



GR 5 (North Sea to the Alps)

THE COMPLETE GUIDE



hikelist.com/hikes/gr-5-north-sea-to-the-alps

Last updated 14 June 2026

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Overview

GR 5 Belgium: A Classic Lowland-to-Ardenne Thru-Hike

The GR 5 is a white-and-red waymarked Grande Randonnée path linking the North Sea and the Mediterranean; this page covers its Belgian section. In Belgium it runs for about 270 km over roughly 14 days, from the Antwerp Kempen near the Dutch border to Ouren on the Luxembourg border. It is a hard point-to-point walk because of the sustained distance, not technical terrain. Expect heath, pine forest, towns, the Meuse at Liège and the hillier Ardennes. See more routes on our [Belgium hiking trails](#) page.

Route Overview

The Belgian GR 5 runs north-west to south-east. It enters Belgium from the Netherlands around Kalmthout, Wuustwezel and Brecht, crosses the Campine through places such as Herentals, Westerlo, Diest, Hasselt and Genk, then dips via Lanaken towards Maastricht. In Wallonia it continues through Visé, Barchon, Liège, Banneux, La Reid, Spa, the Fagne de Malchamps, Stavelot, Vielsalm and Burg-Reuland before reaching Ouren in the Our valley, where the route crosses into Luxembourg. This is a point-to-point hike with frequent town access, making public-transport-supported sections feasible. For comparison, look at the [GR 12 Amsterdam to Paris route](#) or the [GR 126 Semois and Meuse Rivers](#).

History of the GR 5 in Belgium

The GR 5 is one of Europe's classic long-distance paths, developed within the cross-border Grande Randonnée network and later incorporated into European route E2. The Belgian section was formally laid out in the early 1960s, linking the Netherlands and Luxembourg legs and giving walkers a continuous waymarked corridor from the Campine through the Meuse country to the Ardennes. It is maintained by Belgium's GR organisations: Grote Routepaden in Flanders and SGR / GR Sentiers in Wallonia.

Notable highlights

- **The Campine (Kempen):** The Belgian entry is flat and sandy, with heathland, pine plantations, fens and quiet villages around Kalmthout, Herentals and Westerlo. It is the easiest-feeling part of the route.
- **Diest:** A historic Flemish town with a preserved beguinage and old fortifications. It makes a useful cultural stop between the lowland stages.
- **Liège and the Meuse:** The GR 5 reaches the Meuse valley at Liège, the largest city on the Belgian route. It marks the transition from Flemish lowlands towards the Ardennes.
- **Spa and the Fagne de Malchamps:** Spa is the thermal town whose name became associated with spa resorts worldwide. South of town, the route crosses the upland heath and moor of the Fagne de Malchamps.
- **Stavelot and Vielsalm:** These Ardenne towns sit amid forested hills and river valleys. Stavelot is known for its ancient abbey and Carnival.
- **The Our valley and Ouren:** The final Belgian stretch follows the wooded Our valley to Ouren near the three-country area, where the GR 5 crosses into Luxembourg and links with the GR 56.

Challenges to expect

The GR 5 in Belgium is not technical: surfaces are footpaths, forest tracks, towpaths, lanes and some urban sections. The main challenge is keeping a steady pace for about two weeks, especially through the hillier Ardennes. Weather is changeable and often wet, so forest and valley paths can be muddy. Navigation is helped by GR blazes, but carry maps or GPX. For more Ardennes context, compare the [Battle of the Bulge Trail](#) and the [Abbey Trail of Wallonia](#).

Key Data

Country	Belgium
Distance	270 km
Duration	14 days
Difficulty	Hard
Trail type	Point to point
Terrain & landscape	Forest, Hills, River Valley
Trail surface	Dirt, Gravel, Paved
Accommodation	Hotels, Hostels, Campsites
Average daytime temp.	17°C
Chance of rainfall	High
Estimated cost	\$\$
Optimal season	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Accessibility	Family Friendly, Pet Friendly
Facilities	Restrooms, Water Sources, Campsites, Shelters, Picnic Areas
Permits & fees	No permits or fees

Introduction

The Belgian GR 5 is a serious cross-country walk with a quiet, understated character: about 393 km from the Dutch border near Kalmthout to Ouren, where Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany meet. It suits hikers who like long days, reliable waymarking and changing landscapes more than dramatic mountain terrain.

North of the Meuse, the route threads the sandy Campine, Hageland and Limburg: heath, pine forest, canals, abbeys, small towns and easy paths through places such as Herentals, Diest, Hasselt and Genk. This is gentle walking underfoot, but the cumulative distance soon matters.

Beyond Visé and Liège, the trail becomes more Ardennes in character. It climbs between the Vesdre, Amblève, Salm and Our valleys, crossing wooded plateaux, Spa, Stavelot, Vielsalm and the high ground near Mont-le-Soie before dropping towards Ouren.

What the walk asks for is stamina, planning and consistency rather than scrambling ability. Accommodation and transport are generally straightforward, but the upper-Ardennes stages around Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren need more care, especially if relying on buses.

This guide covers stages, daily distances, accommodation, food, transport, terrain and the common mistakes that make the Belgian GR 5 harder than it needs to be.

Stage-by-Stage Guide

The stages below use an 18-day Belgian GR 5 itinerary from the Dutch border near Kalmthout to Ouren. Distances are approximate: always check the current GR topo-guide, waymarking updates and live public transport before travelling.

Stage 1: Kalmthout (Dutch border) to Brecht — 22 km

The Belgian route begins in the Kalmthoutse Heide area, where the GR 5 crosses into the sandy Campine near the Dutch border. This is classic Kempen walking: heathland, pine woods, open sandy tracks and quiet lowland paths, with little climbing but plenty of exposed, dry ground underfoot in warm weather.

Kalmthoutse Heide is the main highlight of the day and sets the tone for the early Belgian stages. The route then works south-east through the Kalmthout and Wuustwezel area towards Brecht, using a mix of dirt tracks, forest paths and lanes.

Food and water are most reliable at the settlements rather than in the heath and woodland sections, so start with enough for the day. Brecht gives the best end-of-stage options for accommodation and supplies; book ahead if walking in busy spring or summer weekends.

Navigation is generally straightforward on the white-and-red GR flashes, but sandy forest junctions can look similar. Carry the current map or GPX and take care where the route leaves open heath for woodland or village lanes.

Stage 2: Brecht to Grobbendonk — 23 km

This is another long but low-gradient Campine day, moving through a settled landscape of villages, woods and sandy tracks. The walking remains technically easy, though the distance is enough to make pacing important if carrying a full pack.

The route passes the Westmalle area, with its Trappist abbey on or close to the line of the early GR 5 stages, before continuing through Zoersel towards Grobbendonk. Expect a practical mixture of woodland paths, gravel tracks, quiet roads and village edges rather than remote hill country.

Food and water are easier to manage than on the most rural Ardennes stages, but services should still be treated as settlement-based. Grobbendonk is the logical overnight stop; accommodation at or near the end should be arranged before arrival on a continuous walk.

This stage is in Flanders, so De Lijn buses are the main public transport backup where rail is not directly useful. Check current timetables before relying on an evening connection.

Stage 3: Grobbendonk to Herentals — 14 km

A shorter linking stage gives an easier day after two longer starts. The route continues through the Kempen, passing Bouwel before reaching Herentals, with mostly gentle terrain and no significant ascent to manage.

Underfoot, expect the usual mix of gravel, dirt, forest paths, lanes and some paved sections near settlements. This is a good stage for easing into the GR rhythm or for combining with adjacent

kilometres if accommodation dictates.

Herentals is one of the most useful early transport points on the route, with railway access. It also offers better end-of-day services than the smaller villages, making it a practical place to resupply or adjust the itinerary.

Navigation is not difficult, but the shorter distance should not lead to complacency through town edges and junctions. Follow the GR markings carefully where paths meet local walking and cycling routes.

Stage 4: Herentals to Averbode — 24 km

This is one of the longer Flemish stages, continuing across the easy but sustained lowlands from Herentals through the Westerlo area to Averbode. The terrain remains moderate, with the challenge coming from the length rather than steep ground.

The main cultural landmark is Averbode Abbey, one of the notable abbey sites on the Belgian GR 5. The day also keeps the typical Kempen character: quiet villages, woods, field edges, tracks and some road or paved walking.

Start with enough food and water to cover the gaps between settlements, especially if walking outside normal shop or café hours. Averbode has limited small-place logistics compared with larger towns, so accommodation and dinner arrangements should be made in advance.

This stage is still well suited to section hiking, but public transport links may require a bus connection rather than a simple station-to-station plan. Check De Lijn times before committing to a late finish.

Stage 5: Averbode to Diest — 17 km

The route leaves Averbode and moves into the Hageland side of the walk, with a manageable day towards Diest. It is still lowland walking, but the landscape becomes more varied as the route approaches Scherpenheuvel-Zichem and the historic town of Diest.

Scherpenheuvel is the key landmark, known as Belgium's major Marian pilgrimage town and for its domed basilica. Diest then makes a strong end point, with its begijnhof and old fortifications giving this stage more historic interest than the forested Campine days.

Food and water are relatively straightforward if timed around the settlements, but do not assume services will be available at every intermediate point. Diest is a sensible overnight base with better facilities than many smaller stops.

Diest has railway access, making this one of the easier stages to use for a weekend section. Navigation is usually simple, but pay attention through built-up areas where the GR markings share space with local streets and paths.

Stage 6: Diest to Lummen — 22 km

From Diest, the GR 5 continues across the Demer country and towards Lummen, passing the Halen area. The terrain stays forgiving, with no technical walking, but the distance is again a full day for most backpackers.

Expect a mixed Flemish stage of farmland, lanes, tracks, village approaches and occasional woodland or green corridors. After rain, lowland paths can still become wet or muddy, even where the route is otherwise easy.

Diest is the best place to stock up before leaving, while Lummen provides the end-of-stage target. Accommodation and evening meal options should be checked before arrival, particularly if walking outside the main season.

Public transport is generally available in this part of Belgium, but connections may be by bus rather than directly from the trail. For section hikers, check both rail and De Lijn bus times before setting start and finish points.

Stage 7: Lummen to Hasselt — 20 km

This stage moves from the quieter Lummen area towards Hasselt, the provincial capital of Limburg. The walking is still low and non-technical, but becomes increasingly influenced by town edges, lanes and more developed surroundings as Hasselt approaches.

Heusden-Zolder lies on the broader line of travel between Lummen and Hasselt. The stage is useful logistically, linking smaller-place walking with one of the best-served towns on the Belgian route.

Hasselt is a strong resupply and accommodation stop, with far more choice than rural stage ends. Food and water are easy to plan if the day begins in Lummen and finishes in Hasselt, though carry enough for the middle kilometres.

Hasselt has railway access and is one of the simplest places on the GR 5 to join, leave or pause the trail. Navigation requires attention through more urban sections: do not rely only on a general sense of direction when the GR leaves streets for paths or vice versa.

Stage 8: Hasselt to Genk — 22 km

This stage links Hasselt with Genk through the Diepenbeek and Bokrijk area. It is a varied Limburg day, with town-edge walking, green corridors and the landscape around Bokrijk and Genk, including the heathland and former coal-mining Kempen context.

The walking remains mostly easy underfoot, although paved and urban sections are more likely than on the early heathland stages. Bokrijk is the main highlight, and the approach to Genk gives a clear sense of moving across central Limburg rather than through remote country.

Food, water and accommodation are among the easiest to arrange on this part of the route, with both Hasselt and Genk well supplied. Genk is a good place to resupply before the route turns towards Lanaken and the Meuse-side transition.

Both Hasselt and Genk have railway access, making this a particularly practical section for day walkers and weekend hikers. In built-up areas, GR flashes can be missed more easily than in open country, so check junctions carefully.

Stage 9: Genk to Lanaken — 24 km

The route leaves Genk for Lanaken via the Zutendaal area, still in Limburg but gradually approaching the south-eastern edge of Flanders. This is a longer day, with gentle gradients but enough distance to

require an early start if daylight is short.

Expect a mix of sandy tracks, forest and heathland influences, village links and some lane walking. The stage remains non-technical, but sandy surfaces can feel tiring over a full day, especially in dry summer weather.

Genk is the best place to stock up at the start. Lanaken is the main end-point for accommodation and services, but book ahead rather than assuming late availability.

Public transport remains comparatively good by long-distance trail standards, although exact bus or rail combinations should be checked. Navigation is generally helped by the GR waymarking, but pay particular attention where the route threads through woodland and settlement edges.

Stage 10: Lanaken to Kanne — 18 km

This stage takes the GR 5 from Lanaken to Kanne, closing in on the Meuse corridor and the language-border transition ahead. At 18 km it is a moderate day, still without technical terrain, and can be used to position for the crossing into Wallonia.

The walking is a varied mix of village approaches, lanes, tracks and green sections. Kanne is an important staging point before the route turns towards Visé and the Meuse.

Food and water should be straightforward if planned around Lanaken and Kanne, but intermediate services should not be assumed. Accommodation at or near Kanne should be arranged in advance, especially if the next day's logistics depend on a fixed start.

This is still within the De Lijn public transport area, but onward planning towards Wallonia will involve TEC and SNCB/NMBS options. Check the change in local transport networks before building a section-hike itinerary.

Stage 11: Kanne to Visé — 20 km

This stage brings the GR 5 to the Meuse at Visé, one of the major transitions of the Belgian route. The walk changes character from Flemish lowland stages towards the Walloon half, with Liège nearby as the major regional hub.

The terrain is not yet Ardennes-hard, but expect a more complex settled landscape around the Meuse corridor, with paths, lanes, urban edges and river-valley approaches. Visé is the key landmark and practical end point.

Food and water are best planned around Kanne at the start and Visé at the finish. Visé has stronger services than the smaller villages immediately before it, and Liège can be used as a wider accommodation or transport base if needed.

Liège-Guillemins is the major rail hub for this part of Belgium, with frequent trains from Brussels; local onward connections should be checked before travelling. Navigation needs care through the Meuse-side urban and peri-urban sections, where the GR markings are more important than simply following the river or roads.

Stage 12: Visé to Soumagne — 20 km

From Visé, the GR 5 turns inland through Wallonia towards Soumagne, passing through the Dalhem area. This is the beginning of the more undulating Walloon half, where the route starts to leave the easy rhythm of Flanders behind.

The day is still moderate, but expect more climbing and descending than on the Kempen stages. Paths, lanes, village tracks and wooded sections begin to replace the long flat sandy feel of the north.

