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**PRESS KIT**  
Brussels, 31 May 2019

## Brussels by bike

2019 is a year like no other for Brussels. This year Brussels is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the first Tour de France victory of Belgian cycling legend Eddy Merckx, as well as being the starting point (Grand Départ) for the 2019 Tour de France. A unique occasion for the European capital to both celebrate cycling and honour its cultural heritage.

### Cycling in Brussels

Brussels boasts no less than 218km of cycle paths. The Brussels-Capital region has seen the number of cyclists double over the last five years. This upward trend, observed since the beginning of the century, has continued with an average annual increase of 13% since 2010. (source: Brussels Bike Observatory).

Brussels has changed over the years, and has given more and more space to bikes. The infrastructure still isn't perfect, but things are improving every year. Laying out cycle paths, creating new parking for bikes, increasing the 30km/h zones...there have been many initiatives, both public and private, to encourage the people of Brussels to get on their bikes.

### Bike for Brussels

With Bike for Brussels, **Brussels Mobility** (regional public service in charge of transport throughout the whole Brussels-Capital region) aims to put Brussels residents in the saddle. In order to do this, the service is supporting several Brussels organisations who promote cycling in the capital. Good parking maps, suggestions of routes to get around the city safely or even key bike-repair places, these organisations communicate with cyclists every day to make cycling in the city easier for them.

For more information visit: <https://bike.brussels/en/>

### Brussels Environment for a greener city

Brussels has more than 8,000 hectares of green spaces, making up almost half the area. From the huge Sonian Forest (Forêt de Soignes) to the Bois de la Cambre, many green areas in Brussels are accessible by bike. To preserve these green spaces and improve the capital's air quality, the regional public authority Brussels Environment is working to create and manage green spaces, and preserve natural areas. It is also encouraging Brussels residents to use more "gentle" methods of transport, for a city that is greener and more picturesque.

For more information visit: <https://environnement.brussels/thematiques/mobilite/mes-deplacements/passez-au-velo>

### Regional Cycle Routes

These are routes that are those recommended for medium and long-distance trips. As a rule of thumb, they use local roads that have lighter traffic, are slower in pace and as a result are less stressful than main roads.

For more information visit: <https://mobilite-mobiliteit.brussels/en/node/5>



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### **The Bikes in Brussels fund**

A Brussels resident who is passionate about cycling has recently set up the “Bikes in Brussels” fund (managed by the King Baudouin Foundation). This fund aims to support projects for infrastructure or equipment that are started by associations, authorities or private and public partnerships. These projects are designed to encourage cyclists to get around the city, by responding to users’ expectations. The fund is aimed at small and medium-sized projects as much as those needing more substantial work and investment.

For more information visit:

<https://www.kbs-frb.be/en/Newsroom/Press-releases/2018/20181129AJBikesBrussels>

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## Brussels and the Tour de France

The 2019 Grand Départ will once again put Brussels and Belgium in the saddle.

The “Great Loop” has included Belgium a total of 47 times, but the story really began in the European capital back in 1947. The Tour has passed through Brussels 11 times. The Grand Départ first took place there during the Universal Exhibition in 1958. It was also in Brussels that Eddy Merckx wore his very first Yellow Jersey, in Woluwe-Saint-Pierre in 1969, near his family grocery store.

Belgium is historically a cycling country. With its three classic bike races in Flanders, two in Ardennes and around 10 semi-classics, the flat country offers a choice of races for amateur cyclists. On an international level, Belgium is ranked second in the cycling nations, according to the International Cycling Union (source: UCI, 29 May 2019).

It is for all these reasons that Brussels feels great pride and fondness for the Tour de France, which has enthralled so many cycling fans by putting their champions in the spotlight.

### Some key figures

106th edition of the Tour de France

50 years since Eddy Merckx’s first Tour de France victory (1969)

100th anniversary of the Yellow Jersey, worn 111 times by Eddy Merckx (a record which he still holds today)

Number of times the Tour has passed through Brussels: 11

Last time the Grand Départ took place in Brussels: 1958

Last time the Tour passed through Brussels: 2010

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## Grand Départ highlights

### WEDNESDAY 3 JULY

Opening of the welcome centre at Brussels Expo, on the Heysel Plateau. This will welcome the press and organisers of the Tour of France, from A.S.O. (Amaury Sport Organisation).

