

## **I don't want to stay in Belgium for the rest of my life, because ...**

... as much as I fell in love with the charm and beauty of Belgium — especially Bruges — I know deep down that it was a magical chapter, not the whole story of my life.

From the moment I arrived in Bruges, I felt like Alice tumbling into Wonderland. The city is a masterpiece — its cobbled streets, fairytale houses, and peaceful canals create a sense of calm that is rare in today's world. You can feel history breathing through the brick walls and the preserved architecture. It's a place where time slows down, and every corner holds a photo-worthy memory. It felt like Venice met northern Europe and decided to raise a quiet, beautiful child named Bruges.

Belgium definitely has strong points that I deeply appreciated. First and foremost, it's clean. As someone who appreciates order and tidiness, this was immediately striking. The landscapes are breathtaking, and the security made me feel at ease, even when walking alone in the evening. Not once did I have a bad encounter. The Belgians I met — especially shopkeepers and locals — were polite, smiley, and helpful. I didn't make Belgian friends, but that may be because I didn't have much time outside of my studies to socialize.

Which brings me to my main reason for not staying here: my experience in Belgium was more about the workload than the waffles. I had imagined my Erasmus to be both academically enriching and culturally immersive — unfortunately, the balance wasn't quite there. While my friends in other programs were enjoying free afternoons and weekend getaways, I was buried in coursework until the end of June. I felt like I was living next door to a dream vacation I never had time to take.

Another factor is the cost of living — groceries, medicine, even train tickets felt very expensive, especially for a student. While I understand that beauty and comfort come with a price, it made everyday life harder than expected.

Culturally, I wish I had experienced more. I didn't get to explore much beyond my academic bubble, and that's a personal regret. But from what I saw, Belgium — and Bruges in particular — values its heritage, its calm, and its people. And that is something truly precious.

So, no, I don't want to stay in Belgium forever. But I do want to come back — again and again — as a visitor, as a fan, and maybe one day as a storyteller bringing her family along to explore the wonderland she once called her classroom.