

Orientation for New Staff Moving to Belgium 2011-2012

Antwerp International School



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Inspiring Successful Futures

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Date: February 2011

Moving to Belgium

1. Location – Belgium, Antwerp and Ekeren



Find out about Belgium: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgium>

IN SHORT

Belgium is a constitutional monarchy with a parliament, council of ministers and a prime ministers, located in Western Europe, founding member of the European Union and hosts the EU's headquarters as well as those of other international organizations like NATO. Covering an area of around 30,500 km², it is slightly larger than the American state of Maryland, has a population of approximately 10 million and is the second most densely populated country in Europe with 335.1 people per km². It is generally flat, with hilly terrain toward the south-east. The highest point is only 694 metres high.

Having borders to France, Luxembourg, Germany, the Netherlands and the North Sea, Belgium has a state border of nearly 1,500 km. Ideally located for travelling through Europe, either by car, train or plane, Belgium has regular trains leaving from Antwerp Central Station to anywhere in Europe. Brussels is only a thirty-five minute drive from the school where you can catch a plane from Zaventem, the national airport.

Belgium has a temperate climate comparable to the British Isles, influenced by the Gulf Stream and West-South-westerly winds. Weather is definitely changeable. The day may start out with sunny skies, change to clouds and rain at mid-day and go back to clear skies in the evening.



Temperatures may fall below freezing in the winter, although it is generally mild (1-10°C), while summer temperatures are usually around or above 20°C. Late spring and early Fall bring out the best sunny days. Belgium has its fair share of rainfall during the year, so rainwear and warm clothing are recommended. The last few years, Belgium has had snow in winter.

Belgium is divided between two major language groups: French-speaking Walloons (40%) in the south and Dutch-speaking Flemings (60%) in Flanders in the north. A small number of German-speakers (about 74,000) are located in the east of the country. Antwerp is in Flanders and, therefore, a Flemish city. It is advisable to speak English rather than French if one cannot speak Dutch. Many Flemish speak English quite well. All newsstands sell a selection of American and British magazines. There are usually 15-20 English-language movies playing in Antwerp and at Metropolis on the Noorderlaan during the week. The selection ranges from old favourites and movie classics to recent releases. All English-language movies are shown with French and Dutch subtitles.

Some of the more well-known cities of the country are:

- Bruges: old medieval city. Tourist centre with canals, parks and bridges. Handmade lace is a specialty.
- Antwerp: chief seaport, international harbour; centre of diamond trade; lively night life.
- Brussels: capital; important commercial and industrial centre; headquarters of the European Economic Community, NATO.
- Bastogne: scene of famous Battle of the Bulge during World War II; impressive war memorial.
- Ypres: scene of World War I battles in "Flanders' Fields"; war museum; centre for cloth trade in Middle Ages.
- Ghent: important medieval city; many art treasures.
- Spa: tourist centre of the Ardennes in southern Belgium; famous for its mineral water.
- Waterloo: site of Napoleon's defeat at the hands of Wellington in 1815.

Antwerp is a very lively city of about 500,000 people, abundant with movie theatres, cafes, restaurants, museums and lots of history. Ekeren is a suburb about ten kilometres north of Antwerp. There are a lot of trees, parks and shops - a quiet town. Supermarkets are within a 10-15 minute walk from school.

The school is 500 metres from the train station and there are trains every hour to the centre of Antwerp which is about a 15-minute ride. Buses run more regularly from the town centre and from a bus stop outside the school.

Moving to Belgium

TESTIMONIALS ABOUT ANTWERP AND EKEREN – by former AIS staff members:

Antwerp

“When I interviewed with the AIS high school principal he said, smiling, “Antwerp is the best-kept secret in Europe... and we’re hoping it stays that way.” I couldn’t agree with him more. Antwerp offers a cornucopia of opportunity for those who wish to be culturally, historically, or socially enriched.

Although Antwerp is a prominent Flemish town, tourists often miss it as they journey to Antwerp’s more famous cousins Ghent, Brussels, and Brugge. The result is that, while not free of tourists, Antwerp’s touristy side is extremely manageable – even during the busy summer months. There are many hidden-away places that tourists don’t find, and even in the busiest “tourist” restaurants and bars, you’ll find many more Belgians than foreigners. The fact that we are very close to many of the great European cities and sites is an added advantage.

Historically, Antwerp has many things to offer. The Grote Markt, the central square of Antwerp, has been beautifully maintained, and the cathedral’s spire soars 123 feet into the air over the city. Pieter Paul Rubens was born here, and many of his works are on display in different places of the city. In addition, one of the foremost printers of the 17th century was based in Antwerp. His house is now a museum that includes, among other interesting things, a Gutenberg Bible.

Culturally, there are many interesting facets to Antwerp. Simply wandering aimlessly through the old quarter will be enough for some. The narrow streets are lined with beautiful, centuries-old, Dutch-style townhouses with traditional stepped gables, many of them housing charming antique or curiosity shops.

Antwerp also has a variety of interesting museums including an art museum with many works by the Flemish masters, the previously mentioned printing museum, Rubens’ house, and various tours related to the local diamond industry. In addition, there are often concerts and exhibitions, as well as shows and displays; and we are only an hour from Brussels – where an even greater variety of cultural opportunities awaits.

The social side of Antwerp, however, is where the city really shines. Whether you are a shopper or an eater, a wine connoisseur or a beer taster, Antwerp is the land of opportunity. There are places to buy whatever you want. The antique district near the cathedral (where many AIS teachers live) has dozens of musty little shops where you can spend hours searching for treasures. There is also a tremendous retail scene on a road called the Meir that includes one shopping mall and two shopping galleries as well as many, many, street-side shops where dedicated shoppers will find countless hours of enjoyment while window shopping. Because Antwerp is a port town (the 2nd largest port in Europe, in fact), shoppers with exotic tastes can find articles from all over the world.