### THURSDAY 4 JULY

#### The FAN PARK

From 4th - 7th July, a space exclusively dedicated to the Tour de France will be set up in the Place de Brouckère. Over four days, until the end of the last stage of the Grand Départ, events, games and workshops will be organised by the A.S.O. and Tour partners.

#### > Introducing the teams

This is undeniably one of the highlights of the Grand Départ!

Crowds will gather to see the 22 teams of 8 racers, who will thrill spectators for the next 3 weeks. A range of shows will also take place during this time. The champions will leave the Place des Palais and go through the superb Royal Galleries of Saint-Hubert, giving spectators around the world some exceptional views. The teams will be presented in the Grand-Place.

### FRIDAY 5 JULY

Belgian championship final of the Eddy Merckx game. Just like the first victory of our Tour de France champion, this famous board game named after him is celebrating its 50th anniversary.

### SATURDAY 6 JULY ROAD STAGE BRUSSELS-CHARLEROI-BRUSSELS > 192KM

The tone will quickly be set during this first stage of the 2019 Tour de France. On leaving Molenbeek Saint-Jean and then Anderlecht, the racers will already be thinking about the Mur de Grammont, a steep, cobbled street at 43km, which was on the route of Eddy Merckx's first Tour de France in 1969.

**Brussels communes on the route:** Brussels, Molenbeek Saint-Jean, Ganshoren, Koekelberg, Anderlecht, Etterbeek, Woluwe-Saint-Pierre, Auderghem

### SUNDAY 7 JULY TEAM TIME TRIALS STAGE IN BRUSSELS > 28KM

The first surprises of the 2019 Tour are predicted now, starting with a change in leader...if the sprinter, who will probably have taken over the evening before, is not part of a team of specialists.

The wide streets of Brussels will give the best-equipped teams a chance to display their strength, with few corners and a series of false-flats testing their technical virtuosity at a high level of power.

**Brussels communes on the route:** Brussels, Etterbeek, Woluwe-Saint-Pierre, Auderghem, Watermael-Boitsfort, Ixelles, Woluwe-Saint-Lambert, Schaerbeek

More information available at: [www.brusselsgranddepart.com](http://www.brusselsgranddepart.com)

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## Brussels and Eddy Merckx

**Eddy Merckx Square:** Opened on 28 March 2019, this square in Woluwé-Saint-Pierre pays tribute to the former cycling champion. He grew up and lived in the commune for 27 years with his parents, who owned a grocery store there. It was also where Eddy Merckx gained his first yellow jersey, during a Tour de France stage in 1969.

**The Grand-Place in Brussels:** In July 1969, Eddy Merckx was cheered by thousands on the balcony at the Hôtel de Ville, for his superb performance in the Tour de France. The cyclist wore his first yellow jersey to Paris.

**Laeken:** Eddy Merckx competed in his first race in Laeken on 16 July 1961, finishing in sixth place. The 25 editions of the Grand Prix Eddy Merckx also took place in Laeken, between 1980 and 2004. The time trial race started off with cyclists racing alone, then in teams of two. It covered a distance of 42km.

**Forest:** Still an amateur, Eddy won the Forest Omnium in 1964 with Patrick Sercu.

**Eddy Merckx metro station in Anderlecht:** The bike that the “Cannibal” used during his Hour Record in 1972 is on display on the main platform of this metro station, which was opened in 2003.

**Eddy Merckx School:** Located in Woluwe-Saint-Pierre, this secondary school was renamed in honour of the racer in 1986.

**Royal Sporting Club Anderlecht:** A football enthusiast, Eddy Merckx became a big fan of the Anderlecht football club through his great friend, former Belgian footballer and international manager Paul Van Himst.

**La Belle Maraîchère :** This seafood restaurant located in the heart of the capital is the former racer's favourite. He still goes there regularly with Paul Van Himst to enjoy, among other things, the delicious Prawn Croquettes.

