



the wallonia patrika

News and updates from the Wallonia region of Belgium

December 2017

**F1: KARUN CHANDHOK ON RACING AT SPA,
THE WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL CIRCUIT**

**FISCAL: TAX BENEFITS FOR
EXPATS LIVING IN BELGIUM**



HERGÉ

**A GUIDED TOUR THROUGH THE MUSEUM
DEDICATED TO HERGÉ, THE CREATOR OF TINTIN**



Wallonia.be

EXPORT
INVESTMENT



- > **Wallonia** is a region structured by comprehensive, effective and interconnected transport networks. Travelling through Wallonia, Belgium, is an easy passage through a territory where distance has been abolished. Europe in concentrated form, a land of contrasts where inspired locations never end.
- > You can do business in Wallonia with a density and intensity unlike anywhere else: available space, quality infrastructure, a high level of skills and proximity to research centres make Wallonia a sustainable location for development and a fertile ground for innovation.
- > **Wallonia's** doors are open to the world, not just giving access to hundreds of millions of consumers in just a few hours, but each year also welcoming millions of tourists, students and

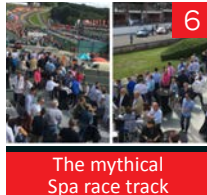
expats who truly blossom here. About 80 Indian companies from a variety of sectors have already elected to set up a base in Belgium.

Through its direct connection to Brussels, Wallonia benefits from its close proximity and immediate access to the European institutions as well as the international organizations and associations located there. In addition, this location at the heart of Europe makes it one of the continent's most attractive regions, especially for distribution centres and logistics platforms.

In fact, Wallonia benefits from the densest road and motorway network in Europe. In just 4 hours by road, you can reach nearly 60 million people. And in one day, an area of 370 million consumers can be reached, as well as 20 of Europe's major cities.

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Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

The year 2017 is drawing to a close and has witnessed a number of memorable events. 2017 indeed marked the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Belgium. More special still, our country was one of the very first to send an ambassador to India in September 1947, just one month after the independence of modern India.

To mark this milestone anniversary, their Majesties the King and the Queen of the Belgians came to India for an official State Visit early November. They were accompanied by a large delegation of federal and regional ministers, as well as government officials, company CEOs, university presidents, journalists and photographers. This State Visit was an excellent occasion to further strengthen the bilateral relations between our two countries. A number of high profile events were organized, including official meetings, business seminars, networking receptions, as well as cultural and historical events.

Numerous MoUs and other agreements were signed during this State Visit. You will read more about these on page 13.

As this newsletter again highlights, relations between our two countries translate into a large number of areas. You will read for example about an Indian couple who are successfully running a restaurant in Wallonia, the Southern French-speaking region of Belgium (page 23). You will also learn about Indian racing driver Karun Chandhok's personal experience of the famous Spa-Francorchamps circuit and of the Wallonia region (page 4).

In addition, this issue conveys some excellent news for potential investors wishing to hire employees in Belgium (page 10). And we provide you with a guided tour of the museum dedicated to Hergé – the creator of the Belgian cartoon hero Tintin (page 18).

We wish you a pleasant read and remain at your disposal for any question you might have about Wallonia.

Sincerely yours,

Christophe Van Overstraeten
First Secretary – Trade & Investment
Wallonia-Brussels Economic Representation
Embassy of Belgium, New Delhi



In discussion with Karun Chandhok

Karun Chandhok is part of a very exclusive club of only two Indian Formula 1 drivers. Having successively raced for Hispania Racing and Team Lotus, he competed a number of times at the Spa-Francorchamps circuit in Belgium. In this interview, he tells us about his career and his views of this hilly race track set in lush green surroundings.

Tell us about your racing career. What, in your opinion, have been the highlights so far?

I've been very fortunate to experience a lot of different things across my 17 years of racing. If I had to pick 3 highlights, I would say winning at Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium in GP2 put me on the European map, doing my first F1 race in Bahrain in 2010 was a culmination of a dream and also being

the first and so far only Indian driver to race at Le Mans in 2012 are the standout moments for me.

What fascinates you most about being a professional racing driver?

Driving the cars is undoubtedly the best part of the job. The buzz you get from driving on the absolute limit of a car's potential is something very special. But I actually also really enjoy being a part of a larger team. Working

alongside clever engineers and problem solving together is a great challenge that I thoroughly enjoy.

How often have you driven at the Spa-Francorchamps race track, and in which series?

I've been very fortunate to drive at Spa-Francorchamps in Formula 3, GP2, F1 and in the Le Mans prototype Sportscars! I first went there in 2003 and have absolutely enjoyed going

back there several times since then.

What are your views of this circuit? What are its main challenges?

It is a very unique circuit with a lot of undulations and has a great flow to it. I think the fast flowing nature of the circuit as

"The high speed nature of the Spa-Francorchamps track with the big elevation changes makes it very unique in the modern world of racing"

it winds through the Ardennes forest makes it very special. The first part of the lap has the very special Eau Rouge corner in it but the middle sector is my favourite as it has the most corners and is a real challenge to get right. The high speed nature of the track with the big elevation changes makes it very unique in the modern world of racing.

How fondly do you remember your visits to Wallonia, Belgium?

Well Spa village as well as Francorchamps are very picturesque areas. I quite enjoy cycling and running in the Ardennes hills as it's a very pretty part of the world. The weather is unpredictable and you can have bright sunshine one minute and pouring rain the next but it's all a part of the charm of the place.

What Belgian food items have you had the chance to taste?

I love the waffles they make hot in the stands but obviously as a racing driver, it's not something I can eat very often! I treat myself to one at the end of the weekend before I leave. The various river fish that they have is normally very nice.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Karun Chandhok was born in Chennai. A multiple race winner and podium finisher in GP2, Karun was a test driver for the Red Bull Racing Formula 1 team in 2007 and 2008, before going on to race in Formula 1 for Hispania Racing and Team Lotus in 2010 and 2011 respectively.

Since 2012, he has been competing in Sportscars, becoming the only Indian to ever compete in the iconic Le Mans 24 hour race, finishing in the top 6 in class at Le Mans in 2012, 2013 and 2015. Karun also joined Mahindra Racing for the all new Formula E series, a historic new championship for Electric race cars for the inaugural season in 2014-2015.

Karun was born into a motor racing family where his father, grandfather and even grandmother used to race! After winning the Indian National Championship on debut in 2000, he won the Formula Asia Championship in 2001 before moving to England where he was a front-runner in Formula 3. Karun went back to Asia and won the Asian Renault V6 series in 2006, which served as a launch pad up to GP2 and then Formula 1.

In recent times, Karun has also experienced historic racing competing in a Jaguar E type and a Mini Cooper S at the Goodwood Revival apart from being a regular driver for the Williams Formula 1 team's heritage cars.

In 2013, Karun became a member of the first ever FIA Driver's Commission and continues to represent the rights and views of drivers from across the world.

He also conducts two major charity events, the "Karun's Karting Carnival" in the UK and the "KC500", a 500 kilometre cycling event run in South India to raise funds for the education of underprivileged children in India through his family run Vishnu Devananda Charitable Trust.

