

The Onboarding Guide

Edition 2025 — 2026



Indian Students
Association Leuven



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Pre arrival	4
Visa	4
Insurance	4
Housing	5
Money matters	7
Travel	8
Things to bring	8
Arrival	10
Post arrival	11
Shopping	13
Furniture/Home goods	14
Miscellaneous	16
Part time jobs	16
Leisure	16
Domestic waste management	16
Other Student Associations	17
ISAL's Upcoming Events Schedule	17
Emergency Contacts	18
Important Links	18
Checklists	19
Things to do	19
Things to bring	19

Introduction

We, the members of the Indian Student Association in Leuven (ISAL), hope that this guide will provide you with the best and most transparent information to aid during your studies and life in Leuven, Belgium. Throughout the guide, there are links in the text that you may click to go to the website for further information. For any further questions, you can join our [Whatsapp group](#) for new students and post your queries there. An [interactive Google map](#) is also made along with this document to give you an idea of where all the places mentioned in the document and many more are. If you have any further questions, don't hesitate to send us an email on our address: leuvenisal@gmail.com and get in touch with ISAL by scanning the QR code through your smartphone or visiting our [social media handles](#).

We also appreciate the contribution of the following people to this guide:

Jehan Nozer Taraporewalla

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ISAL Board and committee of 2022-2023



(Click/Scan me)

Pre arrival

Visa

Use the link here to see the documentation required for your [Visa](#). Although the procedure is pretty straightforward it might appear confusing for some. You can always contact the VFS Global center nearest to you for further clarification.

Do get the following documents signed with an [Apostille](#)¹, you can find a private agent who can attest for you using [this link](#) (optional).

- [Police Clearance Certificate \(PCC\)](#)
- [Degree and transcripts](#)

Insurance

It is mandatory that you have medical insurance during your stay in Belgium. KU Leuven has already given a pretty straightforward [write-up](#) reading this. Major insurance providers in the country are:

- [CM \(Christelijke Mutualiteit\)](#) (available in English)
- [LM \(Liberale Mutualiteit\)](#)
- [Helan/Partenamut \(Onafhankelijk Ziekenfonds\)](#) (available in English)
- [Neutraal Ziekenfonds](#)
- [Socialistische Mutualiteiten](#)

¹ This can vary from the place you are applying from, here it is assumed that you are applying from India and hold an Indian degree certificate.

Housing

Finding a place to call your own might be a challenge for you in Leuven, we are not going to lie. With limited infrastructure available in contrast to the ever increasing student population in the city, we advise you to start looking for accommodation as soon as you have received your acceptance from the University and finalized your move to Belgium.

You can start your search here: [Housing Information for Students](#) - this webpage will provide you detailed information on type of contracts, residences etc. [Kotwijs](#) is the one stop database for university based housing. There are private market websites like [Zimmo](#), [Immoweb](#), etc. which do not come under the university umbrella but are the go-to location for housing search. Mention these locations while searching: [Heverlee](#) (3001), [Kessel-Lo](#) (3010) and, of course, [Leuven](#) (3000). These are nearby municipalities from Leuven and many students often live there and commute by bike to the University regularly. You can also book a [KU Leuven Guesthouse](#) for temporary accommodation in the initial days.

We understand that some of the pages are in Dutch or French but nothing that Google translate can't help you with. God bless the advancement of technology!

If you are interested in co-housing/private market residences, facebook groups are a splendid way of finding them. Search in the [Marketplace](#) section, join [Indians in Leuven](#), [Indians in Belgium](#) and of course the [ISAL Facebook](#) page where you can post any of your queries, look for a co-housing situation with other Indian fellows as more chance in finding a shared apartment than a single one or a studio which means more the

merrier (who knows you might find one from your own hometown! ;))

However, **you should always be careful about scammers and fraud on Facebook or private market advertisements. Never share your personal information or bank account details, on these platforms.** Also, always ask for more details, videos etc. before finalizing anything. We also highly advise against transferring rental deposit/rent before reaching Belgium and visiting the property posted online, in person when you reach.

We understand it would be difficult to manage booking an accommodation here while being in India and therefore recommend reserving a [guesthouse](#), [student hostel](#) or an [Airbnb](#) for a short period.

Travel

The transition from home to a new city and new college can seem daunting, especially if you have never lived away from family before and that is why it's important to be prepared!

We know you'll be carrying a lot of stuff, from Maa's handmade laddoos and pickles to a universal adapter for your electronics!! All these items, including other stuff, quickly adds up to a lot of kgs and to be honest, not all of us are body-builders, hence, we advise you to share this challenging and life changing moment together. Feel free to create your own WhatsApp group (region wise) or post it on ISAL's [Whatsapp Group](#) and arrange your travels together as in the case of India - "Strength in Unity".