There are dozens of charming restaurants, as well, offering all types of cuisine – so many that you'd never be able to try them all. Depending on your tastes, you can get good marinated steak; tradition Belgian mussels, seafood, and hearty stews; Arabic food, Indian, Chinese, Korean, French, and a host of other international flavours. And then, of course, there are the French fries. Arriving in Belgium, I found it hard to believe that French fries in one country could be noticeably better than those from virtually anywhere else. I was wrong. You may have to taste it to believe it, but Belgian fries truly stand out.

Antwerp is full of diversified entertainment, all of which could be loosely termed cultural.

The city can be roughly divided into two parts: the "upmarket" eating, drinking, shopping area between Central Station and the towering office block belonging to KBC at the bottom of the Meir and, the somewhat more traditional homely ("rustic" to Americans) and, above all, less expensive region around the cathedral.

Upmarket Area

Dozens of restaurants offer delicious food from all corners of the world. (There is even a McDonald's.) It is not the cheapest area to eat in but nevertheless gives good value for money, particularly when the restaurant you choose accepts our food vouchers. (A sign will be displayed in the window.)

The cinema complex UGC houses eighteen theatres. The majority of them show American and English films with French and Dutch subtitles. Do not be dismayed if you find yourself to be the only one laughing at a joke as the subtitles sometimes lose something in translation. The prices are between € 7.00 and € 10.00 per person.

Even the insatiable shopper will be satisfied by the wide variety of good quality footwear and clothing available along De Keyserlei, the Meir and surrounding streets.

Around the Cathedral

You will find hundreds of bars, cafés, and restaurants. The majority tend to be old and Flemish in nature. This normally means a wide variety of Belgian beers and local food available at a very reasonable cost, consumed in convivial surroundings.

Every Monday evening from the beginning of June till the end of September, there is a carillon (bells) concert at the Cathedral in the Grote Markt area of Antwerp. Go early since it is a popular activity and fills up quickly.

This is the area in which you will also find members of faculty. Usually found in or between bars totally dedicated to the task in hand, i.e. working his/her way through the list of Belgian beers and discussing their relative merits with the locals. (This may mean a couple of free drinks.)

Moving to Belgium

Considering that there are over 500 different beers brewed in Belgium you can understand that total dedication is necessary. A tip to the British: forget the idea that English beer is the best in the world (unless of course you are comparing it with the States). The Belgians supersede all our claims. The closing time of bars is varied; there are many bars open all night.

Discos abound in many areas. Most types of music and fashion are catered to. Regular concerts are given by famous dance groups from ultra-modern to traditional ballet at various venues throughout the city. Live music concerts performed by international stars occur at regular intervals in Brussels and Antwerp. There are also frequent classical concerts in town.

For the sports enthusiasts, there are several ways to keep fit and have fun. Antwerp has many local sports teams in soccer, volleyball, and basketball that teachers have joined in the past. There are many opportunities for runners to augment their T-shirt and medallion collections locally and within an hour's radius. Bike paths are everywhere!

There is no excuse for anyone complaining that there is nothing to do. Whether your interests are Bacchanalian in nature or you're a fitness freak, it's all here in Belgium and the locals are more than happy to help you.

To drive it all home the delicious and ever-present chocolates and the homemade waffles that you buy dripping with sugar and steaming from the local street vendor will convince you that you are truly in culinary heaven.

If you like to tipple a bit, Antwerp has a nearly endless variety of beverages to suit your tastes. Belgium reportedly has over 400 different brands of beer with each brand commonly producing 3-6 different brews. Do the math. There are more beers here than you can get your lips onto – in every style and flavour. There are dark beers, ambers, yellow beers, wheat beers, cherry beers, and even (that's right) chocolate beers, and every brand of beer is served in a unique glass. There are nearly as many interesting places to drink beer, as well. Those who want variety can go to a specialty beer pub that offers over 100 different brews. Other bars are housed in unique and scenic locations – 400-year-old houses and the arched brick basements beneath the town. For those who love the nightlife, bars often close only after the last customer has left, and several downtown discos open up on the weekends.

Antwerp's location – a mere 2 hours from France or Germany – means that there are many excellent wines, too. Belgium is well-stocked with the products of teams of small French vintners that offer excellent quality wines very cheaply. Of course, those who prefer wine from elsewhere in Europe or somewhere else in the world can get whatever they wish –Italian, Greek, Chilean, Australian, South African, California, and many others.

Many different sides of Antwerp are shown depending on the season. During the summer months, cafes and bars all over the city put patio furniture outside for customers. Few experiences can equal quaffing a glass of your favourite beer sitting outside in the shadow of the cathedral. Over the Christmas season, Antwerp mounts a lovely Christmas market complete with quaint little stalls selling all things. Christmas, delicious food, a Belgian gin-like drink called Jenever (often fruit-flavoured), and ice-skating on the historic (and beautiful) central square.



All-in-all, Antwerp is a great place to live all year round. The charm of the old city, the food and drink, and the many interesting things to do add up to make a city that shines brightly for those who are lucky enough to experience it.”

Town of Ekeren

Ekeren is a quaint little Belgian town with all the amenities that a larger city has to offer. Ekeren's main street, Driehoekstraat, is lined with many small shops, including several wonderful bakeries, and of course, chocolate shops. There is also a Wednesday morning market with fresh fruits, vegetables and various other booths. The people of Ekeren are all pleasant and friendly; and it takes little time to get to know the vendors and shopkeepers.