How do you see the future of India in terms of racing?

That's a hard question to answer to be honest. The sport had a big bump in 2010 - 2011 when we had two drivers in F1, a team and a race in India. Since then, things have dipped a little bit and plateaued so now we need to find the next catalyst to boost the sport in the country.

What is being done today to nurture new Indian talent?

There are now several racing and karting series in India which didn't exist when I was starting out. This gives the next generation more platforms and opportunities to find their feet in the sport and learn their craft at a younger age. They are now more knowledgeable about the sport and are able to find their way up the motorsport ladder in new and different championships which didn't exist a decade ago.

What are your personal plans for the future, both as a driver and beyond?

I would like to carry on in Sportscar racing where I have been competing since 2012. Racing at Le Mans is a magical experience that I absolutely love and it's a race I'd love to win one day. Beyond driving, I've now worked with 5 major global Formula 1 TV broadcasters, I manage a couple of young Indian drivers, I work with a company in the UK designing race tracks around the world and also work with the Williams F1 team as a business consultant on their heritage car business. So all in all, life is pretty busy!



Spa-Francorchamps: a mythical race track in the middle of the forest

Regularly acclaimed by drivers from across the world, the Spa-Francorchamps Circuit is one of motorsport's legendary tracks. It has an undulating profile with fast corners such as the famous and unique Raidillon, and presides over the middle of a conifer forest reverberating to the roar of revving engines. Resolutely turned to the future, the track has made the shift to Industry 4.0 and is equipped with the latest cutting-edge technology, both for drivers and their teams, as well as for the general public.

This legendary racing track hosts the Belgian F1 Grand Prix. With a length of a little over 7 km, it is the longest in the world championship and is regularly referred to as the most beautiful circuit in the world. This global label for the Spa loop is rarely disputed and is due to its undulating profile and quick turns, with its famous and unique Raidillon, but also to a natural and majestic setting, in the middle of forests of fir trees in which the noise of the engines resonate. The Circuit is a monument of Belgian history, equally well known throughout the world as the Atomium or the Grand Place in Brussels.

Prestigious winners over the years
From Juan-Manuel Fangio to Lewis

Hamilton, and including the likes of Alberto Ascari, Jack Brabham, Bruce McLaren, Jim Clark, Alain Prost, Ayrton Senna, Michael Schumacher, Henri Pescarolo (with a record lap on the

"We have 40 people on site and every day they make sure that the track is perfect."

old track of an average of 262 km/h), Fernando Alonso, Kimi Raikkonen, Jacky Ickx, Thierry Boutsen, Stoffel Vandoorne and Sebastian Vettel, the majority of the greatest names

of international motorsport have triumphed here at one time or another. But Spa-Francorchamps is also a real hub for tourist attractions and sporting events. In addition to the Belgian F1 Grand Prix, it also welcomes a round of the World Endurance Championship, the 24 Hours of Spa, as well as all kinds of activities, national races and foreign championships, trials, track discoveries, visits and incentives. All in all, the Circuit operates 220 days a year.

A place of choice for corporate events

Apart from sporting events, the wonderful environment of the Circuit is an asset for the success of any seminar: original work rooms, luxurious Eau





DID YOU KNOW?

Spa is also the city where the concept "Health Spa" originates from. The small town of Spa, located close to the Circuit, has long been known for its natural springs and the healing power of its waters. Over time, the name "Spa" has grown so famous that it is now being used for health and relaxation centers across the world.

Rouge lounges for receptions, gala dinners, and other places with the exotic touch that will guarantee the success of business events. Even when coupled with business, Spa-Francorchamps remains true to form. Invitations, event organizations, receptions can all be organized in this idyllic setting. For a group of 10, 50, 100, or even 600 participants, it is possible to find a suitable space that matches the size of the event. Nestled in the middle of nature, the Circuit also offers guests the opportunity to discover the joys of a track introduction session alongside a renowned driver or a discovery of the Circuit at the wheel of their own car. Living a great race by mingling with champions, strolling in the paddocks in all tranquillity: guests return completely satisfied with the exceptional climate that is thus created.

A dedicated Business Club

The Circuit has also introduced the "Spa-Francorchamps Business

Club". Numerous companies are typically present during the highly competitive and thrilling races and events that take place each year on the track. The Circuit therefore aims to be a catalyst for firms throughout the year. Its goal in creating the Spa-Francorchamps Business Club is to allow companies to expand their network of acquaintances and, of course, to develop their business. Indeed, as an internationally renowned actor in the Region, both in terms of economy and tourism, the Circuit of Spa-Francorchamps has an undeniable role to play in developing the local as well as the regional economy.

New CEO, new digital strategy

Nathalie Maillet was appointed as the new CEO of the Circuit on 1 July, 2016 and by the end of the year, a new strategy had been devised for the next five years. "A lot of the work is going into the digital sphere in order to have a 100% connected circuit", says Nathalie Maillet. "We have almost 40 people on site and every day they make sure that the track is perfect. We employ 13 people in the workshop - electricians, plumbers and so on. Recently, we spent a lot of time on further enhancing track security. We've also changed all the cameras around it and we have built a brand new Race Control system equipped with the latest technologies."

"We work for the fans. We have

some creative ideas for fans that we hope will work very well. First, we are going to offer free WiFi around the circuit and for that we've just finished installing 15 kilometres of fibres. We will also launch an app in 2018. The year 2017 was all about building the digital strategy and 2018 will be about implementing it."

Centenary celebrations around the corner

In three years' time, the Circuit will be celebrating its centenary. "To prepare for these festivities, we have designed a temporary exhibition that should open next year," notes Nathalie Maillet, proudly. "The idea is to also attract people that don't regularly come to the circuit - families and kids. Most of the time men go to the track and drive and families stay at home. But we also want families to come, even the ones that don't like racing, families that may prefer bicycles. For them we will have electrical bicycles and they will be able to ride the 7 km of the current circuit, as well as the 14 km of the old circuit, and get the full story with augmented reality. We're going to tell the story of the 100 years of the circuit. It will even be possible from people at the other end of the world to connect remotely and to enjoy the experience as well."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.spa-francorchamps.be/en



Expats in Belgium: attractive tax concessions

Living in Belgium is a popular choice for many expatriates. The expat community in Belgium is estimated at approximately 750,000 people, almost a tenth of the country's population. The high standards of living coupled with excellent healthcare, education and public facilities have made Belgium popular. A fact further enhanced by the number of attractive tax incentives.

Resident or non-resident?

For individuals the taxation in Belgium depends on whether you are a resident (Personal income tax residents) or non-resident (Personal income tax non-residents) of the country. For Belgian taxation purposes, you are classified as a resident if you are an inhabitant of the Kingdom, meaning that your domicile is in Belgium or, when not domiciled in Belgium, your seat of wealth is located in Belgium.