Carry sufficient food and water from Visé, as services become more uneven between Walloon villages. Soumagne is the practical overnight target, but accommodation should be checked before committing to this split.

This stage is in TEC bus territory, with SNCB/NMBS rail options generally easier via larger nearby towns and Liège. Check current transport times, especially for evening exits after a full walking day.

Stage 13: Soumagne to Banneux — 19 km

This stage continues across the hills above the Vesdre side of the route, passing the Olné and Nessonvaux area before reaching Banneux. The walking becomes more distinctly Walloon: more frequent climbs, valley approaches, woodland and village-to-village linking paths.

Banneux is the day's main landmark, known for the Notre-Dame des Pauvres pilgrimage shrine. The terrain remains non-technical, but this is no longer flat lowland walking, and wet weather can make forest and valley paths slippery.

Food and water should be managed carefully, with supplies taken from Soumagne and topped up only where services are actually open. Banneux is a noted destination, but accommodation and food arrangements should still be booked ahead rather than left to arrival.

Navigation is usually clear on the white-and-red flashes, but the route crosses a more broken landscape of lanes, paths and woodland junctions. Take extra care after rain, both for footing and for keeping to the correct GR line where paths are muddy or leaf-covered.

Stage 14: Banneux to Spa — 17 km

The route from Banneux to Spa is shorter in distance but more hilly than the Flemish stages. It passes through the La Reid area and approaches one of the most useful towns in the Ardennes part of the walk.

Spa is the highlight and the practical prize of the day: a historic thermal town and a major service point before the higher Ardennes stages. The walking uses a mix of lanes, woodland paths and upland approaches, with more sustained climbing and descending than the route's first half.

Banneux and Spa are the best places to organise food and water; carry enough between them, as upland and woodland sections are less predictable for supplies. Spa is a strong overnight and resupply stop, and it is wise to use it before heading for Stavelot and Vielsalm.

Spa has railway access, making it one of the best public transport points in the Walloon section.

Navigation through forest and town-edge transitions should be checked against the current guide or GPX, particularly if local diversions are in place.

Stage 15: Spa to Stavelot — 17 km

This is one of the most characteristic Ardennes stages, leaving Spa and crossing the upland heath and bog of the Fagne de Malchamps below the Bérinzenne area. The route reaches around 570 m in this upland zone, so conditions can feel more exposed and changeable than in the lower valleys.

Underfoot, expect forest tracks, heathland or bog-edge paths, gravel and some lanes. The terrain is still not technical, but wet ground, mud and slippery woodland paths are realistic issues after rain.

Food and water should be taken from Spa before setting out. Stavelot is the end-of-stage base, known for its ancient Benedictine abbey and as a significant Ardennes town with better services than the more remote stops beyond.

Spa is the strongest public transport point at the start; onward transport from Stavelot should be checked before relying on it. Navigation on the upland and in forest requires attention, as junctions and forestry tracks can be confusing even on a well-waymarked GR.

Stage 16: Stavelot to Vielsalm — 16 km

Although only 16 km, this is one of the hardest and most important Belgian GR 5 stages. The route climbs from the Amblève area onto the high wooded Ardennes plateau near Mont-le-Soie and Grand-Halleux, reaching the Belgian GR 5's high point of about 580 m.

The day gives the wildest feel of the Belgian section: wooded uplands, plateau walking and repeated height gain rather than long lowland kilometres. Paths can be muddy and slippery after rain, and weather on the higher ground can be cooler and more exposed than in Stavelot or Vielsalm.

Start with enough food and water from Stavelot, as this is not a stage to rely on frequent intermediate services. Vielsalm is the practical overnight target and should be booked ahead during busy periods or if walking the full route continuously.

Vielsalm is on the Liège–Luxembourg rail line, making it a key access point for the Ardennes section. Navigation is generally aided by GR markings, but careful map or GPX use is recommended across the plateau and through forestry junctions.

Stage 17: Vielsalm to Burg-Reuland — 22 km

This is a long upper-Ardennes stage from Vielsalm to Burg-Reuland, passing the Commanster and Braunlauf area. The route stays on high, wooded and rural ground, with the stage topping out around the Quatre-Vents area at about 520 m.

The walking is not technical, but it is more demanding than the flat Belgian north because of distance, ascent, forest tracks and fewer services. Expect a mix of woodland, plateau paths, lanes and village links through a quieter part of the route.

Food and water planning matters here: leave Vielsalm supplied and do not assume frequent shops or cafés en route. Accommodation in Burg-Reuland or nearby should be booked ahead, as the upper-Ardennes stages between Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren are thinner for overnight options.

Vielsalm is the best transport point at the start; the Burg-Reuland end is more remote and relies on less frequent TEC buses. Check bus times before travelling, especially if section hiking or finishing late in the

day.

Stage 18: Burg-Reuland to Ouren — 14 km

The final Belgian stage is shorter but logistically important, leaving Burg-Reuland for Ouren in the Our valley. This is the quiet finish of the Belgian GR 5, in the German-speaking Community, with the route reaching the Belgium–Luxembourg–Germany tripoint on the river Our.

The terrain is wooded and rural, with valley walking and the last Ardennes ups and downs rather than any technical difficulty. Ouren is also where the GR 5 crosses onward into Luxembourg, and the GR 56 meets the route nearby around Burg-Reuland.

Carry enough food and water for the full stage unless specific services have been checked in advance. Accommodation at the finish is not something to improvise: the Ouren and Burg-Reuland area is the thinnest part of the Belgian route for logistics.

Public transport is the main warning for this stage. Burg-Reuland and Ouren depend on infrequent TEC buses, so onward travel should be planned before setting out; this should be checked before travelling.

Recommended Itinerary

The most practical end-to-end plan is **18 walking days**, with daily stages mostly in the 16–24 km range. That suits fit walkers carrying overnight kit without forcing very long days in the Ardennes, where the route becomes hillier and accommodation is less evenly spaced.

Distances below are approximate. Check the current official mapping/topo-guide before booking accommodation, as day lengths can vary with the exact start/end point used, local diversions and where you stay overnight.

Standard itinerary: 18 days

Day	From	To	Approx. distance	Why this stage makes sense	Services/accommodation notes
1	Kalmthout / Dutch border	Brecht	22 km	A full but manageable opening day across the flat Campine, starting with heath and sandy lowland terrain rather than hard climbing.	Use this first night to settle into the rhythm of the route. Check local accommodation and transport options before committing to a late arrival.
2	Brecht	Grobbendonk	23 km	Keeps momentum through the easy-walking Kempen without over-stretching early in the trek.	Villages are more frequent than in the Ardennes, but accommodation should still be booked rather than assumed.
3	Grobbendonk	Herentals	14 km	A deliberately shorter day after two 20 km-plus stages, useful for recovery or a later start.	Herentals is one of the useful railway points on the route, making this a good access or exit stage for section-hikers.
4	Herentals	Averbode	24 km	A longer lowland day, still on relatively gentle terrain, linking the Herentals area with the abbey country around Averbode.	Accommodation is more limited than in larger towns, so book ahead or check transport links to nearby places before travelling.
5	Averbode	Diest	17 km	A shorter day into a well-placed historic town, balancing the previous 24 km stage.	Diest is a useful overnight stop and rail-access point. It also works well as the end of an early section-hike block.
6	Diest	Lummen	22 km	A steady day across the Demer/Limburg transition, long enough to keep the itinerary efficient without becoming a forced march.	Check accommodation in advance; if staying off-route, confirm the onward return to the trail.

Day	From	To	Approx. distance	Why this stage makes sense	Services/accommodation notes
7	Lummen	Hasselt	20 km	A sensible stage into a major Limburg service town, with easier logistics than the smaller rural stops.	Hasselt is one of the best resupply, rest and transport points in the Flemish half.
8	Hasselt	Genk	22 km	Links two well-served towns while passing the Bokrijk/Genk area, keeping the day practical for accommodation and transport.	Genk has rail access and is a strong place to re-stock before the quieter approach towards the Meuse.
9	Genk	Lanaken	24 km	One of the longer Flemish days, but still before the sustained Ardennes climbing begins.	Book ahead in Lanaken or nearby. Check the exact trail-to-accommodation distance, as this can affect the real day length.
10	Lanaken	Kanne	18 km	A more moderate day after the Genk–Lanaken stage, positioning you for the Meuse crossing section.	Kanne is a smaller overnight stop; check availability early, especially at weekends or in holiday periods.
11	Kanne	Visé	20 km	Brings the route to the Meuse area, marking the transition from Flemish lowlands towards Wallonia and the Ardennes approach.	Visé is close to the Liège transport sphere. For wider rail connections, Liège-Guillemins is the major hub in this part of Belgium.
12	Visé	Soumagne	20 km	A practical first Walloon stage beyond the Meuse, starting the more rolling and valley-linked character of the second half.	Services become less uniformly convenient than in the Flemish towns. Check the day's food and accommodation plan before leaving Visé.
13	Soumagne	Banneux	19 km	A moderate hill-country day, avoiding an overlong push while the route begins to gain a more Ardennes feel.	Banneux is a recognised pilgrimage stop, but do not rely on last-minute beds; book ahead.
14	Banneux	Spa	17 km	A shorter but useful stage into Spa, allowing time for resupply, laundry or a partial rest before the highest and more remote Ardennes stages.	Spa is one of the best service bases on the Walloon half and has rail access. It is a sensible place for a rest day if needed.

Day	From	To	Approx. distance	Why this stage makes sense	Services/accommodation notes
15	Spa	Stavelot	17 km	Keeps the first high-Ardennes day controlled, crossing upland terrain south of Spa without making the stage too long.	Stavelot is an important overnight stop before the quieter upland crossing towards Vielsalm. Book ahead.
16	Stavelot	Vielsalm	16 km	Short on paper, but this is one of the key Ardennes stages, climbing from the Amblève/Amel side towards the high wooded plateau near the route's Belgian high point.	Treat this as a harder day than the distance suggests. Vielsalm has rail access on the Liège-Luxembourg line, making it a useful exit or resupply point.
17	Vielsalm	Burg-Reuland	22 km	A longer Ardennes stage through the quieter eastern part of the route, with more commitment than the lowland days.	Accommodation is thinner from here to the finish. Book Burg-Reuland in advance and check food options carefully.
18	Burg-Reuland	Ouren	14 km	A short final day to the Our valley and the Belgium-Luxembourg-Germany tripoint, avoiding a rushed finish in the most remote transport area.	Ouren and the Burg-Reuland area rely on more limited public transport. Check TEC bus times before travelling, especially for the journey away from the finish.

Slower variant: 19–20 days

A slower plan suits walkers carrying camping gear, anyone wanting shorter days, or those using public transport to stitch the route together in sections. The easiest way to slow the itinerary is to add one or two non-walking or short-transfer days at the better-served towns.

Good places to add time are:

- **Hasselt or Genk** — useful mid-Flanders service towns with rail access and straightforward resupply.
- **Spa** — the best place to pause before the harder Ardennes stages.
- **Vielsalm** — useful before the final, quieter stretch towards Burg-Reuland and Ouren.

Avoid planning the final Ardennes nights too loosely. The section between **Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren** has fewer accommodation options than the earlier parts of the route, so a slower itinerary still needs firm bookings.

Faster variant: 15–17 days

A faster schedule is only sensible for strong long-distance walkers who are comfortable with repeated 25 km-plus days and who have already secured accommodation. The flat Flemish half is the best place to

gain time; the Ardennes stages are shorter for good reason, with more climbing, rougher forest paths and thinner logistics.

Possible ways to save days include combining shorter lowland stages, such as using the short **Grobbendonk–Herentals** or **Averbode–Diest** days as part of a longer day. Do this only after checking current official mapping and accommodation, because the exact total distance will depend on where the overnight stop is located.

A 14-day crossing of the full Belgian GR 5 is optimistic for most walkers. It leaves little margin for heat, rain, muddy valley paths, transport delays or the more limited services near the Ouren finish.

Planning the Route

How many days to allow

For the full Belgian GR 5, plan around **18–20 walking days** from Kalmthout to Ouren. An 18-day schedule matches the natural town-to-town rhythm of the route, while 19–20 days gives a more comfortable margin for transport connections, shorter winter daylight at the edges of the season, accommodation availability and the tougher Ardennes stages.

A fast itinerary is possible on the flatter Flemish half, where the walking is generally level and settlements are frequent. It becomes less sensible after the Meuse, where the route repeatedly climbs out of the Vesdre, Amblève, Salm and Our valleys onto wooded Ardennes plateaux; there, short-looking days can still take time.

Treat any substantially shorter end-to-end schedule with caution. A 14-day crossing would require long daily distances on consecutive days and leaves little flexibility for weather, mud, missed buses or a full pack.

Using the natural stage breaks

The route is best planned around towns and accommodation rather than around equal daily mileage. In Flanders, places such as Herentals, Diest, Hasselt and Genk make flexible overnight or transport points, and the walking between them is usually straightforward.

The Walloon and East Belgian end needs tighter planning. Nights around **Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren** should be arranged ahead, because services are thinner than in the Flemish lowlands and the Liège/Spa area.

The shorter stages near the end are not wasted days: they help manage transport, accommodation availability and the more remote Our valley finish. Do not assume that the final Ardennes section can be planned with the same flexibility as the Kempen or Limburg stages.

Walking it as sections

The Belgian GR 5 is very practical as a section hike. Rail access is one of its strengths, with useful stations on or near the route including **Herentals, Diest, Hasselt, Genk, Liège, Spa and Vielsalm**, plus the wider SNCB/NMBS network for returns to Brussels and other Belgian cities.

In Flanders, De Lijn buses add useful options for reaching villages and shortening stages. In Wallonia, TEC buses become more important, especially beyond Spa and Vielsalm.

The finish around **Burg-Reuland and Ouren** is the most awkward public-transport area on the route. Bus services there can be infrequent, so onward travel from the tripoint should be checked before committing to a finish time.

Shortening, extending or splitting the route

The clean Belgian end-to-end is **Kalmthout to Ouren**. If time is limited, it is more practical to split the trail into logical blocks than to rush the whole route: the Flemish lowlands, the Meuse/Liège transition,

and the Ardennes to Ouren each have a distinct character and different logistics.

Liège is the most useful major break point for many itineraries, because it is the main transport hub on the Belgian section and marks the change from lowland walking to Ardennes terrain. Spa, Stavelot and Vielsalm also work as later-stage access or exit points, subject to current transport times.