Refer to the [Arrival Section](#) in this document, for transportation modes from Brussels airport to Leuven.

If you are a group and want to avoid slogging your heavy luggage around Leuven on arrival, another option is using the [airport taxi](#) or private Taxi companies: [Taxi Gerard](#), [Taxi Leuven](#) to name a few.

Desi tip: Some flights actually allow you to carry extra luggage on showing your student enrolment letter (PhDs as well) and you can bring more masalas and pressure cookers and sweets for us ;)

Money matters

In case you are wondering about forex cards or transferring money to and from India, a better and hassle free alternative to it is [Wise](#). You can load money into your account and convert it into the currency you desire. Transferring money has never been easier as well and at rates comparable to the real-time exchange rates. However, **you cannot order the card when you are in India** so you will have to make due with some cash or a [forex card](#) during the initial days. Another option is [Niyo](#).

Things to bring

- Pressure cooker - a must have you plan on making dal, rice, a chicken biryani and other indian dishes. A pressure cooker has a vital role and given that it isn't available in the EU, its role in your life will become more vital. A pressure cooker of capacity according to your usage with extra whistle, seals and gasket will do you wonders. A rice cooker is also quite the game changer, if we may say, but this is optional.
- Specialty vessels - Occasionally, we feel like in the mood for puttu or an idli. So getting these vessels from India was quite comforting since these aren't available here.
- Travel or EU adaptor- Ah! Now this is a must have and it never hurts if you have more than 2 of this. EU plugs are different from the ones back home so your devices such as laptop charger and phone charger or mixies from India won't work without them. A [universal adaptor](#) specific to Belgium's plug point is the best option.
- Medicines - Sure you get the generic ones and there are pharmacies here. But it might become a task to find the medicine you depend on at times. Better to carry the essentials in our opinion. Remember to include a

doctor's prescription of the medicines you are carrying in your luggage as well.

- Vitamin D - When Joy Lobo in 3 Idiots sang "Give me some sunshine.." we felt that. In the winter months, it can be quite dark and gloomy and coming from such a sunlight rich country, we can feel the effects of Vitamin D deficiency. Bring some Vitamin D supplements for you and your wellbeing.
- Masalas (optional) - You do get masalas (spices) in the Indian stores here (refer to "[Shopping](#)" under [Post Arrival section](#)) but only the limited brands like TRS and MDH. We recommend bringing your hometown specific masalas if you want to have the same taste!

After all this stuff, if there is still some space left in your bags, we can suggest stocking up some Maggi packets, Tea packets, Haldiram/MTR ready to eat packets etc. Although you pretty much get everything in the Indian stores here but it can be a little pricier compared to that in India. Hurts to see items priced higher than the MRP in India :'). We also given a generic [Checklists](#) for you at the end of this document.

Arrival

- Flights - Traveling to and from other cities via flight can be done using [Skyscanner](#) in case you are not coming from Brussels, like from Frankfurt or Paris (these are also very viable options). It is also quite easy to look out for offers and deep discounts for your favorite destination here.
- Bus - [DeLijn](#) is the company used the most in Belgium and only present in Leuven as bus transport. As a student, you are entitled to get a Student Bus Pass from the [university](#) for an entire academic year, more information: [here](#). We advise you to check DeLijn's website for [ticket](#) prices during your initial days in the city. Friday and Saturday, buses are free after 23:00. [FlixBus](#) - If you wish to travel to and fro other cities in the EU, FlixBus is quite well connected, but do check out other options before, because you never know where a mouth watering offer lies.
- [BlaBlaCar](#) - for intercity buses and car pooling facilities.
- Train - [SNCB](#) is the Belgian National railway system and is quite well connected. You can book your tickets to and from different cities from the link here or at the vending machine in the station (Save paper and use the App or the website!). Check out the various [Ticket](#) options they offer, based on your age! You can also use the [SNCB international](#) to travel to other countries, however, this is rather expensive but gives out discounts at times. So do check it out!

Refer to the [Travel section](#) in the guide for other means of transportation modes.