If you are living in Belgium and are registered with your local municipality in the National Register of Individuals, then you are classified as a resident and have to declare your worldwide income in your Personal income tax return for residents. Your taxable income is

IN A NUTSHELL

- Special tax concessions exist for foreigners who temporarily reside in Belgium for work.
- Reimbursements made by the employer to cover extra expenses can be treated as tax-free allowances up to a certain limit.
- An application request must be made to qualify for the expatriate special income status.

the income left after deductions for social security contributions, personal allowance, professional costs, etc. If you live in Belgium as a non-resident under the Belgian tax legislation (i.e. you are still considered resident of another country based on tax law), you will only have to declare the income earned in Belgium.

Taxes in Belgium take into account the individual's family situation, such as whether or not you have dependents. Tax is paid on a progressive scale with marginal tax rates of 25 to 50 %, depending on the amount of taxable income. Tax-free allowances depend on the family situation of the employee as well as tax deduction payments such as pension and dependents. There is, however, a special tax regime for non-Belgians who are in the country on a temporary basis for work, allowing them to be treated as non-residents/expats for tax purposes.

Who can apply?

Qualification for the expatriate special income tax regime is not automatic. It requires the filing of an application request by both the employer and

A special tax regime for foreigners who are in Belgium on a temporary basis for work allows them to be treated as non-residents/expats for tax purposes

expatriate employee within six months of the first day of the month following the start of employment or secondment to Belgium. It should be clearly shown that the four qualifying conditions have been met:

- The expatriate must be a foreign national
- The expatriate must be either an executive or a director of a company, or a researcher or a specialist
- The expatriate must be a non resident for Belgian income tax purposes. The Expatriate Tax Circular of 8 August 1983 lists a set of factual circumstances that are indicative of such a non resident status
- The expatriate must be temporarily employed in Belgium by an employer that is part of an international group of companies

What tax regime for expats?

The expatriate who meets these conditions will benefit from the fact that reimbursements made by the employer (to cover the extra expenses) are treated as tax-free allowances, up to a limit of EUR 11,250 or EUR 29,750 per year (see below).

Furthermore, the expatriate is only taxable in Belgium for work actually performed in Belgium and on other Belgian-sourced income.

Distinction between repetitive and non-repetitive expenses

A distinction is made between non-repetitive expenses and

repetitive expenses. The non-repetitive expenses (once-only expenses) are for instance moving costs on arrival in Belgium, costs of setting up a household, moving costs when leaving Belgium.

The repetitive expenses and losses are the differences in the cost of housing and the cost of living between Belgium and the executive's country of origin; the cost of schooling for children in primary or secondary schools; the cost of an annual trip to the country of origin for the executive and their family (for trips by air, only economy class fares are covered); losses incurred by an executive's inability to rent his home in the country of origin or to rent it at a normal market rental value; transport costs following special circumstances (death or serious illness of a close family member of the executive or their spouse); differences in foreign exchange rates; "tax equalization"; costs for the transportation of children who stay outside Belgium, permitting

them to make no more than two visits per year to their parents. The actual allowance paid only qualifies for exclusion to the extent permitted by prescribed guidelines.

The excludable portion of repetitive expenses is limited to EUR 11,250 per year for expatriate personnel employed by operating companies, and to EUR 29,750 per year for expatriate personnel employed by controlling and coordinating offices or research centres. Non-repetitive expenses may be excluded without limit.

The determination of the expatriate's country of origin has a direct impact on the total amount of tax-free allowances as the excludable expenses may only cover the cost differential between Belgium and the expatriate's country of origin.

What about education expenses?

Education expenses may be excluded without limit. Education expenses (duly justified with invoices) for the expatriate's children in primary or secondary schools, while repetitive in nature, are expenses that can be excluded in addition to the maximum amounts mentioned above. The excludable cost of education in Belgium includes tuition and registration fees, local transport, and other expenses imposed by the school, but exclude boarding expenses (food and lodging) and the cost of private lessons.

PART OF A BROAD SET OF INCENTIVES

The tax incentives for expatriates are part of a broad set of measures that make Belgium attractive for companies. Other incentives include the Notional Interest Deduction and the Advance Ruling practice. Contact one of the AWEX offices in India for additional information:

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New measures make hiring more attractive

Lower flat rates for social security taxes, new regulations to stimulate night work in the e-Commerce sector, reduction of notice periods, greater flexibility in working hours. These are some of the strong measures taken recently by the Government to make business in Belgium easier than ever.

Flat rate for social security taxes

From 2018, the rate for social security taxes will be lowered to 25% for white collar workers and to 35% for blue collar workers. This is a decrease of 5% over the previous level and will reduce the cost of hiring staff. In addition, every employer hiring for the first time in Belgium is entitled to important reductions in social security taxes:

- Total exemption from basic social security contributions for life for the 1st employee
- Important reduction in social security contributions for over 3 years for the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th employees

An Indian company hiring for the first time in Belgium will automatically qualify for these measures even if the employees are Indian nationals.

Night work in e-Commerce

Furthermore, the law concerning feasible and manageable work was published in 2017 and one of the new measures that came into force on 1 February, 2017 concerns night work in the e-Commerce sector. This law offers the possibility to further develop night work in Belgium. It allows an employer in the e-Commerce sector to organize

night work more flexibly between 8pm and 6am based on sector-specific regulations.

Shorter notice periods

For employment contracts that started on or after 1 January, 2014, notice periods for permanent contracts depend solely on the employee's length of service with the employer.

If termination during:	1 st year	2 nd year	After 2 years	After 3 years	After 4 years	After 5 years and until 19 years	From 20 years
1 st quarter	2 weeks	8 weeks	12 weeks	13 weeks	15 weeks	3 weeks per year of seniority	62 weeks + 1 additional week per year of seniority
2 nd quarter	4 weeks	9 weeks					
3 rd quarter	6 weeks	10 weeks					
4 th quarter	7 weeks	11 weeks					

If an employer wants the termination to take effect immediately without allowing the employee to work during the notice period, he or she will be liable to pay a notice compensation equal to the wages the employee would have been entitled to in case of work during that period. The employer is only required to state the reason for dismissal if the employee requests so, except in the cases of serious misconduct. Furthermore, there is no need for the employer to state the reason for dismissal of an employee during the first 6 months of a contract. Starting from January 2018, if the employer wants to dismiss an employee within the first 6 months



If termination during:	1 st year	2 nd year	After 2 years	After 3 years	After 4 years	After 5 years and until 19 years	From 20 years
1 st quarter	1 week	8 weeks	12 weeks	13 weeks	15 weeks	3 weeks per year of seniority	62 weeks + 1 additional week per year of seniority
More than 3 months but less than 4 months	3 weeks	9 weeks					
More than 4 months but less than 5 months	4 weeks	10 weeks					
More than 5 months but less than 6 months	5 weeks	11 weeks					
3 rd quarter	6 weeks						
4 th quarter	7 weeks						

law brings the reference period of the limited flexibility scheme to 12 months and thus allows working time to be annualized at the sectorial level or at the company level by introducing

From 2018 onwards, notice periods will be shortened for employers wishing to terminate a contract within the first 6 months of employment.

of employment, the abovementioned notice period is shortened. This new law is applicable only to working contracts initiated after 1 January, 2018.