The GR 5 continues beyond Belgium into Luxembourg after Ouren, and it also links back north into the Netherlands before Kalmthout. For this HikeList route, however, plan only the Belgian crossing unless deliberately adding international stages.

What to plan first

Planning item	What matters on this route
Accommodation	Book the thinner Ardennes nights ahead, especially between Spa, Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren. Flanders and the larger towns give more choice.
Food	Resupply is generally easiest in the towns and larger villages. Carry enough food for the day in the upper Ardennes, where services are less frequent.
Water	Plan refills through accommodation, cafés and settlements. Do not rely on finding services at every forest or plateau section.
Navigation	The GR 5 is waymarked with white-and-red GR flashes, but carry the current topo-guide, map or GPX as a backup, especially through towns, forests and any diversions.
Transport	Check live SNCB/NMBS, De Lijn and TEC times before each section. This is particularly important at the Burg-Reuland/Ouren end.
Weather and ground	Spring, summer and autumn are the normal seasons. After rain, Ardennes valley and forest paths can be muddy and slippery, so build time into those days.
Permits	No special walking permit is a major planning issue for the GR 5 itself. Accommodation, campsite and any local access rules should still be checked before travelling.

Maps, guidebooks and waymarking

Use the official GR material rather than relying only on phone navigation. The Belgian route is covered by Grote Routepaden / SGR vzw in Flanders and GR Sentiers in Wallonia, with topo-guides for the Flemish and Walloon sections.

The white-and-red GR marks are the primary on-the-ground navigation. They are usually reliable, but diversions, forestry work and urban changes can affect any long trail; current waymarking and route notices should be checked before travelling.

When searching transport or accommodation, use the local place names. In Flanders the route uses Dutch names such as **Kalmthout, Herentals, Hasselt and Genk**; in Wallonia use French names such as **Visé, Soumagne, Spa, Stavelot and Vielsalm**; in the German-speaking Community use **Burg-Reuland** and **Ouren**.

Towns, Villages and Overnight Stops

For accommodation planning, the GR 5 in Belgium is easiest in Flanders and around the larger towns, then becomes more constrained in the Ardennes. Hotels, guesthouses, B&Bs, gîtes d'étape, youth hostels and campsites are all part of the accommodation mix, but the quieter upper-Ardennes section between Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren should be booked ahead.

Food and resupply are generally straightforward through the Flemish towns and in larger stops such as Hasselt, Genk, Visé, Liège and Spa. In smaller villages, do not assume a shop, café or evening meal will be available when you arrive. This should be checked before travelling.

Kalmthout

Kalmthout is the practical Belgian start area, with the GR 5 entering from the Netherlands through the Kalmthoutse Heide near the Dutch border. It is a sensible place to stay the night before starting, especially if you want an early departure across the heathland and sandy Campine terrain.

Accommodation and food options are more realistic here than at the exact border crossing, but the precise start-point access should be planned in advance. If arriving by public transport, check current SNCB/NMBS and De Lijn connections before fixing the first night.

Wuustwezel

Wuustwezel sits early on the Campine section between Kalmthout and Brecht. It is more useful as a staging or escape option than as a mandatory overnight for most end-to-end itineraries.

Use it if splitting the first stage or if accommodation in Kalmthout or Brecht works better for your schedule. Food and local transport details should be checked before travelling.

Brecht

Brecht is the first obvious overnight stop after the Kalmthoutse Heide, and it works well as the end of a first full day from the Dutch border. It is a better logistical target than the smaller villages and hamlets on the heathland approach.

Expect a more practical choice of food and accommodation than on the open Campine sections, but book ahead if arriving late or walking in a busy period. It is also a useful place to start or stop a short section walk using local Flanders transport.

Westmalle

Westmalle lies on the early lowland section between Brecht and Grobbendonk. Hikers often use it as a break point because of its abbey association and its position before the route continues through the Campine villages.

It can be useful for food or a shorter overnight stage, but it is not one of the strongest logistical anchors on the Belgian GR 5. Accommodation and meal availability should be checked before building an itinerary around it.

Zoersel

Zoersel is another practical intermediate village on the Brecht to Grobbendonk stretch. It is mainly useful if you want to avoid a long day or need a local service stop.

Do not treat Zoersel as a guaranteed resupply point without checking opening times. For most continuous walkers, Brecht and Grobbendonk are cleaner overnight targets.

Grobbendonk

Grobbendonk is a logical overnight stop and a good place to reset before the shorter onward stage to Herentals. It sits in the easier Flemish half of the route, where accommodation and services are generally more available than later in the Ardennes.

It is a useful stop if you are walking the official-style stage rhythm, but it also works well for adjusting mileage. Check local transport and accommodation availability before committing to a fixed arrival time.

Bouwel

Bouwel lies close to the route between Grobbendonk and Herentals. It is best treated as an intermediate place rather than a primary overnight stop.

It may be useful for section-hikers arranging local access, but Herentals is the stronger logistical base nearby. Food, accommodation and transport details should be checked before travelling.

Herentals

Herentals is one of the best early service towns on the GR 5. It has a railway station and makes a practical overnight, resupply and section-hiking access point.

Because the previous stage from Grobbendonk is relatively short in the standard itinerary, Herentals can also be used to rebalance the first few days. It is a good place to stock up before continuing towards Westerlo and Averbode.

Westerlo

Westerlo sits between Herentals and Averbode and is useful if you want to shorten that day. It is more practical than relying on very small intermediate settlements.

For a continuous end-to-end, it is usually an optional stop rather than a required night. Check accommodation and evening food before deciding to stop here instead of Averbode.

Averbode

Averbode is a natural overnight stop on the route and a useful target after Herentals. The abbey makes it a worthwhile halt, but from a planning point of view its main value is as a manageable stage end before the shorter walk to Diest.

Because it is smaller than Diest, accommodation should be booked ahead if you need to stay exactly here. Do not rely on last-minute food options without checking current opening times.

Scherpenheuvel-Zichem

Scherpenheuvel-Zichem lies between Averbode and Diest and is one of the more notable cultural stops on the Flemish section. The pilgrimage town of Scherpenheuvel is a good place to pause during the day if your timing allows.

It can work as an alternative overnight if you are adjusting stages, but Diest is the stronger end-of-day base for transport and services. Check accommodation before diverting your itinerary around this stop.

Diest

Diest is a very useful overnight town, with a railway station and enough services to make it a natural resupply point. It sits after the Averbode and Scherpenheuvel section and before the route continues towards Halen and Lummen.

For section-hikers, Diest is one of the easier places to join or leave the route. For continuous walkers, it is a sensible place to replace food, check weather and avoid carrying unnecessary supplies across the next Flemish stages.

Halen

Halen is an intermediate stop between Diest and Lummen. It is useful for pacing the day, but most itineraries continue through to Lummen.

Treat food and local services here as uncertain unless checked in advance. If you are shortening the Diest to Lummen stage, arrange accommodation before relying on Halen as an overnight.

Lummen

Lummen is a practical stage end between Diest and Hasselt. It is a good place to stop before the route continues into the better-served Hasselt area.

Accommodation and food options should be easier to plan here than in the smaller villages immediately before and after it, but bookings are still advisable. Use live De Lijn and SNCB/NMBS information if using it as a section endpoint.

Heusden-Zolder

Heusden-Zolder lies between Lummen and Hasselt. It is useful for walkers splitting the day or needing services before reaching the Limburg capital.

For most end-to-end schedules, Hasselt is the stronger overnight target. If stopping in Heusden-Zolder, check accommodation, food and transport before travelling.

Hasselt

Hasselt is one of the strongest logistical stops on the Belgian GR 5. It has a railway station, a wide service base and good onward public-transport options compared with the smaller Campine and Limburg villages.

This is a sensible place for a restock, laundry stop or shorter recovery day if your schedule allows. It is also one of the easiest points for joining or leaving the trail by train.

Diepenbeek

Diepenbeek sits between Hasselt and Genk. It is mainly an intermediate service point rather than a major overnight stop.

It can be useful if the Hasselt to Genk stage needs shortening, but Genk has the stronger transport and accommodation value. Check current local services before treating Diepenbeek as a resupply point.

Genk

Genk is another key town for logistics, with a railway station and a good range of town services. It is a practical overnight before the route continues through the heath and forest country towards Zutendaal and Lanaken.

For section-walkers, Genk is one of the easiest Limburg access points. For continuous walkers, it is a sensible place to top up supplies before the route becomes less urban again.

Zutendaal

Zutendaal lies between Genk and Lanaken and is useful for breaking up that stage. It is a quieter stop than Genk or Lanaken, so do not assume late food or broad accommodation choice.

It works best where accommodation has already been booked. Otherwise, most walkers will find Genk and Lanaken easier overnight anchors.

Lanaken

Lanaken is a good overnight stop before the route turns towards Kanne and the Meuse-side transition into Wallonia. It is one of the better practical bases in this part of Limburg.

Use it to organise food and accommodation before the next section, especially if walking the standard stage pattern. It is also a sensible place to check onward transport options before crossing into the Walloon part of the route.

Kanne

Kanne is the last Flemish stage end before the route reaches the Meuse at Visé. It is a smaller and more specific overnight target than Lanaken or Visé, so accommodation should be arranged ahead.

It is useful for keeping the daily distances even, but not the best place to rely on for flexible late arrivals. Check food and local transport before travelling.

Visé

Visé, also known in Dutch as Wezet, is the first major Walloon-side stop after Kanne and the Meuse crossing area. It is a practical place for accommodation, food and route logistics before the GR 5 climbs away from the Meuse towards Dalhem and Soumagne.

This is also the point where Liège becomes important for wider transport and accommodation planning. If Visé accommodation does not fit your itinerary, Liège can be used as the larger nearby hub, but transfers should be checked before booking.

Liège

Liège is the largest city associated with the Belgian GR 5 and the main transport hub for the Meuse section. Liège-Guillemins has frequent trains from Brussels, taking around an hour, and is the key rail gateway between the Flemish lowlands and the Ardennes side of the walk.

Not every continuous itinerary needs an overnight in Liège, especially if following the Visé to Soumagne stage. However, it is the strongest place in this part of the route for a major resupply, replacement gear, flexible accommodation or a rest stop.

Dalhem

Dalhem lies on the Walloon section after Visé and before Soumagne. It is more of an intermediate place than a core overnight for most hikers.

Use it for pacing the day rather than as a guaranteed service stop. Food, accommodation and bus links should be checked before travelling.

Soumagne

Soumagne is a practical overnight stop after the route leaves the Meuse side and heads into hillier Wallonia. It is a logical stage end before continuing through Olne and towards Banneux.

Accommodation should be planned rather than left to chance, as the route is now moving away from the most service-rich part of Belgium. Check TEC bus times if using Soumagne as a section start or finish.

Olne

Olne sits between Soumagne and the Vesdre-side country around Nessonvaux. It is useful as an intermediate halt but not usually a main overnight anchor.

Do not rely on it for a full resupply without checking ahead. If shortening the Soumagne to Banneux stage, arrange accommodation before committing to Olne.

Nessonvaux

Nessonvaux lies in the Vesdre valley section between Olne and Banneux. It is a useful reference point as the route begins to feel more like the Ardennes, with more valley-and-plateau walking than the flatter Flemish stages.

It may be useful for section logistics, but accommodation and food should be checked in advance. The next reliable stage-end target is usually Banneux.

Banneux

Banneux is a logical overnight stop on the climb towards Spa and is known for the Notre-Dame des Pauvres shrine. Its pilgrimage role can make it a useful place for accommodation, but availability should still be checked before travel.

For hikers, the main value of Banneux is its position: it keeps the Soumagne to Spa stretch manageable and sets up a shorter onward stage to Spa. Confirm evening food options before relying on a late arrival.

La Reid

La Reid lies between Banneux and Spa. It is best treated as a daytime service point or an optional stop if you need to shorten the stage.

Spa is the stronger accommodation and transport base, so most itineraries will continue there. If stopping at La Reid, book ahead and check food availability.

Spa

Spa is one of the most useful overnight stops on the Walloon GR 5. It has a railway station, a good accommodation base and the strongest services before the route crosses the higher Fagne de Malchamps and continues towards Stavelot.

This is a sensible place for a rest day, laundry, weather check or full resupply. If walking the Ardennes stages in poor weather, use Spa to reassess footwear, waterproofs and timing before the muddier forest and upland sections.

Stavelot

Stavelot is a key Ardennes overnight and the last major town before the thinner high-plateau section towards Vielsalm. It is a good place to eat well, resupply and check the forecast before the route climbs towards its highest Belgian ground.

Accommodation exists, but from here to Ouren the planning margin narrows. Book Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and the finish-area nights ahead rather than assuming same-day availability.

Grand-Halleux

Grand-Halleux lies near the Stavelot to Vielsalm stage, close to the high Ardennes uplands crossed by the GR 5. It is mainly an intermediate reference point rather than a standard overnight for most walkers.

Do not plan on using it as a guaranteed resupply unless current services are checked. The more practical overnight targets are Stavelot before the uplands and Vielsalm after them.

Vielsalm

Vielsalm is one of the most important late-route stops. It sits after the high Ardennes plateau section from Stavelot and is associated with the Liège–Luxembourg railway line via the Trois-Ponts/Vielsalm area.

For section-hikers, it is a valuable access point. For continuous walkers, it is the place to resupply and organise the final stages towards Burg-Reuland and Ouren, where accommodation and transport become more limited.

Commanster

Commanster lies on the Vielsalm to Burg-Reuland stage. It is a small upland village and should not be treated as a dependable service stop without checking in advance.

It may help with orientation and pacing across the German-speaking Community approach, but most overnight plans should remain focused on Vielsalm and Burg-Reuland. Carry enough food and water for

the day rather than relying on intermediate services.

Braunlauf

Braunlauf is another small settlement before Burg-Reuland. It is useful as a marker on the final Ardennes approach, but not as a primary logistics base.

Accommodation, food and transport should be checked before travelling if you intend to stop here. Otherwise, plan to continue to Burg-Reuland.

Burg-Reuland

Burg-Reuland is the final substantial overnight base before Ouren and the tripoint finish. It is an important place to book ahead, because the far eastern end of the route has fewer accommodation options and less frequent public transport than the earlier sections.

Use Burg-Reuland to fix the final-day plan: accommodation, food, onward travel and contingency arrangements should all be settled before leaving. TEC bus services in this area can be infrequent, so live timetables matter.