The village has everything from grocery stores to flower shops, and is significantly less crowded than the downtown core of Antwerp. When you do want to venture into the city of Antwerp, however, you can quite easily take the bus or train. The bus comes to Ekeren's church square every fifteen minutes during the week. The main square is a picturesque area accented by row houses with traditional gabled rooftops. If you take a stroll down the Veltwijcklaan, which will lead you directly to AIS, you might pass the Gemeentehuis, Ekeren's town hall. You can stroll up the cobblestone walkway lined with neatly trimmed topiaries to arrive at a beautiful castle-like building surrounded by a moat. Behind the Gemeentehuis, you will find both walking and biking trails through a forested area. Ekeren is a wonderful place to live, and you would find yourself in good company, should you choose to join the many AIS teachers living here who now call it home!”

2. Cost of Living

While the salary may appear higher than you received at home, it is easier for families with children to make it financially when both adults work. It is difficult to find employment for partners who are not European Community nationals. For this reason, it is not advisable for married couples to come expecting the spouse to find employment immediately after arrival. Means of supplementing one income, usually on a part-time basis, may be found but it takes time to search and no guarantee can be made.

Traditionally Antwerp and all of Belgium have been recognized as having a high cost of living. Its economy merely echoes its high standard of living. The first several months in Antwerp can be difficult - investing in needed household items, possibly buying a car. Once a pattern of living has been established, you may then begin to appreciate the fine aspects of Belgium – the fine dining, beautiful parks, opera, theatre, open air markets, the cosmopolitan European environment as well as the many bike paths and numerous other outside and inside sporting facilities.

Everything depends upon your style of living. You will generally find clothing, gasoline and some food items more expensive than the US but similar to the UK. However, with a little careful shopping on your part, you can find at a low price an excellent bottle of wine, regional cheeses, a bountiful supply of fresh vegetables, or freshly baked breads.

Your food vouchers can be used in restaurants and in the larger department stores.

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There are several options for buying food. Within the environs of the school, there are several large grocery stores (GB, Carrefour, and Delhaize) which generally have a good selection of anything you would need in the home. There are three no-frills stores called LIDL, ALDI and COLRUYT located in Ekeren as well as other nearby places that offer you many decent quality products at a cheaper price.

Since many people of many nationalities reside in Belgium, almost any food item can be found with a sufficient amount of searching.

There are some items typical to North American cooking that are difficult to find, or very expensive and only found in a specialty store. These include: Sweet 'n Low, grape jelly and chocolate chips. If you use lots of mixes in your cooking, you might consider bringing some of your favourites.

Also, if you intend to use American recipes, bring a set of measuring cups and spoons. The metric system is the only system in Belgium.

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3. Moving to Belgium

3.1. AIS Buddies

New AIS staff arriving in Belgium will be welcomed by an 'AIS Buddy'. This person is a current AIS staff member who will act as a point of contact prior to your arrival, and who will assist you with settling in once you get to Belgium. Your Buddy can help you deal with the process of culture shock and adjusting to the realities of living and working in this part of the world, can welcome you into the AIS community, and help you get oriented professionally to the working procedures of the school. We hope you will find your Buddy a friendly and welcoming resource, who helps make your arrival and settling into Belgium go smoothly.

3.2. Important and Necessary Documents

Please read the following information carefully. It is very important that you complete the necessary paperwork as soon as possible. There are four different documents needed for your stay in Belgium:

A. Work Permit (arbeidskaart)

If you are not a citizen of a European Union member country (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom) or a citizen of the EVA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway).

B. Resident Visa (inschrijving tot voorlopig verblijf)

C. Identity Card (identiteitskaart)

D. Driver's License (rijbewijs) = optional



BEFORE YOUR MOVE TO BELGIUM

3.2.1. Work Permit

A citizen from outside the European Community who intends to work in Belgium on a salaried basis, must first obtain a work permit issued by the proper governmental authorities. Since only the employer in Belgium is entitled to introduce an application for the work permit, and since the process takes three months or longer, it is strongly recommended that the applicant forward the following documents to the school AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE. (This permit is necessary in order to get your resident visa. The resident visa – VISUM D - needs to be obtained in your home country BEFORE entry into Belgium):

1. A medical certificate. (A blank form will have been sent to you.) Check with the Belgian Consulate as this medical certificate has to be drawn up by a physician appointed by the Belgian diplomatic or consular agents and needs to be stamped by these authorities before mailing it to the administrative assistant. Requests for work permits will not be considered without the medical certificate.
2. One recent passport-size, front-view photograph 4,5 x 3,5 cm (1 3/8" by 1 3/4" approximately) on a white background. Bring extra of these passport-size photos with you as you will be asked for passport-size photos on several other occasions.
3. Complete personal data: first name and surname, date and place of birth, residence abroad, and nationality.

On rare occasions you may be requested to show your work permit to certain authorities such as a work inspector or your local town hall authorities. Try to send the items required for the work permit to the Headmaster's PA, Ann Jacobs (pa@ais-antwerp.be) as soon as possible. When the authorities grant the permit, we will send it to you by mail.