Increased flexibility in working hours

Generally speaking, the full working regime in Belgium is fixed at 38 hours per week and 5 working days per week. However, sector-specific regulations can rule differently. One of the new measures that came into force on 1 February, 2017 following the publication of the law concerning feasible and manageable work concerns the annualization of limited flexibility.

What is limited flexibility? It is a scheme allowing for the provision of heavy or light schedules in alternation depending on work volume fluctuations within a company. The alternate schedules may be maximum 2 hours more or 2 hours less than the normal daily schedule (maximum 9 working hours per day) and maximum 5 hours more or 5 hours less than the normal weekly schedule. At the end of a 12-month period, the average weekly working regime should still be 38 hours.

The annualization of working time is the calculation of the average weekly working time over a period of one year rather than quarterly. The

limited flexibility. Employers need to follow relevant rules to introduce a limited flexibility scheme within their company.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Our survey says: Wallonia scores highly in a recent Europe-wide logistics study

According to a study of 50 European regions by business consultancy PwC, Wallonia is the fourth most attractive region in Europe for logistics stakeholders, and the most attractive in Belgium.



Based on the June survey, and at the request of Logistics in Wallonia, the Union Wallonne des Entreprises (Walloon Business Federation) and the Wallonia Export-Investment Agency (AWEX), PwC produced a report to update a 2009 study by Cushman & Wakefield and highlight areas that could still be improved.

Large number of benchmarking criteria

In its survey, PwC analysed and compared 50 European regions based on criteria that are decisive to setting up a distribution centre:

- The market's proximity: buying power and economic activities.
- Work: availability, flexibility, productivity, employer-employee relationship.
- Operational costs: cost of energy, workforce, property.
- Distribution facilities: IT, proximity of cargo airports, maritime ports, density of the road network, boat routes and railway lines.
- Availability of land: industrial parks and building land.

- Regulation and taxes: political stability, administrative obligations, freedom to invest, transparency, effectiveness.
- Competences: linguistic skills and logistics expertise.

At the centre of an efficient transport network

In addition to its advantageous geographic location, Wallonia – the Southern, French-speaking region of Belgium – has many assets for attracting new distribution centres:

- A market of 60 million consumers with a high buying power that can be accessed within four hours.
- A cargo airport that's listed among the top eight in Europe.
- The highest tonnage for inland

The region of Wallonia boasts a geographical edge that is further enhanced by outstanding skills and productivity of the local workforce.

river transport in Europe connected to Antwerp and Rotterdam.



- Effective rail connections, especially to Southern Europe.

Bernard Piette, Director General of Wallonia's Logistics competitiveness cluster, also highlights the availability of workforce and property, although it is still necessary to "improve the perception and image of Wallonia on the international stage".

Further building on Wallonia's image

"For Wallonia to continue to be competitive, it is time to reconstitute a significant stock of large areas of land – more than 15 hectares – to attract large installation projects," said Pascale Delcomminette, CEO of AWEX, who agreed that a great deal of work remained to be done in terms of image. Samuel Saelens, advisor at UWE, added: "It's important to specify that we did not choose the criteria in order to give ourselves an advantage: we wanted to have a frame of reference that allows us to understand where we are."

(Sally Tipper)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.investinwallonia.be

Wallonia and Meghalaya ink regional partnership

First joint initiative in animal breeding and healthcare

During the recent State Visit of their majesties the King and the Queen of the Belgians to India, a good number of agreements were signed – both in New Delhi and in Mumbai. Government-to-government, business-to-business and university-to-university partnerships were all on the menu. The Belgian region of Wallonia and the Indian state of Meghalaya signed a Memorandum of Understanding to boost bilateral relations between the two regional entities.



A broad regional agreement
In addition to the purely economic aspect, the

The regional agreement covers a wide range of areas, including trade, environment, training, agro-food, health, science and technology.

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Meghalaya and Wallonia aims to stimulate projects in a wide range of areas. The agreement mentions, for example, urban development, in reference to the Indian political will to make cities more "liveable" and "smarter". Other sectors in the spotlight include agro-food (e.g. cattle and pig farming), sports and recreation (Meghalaya

wishes to develop ecological tourism), health care (medical facilities), training, architecture and heritage. Minister-President Willy Borsus of the Government of Wallonia, who signed the agreement, sees this as a very good opportunity for Walloon companies: "In all these areas, first-to-market Walloon companies could benefit from a largely untapped market. This collaboration fully meets the desire of the Walloon Government to encourage our companies to further develop their exports and markets on an international scale."

The agreement provides for the creation of a working group to suggest, prepare and organize concrete collaborative projects. This working group will be composed of representatives of both parties and will meet at least once a year.

Discovering lesser known regions

Through this agreement, both parties aim to stimulate the development of joint projects between actors from both regions. They also wish to introduce to Walloon companies and decision-makers an Indian region that is not as well known to them. Indeed, Walloon companies today know India's main cities, such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai or Kolkata, whereas the rest of the country is largely unexplored. Yet many opportunities are to be seized elsewhere in India too. This agreement aims to provide a reference framework for any company wishing to explore new regions.

Wallonia and Meghalaya share similarities

Like India, Belgium is a federal country. It has 3 Regions (Wallonia, Brussels and Flanders). Wallonia is the southern, French-speaking region of Belgium, bordering France to the South, Luxembourg to the South-East, and Germany to the East. The region has a size of 16,844 sq.km. (a little smaller than Meghalaya) and has a population of 3.61 million people (slightly more than Meghalaya). The scale and size of both regions is therefore similar. In addition, Wallonia enjoys a humid climate and lush greenery, making the two environments in both regions comparable as well.

Letter of Intent for livestock projects

A first concrete collaboration project to result from this regional partnership is the joint initiative to promote excellence in livestock, animal healthcare, breeding techniques, animal disease prevention, and education and training. To formalize this initiative, a Letter of Intent (LoI) was signed between the Department of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Government of Meghalaya, and Promotion of Animal Production of Wallonia (ProAniWal). Through this LoI, the two parties aim to work together in a large number of areas of cooperation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
www.wallonia.in

GreenWin: Innovation Cluster for chemical engineering and materials in Wallonia

Headquartered near Brussels, GreenWin is one of the six triple helix innovation clusters set forth by the Government of Wallonia, the French-speaking southern region of Belgium. Its mission is to innovate in sustainable chemistry, in environmental technologies, as well as in materials & sustainable building.

The Cluster aims to support the development of ambitious collaborative projects in R&D, industrial investments and skills development, with an objective of economic growth for industrial members and of job creation in Wallonia.