Post arrival

- Registration at Stad Leuven - The city (stad) administration of Leuven performs an excellent job of communicating what has to be done, and they have a very active workforce to answer your calls or emails. Check out the details here [Registration details](#) and make an appointment [here](#). We also advise you to register with the Indian Embassy [here](#).
- Registration at [University](#) - After receiving an email from KU Leuven, book an appointment and go to the [Registrar's Office](#) for electronic verification of your degrees.
- Get a SIM card! - You get this pretty much anywhere but it is best to check out the various options first and plans. More information is given [here](#).
- Move into a permanent housing - Also see [Housing section](#) under Pre arrival.
- Open a bank account - You can choose the [bank](#) where you wish to open an account, it's quite easy and hassle free. Check the Non-EEA section on [this](#) website. Once you have your account and a bancontact card, you can link it with the [Payconiq](#) app for payments almost everywhere in the city!
- Get your health insurance - It is mandatory to have health insurance in Belgium, it is for your own interest and monetary benefits. Check out this university's [website](#) for more details.
- General Practitioner and Counseling: KU Leuven provides an extensive [webpage](#) with details about [registering](#) with a GP in Leuven. For [mental well-being](#) issues, refer to the website or drop a message/email to ISAL, we will always be the sympathetic ear you need in a crisis.

- Cycle:
 - Renting - One can always rent a cycle for a desired time period. Some companies that do this are [Velo](#), [BlueBike](#) and [Swapfiets](#).
 - Second hand - [Facebook Marketplace](#), [2dehands](#) are good platforms to checkout for second hand bikes. This is also a viable choice. Our estimate would be not going higher than 100 euros for a dutch bike. There are also bike sales that happen year round so keep that in mind as well. A [good guide](#) in buying a 2nd hand bike is given here.
 - First hand - Of course, if you feel like you want to buy one of your own, go for it!! We recommend checking out the bikes at [Decathlon](#) since they are cheaper, student friendly and quite robust.
 - [Fietsatelier](#) - one stop place for getting bikes repaired for free (minimal charge for parts). There is an instructor who will guide you to repair. Visit here frequently to keep your bike in shape.
 - Velo fixed stations for self-repair, tire pumps etc.

NOTE: Lock the bike well to prevent theft. Check bike and general road safety rules [here](#).

Shopping

Disclaimer: Shops generally close around 6 PM here and are closed on Sundays. There are some shops which extend till later in the evening as well, but at higher retail prices. We suggest you explore a few shops/stores in the initial days to make an educated decision for your expenditure!

General stores

- [Colruyt](#) - this is basically the DMart of Belgium. You can find anything and everything here and at good rates as well. Getting an [Xtra](#) card is also useful as it enables you to get some discounts and the occasional goodies.
- [Delhaize](#)
- [Spar](#)
- [Carrefour](#)
- [ALDI](#)

Indian stores - the most anticipated section is here!

- [Everest House](#)
- [Asian supermarket](#)
- [Ekirana](#)
- [SNS Food](#) for deliverable Indian groceries

Now, both of the Indian stores are located quite close to each other on Brusselstraat, Leuven and are competitively priced and offer almost the same selection. However, we invite you to click on the links above to check out the maps and photos of these stores. The managers are quite friendly and you can always request them for any kind of help. One of our Indian fellows had the pleasure of buying an idli thattu from them but at a very high premium of course :D.

Furniture/ Home goods

- Second hand stores (Kringwinkel) - This is quite the goldmine to get new-like items at cheaper costs and the sustainability factor is an extra bonus! You can get anything and everything from electronics to clothes in these stores in [Heverlee](#) and [Leuven](#). A visit is a must!!
- Facebook - Some [groups](#) and Leuven's [marketplace](#) are quite active on Facebook, with posts about buying and selling every day. Given that there are many students moving out of Leuven at the end of the academic year, there will be goods looking for a new home. Don't forget to negotiate ;)
- [IKEA](#) - Well, need we say more? Quite nice for setting up your home. There is one in [Brussels, Zaventem](#).
- [Hema](#), [Action](#) and [Flying Tiger](#) - These three are good stores to get stuff like utensils, bedsheets, etc. Action being the cheapest of the three. Flying Tiger is the place to buy cute stuff for yourself or family back home.
- Online shopping
 - [Amazon.com.be](#) (or) [Amazon.nl](#) (or) [Amazon.de](#) (or) [Amazon.fr](#) - You can search all three options and check what works and what is cheapest.
 - [Bol.com](#) - Belgium's own Amazon in case you are not willing to give money to Bezos bhai.
 - [Coolblue.be](#) - For some heavy duty electronics, Coolblue is also an option that you can look into for your needs.
- [Apotheek](#) (Medical supplies)- Or pharmacies in English can be found everywhere around the city, for generic and prescription medicines. Just search for "Apotheek" on Google Maps!

- [Kruidvat](#) - A handy store for supplements and self care products. They have their own line of products ranging from creams to bandaids which are cheaper than conventional brands.