For Belgian consulates / embassies in foreign countries, please go to:

http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/services/embassies_and_consulates/belgian_embassies_and_consulates_abroad/

3.2.2. Resident Visa

Once you have the actual work permit in your possession, you will be able to take or mail your application papers for a resident visa (VISUM D) to the nearest Belgian Consulate. It is necessary to obtain this very important resident visa before coming to Belgium. A resident visa will be stamped in your passport. The following papers are necessary for a resident visa:

1. Your newly acquired work permit
2. A valid passport
3. A good conduct certificate: This may be obtained from your local city or country police authorities. It is merely a statement attesting to an unblemished police record. (N.B. You may be fingerprinted!). This can take 6-8 weeks and your local state police may recommend that you use the FBI office. Allow two months. For Canadians, please obtain this certificate through the nearest RCMP office. It is done in ten minutes, free of charge. If you do the fingerprinting process through the police, it takes up to six weeks and is quite costly.

Moving to Belgium

If you are accompanied by your spouse and children, they will also need passports and good conduct certificates, and you will need your original marriage license. It is recommended that you write or telephone your nearest Belgian Consulate to confirm the items and procedures needed for these visas. If your spouse is not employed in Belgium (i.e. does not have a work permit), please make sure that he/she has a resident visa stamped in her passport. As he/she is your dependent, this should create no problem with the Belgian Embassy. This will avoid a hassle upon registering in Belgium.

Other Documents to bring along

- Birth certificate with an apostil: The apostil is given by the Secretary of State of the state where the document is issued. Canadians can ask for a “long form” certificate from City Hall.
- Marriage certificate with an apostil (same as above), if applicable
- Divorce papers (if applicable)

When you register in Belgium they may ask for the birth dates of your parents. Americans can consult the US State Department’s web site <http://travel.state.gov> where you can obtain detailed instructions regarding:

- how to obtain a certified birth certificate;
- how to report the birth of a U.S. citizen born abroad;
- where to write for vital records (birth, death, marriage and divorce)

UPON ARRIVAL IN ANTWERP

3.2.3. Identity Card

Once housing has been located and suitable rental arrangements made, non-Belgian teachers have to report to the town hall of the Gemeente where residence is established. When reporting to the Gemeente, take along the passport with appropriate Belgian visa, work permit, contract, birth certificate, copy of the lease and photographs. EC citizens do not need a resident visa.

The Gemeente will record residence and issue an identity card, valid for one year. This identity card is to be carried at all times by the holder. It is an offense not to be able to produce this identity card when requested by the authorities, e.g. police. This identity card for non-Belgians is not a substitute for a valid passport when crossing national borders. The non-Belgian identity card is valid for a period of one year; it must be renewed by the holder before it expires.

The identity card is needed for all governmental formalities and you are required to carry it at all times. Within two weeks of establishing permanent residence in Belgium, every foreigner over twelve years of age must apply for an identity card (identiteitskaart) at his local town hall (gemeentehuis). One adult may register for the entire family. To obtain the identity card, each person needs the following:

1. A valid passport
2. A resident visa
3. Six small photos
4. Marriage certificate, if applicable (needs to be stamped with an apostil)



5. Death certificate (for widowed employees)
6. Divorce certificate, if applicable (needs to be stamped with an apostil)
7. Birth certificate (needs to be stamped with an apostil)

3.2.4. Driver's License

You must relinquish your home country license in order to receive a Belgian one. Your home country license will be reissued when you submit your Belgian license in the event that you return "home".

There is a different ruling according to nationality.

An international driver's license is not valid for a permanent resident. A driver's license is required for the use of an automobile, motorbike or motorcycle. An English edition of the

WEGCODE is recommended reading before starting out on Belgian roads. (Driving in Belgium can be ordered at Standaard Boekhandel, Bredabaan 541 – 2170 Merksem – tel.: 03.645.24.38).

It is an offense for any person who has established residence in Belgium to drive a vehicle without a Belgian driver's license.

Agreements between Belgium and individual countries are continually changing. Check with the embassy in the country in which you currently hold a driver's license to determine if there is a reciprocal agreement regarding drivers' licenses.

Americans will automatically be given a Belgian license upon presentation of that license and their Belgian identity card at the "Gemeentehuis". You need the following documents:

1. two identity size photo
2. fiscal stamps obtained from local post office
3. permanent identity card
4. driver's license from home country

3.3. Shipping Belongings to AIS from Outside Europe

It would be impossible to compile one packing list that would be suitable for all new staff members. What you choose to include from the suggested list (Items to Bring from Home – page 14) and what you wish to bring in addition will be dependent upon your lifestyle. The decision of what to ship will probably be influenced by factors such as your intended length of stay, personal attachment to certain belongings, and certainly the cost factor of shipping as opposed to buying new or second-hand.

Shipping goods to Belgium is expensive. However, replacing a great deal of common household items with new ones once you arrive will very likely be even more expensive. Your settling-in allowance may be better applied toward shipping charges than to purchasing new items upon arrival. We recommend that you bring as much with you as you can.

Moving to Belgium

A variety of second-hand items are sold periodically by people who are leaving the AIS community. There are often good bargains to be had, but the timing is not always in sync with your own. At the end of the school year and around the New Year, more things tend to be available. Often if you are taking over an apartment from previous renters, you may be able to buy many essentials from them, which will almost always be a cheaper option than furnishing with new. If you can live with another's taste for a while, it is recommended. There are also second-hand shops in the area and local flea markets (similar to whole-street garage sales) in the late summer and early autumn, as well as regular ones in Antwerp and nearby towns.

For personal belongings or household effects, you may ship via surface freight through almost any shipping agent. Parcel post and air freight are also options. Be sure to check comparative

costs and the speed with which they will be delivered. Keep records of contents and all documents associated with the shipping, and **BRING THEM WITH YOU**. The shipping process does not always go exactly as planned; be prepared to live without your belongings when you arrive, just in case things are held in any way.

