petty crime is increasing in the city; the police in 2011 observed a significant increase in 'snatch-and-grab' thefts of jewels across Brussels, as a result of a marked rise in gold prices. Such crimes are often carried out by small groups of youths on public transport and all valuables should therefore be hidden from sight. In addition, pickpockets operate on the city's metro network, and personnel are particularly vulnerable in crowded carriages; wallets should be kept out of sight and bags in full view.

Violent crime is comparatively low in Brussels, but has risen over the past few years. Carjacking has been a problem in recent years. Most attacks take place at or near the victims' homes or at traffic lights. Visitors are advised not to leave valuables in vehicles.

TERRORISM

The threat of terrorism is low in Brussels. However, as in many major European cities, there is a credible risk of an Islamist terrorist attack. Any such attacks would be most likely to target NATO or EU institutions; US, British or French diplomatic missions or military installations; or transport infrastructure (airports and railways).

Business personnel working in Brussels in particular may encounter disruption to normal business operations and travel caused by security alerts.

SOCIAL UNREST

Racial and social tensions within the immigrant population prompt occasional riots in poor inner-city areas, but these are unlikely to affect foreign visitors.

TROUBLE SPOTS

Most street and violent crime occurs near the Botanical Gardens, and in the vicinity of Gare du Nord and Gare du Midi. The areas of Saint Josse, Schaerbeek, Simonis, Place Sainte-Catherine and Place Fontainas also have high crime rates. Molenbeek is known for gambling, money-laundering and drug-dealing. Caution should be exercised after dark at Rogier and de Brouckere metro (subway) stations.

SEEKING HELP

The police are well trained, reliable and can be approached with confidence. Most police officers will speak some English.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance: 100
Fire services: 100
Police: 101

The number 112 can be used to call emergency services throughout the EU and supplements the local emergency numbers.

City travel guide

PORT OF ENTRY

Airport code: [BRU](#), [CRL](#)

Brussels Airport, also known as Zaventem Airport, is nine miles (14km) north of the city centre. The airport is modern and has excellent facilities, including bureaux de change, ATMs, shops and business lounges. Car-hire facilities are also available.

Brussels South Charleroi Airport is mostly used by low-cost airlines, including Ryanair, and charter operators. The airport is located around 40 miles (65km) south of the city

centre. The single terminal is small, but offers most facilities, such as ATMs, shops and car hire. Customs and passport formalities are straightforward.

Eurostar and Thalys services

Eurostar services arrive at and depart from Gare du Midi/Zuid Station, situated in the city centre, south-west of the Grand Place. Taxis are plentiful and depart from the basement level (Level 1) of the Eurostar/Thalys terminal. There are tram, bus and metro stops outside the station. Personnel are advised to check-in 30 minutes before departure to allow time for luggage security-checks.

In addition to the Eurostar service to London (UK, 2 hours 40 minutes), it is possible to travel by Thalys high-speed train to Paris (France, 1 hour 30 minutes), Amsterdam (Netherlands, 2 hours 40 minutes), Cologne (Germany, 2 hours 30 minutes), Düsseldorf (Germany, 3 hours), Paris' Charles de Gaulles Airport (1 hour 20 minutes), Rotterdam (Netherlands, 1 hour 40 minutes), The Hague (Netherlands, 2 hours), and Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport (2 hours 20 minutes).

TO CITY CENTRE

Zaventem

Trains operate regularly between the airport and the three main railway stations: Gare du Midi, Gare Central and Gare du Nord. The Airport City Express train runs every 15 minutes from 06:00 to midnight and the journey takes about 15 minutes. The Airport Line express service (bus no. 12) takes 30 minutes to reach the city centre; it carries no. 21 on weekdays after 20.00, on weekends and public holidays. Metered taxis are available at the stand outside the arrivals hall. Licensed taxis have a yellow and blue emblem; the drive to the city centre takes 25-35 minutes, though traffic congestion can make the journey considerably longer.

Charleroi

There is a taxi stand outside the terminal building at Charleroi; the journey to the city takes around 45 minutes, depending on traffic. The coach service Navettes Bruxelles-Aéroport goes from the airport to the Gare du Midi at least twice an hour. The journey takes one hour. Coaches depart from the city to the airport between 04.30-19.45, and from the airport to the city between 08.30-23.15. There is also a train, which arrives at Charleroi Sud station, though it is then necessary to take bus A or bus number 68 to connect from the town to the airport.

WALKING

The city centre is compact and most destinations are easily reached on foot.

CAR HIRE

Car hire is readily available, but traffic congestion can make driving slow and the complex road system can make navigation frustrating. Internationally recognised car-hire firms such as [Hertz](#) and [Avis](#) have offices in the city and at the airport. Foreign personnel can drive in the city provided they have a valid national driver's licence.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The city has an efficient bus, tram and metro network operated by Société des Transports Intercommunaux de Bruxelles ([STIB](#)). One type of ticket covers all three modes of transport. The swipe-card style tickets can be purchased at stations. Pickpockets operate on public transport.

TAXIS

Taxis are a safe way of travelling around the city. They are available at taxi stands and can be booked by telephone.

Calendar

Holidays & Security Dates

Category Key: **H**oliday | **S**ecurity date | **E**lection | **T**ransport disruption

21 Dec 2011 - 22 Dec 2011 Nationwide strikes over pension reform ()
Various categories of workers plan to observe a strike nationwide on 21-22 December over a proposed reform of pensions. The work stoppages are expected to significantly affect urban public transport, train services and possibly also flights. Protests are also likely to generate traffic congestion. Personnel should anticipate travel delays and be flexible in their itineraries.

25 Dec 2011 Christmas Day (H)
In some countries, if this holiday falls on a Saturday or Sunday, a public holiday is declared for the following Monday.

1 Jan 2012 New Year's Day (H)
In many countries, if this holiday falls on a Saturday or Sunday, a public holiday is declared for the following Monday.

1 May 2012 Workers' Day/Labour Day/May Day/Spring Day (H)
Student/labour demonstrations. If the holiday falls on a rest day, it may be observed on the next working day.

11 Jul 2012 Local holiday - North (H)

21 Jul 2012 National Day (H)

15 Aug 2012 Assumption Day (H)

27 Aug 2012 Yser pilgrimage (S)
The commemoration of Flemish soldiers who died in the First World War sometimes attracts right-wing extremists from across Europe, prompting riots and clashes with the police.

27 Sep 2012 French Community Day (H)
French-speaking community only.

1 Nov 2012 All Saints' Day (H)

11 Nov 2012 Veterans' Day (H)

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