Miscellaneous

Part-time jobs

The University has a nice [website](#) for an overview of the student job market here in Belgium. Advertisements are generally posted on the Career Zone portal which you can access from [here](#). Another database for city wise search for student jobs [here](#).

There are also possibilities of student jobs in the supermarkets, online delivery, restaurants and private cleaning agencies. For supermarkets and front end restaurant jobs, some basic level of Dutch proficiency is a requirement. These vacancies are generally put up on the webpages of these stores respectively.

Desi tip: Some restaurants and shops even put up their vacancies on a poster outside their shops. So it's always better to keep an eye, especially during summers.

Leisure

[See and do](#) in Leuven, Farmer's market on Saturdays in the city center, [Abdij van Park](#), Did anyone say [Beer](#)? Meerdael Forest (Heverlee), Arenberg Castle and Park (Heverlee) and many more!

Domestic waste management

You need to separate your domestic waste into categories called Restafval, PMD and Paper/Cardboard. See [separation rules](#) and collection days [schedule](#). Still confused? Search [here](#).

Other Student Associations

LOKO - every KUL student is a part of LOKO and can attend all of their fun events. Looking forward to seeing you there!

ISAL's Upcoming Events Schedule

Of course! We have events of our own as well. Ranging from crazy Bollywood dance nights, Holi celebrations and the many student trips to nearby countries and cool places. One event that you have to be in the look out for is the **Welcome service** we have for you! We look forward to meeting you in person and getting all that lovely mithai you have for us :P

August 15, Friday: @ Indian Embassy brussels - Independence Day celebrations

September 17, Wednesday: @KU Leuven - Orientation Days Student Fair

September TBD: New students meet up and networking

October TBD: Bollywood Night

October TBD: UTSAV: Annual Cultural Event @ Aula Vesalius, Groep T

December TBD: Christmas Market Day trip

Follow our [social media handles](#) for updates about tickets, event timings, volunteering, participation etc.

Emergency Contacts

We hope that you never get yourself in such a situation but it is always better to be prepared and familiar with the [Emergency numbers](#) and officials to [contact](#).

Important Links

- [Visa and other services](#)
- [Application Instructions](#)
- [Student services KU Leuven](#)
- [Life at KU Leuven](#)
- [Moving to Belgium](#)
- [Coming to study in Belgium](#)
- [Welcome activities](#)
- [Indian Embassy in Belgium](#)
- [KU Leuven Buddy Program](#)
- [Pangaea Orientation Days](#)
- [Help desk: Discrimination](#)
- [International House Leuven](#)
- [Mental health and well being](#)
- [Kotmobiel](#); [VTK Services](#)

Checklists

To summarize, we leave you with two sets of checklists that you can print out and check so that you won't miss out on anything. Please note: this is a personal checklist that works well for students from India and can differ for students from other nations. If you have any queries, don't hesitate to drop an email or ping us on our social media platforms. Take care and see you!

Things to do	Things to bring
<input type="checkbox"/> Arrange your housing in Leuven	<input type="checkbox"/> Mug (you know for what)
<input type="checkbox"/> Apply for Police clearance certificate (PCC)	<input type="checkbox"/> Winter clothing
<input type="checkbox"/> Get your medical certificate	<input type="checkbox"/> Pressure cooker and accessories
<input type="checkbox"/> Apostille your degree and PCC	<input type="checkbox"/> Specialty cooking vessels
<input type="checkbox"/> Arrange finances	<input type="checkbox"/> Admission letter
<input type="checkbox"/> Apply for Visa	<input type="checkbox"/> Degree certificate + Transcripts
<input type="checkbox"/> Book flights to Belgium or EU	<input type="checkbox"/> Travel documents
<input type="checkbox"/> Arrange your Belgium insurance	<input type="checkbox"/> Passport
<input type="checkbox"/> Register in Stad Leuven	<input type="checkbox"/> Prescription medicines
<input type="checkbox"/> Open bank account	<input type="checkbox"/> Vitamin D supplements
<input type="checkbox"/> Get international roaming internet pack	<input type="checkbox"/> Spare mobile phone
<input type="checkbox"/> Attend ISAL Welcome party	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific calculator (according to your need)
<input type="checkbox"/> Give sweets and chai for ISAL members	<input type="checkbox"/> Insurance documents
	<input type="checkbox"/> Bedsheets (quite expensive here)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Water resistant shoes and outerwear

The information presented in this document has been thoroughly vetted and verified by the ISAL members and friends. If you have any queries or difficulties in any form or manner, do not hesitate to contact us on our [social media handles](#) and we will be responding as soon as possible!

If you think any of the information presented is wrong or needs editing, please contact us!