Ouren

Ouren is the Belgian finish on the river Our, at the Belgium–Luxembourg–Germany tripoint. It is a small, remote end point rather than a major service centre, so do not arrive assuming easy onward travel or spare accommodation.

If staying near the finish, book ahead. If leaving the same day, check TEC bus times and any onward connection before walking the final stage from Burg-Reuland. The GR 5 continues into Luxembourg from here, and the GR 56 also meets the route nearby, but onward plans should be fixed before arrival.

Getting to the Start

The Belgian GR 5 starts at the Belgian–Dutch border in the Kalmthoutse Heide area, near Kalmthout / Wuustwezel, north of Antwerp. The key planning point is that the trailhead is a border crossing in heathland, not a city-centre start: use the official GR topo-guide, map or GPX to identify the exact point where the white-and-red GR 5 markings enter Belgium.

By train

The usual rail approach is to travel into the Antwerp region, then continue towards the Kalmthout / Wuustwezel area by local public transport. Belgium's SNCB/NMBS network is the main rail operator, and the route as a whole is very public-transport friendly, but the exact best station and onward link for the border start depends on current timetables and where you intend to begin walking. This should be checked before travelling.

If arriving from Brussels or another Belgian city, plan the journey around an SNCB/NMBS connection to the north of Antwerp, then allow time for the final approach to the Kalmthoutse Heide / border area. Do not plan around simply reaching "Kalmthout" town centre unless the route to the actual GR 5 border crossing has also been checked.

By bus

De Lijn operates bus services in Flanders and is the relevant operator for local connections around the Antwerp Kempen. Buses may be useful for the final approach from nearby towns such as Kalmthout, Wuustwezel or Brecht, but stop locations and frequencies need checking carefully against the exact trailhead. This should be checked before travelling.

For an end-to-end walk, avoid starting late in the day if relying on a final bus connection. The first stage heads from the Dutch border towards Brecht, so missing the correct stop or starting from the wrong side of the heath can add unnecessary kilometres before the walk has properly begun.

By car

Driving to the start is possible in principle, but it is not the most convenient option for a point-to-point route ending far away at Ouren. Leaving a vehicle near the Kalmthoutse Heide / border area creates a retrieval problem after a nearly 393 km walk across Belgium.

Do not assume long-stay parking is available at or near the nature reserve or in small villages around the start. Parking rules, permitted durations and overnight restrictions should be checked locally before leaving a car.

A more practical car-based plan is often to be dropped at the start, or to park at accommodation the night before and use local transport or a pre-booked taxi for the final link to the border. Taxi availability in the Kalmthout / Wuustwezel / Brecht area should be arranged in advance rather than left to the morning of departure.

From the nearest airport

There is no special airport-to-trailhead transfer for the GR 5 start. After flying into Belgium, join the national rail network and route towards the Antwerp region, then use local transport for the Kalmthoutse Heide / border area. Airport rail and bus connections, and the final De Lijn link to the start, should be checked before travelling.

If arriving late, it is usually better to sleep near Antwerp, Kalmthout, Wuustwezel or Brecht and start the trail the next morning rather than trying to reach the exact border start after dark.

Where to stay before starting

The simplest pre-start bases are Kalmthout, Wuustwezel or Brecht, depending on where accommodation and local transport work best for the exact trailhead. Antwerp is the more useful larger-city base if you want wider transport connections and services before heading out to the border in the morning.

Book the first night and the first morning's access together: accommodation that looks close on a map may still leave a long or awkward approach to the actual GR 5 crossing into Belgium. Before setting off, check current SNCB/NMBS and De Lijn times, current GR waymarking or diversion notices, and the exact point where the Belgian section begins.

Getting Home from the Finish

The Belgian GR 5 finishes at Ouren, in the municipality of Burg-Reuland, on the river Our at the Belgium–Luxembourg–Germany tripoint. This is the most remote transport point on the Belgian route, so onward travel needs more planning than earlier stage towns such as Liège, Spa or Vielsalm.

Do not assume an easy late-afternoon exit from Ouren. If the final stage from Burg-Reuland to Ouren is likely to finish late, either book accommodation at or near the finish, arrange a lift or taxi in advance, or plan the final walking day around a known TEC bus connection. Live timetables should be checked before travelling.

By train

There is no railway station at Ouren or Burg-Reuland. The nearest practical rail access is back towards the Ardennes rail corridor, with Vielsalm and Trois-Ponts on the Liège–Luxembourg line being the key railheads named for this part of the route.

From Vielsalm or Trois-Ponts, trains connect towards Liège, where Liège-Guillemins is the main hub for onward Belgian and international rail travel. Liège-Guillemins also has frequent trains from Brussels, taking about 1 hour, making it the natural interchange for many walkers leaving the trail.

The main difficulty is the first step: getting from Ouren or Burg-Reuland to a station. That link depends on local TEC buses or a pre-arranged taxi. This should be checked before travelling, especially at weekends, on public holidays and outside school-term patterns.

By bus

The finish around Burg-Reuland and Ouren relies on TEC buses, and services are limited compared with the rest of the GR 5. Treat the bus out of Ouren as a fixed part of the walking plan rather than something to improvise at the end of the day.

Check the current TEC timetable for Ouren and Burg-Reuland before booking accommodation or onward trains. If the only usable bus is early or mid-afternoon, shorten the final day, stay locally, or arrange a taxi to a railhead such as Vielsalm or Trois-Ponts.

By car/taxi

A car pickup is the simplest way to leave Ouren, but it needs arranging in advance. The finish is rural, and walkers should not rely on finding an available taxi on arrival without a booking.

For a taxi transfer, pre-book from accommodation or from a larger nearby rail-linked town. The most practical use of a taxi is usually to bridge the gap from Ouren or Burg-Reuland to a railway station on the Liège–Luxembourg line, then continue by train.

If leaving a car for the finish, check local parking arrangements in advance and avoid assuming long-stay parking is available at the tripoint itself. This should be checked before travelling.

From the nearest airport

For most international departures, plan the route out of the finish as: Ouren or Burg-Reuland to a railhead by TEC bus or taxi, then train via Liège-Guillemins, with onward rail connections towards Brussels and other Belgian cities.

Specific airport choice depends on flight availability and onward rail connections. The critical planning point is not the airport itself but the rural first leg from Ouren: confirm the bus or taxi before committing to a same-day flight.

Where to stay at the finish

Accommodation is thinner on the final Ardennes stages between Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren, so the last night should be booked ahead. This is particularly important if finishing outside the main summer season or on a day when bus options are poor.

Staying at or near Ouren/Burg-Reuland makes the final day more relaxed and avoids racing the last bus. A more transport-focused alternative is to continue or transfer back to Vielsalm or another rail-connected town, but that requires a reliable bus or pre-arranged taxi from the finish.

Which Direction Should You Walk?

Standard direction: Kalmthout to Ouren

The natural direction for the Belgian GR 5 is south-east from the Dutch border near Kalmthout to Ouren, where Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany meet. This follows the wider logic of the international GR 5 as it heads away from the North Sea towards Luxembourg and, beyond Belgium, the Alps and Mediterranean.

For most end-to-end walkers, Kalmthout to Ouren is the best direction. The route starts with the flatter, easier terrain of the Campine and Limburg, then becomes progressively hillier after the Meuse near Visé and Liège as it enters the Ardennes. That gives your legs several days to settle before the repeated climbs between the Vesdre, Amblève, Salm and Our valleys.

The scenery progression also works well this way. The walk builds from heath, pine forest, canals and quiet Flemish villages to the more enclosed and rugged Ardennes, finishing in the wooded Our valley at the tripoint. As a long-distance objective, Ouren is a far more satisfying finish than simply arriving back in the lowlands.

The main drawback is transport at the end. Burg-Reuland and Ouren are the most remote part of the Belgian route and rely on less frequent TEC buses, so onward travel from the finish needs planning. This should be checked before travelling.

Reverse direction: Ouren to Kalmthout

Walking north-west from Ouren is perfectly possible, but it changes the character of the hike. The hardest and most remote stages come first: Ouren, Burg-Reuland, Vielsalm, Stavelot and Spa sit in the upper Ardennes, where accommodation is thinner and the walking is more demanding than in Flanders.

The advantage is logistical rather than scenic. By dealing with the remote Ouren or Burg-Reuland access at the start, the route becomes progressively easier to leave by public transport as it approaches Liège, Limburg and the Antwerp Kempen. This can suit section-hikers or anyone who wants the final days to be simpler underfoot and easier to connect from.

The reverse direction also means many of the bigger climbs are tackled early, before any accumulated fatigue from two weeks on trail. However, the Ardennes are a series of valley-to-plateau crossings rather than one single directional climb, so there is no major technical advantage either way.

Direction comparison

Factor	Kalmthout → Ouren	Ouren → Kalmthout
Traditional route logic	Best fit with the GR 5's southbound journey	Less intuitive, but valid
Terrain progression	Easier lowlands first, Ardennes later	Harder Ardennes first, easier lowlands later
Transport	Easier start, more awkward finish at Ouren	Awkward start, easier finish towards Flanders

Factor	Kalmthout → Ouren	Ouren → Kalmthout
Accommodation flow	Plentiful early; book upper-Ardenne nights ahead	Book remote first nights carefully, then easier later
Psychological finish	Strong finish at the Our valley tripoint	Lower-key finish in the northern lowlands
Weather and wind	No reliable route-specific advantage	No reliable route-specific advantage

Recommendation

Walk the Belgian GR 5 from Kalmthout to Ouren unless there is a specific transport reason to do otherwise. This direction gives the best overall progression, lets fitness build before the Ardennes, and ends at the memorable Belgium–Luxembourg–Germany tripoint.

Choose the reverse only if it makes public transport or section-hiking plans easier. In either direction, pay particular attention to the Burg-Reuland and Ouren end of the route, where buses are less frequent and accommodation should be arranged ahead.

Accommodation Along the Route

The Belgian GR 5 works well as an inn-to-inn walk, but it is not a hut-to-hut route with a fixed lodging network. Accommodation is a mix of hotels, guesthouses, chambres d'hôtes/B&Bs, youth hostels, gîtes d'étape and campsites, with the easiest planning in Flanders and around the larger Walloon towns.

The main constraint is not the terrain but matching available beds to an 18–20 day walking schedule. Flanders has frequent towns and generally stronger public transport back-up; the upper-Ardenne section from Spa through Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren is thinner and should be booked before committing to dates.

Where accommodation is strongest

The most useful overnight bases are the larger towns on or near the route: Herentals, Diest, Hasselt, Genk, Liège and Spa. These are the places where walkers have the best chance of finding a choice of hotels, guesthouses and transport options, and they are also useful for rest days, laundry and resupply.

Liège is especially useful if the Visé/Soumagne area does not fit neatly with available beds. The city is the major transport hub on the Belgian GR 5, so it can be used as an off-route overnight base if rail or bus timings work for the stage. This should be checked before travelling.

Spa is the key accommodation stop before the highest Ardenne stages. It is also a practical place to pause before the more remote stretch towards Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren.

Where accommodation is limited

Smaller stage ends such as Averbode, Lummen, Kanne, Soumagne and Banneux need more care. They are usable as overnight stops, but there may be fewer beds and less flexibility if arriving without a reservation.

The final Ardenne stages are the most important to plan. Stavelot and Vielsalm are established overnight stops, but the country becomes quieter beyond them, and Burg-Reuland and Ouren should not be treated as places where last-minute accommodation is guaranteed.

Commanster and Braunlauf are better thought of as route points rather than dependable overnight bases unless accommodation has been arranged in advance. If a lodging plan depends on one of the smaller villages, confirm the booking and the walking distance to it before finalising the stage.

Booking strategy

For a continuous end-to-end walk, book the Ardenne section first, then build the easier Flemish nights around it. The risk of awkward gaps is highest near the end of the Belgian route, not in the flatter northern half.

In spring, summer and autumn, weekends can tighten availability in popular places such as Spa and the Ardenne towns. Local events and pilgrimage periods may also affect availability around Stavelot and Banneux, so fixed-date walkers should book early.

Camping can be part of the accommodation mix, but it should not be assumed to solve every stage. Campsites, opening seasons and exact locations should be checked before travelling, especially outside midsummer or in the quieter Ardennes valleys.

Luggage and transfer options

There is no single route-wide luggage-transfer system built into the Belgian GR 5. Some walkers may be able to arrange local taxi transfers, accommodation pick-ups or luggage help for awkward stages, but this must be organised directly and confirmed in advance.

Public transport is often the cleaner solution in Flanders and around Liège, Spa, Trois-Ponts and Vielsalm, where rail access can make it possible to sleep off-route and return to the trail the next morning. The finish around Burg-Reuland and Ouren is more remote and relies on infrequent TEC buses, so transfers there need more careful planning.

Accommodation planning table

Place	Accommodation level (good/limited/none)	Best for	Notes
Kalmthout / Wuustwezel	Limited	Starting the Belgian section	Useful for positioning near the Dutch border and Kalmthoutse Heide; book the first night rather than relying on late arrival.
Brecht	Limited	First-stage overnight	A practical stop after the opening Campine stage, but not a major accommodation hub.
Grobbendonk	Limited	Shortening the early Flemish stages	Works for the Brecht–Herentals area; check availability before fixing a short day here.
Herentals	Good	Strong Flemish base	One of the better early-route towns for accommodation, transport and resupply.
Averbode	Limited	Abbey-area overnight	Useful for the Herentals–Diest stretch, but options are fewer than in the larger towns.
Diest	Good	Comfortable town stop	A strong overnight choice in the Hageland, with better services than smaller nearby villages.
Lummen	Limited	Breaking the Diest– Hasselt approach	Practical if following the standard stage pattern, but book ahead.
Hasselt	Good	Rest, resupply and transport	One of the best-served accommodation stops in the Flemish half.
Genk	Good	Limburg overnight and section-hiking base	Good for walkers using public transport or splitting the Hasselt–Lanaken area.
Lanaken	Limited	Approaching Kanne and the Meuse	A useful pre-Meuse stop, but smaller than Hasselt or Genk.