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## #touresemble: The 23rd team for the Grand Départ of the 2019 Tour de France

Of course, the main attractions of the Tour de France will be the international professional cyclists, who are the stars of the Great Loop. But what about every day cyclists? The #touresemble initiative aims to get as many Brussels residents as possible in the saddle for and after the Grand Départ. Whether they cycle occasionally, as a commuter, for pleasure or even a bit reluctantly in town, #touresemble is bringing everyone together for the same shared goal: to be able to cycle around our capital, more, again or always!

#touresemble unites all Belgians with all the nationalities that give the capital its cultural richness, around a collaborative project which gives meaning to the Tour de France and the Grand Départ. It will be the starting point for a "citizens' life project", where the bicycle will become the main form of transport in the city.

The aim of this regional campaign is to significantly increase the number of cyclists in Brussels in the run-up to the Tour de France, and to have more bikes than cars in the capital the week of the Grand Départ. A real social initiative, everyone is invited to join the team by applying to [touresemble.brussels](https://touresemble.brussels).

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This year in particular, Brussels has been working extra hard. From exhibitions to the building of a velodrome, via guided tours with original themes, multiple events are being organised in different places in the capital to pay tribute to cyclists and our celebrated champion.

## Exhibitions

### Jef Geys Exhibition

The Belgian artist Jef Geys (1934-2018) photographed the first Tour de France, which Eddy Merckx won in 1969, to "immerse himself completely in the world of cycling". Far from glamorising this race to victory, his contrary coverage focuses primarily on the mix of the idiosyncrasies and everyday life of the cycling world. Among spectators, racing bikes, team cars and billboards, from time to time a racer can be seen, who could easily be Eddy Merckx...Two pages of Belgian newspapers from that period of time put these images into perspective. The day that Eddy Merckx won the Tour, Neil Armstrong took his first steps on the moon. Through this exhibition, Jef Geys once again shows himself to be master of the links between the Highs and Lows (literally, here) which made him one of the most influential post-war Belgian artists.

**Location:** BOZAR

Price: Free

Dates: Until 1 September 2019

More information: <https://www.bozar.be/en/activities/149475-jef-geys>

### 100 years of the Yellow Jersey Exhibition

For this 106th edition of the Tour de France, the exhibition pays tribute to the 15,059 cyclists who have started the Tour, and to its 3,228 champions. 54 Belgian cyclists have proudly worn the Yellow Jersey, the most famous being Eddy Merckx, uncontested master of two-wheels, who has worn it a total of 111 times during his career. A record!

**Location:** Espace Wallonie

Price: Free

Dates: Until 14 July 2019

More information: <http://walloniebelgiquetourisme.be/en-gb/content/expo-100-ans-du-maillot-jaune-a-lespace-wallonie-de-bruxelles>

### The Tour Exhibition

This exhibition traces the history and development of the world's third biggest sporting event, through different themes: the history, the creation of the routes and its challenges, a day on a stage, the publicity car, the magic of live sports, the Tour Festival and its supporters, the 105th Tour de France route and figures, etc.

Located in Molenbeek Saint-Jean, one of the 19 communes in the Brussels-Capital region, the exhibition takes place in the Raymond Goethals Stand at the Edmond Machtens Stadium. This is a stone's throw from the real departure point of the Tour de France's first stage, and the old Karreveld velodrome.

**Location:** Edmond Machtens Stadium

Price: Free

Dates: Until 14 July 2019

More information:

[http://www.culture1080cultuur.be/fr/agenda/categorie/Le\\_Tour\\_\\_L\\_EXPO/6456/](http://www.culture1080cultuur.be/fr/agenda/categorie/Le_Tour__L_EXPO/6456/)





### Velomuseum

The VELOMUSEUM is an initiative of the Archive and Museum for the Flemish living in Brussels (AMVB), in partnership with social economy enterprise Cyclo and Dutch library Muntpunt. It takes you on a free journey through 150 years of cycling culture in Brussels. It's one hundred and fifty years, because in 1869 the first cycling regulations were introduced in the city of Brussels.