GreenWin's activities focus on three leading markets:

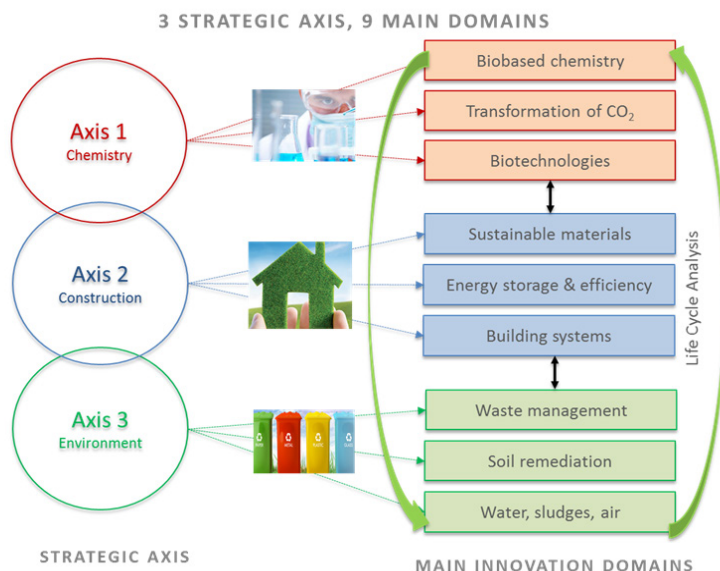
- Sustainable chemistry, including, among others, CO₂ transformation into a variety of value-added products, process intensification and white biotechnologies;

- Sustainable materials for the construction sector: production of building materials or building systems with reduced environmental impact, energy efficiency and energy storage solutions;
- Environmental technologies: waste treatment and recycling, water and air treatment, soil remediation, sludge recovery.

GreenWin's operational structure is composed of permanent internal staff members and

GREENWIN OFFERS:

- A platform for networking, information and knowledge exchange
- A support to set up R&D partnership projects
- A labelling of projects for their financing by regional funds
- A dynamic environment for sustainable technologies
- Visibility and support for international R&D and business partnerships



a network of external experts or consultants. The Cluster is leading or involved in several European projects. From 2013 to 2017, the Innovation Cluster led the SCOT project funded as part of the European Seventh Framework Program and dedicated to CO₂ utilization (www.scotproject.org). Following the SCOT Project, GreenWin is helping with the creation of a new European CO₂ Association. This "CO₂ Value Europe" Association, which is due to be launched in the second half of 2017, will aim, among other things, to propose an ambitious and integrated vision for the development of CO₂ capture and use in the medium and long terms.



Supporting innovative R&D projects

GreenWin supports innovation and stimulates the development of projects, with a view to growing the

All members are involved in developing the green economy and motivated by the opportunities resulting from pooling skills and sharing resources

industrial infrastructure of Wallonia and creating jobs. The selected innovative files constitute a portfolio of quality projects of international scope, validated by independent experts and complying with the principles of sustainable development. The Cluster is also open to foreign members and fosters collaborative partnerships, always in a spirit of innovation.

Examples of GreenWin success stories

Sustainable Chemistry

March 2017 saw the completion of the LOWEMI project, which exceeded the expected goals. With this project, Wallonia has now positioned itself as a leader in the European market for

wall paints with zero environmental impact. Indeed, the Dothée Company recently developed ECOMAT, the most efficient European wall painting with zero VOC (Volatile Organic Compound). The project generated an unexpected result in the form of VOCBOX, a new instrument for measuring VOC emissions. A true innovation on a global scale!

Digital – Environmental technologies

The EcoCityTools project, coordinated by 1 Spatial Company, aims to revolutionize the environmental management of cities. Each year, 7 million premature deaths are linked to air pollution, or 1 of 8 deaths globally. Densification of the population leads to challenges related to air quality, pollution, energy transition, networks, demography, mobility, In cities, during the peaks of heat, the absence of wind prevents the pollutants to disperse, making the routes riskier and congesting streets. This issue could be addressed by improving the localization of pollution peaks. The final objective of the project is therefore to develop decision-making tools and services to effectively establish environmental and energy diagnoses at the neighborhood level and to assist in making choices for area rehabilitation or development.

Open to business

GreenWin brings together about 200 members in a single network, including 150 companies (75% of SMEs), 5 universities (140 university departments), 15 research centres, 1000 researchers, various high schools and 6 professional training organizations. All members are involved in developing the green economy and motivated by the opportunities resulting from pooling skills and sharing resources.

GreenWin also provides its members with international visibility and supports them in accessing new markets through technological and commercial partnerships. Unlike clusters in India, the members are not necessarily located in a close geographical entity. The 5 other clusters are BioWin (life sciences), Logistics in Wallonia (logistics), MecaTech (mechanical engineering), Skywin (aerospace), and WagrALIM (agro-food).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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<https://www.linkedin.com/company-beta/2767348/>

<https://www.facebook.com/pole.wallon.greenwin>

<https://twitter.com/PoleGreenWin>

Expert support in ◀ registering your chemical ▶ product for the EU market

Registering a plant protection product, biocide or chemical is compulsory within the European Union (EU). This process can be complex and lengthy if you are entering the European market for the first time. An expert support company, however, can help you greatly smoothen the registration process of your product. Redebel, based in Wallonia, is one of them.

Redebel Group, a private family company, offers the full range of services for the registration of plant protection products, biocides and chemicals. Since 30 years, Redebel's experts have been helping companies obtain the required authorizations for marketing their products in all 28 EU Member States. The Redebel team offers tailor-made solutions for the resolution of regulatory issues with the European Commission as well as with any of the 28 national authorities within the EU to obtain the approval of active substances as well as products. Redebel's services offering revolves primarily around product registration and field trials.

Registration: from conventional chemistry to biocides

Redebel Regulatory Affairs (RRA) has over 25 years of expertise in the registration of active substances and plant protection products. "We can work with customers on their projects for all types of products," says Sébastien Dumont de Chassart, Managing Director of Redebel Regulatory Affairs. "Whether it's conventional chemistry, biopesticides or biostimulants, our experts can run the trials and are therefore able to support a company throughout the entire development process of a product. We operate as a handholding partner in all EU Member States, from a product's field trials to its ultimate registration."



"In terms of upcoming chemistry, our range of services is also expanding," adds Sébastien Dumont de Chassart. "Biopesticides, for example, are developing on a daily basis and offer an increasingly specific alternative to conventional products. Over the years, RRA has gained valuable expertise in this field, notably by

participating in the REBECA program. Based on this expertise, RRA can run the entire process; from strategic thinking underpinning the biopesticide to its registration in the different Member States. The same is true for biostimulants, which contain a substance or a micro-organism capable of stimulating a plant's natural functions. A biostimulant may be used in conjunction with conventional chemicals or with biopesticides. Again, thanks to its expertise, RRA is at the forefront in this particular area and is constantly developing. And in terms of biocides, our European network and privileged contacts with the European Commission are key assets in advising companies regarding transitional authorizations of biocidal products in Europe. We provide help in preparing the application files for substances and products until their final submission to the relevant

IN SHORT

- Redebel's team of 60 experts builds on 30 years of experience
- Files are handled in full confidentiality
- The company fosters direct contacts, for a privileged and personalized relationship
- It has close working relationships with service providers and laboratories all over Europe
- Privileged contacts with the European Commission and all 28 national competent authorities

authorities and monitor application files until final approval is obtained.”