Place	Accommodation level (good/limited/none)	Best for	Notes
Kanne	Limited	Last Flemish-side overnight before Visé	Treat as a small-village stop; confirm beds before planning to end the day here.
Visé / Liège	Good	Meuse crossing and major transport hub	Visé is on the route; Liège offers the strongest city-base options nearby if transport connections suit.
Soumagne	Limited	First Walloon upland stage	Usable as a stage end, but less flexible than Liège or Spa.
Banneux	Limited	Pilgrimage-site overnight	Book ahead, particularly around busy shrine periods.
Spa	Good	Main Ardennes gateway	The best accommodation base before the high wooded stages towards Stavelot and Vielsalm.
Stavelot	Limited	Ardennes town stop	Important stage end, but the route is now in a thinner accommodation zone; book ahead.
Vielsalm	Limited	Final high-Ardennes base	Key overnight before Burg-Reuland; useful rail access nearby, but do not leave beds to chance.
Burg-Reuland	Limited	Penultimate overnight	Essential to arrange before walking the Vielsalm–Ouren end of the route.
Ouren	Limited	Finish at the Belgium–Luxembourg–Germany tripoint	Remote finish on the Our valley; onward transport and accommodation should be confirmed before travelling.

Camping and Wild Camping

Camping can work on the Belgian GR 5, but it needs more planning than hotel or B&B walking. The route passes many towns and villages, yet formal camping options are not guaranteed at every natural stage end, especially in the quieter Ardennes between Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren.

Treat camping as a mixed accommodation strategy rather than a simple campsite-to-campsite trek. Most walkers carrying a tent should still be ready to use guesthouses, youth hostels, gîtes d'étape or hotels on stages where there is no practical campsite close to the trail.

Formal campsites

Formal campsites are the safest and most reliable option where they fit the itinerary. Look first around larger service points and tourist areas on or near the route, including the Kempen and Limburg towns, the Meuse/Liège area, Spa, Stavelot, Vielsalm and the Our valley.

Do not assume a campsite exists exactly at each day's endpoint. The official-style 18-stage split includes several places where accommodation is thinner, so current campsite locations, opening dates and booking requirements should be checked before travelling.

Part of the route	Camping practicality
Kalmthout to Genk	Generally the easiest half to plan around services, with frequent towns and flatter walking, but stages still need checking individually.
Genk to Visé / Liège area	More built-up and transport-friendly; campsites may not always be the most convenient option compared with indoor accommodation.
Banneux, Spa, Stavelot and Vielsalm	Better suited to walkers carrying a tent than the final remote stretch, but book or check availability ahead, especially in holiday periods.
Vielsalm to Burg-Reuland and Ouren	The thinnest section for services. Do not arrive assuming a late, unbooked camping option will be available.

Wild camping

Do not plan the GR 5 on the assumption that wild camping is allowed. Rules can vary by region, municipality, landowner and nature area, and this should be checked before travelling.

This matters particularly on the GR 5 because the route crosses sensitive heath, forest and upland environments, including places such as Kalmthoutse Heide and the Fagne de Malchamps area. It also passes through farmland, villages, river valleys and managed woodland where camping without permission can cause conflict or damage.

If no formal campsite is available, use lawful alternatives: booked indoor accommodation, a recognised gîte d'étape, a youth hostel, or public transport to a nearby town with accommodation. Belgium's rail and bus network makes this easier than on many long-distance trails, although the Burg-Reuland and Ouren end is more remote and bus times must be checked carefully.

Water and resupply when camping

The route is not a wilderness trail, so water and food are usually managed through towns, villages and accommodation rather than natural sources. Carry enough water for long heath, forest and Ardennes sections, especially in warm weather or when walking between smaller settlements.

Do not rely on rivers, fens or boggy upland water as a primary supply. The route follows or crosses river valleys such as the Vesdre, Amblève, Salm and Our, but access, quality and treatment suitability are not something to improvise around after a long day.

Fires, stoves and low-impact camping

Campfires should be treated as inappropriate on this route. Heathland, pine forest, dry summer grass and managed woodland are all poor places for open flames, and protected areas may have strict restrictions.

Use campsite facilities where available. If using a stove in a permitted setting, keep it stable, away from vegetation and never leave it unattended.

Follow Leave No Trace standards throughout the Belgian GR 5:

- camp only where it is legal and permitted;
- avoid trampling heath, bog, young woodland and crops;
- take all litter out, including food waste;
- keep noise low near villages, campsites and wildlife areas;
- do not wash directly in streams, ponds or fens;
- leave gates, paths and signed nature restrictions exactly as found.

Seasonal considerations

Spring, summer and autumn are the practical camping seasons. Summer gives the longest daylight and easiest drying conditions, but it is also when campsites and tourist accommodation around Spa, Stavelot, Vielsalm and the Ardennes can be busiest.

After rain, valley and forest paths in Wallonia can be muddy and slippery, and a wet tent adds noticeable weight over an 18–20 day walk. In the Ardennes, nights can also feel much cooler than in the flat Kempen and Limburg stages, particularly around the higher wooded plateaux between Spa, Stavelot and Vielsalm.

Food, Water and Resupply

The Belgian GR 5 is not a wilderness food-carry route, but it still needs stage-by-stage planning. The Flemish half is the easiest to resupply: towns and villages are frequent, and larger stops such as Herentals, Diest, Hasselt and Genk are well supplied.

The Walloon half becomes progressively more rural after the Meuse. Liège and Spa are major resupply points, but the upper Ardennes stages towards Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren are thinner for shops and eating options, so do not leave food planning until late in the day.

Food resupply strategy

For most walkers, the simplest system is to buy breakfast and lunch supplies in the larger towns, then use accommodation or town restaurants for the evening meal where available. Carrying one full day of food is usually enough on the better-served sections, but the Ardennes finish is worth treating more cautiously.

Do not assume every village on the map has an open shop, café or petrol station. Rural opening hours, seasonal closures and Sunday trading can affect food access, especially in smaller Walloon villages and around the Burg-Reuland–Ouren end. This should be checked before travelling.

Good resupply anchors on the route include Kalmthout/Brecht, Herentals, Diest, Hasselt, Genk, Visé/Liège, Spa, Stavelot and Vielsalm. For the final approach to Burg-Reuland and Ouren, start with enough food for the stage and the evening unless accommodation has confirmed meals or nearby options.

Water

The reliable water plan is to refill from accommodation, cafés, restaurants and public facilities in towns. The route crosses or follows plenty of wet country — canals, fens, the Meuse, Vesdre, Amblève, Salm and Our valleys — but natural water should not be treated as drinkable without filtration or purification.

On typical Belgian GR 5 stages, most walkers should start with enough water for several hours of walking rather than relying on finding taps between villages. In warm weather, on sandy Campine paths, open heathland, or during the hillier Ardennes stages, carry extra.

A practical baseline is 1.5–2 litres at the start of a normal day, increasing in hot weather or where the next confirmed refill is at the stage end. If camping or staying somewhere without confirmed meals, add water needs for cooking and the evening.

Section-by-section resupply notes

Section	Food availability	Water availability	Notes
Kalmthout / Dutch border to Herentals	Generally good by GR standards, with towns and villages including Kalmthout, Wuustwezel, Brecht, Westmalle, Zoersel, Grobbendonk, Bouwel and Herentals.	Refill in towns, accommodation and cafés where open. Do not rely on heathland or fen water.	The Campine is easy walking but can feel dry and exposed on sandy heath and pine-forest sections. Start each day with lunch if leaving early or walking on a Sunday.
Herentals to Hasselt	Good overall, with useful stops including Westerlo, Averbode, Scherpenheuvel-Zichem, Diest, Halen, Lummen and Hasselt.	Town and accommodation refills are the safest plan.	This is one of the easier parts of the route for food planning. Diest and Hasselt are strong resupply points before continuing east.
Hasselt to Visé / Liège area	Good around Hasselt, Diepenbeek, Genk, Zutendaal, Lanaken, Kanne and Visé, though individual village services should still be checked.	Refill in settlements; do not rely on canals, fens or the Meuse as untreated drinking water.	Use Hasselt or Genk for a fuller shop. Visé and the Liège area are the transition point before the more rural Ardennes stages.
Visé to Spa	Moderate to good, with larger settlement access around Visé/Liège and Spa, and smaller places such as Dalhem, Soumagne, Olne, Nessonvaux, Banneux and La Reid.	Refill before climbing away from river valleys and again at accommodation. Natural water in the Vesdre area should be filtered or purified if used.	The route becomes hillier and services are less predictable between towns. Carry lunch rather than assuming a midday café will be open.
Spa to Stavelot	Fair, anchored by Spa and Stavelot.	Refill before leaving Spa and again at the stage end. Upland bog and stream water around the Fagne de Malchamps should be treated if used.	This is a short stage by distance but crosses higher, wetter upland terrain. Weather can make stopping options less appealing, so carry food that can be eaten on the move.
Stavelot to Vielsalm	Limited between the main towns, with Stavelot and Vielsalm the key resupply points.	Refill at Stavelot and Vielsalm; filter or purify any stream water if needed.	This is the highest and wildest-feeling Belgian section, climbing onto wooded Ardennes uplands near Mont-le-Soie / Grand-Halleux. Start with enough food and water for the full stage.
Vielsalm to Burg-Reuland	Limited and more rural, with Vielsalm the safest place to buy supplies before setting off.	Refill at accommodation and confirmed services; do not depend on finding public taps en route.	Treat this as a self-sufficient day unless meals or shops have been checked in advance. Commanster and Braunlauf are useful route points but should not be assumed to have open resupply.
Burg-Reuland to Ouren	Most limited part of the Belgian route. Burg-Reuland is the last practical planning point before Ouren.	Carry enough water from the start or from confirmed accommodation. The Our is not a tap source unless water is filtered or purified.	The finish at Ouren is remote by Belgian standards. Check food, accommodation meals and onward transport before committing to the final stage.

Navigation and Waymarking

The Belgian GR 5 is an official Grande Randonnée route and is generally straightforward to follow. It uses the standard white-and-red GR flashes throughout, with maintenance split between Grote Routepaden in Flanders and GR Sentiers / Les Sentiers de Grande Randonnée in Wallonia.

Do not treat the waymarks as the only navigation tool. On a route of around 393 km, markers can be missed at road junctions, in towns, after forestry work or where temporary diversions are in place. Current waymarking and diversion notices should be checked before travelling.

How the waymarking feels on the ground

In Flanders, the route is mostly low-level and non-technical, crossing heath, pine forest, towpaths, lanes, villages and towns from Kalmthout through Herentals, Diest, Hasselt, Genk and Lanaken. Navigation is usually easy, but the flat terrain can make small turns feel less obvious, especially where paths, cycleways and local walking routes overlap.

Around the Meuse, Visé and the approaches to Liège, expect more urban and semi-urban navigation. Keep a closer eye on turns through streets, bridges, lanes and built-up areas, where a missed blaze can send you off-route quickly.

In Wallonia, the GR 5 becomes hillier and more wooded between Soumagne, Banneux, Spa, Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren. The route is still waymarked, but forest tracks, muddy valley paths and repeated climbs onto Ardennes plateaux make a GPX track more useful than it is in the easier Flemish lowlands.

GPX and digital navigation

A GPX file is strongly recommended for the full Belgian section, even though the trail is waymarked. It is most useful for checking turns in towns, confirming the correct line through forests, and rejoining the trail after accommodation stops or public-transport links.

Download the route for offline use before setting out each day. Mobile data should not be relied on as the primary navigation method, particularly in the quieter upper-Ardennes stages towards Burg-Reuland and Ouren.

Any reliable offline mapping app that can display GPX files over a detailed walking or topographic base map is suitable. Make sure the app shows paths, forest tracks, minor lanes, railway stations and village names clearly; road-only mapping is not enough for this route.

Paper guides and backup maps

The most useful paper navigation backup is the official GR topo-guide material. The Belgian route is covered by official Grote Routepaden guides for the Flemish section and the Wallonia/Luxembourg section, with GR Sentiers responsible for the Walloon network.

Current editions and prices should be checked before ordering. Carrying the relevant guide pages, or at least saved offline route notes, is sensible for a continuous end-to-end walk.

A paper backup matters most if walking long days between Spa, Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren, where settlements and public-transport options are thinner than in Flanders. It is less critical for short section hikes near rail-served towns such as Herentals, Diest, Hasselt, Genk, Liège, Spa or Vielsalm, but still useful if a phone fails.

Places to pay extra attention

- **Kalmthout / Kalmthoutse Heide:** the Belgian section begins near the Dutch border, so check that you are following the Belgian GR 5 line south-east rather than another local heathland route.
- **Towns and built-up sections:** Herentals, Diest, Hasselt, Genk, Visé and the Liège area require more attention at junctions than the open countryside.
- **Forest and plateau sections in the Ardennes:** between Spa, Stavelot, Vielsalm and Burg-Reuland, use the waymarks together with GPX checks rather than relying on memory or a single forest track.
- **Burg-Reuland / Ouren:** the GR 56 meets the route nearby, and the GR 5 continues across the border towards Luxembourg. Check signs carefully if finishing at Ouren rather than continuing beyond Belgium.

Is it suitable for less experienced navigators?

Yes, provided basic preparation is in place. The Belgian GR 5 has official white-and-red waymarking, no technical terrain and frequent towns across much of the route, so it is a good long-distance trail for walkers who are comfortable following signs and checking a map.

It is not a route to walk with waymarks alone for 18–20 days. A downloaded GPX track, offline mapping, charged phone, power bank and the relevant official topo-guide or route notes are the sensible minimum for an independent end-to-end hike.

Terrain, Conditions and Difficulty in Practice

The Belgian GR 5 is hard because it is long, not because the walking is technical. There is no alpine terrain, scrambling or exposed ridge walking; the route stays on a mix of footpaths, forest tracks, dirt and gravel paths, towpaths, lanes and some urban or paved sections.

The main practical difficulty is the change in character after the Meuse. The Flemish stages are generally easy underfoot and low-gradient, while the Walloon section repeatedly drops into and climbs out of river valleys before crossing higher wooded Ardennes plateaux.

A trail of two distinct halves

Section	Terrain in practice	What makes it easy or hard
Kalmthout to the Limburg / Meuse approach	Flat, sandy Campine and Limburg walking: heathland, pine plantations, fens, canals, quiet villages, farmland and some town sections	Easy gradients and straightforward surfaces, but the repeated 20 km-plus days still accumulate fatigue
Around Kanne, Visé and Liège	More urban, paved and valley walking around the Meuse corridor	Navigation through built-up areas and hard surfaces can be more tiring on feet than the height gain
Visé / Liège to Spa, Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren	Ardennes walking: wooded hills, river valleys, plateaux, forest paths, lanes and quieter upland country	Repeated climbs and descents, wetter forest paths, mud after rain and fewer easy bail-out points towards the far end

Underfoot: sand, forest paths, lanes and paving

In the Flemish north, much of the walking is forgiving: sandy tracks, heath paths, pine-forest paths, towpaths and quiet lanes. This is the easiest part of the route physically, with little steep ground, although sandy surfaces can still feel slow over a long day.