3.3.1. Parcel Post

We suggest shipping by insured parcel post because it has been the most reliable in the past.

- a) Air Parcel Post: moderately expensive, rapid (2-3 weeks)
- b) Surface Parcel Post: inexpensive in country of origin; takes longer (4-10 weeks)

This means of transport enables you to mail a number of manageable packages through your local post office. Check for size and weight restrictions. Small, manageable parcels may be delivered directly to the school. Large, heavy parcels need to be kept at the Antwerp Parcel Post Depot until a customs questionnaire is filled out as to the contents and value; then the packages will be delivered to your house or apartment for a moderate fee.

3.3.2. Sea Freight through a Shipping Agent

Sea freight is a viable option for those new teachers who have a great amount of household or personal items to send or possess belongings of substantial value. Consult your phone book for shipping agents to compare costs, which are generally based on the cubic volume of your goods. The agent should be able to quote you the length of shipping time and the arrangements for getting the goods to his agency.

Once they arrive in Belgium, a local shipping agent will pick up your belongings in Antwerp, take them through customs, and deliver them to your new residence should you have located it by the time delivery is effected.

Although your shipping agent at home will most likely assure you that you have paid all expenses door to door, there will always be handling and customs charges payable to the Belgian shipping agent.



You must have your work permit and resident visa in your possession in order to have your belongings released from customs.

3.3.3. Air Freight

This option is very rapid (one week); it is costly in the country of origin, but the charges in Belgium are very minimal. It requires your presence at the airport freight department to claim boxes, and you must have manageable packages or trunks that two people could carry.

Check your local phone books for listings of shippers or local air carriers in your vicinity. These companies should be able to tell you the price per pound/kilo to Brussels, and also if they can transport or forward your goods to the closest international airport.

Send your packages only 2-3 days in advance of your arrival in Antwerp, since 48 hours after notification of arrival here, you will be charged with storage fees. The costs of claiming your packages at the airport are minimal, and the procedure is relatively easy and not time-consuming.

Several services exist between Brussels and North America specializing exclusively in express airmail deliveries. Some are door-to-door, others airport-to-airport. Generally, they offer good express service, collection of goods, attention to the shipment from beginning to end, and customs clearance. The weight limit is low: 5 or 8 kilos.

3.3.4. Addressing and Labelling of Small Packages

Address : Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____
c/o The Antwerp International School, vzw
Veltwijcklaan 180
2180 Ekeren-Belgium
* Telephone 03/543.93.00 (for air freight packages)

Labelling of your packages or crates is very important.

1. Label every package "PERSOONLIJKE GOEDEREN" (translation: "personal goods"). This is very important to avoid unnecessary discussion of customs charge.
2. Do not omit "The Antwerp International School" on the label. Without this, we are unable to clear the packages through customs and the goods will have to await your arrival.
3. Please number your packages: No. 1, 2, 3, etc. You should make a list of the contents of each package, number the lists the same as the corresponding packages and then send the list directly to us. This is extremely important, as it will enable us to clear your goods through customs without any problem. You should keep a copy of your inventory.

Moving to Belgium

3.4. Items to Bring from Home

The deliberation over what belongings to pack and how to transport them can have its headache-inducing moments. Your living quarters may resemble a warehouse as life begins to sort itself into "store", "give away", "throw away" and "ship" piles. If you find the same item migrating indecisively between piles, there are AIS colleagues who will be able to relate. We hope the following information will aid you in the decision-making process.

3.4.1. Personal

Teachers coming to AIS should bring all legal papers, in original form, for each member of the family coming to Belgium, i.e. birth certificates, marriage licenses, etc. Although almost any article may be found in Belgium, it is wiser to bring the following items, which are expensive if purchased here:

Clothing

If possible, you should bring whatever clothing you would need for a year's stay. Travel books mention Belgium's average temperatures and refer to them as moderate much to the chagrin of the frozen teacher on playground duty in January. Include warm clothing for rainy or snowy winter weather. Raincoats with zip-out linings, wool coats, hats, scarves, boots, walking shoes, duck shoes and a family supply of umbrellas will be useful. Warm sweaters will save on heating

costs. The Belgians wear beautiful oversized sweaters that they often knit by hand. Summer days can be occasionally hot, so pack for the possible extremes in temperature.

Towels, blankets, bed linens, tablecloths, etc.

Mattress sizes in Belgium may be different from those your linens were designed for (sized in cm, i.e. 140 x 200, 180 x 200). Your fitted sheets may not be of use but you may wish to manage with the flat ones.

English novels, greeting cards, English-to-Dutch dictionary

When purchased here you may pay double to triple the price printed on the item. Dictionaries purchased here will give pronunciations for the English word rather than the Dutch.

There is a special rate in the United States for sending books if you mail them from one school to another school. Therefore, we recommend that you label an American school as the return address. Air freight is expensive but there is a special rate on books if under a certain weight (10 kilos per package).

Shoes

Hard to find are women's sizes 10 and over, men sizes 12 and over, as well as very narrow or wide shoes.



Cosmetics

There is a wide range of European and North American toiletries easily available here. Prices may be higher than what you are used to. If you are partial to a particular line of cosmetics, brand of deodorant, etc., you might consider bringing a plentiful supply as many teachers have mentioned that these are among the items they ask for when expecting visitors from home.

