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The Xenophobe's Guide To The Belgians (Xenophobe's Guides)



Synopsis

A guide to understanding the Belgians, best known for their fine chocolate, which reveals a humorous and insightful view of the people.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I bought before I moved to Belgium. The author gets a lot of stuff right, but remember not to apply everything to every Belgian!

Good book on Belgians. short and to the point. After 9 months, this covers most of the key point Belgians tell you ... About themselves ... If they consider you worth the effort. :-)That being said, I love living in Brussels.

Many words but not that much information. If you plan to read only one book about Belgians, look for a book giving more historical facts and going deeper into cultural and traditional aspects.

I bought this book to learn more about my own culture and how it is seen by others. Apart from one mistake (Belgians are mixed up by the Dutch as very keen on camping and caravans), it is spot on!

Good Book and I learned that Belgium is united almost by a miracle with two linguistically divided and sometimes rival communities the Flemish and the French. But along this You get to know the Food, Chocolates, The Beer, and the Good things this beautiful contry has to offer and of course the character of the Belgians.

Entertaining and educating

As much as I disliked the Xenophobe's guide to France, which gave a very negative image of the country, I enjoyed this one about the Belgians. The description of the national character, the tensions between Flemings and Walloons, their joint passion for food and drinks, their shared common sense, practical mind and good nature are all accurate. However, the book is not perfect and there are a few factual mistakes that need to be corrected for future editions. On p.37, it says that Belgians greet relatives and friends with a triple kiss. This is false. Belgians only kiss once, everywhere, unlike the French who kiss from one to four times depending on the region. On p.61, the author claims that Belgians prefer foreign channels to their own. That may be true to some extent for French speakers preferring French channels, but the Flemings are quite proud of their channels and will rarely go for Dutch channels instead. On p.69, the authors explains that Catholic schools are single-sex. This was true a few decades ago, but since the 1990's pretty much all schools in Belgium are unisex, even elitist schools. On p.75, it says that following the 2010 political crisis Belgium was left "with no government at all" for over one year. This is a common misconception, but there was actually an current-affair government in function during the whole period, which is why almost everything went as usual. P.84 is the worst in the book. Everything is wrong. The author says that, contrarily to the Dutch, the Flemish intentionally refuse to use French words. The fact is that Flemish is filled with French borrowings (e.g. 'communicatie' instead of the original Dutch word 'mededeling'). He says that the word Walloon comes from an ancient Celtic tribe, the Wala, when there has never been such a tribe. The names Walloon and Wallonia are fairly recent coinages. As for the French mimicking Walloon accents, most of the French don't even know what a Walloon accent is, and think that the Flemish accent is the "Belgian accent" in French. The French are often surprised when meeting native French-speaking Belgians (e.g. guests on TV shows) that they don't have an accent. On p.13, it says that "Belgians dislike the French with a kind

of inborn passion that most Englishmen would recognise". That goes against a recent survey asking French-speaking Belgians if they'd be in favour of joining France if the country split up. 49% voted clearly in favour, while many were undecided, and only a small minority was clearly opposed. Finally, on p.21, the author claims that all Belgians are middle class, mostly because classes aren't much discussed. If it is true that Belgians don't refer to their social classes the way the British do, the class divide is remarkably similar to that of Britain. It's just that Belgians don't care much about it and use disguised appellations for classes. For example, the Walloon word 'barak' refers to a lower class person who dresses poorly, behaves in a vulgar manner, and speaks with a distinctive lower class accent. The Walloons won't call someone lower class, but say that he or she is a 'barak' - which is far worse as it is an insult (but a common one). The Flemings are a bit more egalitarian.

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