The route also uses paved and urban sections, especially through or near towns such as Herentals, Diest, Hasselt, Genk, Visé and Liège. These sections are not technically difficult, but they are harder on feet and joints than forest or heath paths, so footwear should be comfortable for both trail and tarmac.

In the Ardennes, expect more dirt, gravel and forest paths, with valley paths that can become muddy and slippery after rain. A lightweight waterproof boot or grippy trail shoe is more useful here than a stiff mountain boot; the route does not demand technical alpine footwear.

Climbs, descents and high ground

The first half of the Belgian route is mostly level. The significant climbing begins after the Meuse, where the GR 5 works through the Vesdre, Amblève, Salm and Our valleys and repeatedly climbs onto wooded plateaux.

The highest ground is about 580 m on the Stavelot-Vielsalm stage, on the high Ardennes plateau around the Mont-le-Soie / Grand-Halleux area. The Fagne de Malchamps / Bérinzenne upland south of Spa reaches around 570 m, and the Vielsalm-Burg-Reuland stage rises to around 520 m near Quatre-Vents.

These heights are modest by mountain standards, but the cumulative effort matters. A 17 km Ardennes day can feel harder than a longer Flemish day because of the repeated ascent, descent and wetter underfoot conditions.

Mud, wet ground and slippery sections

Mud is most likely on forest and valley paths in the Walloon half, especially after rain. The route is not defined by bog-hopping, but the upland heath and forest areas around Spa, Stavelot and Vielsalm can be damp underfoot in poor weather.

Spring and autumn are often the seasons when surface conditions matter most. Expect softer tracks, wet leaves, slippery roots and slower progress in wooded valleys after rain.

Summer generally gives the easiest walking conditions, but the route remains a long-distance endurance walk. Long flat days on hard or sandy surfaces can still be tiring, particularly when several 20 km-plus stages are walked back to back.

Technical difficulty and exposure

There is no scrambling, no via ferrata-style ground and no sustained exposed terrain on the Belgian GR 5. The Ardennes sections are hill-walking rather than mountaineering: forested slopes, valley paths, lanes and upland tracks.

The main hazards are ordinary walking hazards: slippery mud, wet roots, uneven forest paths, hard paving through towns and fatigue from consecutive days. In poor weather, descents into the Vesdre, Amblève, Salm and Our valleys should be taken steadily, especially with a full pack.

Fields, gates and rural sections

The route passes through rural farmland as well as heath, forest and villages, but it is not primarily a stile-heavy pasture route. The practical issues are more often surface changes, waymark-following through villages and managing long days between overnight stops.

Where the route crosses agricultural land, keep strictly to the marked path and close any gates encountered. Local field access and temporary diversions can change, so current waymarking and diversion notices should be checked before travelling.

What actually makes the route hard

The Belgian GR 5 is best approached as a stamina walk. The terrain rarely creates a single severe obstacle, but the full route asks for roughly 18–20 days of consistent walking, with several long stages and a tougher final third.

The easiest kilometres are in the Campine and Limburg; the hardest walking is usually from the Meuse into the Ardennes and on towards Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren. Walkers who are comfortable with consecutive 17–24 km days, mixed surfaces and repeated moderate climbs should find the route demanding but manageable.

Weather and Best Time to Walk

Best season

The best windows for the Belgian GR 5 are **spring, early summer and autumn**. These give the best balance of usable daylight, comfortable walking conditions and manageable trail surfaces across both halves of the route.

For a continuous 18–20 day walk, **May, June, September and early October** are the most practical choices. They avoid the shortest days of winter and usually make the Ardennes stages between Spa, Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren easier to manage than in cold, wet conditions.

Seasonal planning at a glance

Season	Practical verdict for hikers
Spring	A strong choice. Expect wet or muddy paths after rain, especially in Walloon valleys and forests, but temperatures are generally better for long days than in high summer. Good for a full end-to-end if accommodation is booked ahead in the thinner Ardennes section.
Summer	Realistic and popular for long daylight, but the flat sandy Campine and heathland sections can feel exposed and tiring in hot weather. Carry enough water between villages and start early on warm days.
Autumn	Often one of the best times for the Ardennes forests and quieter stages. Shortening daylight matters on the longer days, and wet leaves, mud and slippery forest paths become more of an issue after rain.
Winter	Not the recommended season for the full route. The trail is not alpine or technical, but short daylight, mud, cold rain, possible snow or ice on the higher Ardennes plateaux, and reduced flexibility around accommodation and buses make it better suited to experienced section-hikers than to a continuous trek. This should be checked before travelling.

Lowland Flanders: heat, sand and exposure

The Flemish half from Kalmthout through the Campine, Hageland and Limburg is mostly low, flat and easy underfoot. In dry summer weather, the sandy heath and pine-forest sections around Kalmthout, Brecht, Herentals and Genk can be dusty and tiring, even without significant climbs.

There is no mountain exposure here, but heat can still become the main difficulty. Plan water stops carefully on heath and forest days, and do not rely on every small village having an open shop or café at the time you pass.

After rain, the lowland route is generally less demanding than the Ardennes half, but fens, forest tracks and unsurfaced paths can still be wet or greasy. Waterproof footwear is more useful than heavy mountain boots for most walkers.

Wallonia and the Ardennes: rain, mud and colder uplands

The route changes character after the Meuse near Visé and Liège. From the Vesdre and Amblève valleys onwards, the GR 5 repeatedly climbs out of river valleys onto wooded Ardennes plateaux, with the highest ground around **580 m** between Stavelot and Vielsalm.

This is the section where weather has the biggest effect on daily progress. Valley and forest paths can be muddy and slippery after rain, and descents may take longer than the stage distances suggest.

The higher ground around Spa, the Fagne de Malchamps, Stavelot, Vielsalm and Burg-Reuland can feel noticeably colder, wetter and windier than the Flemish stages. In poor visibility or fog, keep close attention to the white-and-red GR waymarks and carry reliable mapping or GPX backup.

Storms, wind and bad-weather days

The GR 5 in Belgium has no technical mountain ground, but exposed heath, forest edges and upland plateaux are still poor places to be in thunderstorms or strong winds. If storms are forecast, avoid being committed to a long stage with few bail-out options, especially between Spa, Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren.

Belgium's rail and bus network makes many sections easy to shorten or skip in bad weather, particularly in Flanders and around Liège, Spa and Vielsalm. The far Ardennes finish around Burg-Reuland and Ouren is less flexible and relies on infrequent buses, so weather and transport should be checked together before setting out.

Daylight and stage length

The route is hard mainly because of sustained distance over many days. Long daylight in late spring and summer gives more margin for the 20 km-plus stages in Flanders and Limburg, and for slower progress in the Ardennes after rain.

In autumn and winter, shorter days make early starts more important. This particularly matters on the later Walloon stages, where climbs, mud, forest paths and fewer services can reduce pace.

Accommodation and seasonal availability

Accommodation is generally easier to arrange in the towns and better-supplied Flemish sections, and around Liège and Spa. The quieter upper-Ardennes stages between Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren have fewer options, so those nights should be booked ahead in any season.

Outside the main walking season, opening days and availability for campsites, gîtes, hostels and smaller guesthouses may be more limited. This should be checked before travelling, especially if walking in late autumn, winter or early spring.

Insects and ticks

The GR 5 passes through heath, grassland, woodland and forest, so tick checks are sensible from spring through autumn. Long trousers or gaiters are useful where paths are narrow or overgrown, especially in the Campine heaths and Ardennes woods.

In warm weather, insects can be more noticeable around fens, canals, wooded valleys and still water. Carrying a small repellent is worthwhile, but insects are not usually the deciding factor in when to walk the route.

Is the GR 5 realistic in winter?

Winter section-hiking is possible for well-prepared walkers because the route is waymarked and does not enter alpine terrain. A full winter end-to-end is much less practical.

The main winter problems are short daylight, cold rain, muddy or icy forest paths, possible snow on the higher Ardennes plateaux, and reduced accommodation or bus flexibility near the Ouren end. For most hikers, the Belgian GR 5 is best planned as a **spring, summer or autumn** walk rather than a winter trek.

Safety Notes

The Belgian GR 5 is not a technical mountain route, but it is a long point-to-point walk with tiring consecutive days, changing terrain and some quieter Ardennes stages. Most safety issues come from fatigue, weather, navigation lapses, road sections and limited services late in the route rather than from exposure or difficult ground.

For emergency help in Belgium, call **112**. Keep enough battery to make a call at the end of the day, especially when walking alone or finishing in the Ardennes.

Navigation and waymarking

The route is waymarked with the usual white-and-red GR flashes, but do not rely on paint marks alone. Carry the current official topo-guide or a reliable offline map/GPX, particularly through forest, heath and built-up edges where missed turns can cost time.

Check current GR waymarking and diversion notices before setting off. Forestry work, path closures, urban works and local diversions can affect a waymarked route without much warning.

Remote and thin-service sections

The Flemish half is generally well supplied and passes frequent towns and villages. The upper-Ardennes stretch from **Spa through Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren** is quieter, with thinner accommodation and less frequent public transport.

Do not assume there will be a shop, café or bus option exactly where it is needed on those later stages. Start each day with enough food and water to reach the booked stop, and check onward transport in advance around **Burg-Reuland and Ouren**.

Weather, heat and cold

The lowland Campine and Limburg sections include open heath, sandy ground, canals, lanes and forest edges. In warm weather these stages can feel exposed and dry underfoot, so carry more water than a short map distance might suggest.

The Walloon half climbs repeatedly out of the **Vesdre, Amblève, Salm and Our** valleys onto wooded plateaux. Conditions can be cooler and wetter on the higher Ardennes ground, especially around the **Fagne de Malchamps**, the **Stavelot-Vielsalm** uplands and the final approach to the Our valley.

In spring and autumn, short days matter as much as temperature. Leave early enough to finish forested or valley stages in daylight, particularly if accommodation is off-route.

Mud, slips and underfoot hazards

The trail uses a mix of dirt, gravel, forest paths, towpaths, lanes and paved sections. Valley and forest paths can become muddy and slippery after rain, especially in the Ardennes.

Lightweight footwear is often adequate in dry lowland conditions, but good grip is useful from the Meuse eastwards. Trekking poles can help on repeated climbs and descents when paths are wet or legs

are tired.

Roads, towns and paved sections

Expect some urban walking and lanes, including around larger settlements such as **Hasselt, Genk, Visé and Liège** and on village approaches throughout the route. Stay alert where GR markings lead through built-up areas, across roads or along narrow lanes.

Use pavements and verges where available, face oncoming traffic on roads without a pavement, and avoid walking late on roads in poor visibility without a light or reflective detail.

Water safety

Water hazards are not the main risk on this route, but the GR 5 passes canals, fens, rivers and major valleys, including the **Meuse** near Visé/Liège and the **Our** near Ouren. Take care on wet towpaths, riverside paths, bridges and muddy banks.

Do not enter rivers or canals to cool off or shortcut the route. After heavy rain, treat waterside paths and steep valley descents as slip hazards even if the route itself remains walkable.

Livestock, forestry and rural paths

The route crosses farmland, heath, forest and quiet rural areas. Where livestock is present, keep dogs under close control, close gates, and give animals space rather than walking directly through a group.

In forest sections, obey temporary closure signs and diversion notices. Forestry operations can make a normally clear path unsafe even when the map line appears straightforward.

Solo hiking

Solo walking is realistic on the Belgian GR 5 because the route is waymarked and regularly reaches settlements, but the final Ardennes stages need more self-sufficiency. Share the day's intended finish, carry offline mapping, and keep a reserve layer, food and battery power.

If walking alone, avoid pushing a long stage late in the day simply to keep to an itinerary. The route is well suited to section-hiking, so shortening or breaking a day is often the safer choice when weather, fatigue or transport problems build up.

Daily safety checklist

Before setting off each morning, check:

- the day's weather, including heat, heavy rain and wind on exposed heath or upland sections;
- daylight and realistic walking time for the planned stage;
- current GR diversion or waymarking notices;
- food and water availability before the next stop;
- accommodation check-in arrangements, especially in the Ardennes;
- live SNCB/NMBS, De Lijn or TEC times if relying on public transport;
- phone battery, offline maps and emergency contact details.

Gear Recommendations

The Belgian GR 5 does not need alpine equipment, but it does reward disciplined packing. The main gear challenge is variation: flat sandy heath and towpaths in Flanders, urban and paved stretches around the Meuse corridor, then wetter forest paths and repeated valley climbs through the Ardennes towards Spa, Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren.

Footwear

Trail shoes or lightweight walking boots are both suitable, provided they are comfortable for consecutive 17–24 km days. The Flemish half has long easy sections on sand, gravel, lanes and towpaths, where heavy mountain boots can feel excessive.

For the Walloon and Ardennes stages, prioritise grip. Forest and valley paths around the Vesdre, Amblève, Salm and Our can be muddy and slippery after rain, and the repeated climbs and descents make a worn sole a real liability.

Waterproof footwear is useful in spring and autumn, but breathability matters in summer, especially on the sandy Campine and Limburg sections. If using trail shoes, pack spare socks and be prepared for wet feet on muddy Ardennes days.

Waterproofs and insulation

A proper waterproof jacket should be carried on every section, not just the Ardennes half. The route is low-altitude by mountain standards, but Belgian weather can turn a long day unpleasant quickly when paths are exposed, paved or muddy.

Waterproof trousers are most useful from Liège/Visé onwards and on spring or autumn trips. They are less essential for fast summer section hikes in Flanders, but still worth considering if a wet forecast is likely.

Carry a warm layer even in summer. The highest ground on the Belgian GR 5 is around 580 m between Stavelot and Vielsalm, and the uplands near Spa and the Fagne de Malchamps can feel much cooler than the lowland stages.

Navigation

The GR 5 is waymarked with white-and-red GR flashes, but do not rely on paint alone for an 18–20 day route. Carry the current official topo-guide for the relevant section, plus an offline map or GPX track on a phone or GPS device.

Check current waymarking and diversion notices before setting off, especially if walking the full route in one continuous trip. Urban exits, forestry works and reroutes can be more confusing than the open countryside.