Cooking Ingredients and Supplies

Since people of many nationalities reside in Belgium, almost any food item can be found with a sufficient amount of searching. But there are some items typical to e.g. North American cooking that are difficult to find, or very expensive and only found in a specialty store, so you might consider bringing some of your favourites. Also, if you intend to use recipes, measuring cups, spoons and thermometers... the metric system is the only system in Belgium!

Electrical appliances

All electrical appliances function on cycles between 210V and 240 V. With the use of a transformer, most other appliances may be used without difficulty, although the life span of large appliances will be shortened by the difference in cycles for which the transformer does not compensate. The following alternative V cycle appliances will not work in Belgium even with a transformer: TV, video, record players, stereo ensembles, clocks and clock radios. If you wish to take the time, a special device can be found for record players/stereos that will compensate for the change in cycle. However, you must have a sense of adventure to find it! A more reasonable option is to buy your appliances in Europe.

3.4.2. Professional

Any specialized materials integral to your work that you would find difficult to do without should certainly be brought with you: textbooks, reference books, pre-printed worksheets, etc. Others feel that stickers, stars, lettering, posters and classroom decorations, especially for the holidays, are also very important to bring. The elementary staff has had the habit of ordering a good supply of manipulatives and enrichment materials, and the selection is generally very adequate for teaching at every level. You would probably find or be able to order all of these specialized materials in Belgium but it would most likely require greater time, effort, and expense than it would to bring them with you. The library is in the process of building a professional section of books.

4. Finding Accommodation

Finding a place to live in the area of Antwerp is often very time-consuming and can be fraught with frustration if done in those first few days upon arrival. Many apartments are advertised for rent as much as three months before they will be available. As you can calculate, that makes it difficult to find things available in August when you start looking in August. It is advisable to find something in May or June if you wish to move in during the month of August.

As soon as you have signed your employment contract, AIS will provide you with details of an agency that has been contracted by the school and that will help you in your house search.

The agency will assist new AIS staff (and their family) with the following services:

- Preparations, searching for housing within the given criteria.
- Detailed planning for visits.
- House search accompanied by one of our staff, limited to 1 day, 8 hours.
- Negotiation and drawing up lease contract.
- Administration support for utilities, connection phone, internet and TV.

The above service package cost will be covered one time by the school. If you prefer to receive additional services, incremental fees will be at your own expense.

Alternatively, you can search specialized websites for renting a place.

Be aware that furnished apartments are very rare. Furnished generally means they are equipped with cookware, silverware, and sometimes bedding as well as the basic furnishings. Unfurnished apartments generally do not have appliances, drapes, carpet or light fixtures and frequently might not have an oven or refrigerator.

4.1. Lease

A three-year lease is a normal term for an unfurnished accommodation and a six-months to one-year term for furnished, but you can usually get out of it with a three-month notice.

New teachers and teachers changing their accommodation should ask their prospective landlord to consider using a lease which contains a diplomatic clause (meaning when you leave Belgium the lease can be terminated provided three months notice is given). Use of this clause is, of course, subject to the agreement of the landlord.

4.2. Service Charges

In addition to your monthly rent, you may have to pay service charges (caretaker, concierge, elevator, taxes, in some cases heating, etc.). Be certain to ask about charges when signing your lease, i.e. what the charges include and how much you will pay monthly.



4.3. Deposit

- A security deposit is normally requested and can vary from two to three months' rent (normally three months). The preferred manner of payment is a blocked savings account - the security deposit is placed in an account for the duration of your lease. You receive the interest accumulated, but the money cannot be withdrawn without the signature of the tenant and landlord.

See the Business Office if you want to use the school's guarantee.

The renter is responsible for maintaining and repairing the living unit. In other words, you are responsible for fixing whatever goes wrong inside the house or apartment (furnace, plumbing). Also, if you wish to paint or wallpaper, it is at your own expense. Most leases ask that the apartment be in the condition it was when rented, so unless the next occupants want to buy your drapes and carpets, you must remove them.

4.4. Taxes

In your household, you can expect yearly taxes such as municipality, provincial taxes and cable television. There is a yearly road tax on a vehicle if you choose to have one, and you are required to pay an environmental tax.

4.5. Telephone

It is best to locate an apartment where a phone has been installed. If a telephone needs to be installed for the first time, there will be an initial cost, and the waiting period can be two weeks to six months. If you would only like to use a mobile phone, there will be no problem. However, the telephone line is also used by companies like Telenet, to install cable and internet connections.

4.6. Utilities

You will be asked to pay a substantial deposit to have the gas/electricity turned on in your apartment. Save your receipt as you may claim this amount when you leave. Most utility companies send a new tenant an estimated statement, the figures being based on the consumption of the previous year by the former tenant. At the end of the first year, the utility company will make an adjustment and you will either receive a refund for over-payment or a bill indicating consumption over the estimated billing. From this point, your statement will be based on your average monthly rate of consumption.

4.7. Insurance

Most leases in Belgium will include a clause requiring a tenant to subscribe to fire/liability insurance. To maintain a valid insurance policy, it is compulsory to have your furnace and chimneys cleaned annually. There is also a family insurance covering workers or visitors in your home and/or damage done by your children to a third party. Rates are inexpensive. Inquire in the Business Office.

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4.8. Buying a House

If you are thinking of buying a house in Belgium, think about this. Recent prices for a "row house" with a small back yard are well over € 150.000. If the requirements and paperwork seem daunting, there are many people willing to guide you through it. Banking staff are invariably helpful and fluent in English.

4.9. Establishing Residence

Once housing has been located and suitable rental arrangements made, non-Belgian teachers have to report to the town hall of the Gemeente where residence is established. When reporting to the Gemeente, take along the passport with appropriate Belgian visa, work permit, contract, birth certificate, copy of the lease and photographs. EC citizens do not need a resident visa. The Gemeente will record residence and issue an identity card, valid for one year.