**Location:** Velomuseum

**Price:** Free

**Dates:** Until 7 July 2019

**More information:** <https://www.velomuseum.brussels/en/expo-en/>

## Discover Brussels by bike

### Sightseeing Tours

#### Eddy Merckx and Brussels by bike

This ride celebrates one of the world's most famous cyclists, Eddy Merckx, five-time winner of the Tour de France. From his childhood in Woluwe-Saint-Pierre to his numerous victories, rediscover everything while pedalling in the footsteps of the "Cannibal". Combining Tour anecdotes with the history and development of cycling in Brussels, this tour puts the bicycle in place of honour in the Belgian capital.

**Organisation:** ProVelo

**More information:** [https://www.provelo.org/en/individual\\_tour/eddy-merckx-and-cycling-in-brussels](https://www.provelo.org/en/individual_tour/eddy-merckx-and-cycling-in-brussels)

#### Brussels stage of the 2019 Tour de France by electric bike

2019: Brussels welcomes the Grand Départ of the Tour de France! The last time was in 1958. Sunday 7 July will see a team time trial. The organisers have set out a 28km loop in our capital, travelling down the most sumptuous avenues and crossing the most beautiful parks. "Once in Brussels" couldn't miss out on this. We suggest you put on your yellow jersey and become an electric bike champion with us. On our e-bikes, we'll follow the route taken by the racers and discover Brussels during some cultural intervals. If you've always dreamed about taking part in the Great Loop, this ride is for you!

**Organisation:** Once in Brussels

**More information:** <https://onceinbrussels.be/en/produit/the-brussels-stage-of-the-2019-tour-de-france/>

#### Weekend Tours

Discover Brussels by bike every Friday and Saturday with Cactus.

The Weekend Tour takes small groups off the beaten track to discover the surprising places and areas of Brussels.

**Organisation:** Cactus:

**More information:** <https://cactus.brussels/weekend-tours>



### **Greeters by bike**

Greeters are local people who give tourists an unusual, original and personal insight into their city or neighbourhood, in a friendly and welcoming way. This idea is a perfect example of the trend in alternative tourism, which is increasingly in demand from tourists looking for a more authentic experience. Some of them offer cycle rides which will take you to their favourite places.

More information: <https://visit.brussels/en/sites/greeters>

### **Green Brussels**

#### **Green Promenade:**

You are probably unaware, but the Brussels-Capital region is crowned by a rich greenness which few capitals can rival. To showcase this, and so every Brussels resident can take advantage of it, the Green Promenade was created. The route offers a 63km loop around Brussels: a beautiful ride that allows those both on foot and bike to discover the numerous parks, natural areas and preserved landscapes in our picturesque region. The Green Promenade is divided into seven sections representing various aspects of Brussels' landscapes. Covering between 5 and 12km, its sections cross a variety of landscapes, be they urban, rural, or industrial, showing off Brussels' many green areas along the way.

More information: <https://environnement.brussels/thematiques/espaces-verts-et-biodiversite/la-promenade-verte>

### **Guides for discovering Brussels by bike**

#### **"Brussels by bike" trail map**

This trail map suggests 8 themed routes for cyclists of all levels. At your own pace, discover Brussels and its ambiance, culture and the richness of its heritage. Available from the visit.brussels tourist information offices.

#### **Bike map of Brussels**

This map shows the gradients, cycle routes (with directions), suggested cycle paths, places where bikes can be parked, "Villo!" stations as well as forest paths, and offers numerous tips. You can find this map at cycling associations and visit.brussels tourist information offices.



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## Usquare and its new velodrome

Usquare is the conversion of a military complex from the early 20th century into a lively open space looking towards the 21st century. It's not a campus, but a really new piece of town with all that this implies: a Brussels neighbourhood of the future that's mixed and dynamic, urban and friendly, university-centred and international, sustainable and innovative.

As of this weekend Usquare will have an open-air velodrome: an unmissable place where amateur cyclists can indulge in their passion.

### PRACTICAL INFORMATION

**La Maison du Tour:** The Grand Départ information bureau and Brussels tourist office

#### ADDRESS

4, place De Brouckère – 1000 Brussels

#### OPENING HOURS

From Tuesday to Saturday, 10am - 6pm

Reduced mobility access

#### Press Contact:

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