A phone with offline mapping is adequate for most walkers, but a power bank is strongly recommended. This is particularly important for section hikers using SNCB/NMBS trains and De Lijn or TEC buses, and for the more remote finish around Burg-Reuland and Ouren where transport options are thinner.

Water and food carry

This is not a wilderness route, and many stages pass through or near towns and villages such as Herentals, Diest, Hasselt, Genk, Visé, Spa, Stavelot and Vielsalm. Even so, do not assume every small settlement has an open shop or café when needed.

In Flanders, water and food planning is generally straightforward, but sandy heath and exposed towpath sections can feel hot in summer. Start each day with enough water to walk several hours without resupply.

In the upper Ardennes, carry a more self-sufficient day load. The stages between Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren are quieter, accommodation is thinner, and services are less frequent, so lunch and emergency snacks should be packed before leaving town.

Trekking poles

Poles are optional for the Flemish half, where the walking is mostly level. They become more useful from the Meuse and Vesdre valleys onwards, where the route repeatedly climbs out of wooded valleys and drops back down on muddy or slippery paths.

For a full end-to-end walk, lightweight folding poles are a sensible compromise. They can stay on the pack through the Campine and come out for the Ardennes.

Camping gear

Camping is relevant on the GR 5, but it needs planning rather than a casual approach. Campsites are part of the accommodation mix, though the quieter upper-Ardennes stages have fewer overnight options than the Flemish and urban sections.

Campers should carry a compact three-season shelter, a warm sleeping bag appropriate to spring, summer or autumn conditions, and a sleeping mat that copes with damp ground. A lightweight stove can be useful where evening food options are limited, but fuel availability and campsite facilities should be checked before travelling.

If camping, book or check overnight options ahead around Spa, Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren. Do not plan the remote finish on the assumption that services will appear at the end of the day.

Sun, insects and seasonal extras

Sun protection matters on the heathland, sandy Campine tracks, canal and towpath sections, and open farmland. A hat, sunglasses and sunscreen are sensible from late spring through early autumn.

Insect repellent can be useful around heath, fens, pine forest and damp woodland, especially in warm weather. Long sleeves also help on overgrown or buggy sections.

In spring and autumn, add gloves, a warm hat and a slightly warmer mid-layer for the Ardennes plateau sections. In summer, prioritise hydration, sun protection and blister care, as long easy surfaces can still produce foot problems over repeated 20 km days.

Gear approach by hiking style

Inn-to-inn hikers should keep the pack light and focus on reliable footwear, waterproofs, spare dry socks, a warm layer, phone navigation, power bank and a small first-aid/blister kit. Accommodation is available in many towns, but book ahead in the thinner Ardennes section.

Campers need a more self-sufficient system: shelter, sleeping kit, cooking capacity if required, and enough food and water for quieter stages. Weight discipline is important, because the route is long and the Ardennes climbs arrive after many days of walking.

Fast and section hikers can travel very light on rail-accessible stages, especially in Flanders and around Liège, Spa, Genk, Hasselt, Diest and Herentals. Even for a single-day section, carry waterproofs, offline navigation, water, snacks and a backup power source if relying on public transport to leave the trail.

Budget and Costs

The Belgian GR 5 is not an expensive permit-based trek, but it is a long one: most end-to-end walkers need about 18–20 days, so accommodation and food costs multiply quickly. The biggest budget variable is how often you can use campsites, youth hostels or gîtes d'étape rather than hotels and B&Bs.

All costs are in euros. Accommodation, transport and food prices change seasonally and by booking platform, so current prices should be checked before booking.

Main cost drivers

Cost item	What to expect on this route	Budget impact
Accommodation	Hotels, guesthouses, B&Bs, youth hostels, gîtes d'étape and campsites are all relevant. Towns are more frequent in Flanders and around Liège and Spa; options thin out in the upper Ardennes between Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren.	Usually the largest cost. Book the quieter Ardennes nights early.
Food	Flanders and the larger towns such as Diest, Hasselt, Genk, Liège, Spa and Vielsalm give the best resupply opportunities. Smaller villages may have limited evening food options.	Supermarket lunches and self-catering keep costs down; restaurant meals increase the budget quickly.
Transport	SNCB/NMBS trains, De Lijn buses in Flanders and TEC buses in Wallonia make the route unusually accessible for section-hiking. Liège-Guillemins is the main rail hub.	Generally manageable, but the Burg-Reuland / Ouren finish is the awkward end and may require careful bus planning or a taxi.
Taxis	Most useful at the remote Ardennes end, for off-route accommodation, or if a bus connection fails.	Can become expensive if used repeatedly; avoid relying on taxis as the default plan.
Guidebooks / maps	Official Grote Routepaden / GR Sentiers topo-guides cover the route. One cited price for the combined GR 5 Wallonia/Luxembourg guide is about €19.55 for members / €23.00 for non-members.	Small but worthwhile planning cost; confirm current editions and prices before ordering.
Luggage transfer	Not a standard necessity on this route, but may be possible through accommodation providers or walking-holiday companies on selected sections.	This should be checked before travelling.
Guided or self-guided packages	More relevant for walkers wanting accommodation pre-booked and logistics handled than for independent GR hikers.	Availability and prices should be checked directly with operators.

Budget approach

A lower-cost end-to-end is most realistic if you are flexible about accommodation style: campsites where they fit the stage, youth hostels or gîtes d'étape where available, and simple rooms only when necessary. This approach works better in the better-served Flemish half than in the quieter upper Ardennes, where the choice of overnight stops is narrower.

Food costs can be kept down by carrying breakfast and lunch from supermarkets and using cafés or restaurants selectively. Do not assume every small village will have a reliable shop or evening meal option; plan resupply around larger places such as Diest, Hasselt, Genk, Liège, Spa and Vielsalm.

Public transport is the main saving over private transfers. The route has strong rail access for many sections, but the final Burg-Reuland and Ouren area relies on less frequent TEC buses, so build in time rather than paying for a last-minute taxi.

Mid-range approach

Most independent walkers will fall into a mid-range pattern: B&Bs, modest hotels and occasional gîtes, with supermarket lunches and a cooked evening meal most days. This is the easiest balance between comfort and control, particularly over an 18–20 day itinerary.

Book ahead for the Ardennes section from Spa through Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren. Accommodation choice is thinner there than in the Flemish towns, and being forced off-stage can add taxi costs.

Comfortable approach

A comfortable budget means private rooms throughout, more restaurant meals, shorter days where useful, and occasional taxis to reach accommodation away from the line of the GR 5. This is the least stressful option in the remote final stages, but it also removes some of the cost advantage of Belgium's good public transport network.

Walkers choosing this style should arrange the Spa–Ouren end especially carefully. If an overnight stop is not available exactly where needed, a pre-booked transfer can be more practical than trying to fix transport after a long Ardennes stage.

Section-hiking costs

The GR 5 is well suited to weekend and short-section walking because many stages pass through or near rail-connected towns, including Herentals, Diest, Hasselt, Genk, Liège, Spa and Vielsalm. This can reduce accommodation costs if you return home or to a fixed base between walks.

For section-hikers, the main cost check is not the trail itself but the first and last connection of each section. SNCB/NMBS, De Lijn and TEC timetables should be checked before travelling, especially for Wallonia and the far Ardennes finish.

Luggage Transfer, Guided Tours and Support Services

Luggage transfer

Do not assume the Belgian GR 5 has a route-wide baggage-transfer system operating automatically from Kalmthout to Ouren. The safest planning approach is to treat luggage movement as an ad hoc arrangement made directly with accommodation providers, local taxis or a walking-holiday organiser.

This matters most in the Ardennes and German-speaking end of the route, especially around Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren, where accommodation is thinner and onward public transport is less frequent. If a daily bag move is essential, agree it before booking each night rather than trying to arrange it once on the trail.

For many walkers, luggage transfer is unnecessary on the Flemish and Limburg stages. The route passes frequent towns and is well linked by rail around places such as Herentals, Diest, Hasselt, Genk, Liège, Spa and Vielsalm, making self-supported walking or rail-based section hiking much easier than on more remote European trails.

If arranging baggage moves yourself, check the following in writing:

Item to agree	Why it matters
Pick-up and delivery addresses	Some B&Bs, gîtes and campsites may not have full-time reception
Bag size, weight and number of items	Taxi-based transfers may have limited space
Collection and delivery windows	Late arrival can leave luggage inaccessible after reception closes
Contact phone numbers	Useful where accommodation is off-route or unmanned during the day
Payment method	Small local transfers may not be payable online
Language and place names	The route crosses Dutch-, French- and German-speaking areas; use local names such as Visé, Spa, Burg-Reuland and Ouren

Campsite-to-campsite luggage transfer can be less straightforward than hotel-to-hotel transfer because reception hours and secure storage vary. This should be checked before travelling.

Self-guided walking packages

A self-guided package can be useful if you want accommodation booked, route notes supplied and bag movements arranged where possible. This suits walkers who want the GR 5 experience without spending time coordinating every overnight stop across Flanders, Wallonia and the German-speaking Community.

The full Belgian section is a long, multi-region itinerary, so it is more likely to need a bespoke arrangement than a simple off-the-shelf walking holiday. Shorter packages are more practical,

particularly around the Ardennes stages from Spa to Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren, where accommodation and transfers need more care.

A typical self-guided package may include accommodation reservations, luggage transfer, route information, GPX files and a support contact. Start and finish transport, lunches, evening meals, tourist taxes and transfers from remote villages may be separate. Confirm current inclusions and prices before booking.

Guided options

A fully guided trip is not essential for navigation. The GR 5 is a waymarked Grande Randonnée, using the white-and-red GR flashes, and most independent hikers can follow it with the current topo-guide, GPX and normal map-reading care.

Guided walking is more relevant for groups, first-time long-distance walkers, hikers who want language and accommodation support, or anyone wanting a shorter curated section rather than the whole Belgian traverse. It can also be useful in the Ardennes if the priority is a smoother itinerary with transport, accommodation and local logistics handled for the group.

The official route bodies, Grote Routepaden in Flanders and GR Sentiers in Wallonia, are the key organisations for route information and topo-guides. They should not be treated as a substitute for a tour operator unless a specific event or service is being booked directly with them.

Taxis, rail and local transport support

For most of the route, public transport is the main support service. SNCB/NMBS rail links and De Lijn or TEC buses make many sections practical as day walks or weekend blocks, with Liège-Guillemins the major hub for the Walloon half.

Taxis are most useful for three situations: reaching accommodation that is off the GR 5, moving luggage between pre-booked stops, and handling the remote finish around Burg-Reuland and Ouren. The far eastern end relies on infrequent TEC buses, so any taxi or bus connection from Ouren should be planned before the final day.

Book taxis ahead in the quieter Ardennes villages, especially for Sundays, public holidays, evenings and early departures. Live SNCB/NMBS, De Lijn and TEC timetables should be checked before travelling, as the Belgian GR 5 is public-transport-friendly overall but much less forgiving at the Ouren end.

Shorter Hikes and Best Sections

The GR 5 in Belgium works very well as a section-hike because many natural breakpoints are towns with rail or bus access. The easiest logistics are in Flanders and around Liège, Spa and Vielsalm; the finish around Burg-Reuland and Ouren is the awkward end, with infrequent TEC buses that should be checked before travelling.

Best for	Section	Approx. distance	Why choose it	Transport notes
Best single day	Hasselt → Genk	22 km	Easy Limburg walking with strong town-to-town logistics and the Bokrijk/Genk area nearby	Hasselt and Genk are both useful rail points
Best weekend	Herentals → Diest via Averbode	41 km	A practical two-day Flemish section with Averbode, Scherpenheuvel and Diest	Herentals and Diest have rail access; check accommodation around Averbode
Best 3–5 day hike	Spa → Ouren via Stavelot, Vielsalm and Burg-Reuland	69 km	The strongest compact Ardennes traverse, including the high plateau, Vielsalm and the Our valley	Start at Spa by rail; Vielsalm is a useful rail exit; Ouren is remote and needs TEC bus planning
Best scenery	Banneux → Vielsalm via Spa and Stavelot	50 km	Pilgrimage hills, Spa, the Fagne de Malchamps area and the highest Belgian GR 5 ground near the Stavelot-Vielsalm stage	Spa and Vielsalm are the easiest transport anchors; access to Banneux should be checked before travelling
Best for beginners	Kalmthout area → Herentals	59 km	Mostly flat Campine terrain: heath, pine forest, sandy tracks and villages, without the repeated Ardennes climbs	Herentals has rail access; check the exact access point for the Dutch-border start
Best for public transport	Diest → Genk via Lummen and Hasselt	64 km	A simple three-day lowland section using some of the best-connected towns on the route	Diest, Hasselt and Genk are rail-friendly anchors; use De Lijn for local links
Best for villages and accommodation	Herentals → Hasselt via Averbode, Diest and Lummen	83 km	Frequent towns, cultural stops and easier backup options than the remote Ardennes	Rail access at Herentals, Diest and Hasselt makes shortening or extending straightforward
Best if camping	Herentals → Hasselt	83 km	The Flemish sections give the best combination of services, resupply and fallback accommodation	Campsite availability changes by season; this should be checked before travelling

Best single-day walk: Hasselt to Genk

Hasselt to Genk is the most straightforward day section for hikers who want a real GR 5 stage without complicated access. At around 22 km, it is long enough to feel like a proper day on the trail but avoids the bigger climbs of the Ardennes.

This is a good choice for a first encounter with the Belgian GR 5: easy underfoot, close to services and well placed for public transport. Hasselt and Genk are both among the key rail-access towns on the route, making it one of the simplest point-to-point days to arrange.

Best weekend section: Herentals to Diest

Herentals to Diest makes a strong two-day walk of about 41 km, normally split at or near Averbode. It combines manageable Flemish distances with some of the more rewarding cultural stops on the northern half of the route, including Averbode and Scherpenheuvel before reaching Diest.

The logistics are clean: Herentals and Diest are both useful rail towns. Accommodation around the midpoint should be booked or checked in advance, especially if walking at weekends or during busy periods.

Best 3–5 day section: Spa to Ouren

For a compact version of the Ardennes experience, Spa to Ouren is the standout choice. Over roughly 69 km, the route passes Stavelot, crosses the high wooded plateau towards Vielsalm, continues through Burg-Reuland and finishes in the Our valley at the Belgium–Luxembourg–Germany tripoint.