4.10. Changing Residence

A change of residence must be reported to the Gemeente at the latest three days after the new residence is effective. In case of Gemeente change, you will receive an invitation from the new Gemeente upon receipt of your folder from the previous Gemeente. The Gemeente will indicate the change of address on your identity card.

If you possess a motor vehicle registered in Belgium, you will also have to report to your local police station. The police will inform the central vehicle licensing office of your change of address and it will record this change into the car registration card (grey card).

Change of address must be reported to the Headmaster's PA, Ann Jacobs.

4.11. Change of Civil Status and Family Composition

Any change in civil status (e.g. marriage, separation, divorce, death of spouse, etc.) and family composition (birth of child, etc.) must be immediately reported to the Business Office. This is a legal requirement.



5. Transportation

5.1. Car Prices

New car prices in Belgium are around or over € 10,000 (VAT included). There is a good market on used cars in all price ranges; it just takes a bit of searching and researching with other faculty members.

5.2. To Buy or Not?

Most faculty members find that a car is indispensable. However, many have relied on car pools and public transportation during the first year and made their purchase at the end of that school year. The used car market is good.

5.3. New or Used?

This consideration really depends on your own personal likes and needs. Both are readily available, although a new car with your specifications will necessitate a three-month wait. Used cars are very often found within the AIS community, either from faculty members or parents.

5.4. Bringing a Car from Home?

Generally, it is recommended that you purchase a new or used car here in Belgium. The costs for transforming a car to Belgian specifications are usually far too expensive to warrant importing the car.

5.5. Formalities of Buying a Car

When buying a new car, the dealer will give a bill of sale giving all technical data identifying the vehicle. You will have to pay an extra fee on top of the normal annual car tax payment. This occurs just once.

The dealer will also give you a pink form stating the characteristics of the vehicle, which must be signed by you and given to the insurance company of your choice. The insurance company will certify on this document that the vehicle described is duly insured for third-party risk, and will mail the form to the Central Vehicle Licensing Office. This office will then mail you a rear license plate number by registered post, together with the license registration card (log book) in your name.

A front license number plate will have to be made for the front of the vehicle; this can be done at a local hardware store. It is to be noted that the license number is given to the owner of the car; it is personal and it will be transferred to a new car when there is a vehicle change. The back license plate is government property.

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The procedure for a second-hand car is very similar to the one outlined here above. The seller of a second-hand car must pass the vehicle through a government roadworthy inspection (“technische controle”) before the sale.

Car owners are reminded that they should always have the following documents in their vehicle: "Green" international insurance certificate (from insurance company), car registration card (grey), (customs authorization in case of tax-free transit vehicle), Belgian driver's license, valid technical inspection form, and conformity certificate of the car. Road tax will have to be paid promptly on receipt of demand through the post, which happens every twelve months.

All new cars registered in Belgium must carry a breakdown triangle, and approved first aid box (obtainable only in a pharmacy), a yellow safety vest, a " labelled fire extinguisher, and approved safety belts for the front seats.

PLEASE NOTE THAT WEARING FRONT AND BACK SEAT BELTS IS COMPULSORY BY LAW AND CHILDREN UNDER TWELVE MUST SIT IN THE BACK SEAT OF THE CAR.

5.6. Other Means of Transportation

Bicycles are a viable option for those who are not afraid to brave the wind, the rain, and the dark, dark mornings and late afternoons of winter. (There are nice days as well, but the percentages are probably higher on the nastier end). There are many bicycle paths (used also by mopeds), and traffic laws favour the cyclist over the motorist. Antwerp also has a good system of public transportation that services all of the outlying areas in which you are likely to live.

6. Banking

Bankcards are issued with accounts, and there are numerous banking machines in the city. Proton cards can be loaded with an amount of money from your account determined by you, and can be used in many stores, etc.

Most teachers bank at the KBC Bank, Ekeren branch - Kristus Koningplein 3, which is close to the school and shopping, and is open from 9 to 12:30 and 13:30 to 16:00. The school uses this bank and the branch personnel know the AIS staff quite well. There are other banks in the area, and of course, a teacher may elect to bank wherever the most convenient institution is for him/her. However, it will take a few days to have your salary transferred.

Some teachers think it is wise to keep a small checking account open in their home country, especially if you still have bills to pay there, magazine subscriptions you wish to keep, etc. Do not forget to bring your check book with you! A money transfer is a bit of an expense and a fee is charged when changing from Euros to a non-Euro currency or vice-versa. Remember in continental Europe, a decimal point is used in place of the comma in large numbers commonly used in the U.S. and the U.K. (20,000 is 20.000 in Belgium).



Many teachers choose to have their rent and utility bills paid by automatic checking account deductions. This convenient service is offered free of charge by many banks. It will ensure that bill payments reach your creditors, even while you are on holiday. If you choose not to use the automatic checking deduction and a payment does not reach the creditor by a deadline date, your utility service will be disconnected. Reinstatement of services will take time and installation charges may be applicable.

To initiate the automatic checking account deduction service, you take the first utility bill which you receive from each company to the bank. At the bank you will sign an order to have all future bills for that company paid directly through the bank. Deduction for these payments will appear on your banking statements. The utility company will also send a copy of the bill to your residence so that you will know how much is going to be deducted. This service can be used for electricity, gas, phone, and water payments. An order can also be signed to designate a date for automatic deduction of rent.