Putting REACH within your reach

The European REACH regulation covers a variety of sectors including detergents, protective coatings, solvents for plant protection products and biocides. RRA has been involved in the field of REACH since this regulation first came into force and is able to manage all aspects of chemical product approval files in line with the REACH regulation. These rules apply to the players using substances in various sectors outside of plant

“Redebel’s service range also covers upcoming chemistry such as biopesticides and biostimulants”

protection products and biocides. RRA was involved in the previous 2010 and 2013 deadlines and is currently being consulted for the 31 May, 2018 deadline.

Field trials are key for a product’s market launch

Field trials can be conducted within the framework of R&D, demonstrations or registrations and make it possible to develop, understand and position a product on the European market. Redebel has over 30 years of experience in this matter. “We are committed to carrying out quality work,” specifies Sébastien Dumont de Chassart. “As a matter of fact, Redebel is the European specialist in agricultural testing for all types of products under Good Experimental Practice (GEP) for efficiency and selectivity as well as Good Laboratory Practice (GLP) for residue certification. Our study directors will oversee GLP and GEP studies in accordance with applicable regulations and Redebel quality standards. Throughout the trial period, they work closely with the main managers as well as the quality assurance manager.”

Recently, the company has extended

its service offering to non-target plant trials as well. Plants may involuntarily be exposed to plant protection products from drifting or residue from previous cropping periods. Following regulation 1107/2009, the EU authorities therefore require scientific evidence that these products have a controlled impact on the environment. The GLP department recently undertook ecotoxicological studies to meet these requirements. Non-target plant trials are conducted under controlled conditions (greenhouse or phytotron). The tested species (up to 10 species per trial) must

represent a broad taxonomic diversity and must be selected as per specific test item properties. Plants are grown in pots and tested concentrations are determined by a range-finding pre-test or following the maximum application rate in effect.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Website: www.redebel.com

E-mail: info@redebel.com

Tel: +32 71 853 392

European Research & Development



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www.redebel.com



© Nicolas Borel - Atelier Christian de Portzamparc

Hergé Museum: on a Comic Strip Trail

A spectacular museum dedicated to Hergé, the pen name of Georges Remi, who created the comic-book hero Tintin, is located in the Belgian town of Louvain-la-Neuve, in the Wallonia region. The museum, a fine addition to a somewhat drab skyline, is best seen at nightfall or under grey skies, says its architect Christian de Portzamparc. In murky conditions, the building's structure of angled white planes glows from within, offering glimpses through huge windows of an "imagined landscape" inside.

The museum, built at a cost of over €15m, runs around a central atrium formed of curving walls in bold colours, pierced by high metal walkways. An internal lift shaft at the core of the atrium is painted with a chequerboard pattern, evoking the moon rocket in one of Tintin's

bestselling adventures. The structure stands on stilts in a park and visitors enter across a long footbridge. It feels like boarding a ship only provisionally moored at Louvain-la-Neuve, some 35 kms outside of Brussels.

Within is a landscape of the imagination, brightly lit and coloured, as out-

side a steady drizzle falls against the windows from leaden skies. If that sounds like a memory of childhood reading indoors, it is no accident. Since Tintin's first appearance in a Belgian Catholic newspaper 80 years ago, generations have roamed the world vicariously through his comic-book adven-

tures as a trouble-prone (if unusually clean-living) foreign reporter.

Hergé's creative process detailed

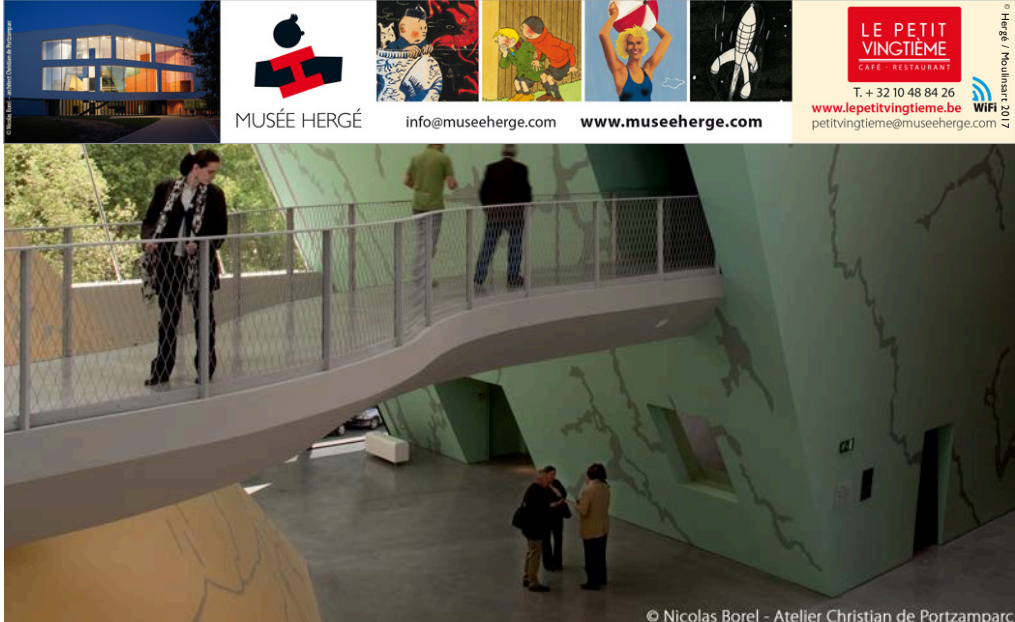
It's a display that perfectly sums up what makes the Hergé Museum such a fascinating place to visit. On a TV screen in a darkened room the face of the artist's most famous creation Tintin slowly appears one line at a time until he greets you with a broad smile. Nearby, a wall is covered with digital images of all the other characters. A winning combination of hi-tech technology and the classic *ligne claire* (clear line) drawing style the cartoonist was famous for. It conveys the message that although Hergé is synonymous with a certain plus-four wearing hero and his little white dog, there is much more to discover.

The museum is the brainchild of Fanny Rodwell, Hergé's second wife who set up the Hergé Foundation in 1987 after his death four years earlier. Determined to create an environment that did the cartoonist justice, she looked long and hard for the perfect location before the City and the University of Louvain-la-Neuve suggested the spot where the building now stands.

From the outside the museum has been made to look like a moored ship to give the structure an air of levitation while large windows cut slightly irregularly reflect the layout of a comic book page. The inside is simply extraordinary with slanted, colourful walls that feature Hergé sketches and are linked with metal walkways. A black-and-white chequered lift-shaft reminds the iconic rocket that carried Tintin to the moon.

Tintin walked on
the moon a good
15 years before Neil
Armstrong

The care and attention taken with the main atrium is mirrored in all the ex-



© Nicolas Borel - Atelier Christian de Portzamparc

hibition halls. Over the course of eight well laid-out sections, Hergé's life is analyzed fully. There are panel upon panel of frenetic pencil drawings that underline the amount of work the cartoonist put into every story he created before he arrived at the clean drawings we all adore. One page out of the weekly children's supplement *Le Petit Vingtième*,

the most interesting part of the museum where Hergé's personal items are on display. The man liked Ella Fitzgerald, Pink Floyd and The Beatles. He was also a big art collector and every few months different works the cartoonist bought are hung on the walls. Hergé's desk, ink stains and all, stands in a section celebrating the team who assisted

him at his Brussels studio while another wing is dedicated to the global impact the artist had in life and death; three of the four paintings Andy Warhol did of Hergé adorning one wall.