This is the best short version for hikers who want the harder, hillier character of the Walloon GR 5. It is not technical, but the repeated climbs, forest paths and thinner services make it more demanding than the Flemish half.

Spa is the practical start because it has rail access. Vielsalm is also a useful rail exit or joining point, while the Burg-Reuland and Ouren end is the least convenient transport area on the Belgian route; TEC bus times should be checked before committing to an itinerary.

Best section for scenery: Banneux to Vielsalm

Banneux to Vielsalm gives about 50 km of varied Walloon walking without having to continue all the way to Ouren. The section links the hills above the Vesdre with Spa, the Fagne de Malchamps area, Stavelot and the high Ardennes plateau around the Stavelot–Vielsalm stage.

This is the best choice if scenery matters more than easy logistics. Expect more climbing and potentially muddier forest and valley paths than in Flanders, particularly after rain.

Spa and Vielsalm are the most useful transport anchors. Starting at Banneux may require a TEC bus connection, so live timetables should be checked before travelling.

Best section for beginners: Kalmthout area to Herentals

The northern Campine section from the Kalmthout area to Herentals is the most forgiving part of the Belgian GR 5. It is about 59 km over the standard stages to Brecht, Grobbendonk and Herentals, with flat sandy terrain, heath, pine forest and quiet villages.

This is a good first multi-day section because the walking is not technically difficult and the distances can be adapted around the shorter Grobbendonk to Herentals stage. The main planning point is access to the exact Dutch-border start near Kalmthout and the Kalmthoutse Heide area; this should be checked before travelling.

Herentals is the strongest transport anchor at the southern end of this beginner-friendly section.

Best section for public transport: Diest to Genk

Diest to Genk is a practical three-day section of about 64 km via Lummen and Hasselt. It keeps to the lower, easier half of the Belgian route while using towns that are much easier to reach than the far Ardennes finish.

Diest, Hasselt and Genk are all useful rail points, which makes it easy to walk only part of the section or bail out if weather, time or fitness becomes an issue. Local links in Flanders are handled by De Lijn, and current timetables should be checked before setting off.

Best section for villages, services and accommodation: Herentals to Hasselt

Herentals to Hasselt is a good four-day section, about 83 km via Averbode, Diest and Lummen. It is one of the best parts of the GR 5 for walkers who want regular towns, cultural stops and more straightforward accommodation planning.

This section is less wild than the Ardennes, but it is much easier to organise independently. Rail access at Herentals, Diest and Hasselt also makes it simple to shorten the trip or walk it over several weekends.

Best section if camping

Camping is part of the broader accommodation mix on the Belgian GR 5, but specific campsite availability should not be assumed stage by stage. Seasonal opening, location and booking requirements should be checked before travelling.

For a camping-based section, the Flemish stretch from Herentals to Hasselt is the most sensible starting point because towns and services are more frequent and there are better fallback options if a campsite plan fails. The upper-Ardennes stages between Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren are more remote and should be planned more cautiously.

Highlights and Points of Interest

The Belgian GR 5 is strongest as a route of changing landscapes rather than single headline viewpoints. The main reason to linger is the contrast: open heath and pine forest in the Kempen, Flemish abbey towns and pilgrimage places, then the Meuse crossing and the wooded Ardennes valleys beyond Spa and Stavelot.

Route highlights in walking order

Highlight	Where it fits on the route	Why it is worth extra time
Kalmthoutse Heide	Start area near the Dutch border, before Kalmthout / Wuustwezel	A wide heathland and shifting-sand nature reserve, and one of the largest heaths in Flanders. It gives the Belgian section a strong natural start before the route settles into the sandy Kempen.
The Kempen: heath, pine forest, fens and quiet villages	Kalmthout, Brecht, Westmalle, Zoersel, Grobbendonk and Herentals	The easiest walking on the Belgian GR 5: flat, sandy and generally low-key. This is good country for a relaxed first few days, with frequent villages and a softer introduction before the longer cultural and Ardennes stages.
Westmalle Abbey	Around the early Kempen stages, near Westmalle	A historic Trappist abbey and one of the best-known cultural names on the Flemish section. It is on or close to the route, so it is a natural place to plan a slower stage if the day's logistics allow.
Averbode Abbey	Between Westerlo / Averbode and Scherpenheuvel-Zichem	A major Premonstratensian abbey in the Kempen and a strong landmark after several days of heath, lanes and forest. Averbode is also a practical place to break the route before Diest.
Scherpenheuvel	Before Diest, in the Hageland	Belgium's most important Marian pilgrimage town, known for its great domed basilica. It is one of the clearest cultural stops on the Flemish half and worth allowing time for rather than treating as a quick pass-through.
Diest	After Scherpenheuvel-Zichem	A historic Flemish town with a preserved begijnhof and old fortifications. It is a useful overnight halt and a good place to add recovery time without leaving the line of the walk.
Hasselt and Bokrijk / Genk country	Around Hasselt, Diepenbeek and Genk	Hasselt is the Limburg provincial capital and one of the more substantial towns on the route. Nearby Bokrijk open-air museum and the heathland country around Genk add a strong local-interest stop before the route turns towards the Meuse.
The Meuse at Visé and Liège	Around Kanne, Visé and the Meuse valley	This is the major transition on the Belgian GR 5: the lowland Flemish half gives way to the Walloon hills and the approach to the Ardennes. Liège is the largest city on the Belgian route corridor and the main urban gateway for walkers joining or leaving the trail.

Highlight	Where it fits on the route	Why it is worth extra time
Banneux	Between Soumagne and Spa	A noted modern pilgrimage site in the hills above the Vesdre, known for Notre-Dame des Pauvres. It also marks the route's changing character as the walking becomes hillier and more Ardennes-like.
Spa and the Fagne de Malchamps	Spa to Stavelot stage	Spa is the original thermal town that gave its name to spas worldwide, making it one of the best places on the route for an overnight pause. South of town, the route crosses the upland heath and bog of the Fagne de Malchamps below the Bérinzenne tower area, reaching around 570 m.
Stavelot	Between Spa and Vielsalm	An Ardennes town known for its ancient Benedictine abbey and the Laetare Carnival of the Blancs Moussis. It is a strong cultural stop before the wilder high-plateau section to Vielsalm.
High Ardennes plateau near Mont-le-Soie / Grand-Halleux	Stavelot to Vielsalm	The highest and wildest-feeling Belgian section. The route climbs from the Amblève valley onto wooded uplands near Mont-le-Soie and Grand-Halleux, reaching about 580 m, the high point of the Belgian GR 5.
Vielsalm and the upper Ardennes	Vielsalm to Burg-Reuland	A quieter, more rural part of the trail, with wooded plateau walking and fewer large service centres than the Flemish half. This is a good area to plan carefully and book accommodation ahead.
Burg-Reuland and the Our valley	Final stages to Ouren	Burg-Reuland is the last significant named settlement before the finish, and the route then drops towards the wooded Our valley. The valley gives the Belgian section a quiet, remote-feeling end.
Ouren and the tripoint	Finish	The Belgian GR 5 ends at Ouren on the river Our, where Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany meet. The GR 5 continues into Luxembourg, and the GR 56 also meets the route nearby at Burg-Reuland.

Best places to build in extra time

Diest, Hasselt, Spa and Stavelot are the most practical cultural pauses: each gives more to do than a small overnight halt and sits naturally on the route. Spa is especially useful because it comes just before the more sustained Ardennes walking.

For landscape rather than town time, the best slower sections are **Kalmthoutse Heide**, the **Fagne de Malchamps**, the **Stavelot-Vielsalm high plateau**, and the **Our valley into Ouren**. These are the places where rushing the itinerary most noticeably weakens the walk.

The GR 5 does not cross the Hautes Fagnes or Belgium's highest point at Signal de Botrange; that is separate GR 573 country. On this route, the high ground is the Ardennes plateau between Stavelot and Vielsalm, with the Belgian GR 5 topping out at about 580 m.

Common Mistakes and Planning Tips

Mistake: planning from the wrong distance

The full Belgian GR 5 from the Dutch border near Kalmthout to Ouren is about **393 km**, not a short two-week 270 km walk. A realistic continuous schedule is usually **18–20 days**, using roughly 11 days for Flanders and around 8 further stages through Wallonia.

Fix: decide exactly what is being walked before booking anything: the full Belgian route, only the Flemish section, only the Walloon section, or a shorter station-to-station slice. Build the itinerary from the current Grote Routepaden / GR Sentiers topo-guides and check current editions before travelling.

Mistake: treating the whole trail like the flat Campine

The northern half through the Kempen, Hageland and Limburg is generally easy underfoot: heath, pine forest, canals, quiet lanes and villages. The character changes after the Meuse near Visé and Liège, where the GR 5 climbs repeatedly between the Vesdre, Amblève, Salm and Our valleys and the Ardennes plateaux.

Fix: keep the Walloon stages conservative, especially from Banneux to Spa, Spa to Stavelot, Stavelot to Vielsalm and Vielsalm to Burg-Reuland. The route is not technical, but the repeated climbs, forest tracks and muddy valley paths make late-stage fatigue more likely than the map profile first suggests.

Mistake: leaving Ardennes accommodation too late

Accommodation is plentiful in many Flemish towns and around Liège and Spa, but the upper Ardennes are thinner. The stages around **Stavelot, Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren** need more care, especially if walking continuously and needing a bed at the end of each day.

Fix: book the final Ardennes nights first, then work backwards. If a stage-end village has limited rooms, be prepared to adjust the day length or use local transport where available. Current availability should be checked before travelling.

Mistake: assuming the finish is as easy to leave as the rest of the route

The GR 5 is unusually public-transport-friendly for a long trail, with useful rail access around places such as Herentals, Diest, Hasselt, Genk, Liège, Spa and Vielsalm. The exception is the far end around **Burg-Reuland and Ouren**, where travel depends on less frequent TEC buses.

Fix: plan the exit from Ouren before committing to the final night. Check live TEC bus times, onward rail connections and the practical time needed to reach a station. This should be checked before travelling, particularly for weekends and public holidays.

Mistake: assuming every village has food when needed

The route passes many useful towns, but not every village on the line is a reliable resupply point. This matters most on quieter Ardennes stages and on days where the route runs through forest, heath or smaller settlements rather than larger towns.

Fix: carry lunch and enough water for the whole stage unless a definite shop or café stop has been checked. Opening hours, seasonal closures and Sunday trading should be checked before travelling.

Mistake: relying only on the white-and-red waymarks

The GR 5 is well waymarked, but long-distance walkers should not depend on paint flashes alone. Urban sections around larger towns, forest junctions, temporary diversions and old GPX files can all cause small but time-consuming errors.

Fix: carry the relevant official topo-guide, an up-to-date digital map or GPX, and check current GR diversion notices from Grote Routepaden / GR Sentiers before setting off. Waymarks are the primary field guide, not a substitute for navigation.

Mistake: underestimating weather and surface conditions

There is no alpine terrain on the Belgian GR 5, but the surface still matters. Forest paths and valley tracks can be muddy and slippery after rain, and the higher Ardennes around the Fagne de Malchamps and the Stavelot-Vielsalm plateau are more exposed than the Flemish lowlands.

Fix: use footwear that handles mud and wet forest paths, not just pavement and towpaths. Carry waterproofs even in warmer months, and check the forecast before the higher Ardennes stages.

Mistake: planning over-long days because the route is not mountainous

A 22–24 km day in flat Flanders is not the same as a 22 km day after the Meuse, especially late in a continuous trek. The difficulty of this route comes from stamina: almost 400 km of repeated walking, with the harder ground saved for the southern half.

Fix: avoid stacking the longest days at the end of the walk. If time is tight, section-hike the route using Belgium's rail network rather than compressing the full Belgian GR 5 into an unrealistic schedule.

Mistake: mixing up GR 5 with nearby Ardennes routes

The Belgian GR 5 does **not** cross the Signal de Botrange or the highest Hautes Fagnes ground. Its high point is around **580 m** on the Stavelot-Vielsalm stage, with other high ground near the Fagne de Malchamps and Bérinzenne south of Spa.

Fix: use GR 5-specific mapping and do not borrow stage descriptions from other Ardennes GR routes. The Hautes Fagnes / Signal de Botrange area belongs to a different route, not this Belgian GR 5 line.

Mistake: searching for transport and accommodation using the wrong place names

The route crosses Belgium's language regions, so place names change with the region. Flemish names are used in Flanders, French names in Wallonia, and German-speaking names around Burg-Reuland and Ouren.

Fix: search with the local names used on signs and timetables: for example **Visé** rather than only Wezet, **Liège** rather than only Luik, and **Burg-Reuland / Ouren** at the eastern end. This avoids missed bus stops, wrong station searches and accommodation confusion.

Final Advice

The Belgian GR 5 is best for walkers who want a long, varied, well-waymarked trek without technical mountain terrain. It suits fit hikers who can handle repeated full walking days, and it is especially good for anyone who prefers a route with regular towns, rail access and the option to break the journey into manageable sections.

The key planning point is accommodation and transport in the Ardennes. Flanders and the larger towns such as Hasselt, Genk, Liège, Spa and Vielsalm are comparatively straightforward, but the stages from Stavelot through Vielsalm, Burg-Reuland and Ouren need more care. Book those nights ahead and check current TEC bus times for the finish before committing to an itinerary.

For many walkers, the most rewarding part is the change after the Meuse: the route leaves the flatter Campine and Limburg country and begins climbing through the Vesdre, Amblève, Salm and Our valleys onto wooded Ardennes plateaux. The Spa–Stavelot–Vielsalm–Ouren stretch gives the Belgian GR 5 its strongest sense of remoteness, with the high ground around the Stavelot–Vielsalm stage reaching about 580 m.

As a full thru-hike, allow roughly 18–20 days for Kalmthout to Ouren rather than trying to compress the route too aggressively. The walking is not technically hard, but 393 km of consecutive days is still a serious endurance undertaking, especially once the Ardennes climbs begin.

As a section hike, the route is exceptionally practical. Stations at or near places such as Herentals, Diest, Hasselt, Genk, Liège, Spa, Trois-Ponts and Vielsalm make weekend or multi-day sections realistic, with the main complication again being the remote Burg-Reuland and Ouren end.

Carry the current official topo-guides or reliable mapping, follow the white-and-red GR waymarks, and check diversion notices before travelling. Do not plan this route as if it were an alpine trek, but do not dismiss it as an easy lowland walk either: the Belgian GR 5 rewards steady pacing, sensible stage lengths and careful logistics in its final Ardennes days.