7. Postal Services

Post offices will be in the vicinity of your residence and are typically open on workdays between 9:00-12:30 and 14:00-17:00. School-related post can always be handed to the school's receptionist, Romy, who will arrange for your letter to be sent out.

8. Babysitting

The "Bond" is a national young families' organization that provides babysitting services through its neighbourhood associations. The cost of this service is reasonable. Babysitters are at least 16 years old, many are college students, and most can be re-requested if you find one you like. Times other than evening hours are more expensive. For more information about membership fees and your local group, telephone the Bond: Gezinsbond 03-542.35.74. Please note, though, that with many High School students at AIS who are interested in earning pocket money, babysitters should be easily available through AIS, too.

Day Care

If both you and your spouse are working, you may need to consider day care for your under-school aged child (i.e. under three years of age). The city of Antwerp, under the auspices of the Ministry of Child Welfare, has set up a program of child-minding women. The women are trained, insured and licensed by the city to provide care for your child in their own homes during the working day. Fees are established based on your income. For further information concerning this care, contact Stedelijke Dienst voor Onthaalouders, Steenstraat 49, 2180 Ekeren – phone: 0032 3 288 34 10 – email: onthaalouders.ekeren@stad.antwerpen.be.

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9. Emergencies

- International emergency number dial 112
- Police dial 101
- Ambulance dial 100
- Fire dial 100
- Red Cross ambulance dial 105
- Child Focus dial 116000
- Anti-poison centre – Brussels
(poison antidotes) dial 070/245.245
- Burns - Brussels dial 02/268.62.00
- Suicide prevention dial 02/649.95.55
- Telephone directory assistance in English dial 1404

These emergency telephone numbers are identical throughout Belgium, its *gemeentes*, and suburbs. Give your address, *gemeente*, and telephone number (where you are calling from) at once when dialling any of the above numbers.

10. Consulates, Embassies and Cultural Services

Please go to the following link to find out where your country's embassy is located in Belgium:
http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/services/embassies_and_consulates/foreign_embassies_and_consulates_in_Belgium/

For Belgian consulates / embassies in foreign countries, please go to:
http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/services/embassies_and_consulates/belgian_embassies_and_consulates_abroad/



11. Leaving Belgium

Formalities for leaving Belgium are virtually the same as for arriving, only in reverse. Below is a checklist to assist you in complying with the various formalities that should be attended to.

11.1. Terminating Lease

Check your lease to see what the conditions are for terminating the lease on your apartment or house and follow them through. Rented furnished accommodation leases are usually on an annual basis and should pose no problem. If you have a diplomatic clause, read it carefully and see what length of notice is required. This clause does not excuse you from giving the landlord the appropriate notice. Remember, whenever there is a notice to be given to the landlord, give it by registered post. If you have a bank guarantee, obtain from your bank the document to be signed by you and the landlord when all lease obligations have been met to release the guarantee.

11.2. Closing Utilities

Make the necessary arrangements for closing utilities if you had to open them on arrival. If in doubt about what to do, check with your landlord. Utilities usually comprise electricity, gas, water, telephone, and TV cable distribution. If it is your responsibility to close utilities, make arrangements with the company or companies well in advance of the day closure is to be effected (at least a month ahead of time) and make arrangements for the payment of your final bills. For example, leave your bank account open with sufficient funds if you have your bank pay utility bills automatically.

11.3. Town Hall (Gemeente)

Report to your town hall (Gemeente) to inform them of your departure date from Belgium. It is usual for the Gemeente to request that your ID card be turned in, so delay this formality until a day or two before you effectively depart, particularly if you drive a car.

11.4. Income Tax

Report in person to your taxation office (Administratie der Directe Belastingen), which handles your Belgian income tax return form. Check the address on your copy of the income tax form last turned in, or better, on your assessment form received from the office for previous tax years. You will have to file your annual income tax form for your income during the year when you left Belgium. The taxation office will assist you to fill out this form and make sure you give your address abroad where you can be contacted regarding taxation matters. Note that a certificate from the tax authorities is needed if you are to ship furniture over the border.

Moving to Belgium

11.5. Insurance

If you hold any insurance policies, make sure you inform your broker or the insurance company or companies that you are leaving Belgium and, as the case may be, that you wish the policy or policies cancelled on a certain date. Again do not leave this to the last minute.

11.6. Ziekenfonds

Normally, you are covered by your Ziekenfonds until August 31. It is nice to inform your ziekenfonds that you are leaving the country and, therefore, will not be employed in Belgium as of September 1. This will avoid your ziekenfonds writing to you several times.

11.7. Bank

Arrange for the closure of your bank account(s) once you are sure all bills (including utilities) have been settled. One way of doing this is to advise your bank of your departure, leaving the account open with sufficient funds to cover any outstanding bills still to come, particularly those bills which the bank pays directly on your behalf. Statements will be sent to you overseas. Once everything has been settled you can write in English to the bank, requesting closure of your account and transfer of any balance. It is advisable to leave open your bank account(s) for the rest of the year in which you leave, as taxes may need to be reimbursed to you, and for that, you will need your Belgian bank account.

11.8. Employer - AIS

Give your Headmaster your address overseas where you can be contacted.

11.9. Conclusion

As you can see, there are quite a few things to be done before you can leave Belgium. Most have to be handled in person, so try to plan not to depart the day after school is over for the summer. Give yourself a breathing space; take a couple of days to get ready to leave Belgium. You need this extra time. For example, to file your income tax form for the current year, you need a statement from the school, the "fiche 281.10". This can only be given to you when your final salary is paid, which is usually on graduation day. So, take your time and do not rush your departure.

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