TINTIN-THE FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

Above all Georges Remi wanted to be a foreign correspondent. So, when his boss at *Le XXe Siècle*, a Belgian Catholic daily where Hergé was working as an illustrator, asked him to create a cartoon strip for a children's supplement, the profession of the main character was never in doubt.

In 1929 journalist Tintin, accompanied by his dog Snowy, headed off to Russia to report on the evils of Bolshevism. It was the first step in a remarkable journey that would take the ginger hero around the world and beyond (Tintin walked on the moon a good 15 years before Neil Armstrong) as he encountered giant spiders, aliens, Al Capone and Bigfoot. The fact that a new Tintin movie by Peter Jackson is due for release is testament to Tintin's enduring appeal.

which first featured Tintin, shows how the young detective speeding off in a convertible gave us the most famous hairstyle in the cartooning world. Other highlights include striking, art deco advertising posters drawn by Hergé, a display exploring the real-life people behind characters like Captain Haddock, Thomson and Thompson and Professor Calculus, and thrilling exhibits showing how science, cinema and travel influenced the artist's work. Soothing jazz music welcomes you to perhaps

Experience that stays

By the time you stroll back into the atrium it is impossible not to have a well-rounded view of Belgium's greatest cartoonist. After a few hours here it feels like Georges Remi has fully emerged from beneath Tintin's large shadow. In prime position, close to the lift is a wonderful bronze statue of Tintin and Snowy by Nat Neujean. And it is here where you discover another benefit of visiting the house that

Fanny Rodwell built. Having just learnt so much about Hergé, his greatest creation is more loveable than ever before.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Studying in Belgium: A smart choice

Belgium is one of the most multicultural countries in Europe, offering an international experience to anyone who chooses to study there – including in English. Let's take a closer look at the options offered in Wallonia and Brussels, the French-speaking community in Belgium.

A small country, with a big cultural history, Belgium is home to 11 million people and has land borders with Germany, Luxembourg, France and the Netherlands.

With a welcoming environment for students, Belgium is a country where people speak French, Dutch, German and English. It's also perfectly positioned if you wish to spend your spare time exploring Europe. For example, Brussels is located 1.5 hour by plane from Barcelona, 2.5 hours by car from Paris, or 2 hours by high-speed train from London.

Why study in French-speaking Belgium?

Studying in Belgium offers more than a rich cultural pastime, thanks to many excellent institutions dotted across the country. Our Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) do cater for international students, with many courses taught partly or fully in English. More than 20% of students enrolled in our HEIs are foreigners and the

number of international PhD students reaches almost 50%. Obviously, if you are interested in studying in the native French language, the choice of courses available will open up for you.

WHAT MAKES BELGIUM SPECIAL IN EDUCATION

- Multicultural environment
- High quality education at an affordable price
- Vast choice of courses in English
- Approximately 400 Indian students are already studying in Belgium

An integral part of the European Higher Education Area

Education in the Wallonia and Brussels regions is an integrated part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This results from the commitment made by the authorities and the HEIs to guarantee the quality of higher education, to encourage student mobility and to make the

academic system international and democratic. This also means that any credits acquired or degree awarded in Wallonia or Brussels can be recognised in the 48 countries of the EHEA.

The HEIs in Wallonia and Brussels issue Bachelor degrees, Master degrees and Doctorates corresponding to three cycle structures. The programmes are defined in credits compatible with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). ECTS is a standard for comparing the study attainment and performance of students of higher education across the EHEA. For successfully completed studies, ECTS credits are awarded.

There are 6 universities, 19 university colleges and 16 colleges of arts in Wallonia and Brussels (see text box). All are recognized and subsidized by the Belgian authorities.

From medicine to law in English

Though most courses in Wallonia and Brussels are taught in French, there are an increasing amount of internationally

Universities in Wallonia and Brussels

- Université catholique de Louvain (UCL)
- Université de Liège (ULg)
- Université de Mons (UMons)
- Université de Namur (UNamur)
- Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)
- Université Saint-Louis - Bruxelles (USL-B)

University colleges in Wallonia and Brussels

- Haute Ecole de la Province de Liège (HEPL)
- Haute Ecole Louvain en Hainaut (HELHa)
- Haute Ecole provinciale de Hainaut - Condorcet (HE Condorcet)
- Haute Ecole Léonard de Vinci (HE Vinci)
- Haute Ecole libre mosane (HELMo)
- Haute Ecole de Namur-Liège Luxembourg (HENALLUX)
- Haute Ecole Galilée (HEG)
- Haute Ecole EPHEC (EPHEC)
- Haute Ecole en Hainaut (HEH)
- Haute Ecole Charlemagne (HECH)
- Haute Ecole « Groupe ICHEC – ISC Saint-Louis – ISFSC » (HE ICHEC ISFSC)
- Haute Ecole Francisco Ferrer (HEFF)
- Haute Ecole Albert Jacquard (HEAJ)
- Haute Ecole libre de Bruxelles - Ilya Prigogine (HELB)
- Haute Ecole Robert Schuman (HERS)
- Haute Ecole de la Ville de Liège (HEL)
- Haute Ecole Lucia de Brouckère (HELDB)
- Haute Ecole de la Province de Namur (HEPN)
- Haute Ecole Bruxelles-Brabant (HE2B)

Colleges of arts

- Conservatoire royal de Bruxelles (CRB)
- Arts²
- Conservatoire royal de Liège (CRLg)
- Ecole supérieure des Arts Saint-Luc de Liège (St-Luc Liège)
- Ecole nationale supérieure des Arts visuels de La Cambre (ENSAV – La Cambre)

aimed courses that allow you to study in English. The HEIs offer hundreds of study programmes (Masters and Doctorates) fully or partly taught in English in various subjects of Medicine, Biomedical sciences, Engineering, Management, Economics, Law, to name but a few. These programmes are listed on www.studyinbelgium.be/en/search-formations

Through the online search engine, you will find for each programme: a description of the course programme, duration, learning outcomes and job opportunities, detailed information about the institution, as well as admission and enrolment criteria.

In general, you have to prove your English language skills by showing the results of an accepted English Language test. You typically need a score of at least 6.0 IELTS or TOEFL 550 (Paper Based), or 213 (Computer Based) in order to study in Belgium in English.

Affordable tuition fees

Belgium uses the Euro for its currency and enjoys a high standard of living. It isn't an expensive place to live, making it a great place to study abroad for the cost-conscious student with excellent standards of education. There are also many discounts available for students, and there are opportunities for international students to save money with offers on recreational activities.

Belgium has basic tuition fees that are standard across the country. You should expect to pay around INR 60,000 for one year of studies in Belgium. In addition to these basic tuition fees, students from outside the European Union will be required to pay additional fees of between INR 1,5 lakh to 3 lakhs. Some scholarships are available for studying in Belgium. For further details on the scholarships you can refer to www.studyinbelgium.be.



- Institut des Arts de Diffusion (IAD)
- Ecole supérieure des Arts Saint-Luc de Bruxelles (St-Luc Bxl)
- Ecole supérieure des Arts Institut Saint-Luc à Tournai (St-Luc Tournai)
- Ecole supérieure des Arts – Ecole de Recherche graphique (ERG)
- Académie royale des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Bruxelles – Ecole supérieure des Arts (ARBA – ESA)
- Académie des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Tournai (ACT)
- Ecole Supérieure des Arts de la Ville de Liège - Académie Royale des Beaux - Arts de Liège (ESAL)
- Institut national supérieur des Arts du Spectacle et des Techniques de Diffusion (INSAS)
- Institut supérieur de Musique et de Pédagogie (IMEP)
- Ecole supérieure communale des Arts de l'Image "Le 75" (Le 75)
- Ecole supérieure des Arts du Cirque (ESAC)

Nationals from outside the European Union or the European Economic Area will need a visa to gain entry to the country to study. If you're studying a degree in Belgium you will need a visa that lasts longer than 90 days, although it does depend on what course you are planning on taking. All details in this matter can be found at www.vfsglobal.com/Belgium/India.



A Dilliwallah in Belgium

After previous spells in Malaysia, Singapore, and Germany, Rohit Ghosh is now posted in Waterloo, a little to the south of Brussels. His job at BASF makes him discover the world, together with his family. We met the Ghosh family in their Belgian home to listen to their experience of life there.

Rohit Ghosh and his family moved to Belgium in the summer of 2014. The first thing that took some getting used to was the weather... "The grey skies and intermittent rain did not exactly spell the likes of summer for us", says Rohit, who hails from Delhi. "But that was not our only first impression of Belgium. We found the country to be surprisingly green and immediately appreciated the beauty of the countryside, even more so under the rays of the few sunny days. On these sunny occasions, we choose to spend the days outside hiking and cycling or visiting around. Belgium also stands out as being clean, well organized, safe and welcoming. As for the frequent gloomy weather, we are slowly adapting to it and have even set up a barbeque in the garage so as to not let the weather get in our way! Obviously, the number of good Indian restaurants is limited compared to India, but we regularly hop over the channel to London where Indian food is served in abundance!"

Cultural similarities

Surprisingly enough, the Ghosh family has found many cultural similarities between India and Belgium. These include the importance attributed to sitting down and taking the time to share a warm meal with your family as well as neighbours helping and looking out for each other. For instance, their local community made sure to involve and introduce them to the Belgian culture. "Our daughter's fondest memory seems to be the first time she met Saint Nicholas", notes Rohit. On the sixth of December, Belgium celebrates Saint Nicholas, who is known as the patron saint of children. He is said to ride a donkey and stop by children's houses to deliver



them presents. "It's like Christmas celebrated early! And the next year, we made sure to share a part of our Indian culture by celebrating Diwali with our neighbours and making them taste Indian delicacies."

Open-minded for business

Business-wise, the Ghosh family perceives Belgians as open-minded, not scared of diversity and thus open to many types of business activities. "Evidently, Belgium and Brussels

Belgium is like a
box of chocolates:
what you see on the
outside does not give
any indication of what
filling lays within.

especially, being the EU headquarters, seem very business friendly", stresses Rohit. "However, my best advice to fellow Indians would be to know the

law well and be as informed as possible before starting a given venture. I would recommend seeking professional help for a smooth business establishment. Fiscal experts, for instance, can make one save considerable sums of tax money."

"Though Belgium is a small country, it has many different faces", adds Rohit. "Based on where you live, you can experience a very different side of the country. For example, in a big city like Brussels or Antwerp, life would be very different from living in a small village in the countryside. It is therefore advisable to consider all your options before choosing a location to settle down. Then, and this may be taken as a given, we advise to keep an open mind. I recall someone once describing Belgium like a box of chocolates—what you see on the outside does not give you any indication of what filling lays within. Therefore, do not be too quick to judge; be it the weather, the food or the people. Give it time, be patient and open and you will most likely find something you like. Finally, and if possible, learning one of the local languages can only work to your advantage!"

(Isabelle Willemart Khan)



◀ La Roma restaurant – A story of Italian and Indian food ▶

At the young age of 19, a brave Parvinder Singh from Kurukchetra district, Haryana, set off to travel around Europe. Upon arrival in Germany he first looked for a Sikh temple. It did not take long for him to bump into a fellow acquaintance. “I decided to follow him to Belgium, unsure of where to head next. I then landed up in Hannut, a small town in Wallonia, in the beginning of 1992, and I have called this place home ever since.”

Picking up new culinary skills Parvinder Singh initially worked in orchards while waiting for his paperwork to be accepted. He then found a job in a local Italian restaurant and picked up most of his culinary skills for Italian and French cuisine during his 8 years working there. Always looking ahead, he felt ready to start a family then on. “In 2001, I returned to India to get married and then moved back to Belgium to start a family,” recalls Parvinder. “At this point, I felt ready to start my own venture. This is when I opened an Indian restaurant in the heart of Hannut with my wife. We named it Maharaja.”

Despite all the efforts and personal investments put into the opening of the Maharaja and its 18 covers, the restaurant was not a success... A year and a revised business plan later, the Singhs decided to change their menu and rename the restaurant to suit local tastes better. The Maharaja became “La Roma” and started offering Italian and French cuisine, including pasta and pizza. Additionally, the restaurant

kept a limited choice of Indian dishes on their menu. “The restaurant’s makeover led to success and in 2013 we renovated and expanded capacity from 18 to 43 covers, as well doubling on kitchen and serving staff,” states a happy Parvinder. “With business doing well, we also found a profitable opportunity to open up a night shop close to the restaurant.”

Experiencing the local life and language

Having done business in Belgium for so long, Parvinder Singh reflects on the key fact of knowing the local language and sees it as an easy potential business barrier to overcome. “Both my wife and I actually learnt French while on the job and we decided to send our children to a French-speaking catholic school.” Along these lines, Parvinder’s best advice to Indians looking to potentially do business in Belgium is to first learn the language and then study the market thoroughly, ideally through experiencing life in Belgium.

When comparing India and Belgium, Parvinder Singh notes that interpersonal relationships are quite different. “I noticed that family plays a rather secondary role in the lives of the average Belgian compared to India,” he says. “However, there are many facets of Belgian life and culture that we have grown to highly appreciate. These include the all-round education from a young age. I find that children in Belgium are sensitized at a young age to be very aware of their surroundings and respecting laws and such. Furthermore, I highly regard the Belgian welfare system. I hope that my children will grow up to be doctors and I would like to help them build a hospital back in India while at the same time exporting and establishing a kind of welfare system it could run on.”

(Isabelle Willemart Khan)

RESTAURANT LA ROMA

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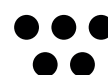
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education establishments

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_____ **CLUSTERS** in
LEADING-EDGE sectors

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QUALITY
OF LIFE

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AVAILABLE
WORKFORCE 

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turnover comes
from **EXPORTS**



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