

HASSELT CITY GUIDE - THINGS TO SEE AND DO



See inside for details about getting around, sightseeing, shopping, nightlife and more

The capital of Belgian Limburg is a sociable, pedestrian-friendly kind of place with a fashion scene, spellbinding street art and history-rich countryside on its fringes. One nearby site is Herkenrode Abbey, where the surviving buildings hint at the size and finery of a complex that met its end more than 200 years ago.

The old city centre, heaving with shops, brasseries and cafes, is mostly closed off to road traffic and lies beneath the spire of the Sint-Quintinskathedraal. Historic townhouses and former monastic properties have been converted into museums for fashion, literature, Hasselt itself and the traditional liqueur, Jenever.

In the outskirts you can get away from it all at Europe's largest Japanese garden, a fantastic outdoor museum, a valuable arboretum and pasture grazed by Galloway cattle.

GETTING AROUND



Since January 2014, the free bus service has been abolished. Bus service is quite expensive when paid on the bus itself (around 3 euros for a single trip), but a lot cheaper when paid by SMS (check the information on the bus stop), or bought from pre-sale points (like the Lijnwinkel at the station, or several press-shops around Hasselt).

There are rental bicycles available at the station (www.blue-bike.be), which are probably the most interesting way to see the city as it is quite small and car traffic through the city centre is discouraged. Hasselt is a pretty safe and small city so it's most likely the best way to get you around on a budget.



Taxis are quite expensive, charging around 20 euro's for a trip from the edge of town to the centre. They are readily available at the station, and at night (in the weekends) at the Kolonel Dusartplein to get partygoers home safely. There are multiple taxi companies which have pretty much the same tariffs but all are pretty expensive compared to other countries.

THINGS TO DO

The City Centre

The first thing you'll notice about the old heart of Hasselt is how walkable the streets are, and this is something that has won the city a lot of praise: In 2004 Hasselt was named "most sociable city in Flanders". The main shopping streets are **Demerstraat** and **Koning Alberstraat**, while the smaller **Hoogstraat** and **Kapelstraat** are where things get a little more upscale.



Grote Markt, south-west of the cathedral is fronted by cafes and brasseries, and on the west side stands one of the most famous old houses in the city, the half-timbered Het Sweet (1659). For a moment of repose, seek out the landscaped Kadettenpleintje, which you'll find along the passageway, Kadettensteegje, which cuts away from the city's tourism office on Maastrichterstraat.

On Groenplein the town hall dates from the end of the 17th century, while the oldest secular building in the city is the Renaissance-style refuge house for Herkenrode Abbey, built in the middle of the 16th century.



Nationaal Jenevermuseum

The juniper-flavoured spirit Jenever is such a part of Hasselt's history that there's even a festival for the drink every October.

From the end of the 18th century a distillery set up shop at a beautiful brick building and courtyard that used to belong to a Franciscan convent – the name Witte Nonnenstraat is a bit of a giveaway. Distilling finally came to an end here in 1971, after which the building was protected by royal decree.



The Jenever Museum, documenting this traditional beverage, opened in 1987 and came through a renovation in the 2010s. You can tour the courtyard, malt tower, germ attic, mill room, boiling room, bottling plant, distiller's residence and oxen stable (these would be fed a by-product from the distilling process). These spaces are enriched with a whole trove of artefacts, from labels to antique posters, shot glasses, bottles, stoneware and ceramic items.

At the end you can pull up a stool at the tasting room to try some Jenever for yourself.

Plopsa Indoor Hasselt

Belgium's first indoor theme park opened in Hasselt in 2005 and is a welcome rainy day option for young families.

This is one of seven amusement parks in four different nations, established by the theme park division of Studio 100, a Belgian broadcasting corporation making children's shows.



On almost a hectare, Plopsa Indoor has more than 20 attractions, mostly themed on Studio 100 characters, like Mega Mindy, Piet Piraat, Samson & Gert, Kabouter Plop and Bumba.

This is all geared towards children up to the age of six or so, with soft play, slides, a ball pool, a carousel, spinners, an indoor rollercoaster, bumper boats, to name a few.

There's a Studio 100 restaurant inside and a store for Plopsa merchandise.

Japanese Tuin is the largest Japanese garden in Europe is a symbol of friendship between Hasselt and its Japanese twin city, Itami in Hyogo Prefecture. The Japanese Tuin is a 2.5-hectare extension of the Kapermolenpark and was laid out in the early-1990s by the landscape architect Inoue Takuyuki.

As you'd guess, the garden is completely suffused with symbolism, from its bubbling creek to its zigzagging bridge (Yatsubashi), waterfall and stone lantern (Yukumi-Doro). As well as harmonising with the garden by being reflected in the pond, the Ceremonial House is built from traditional materials like bamboo, stone and clay. This structure also uses centuries-old cooling techniques, like exaggerated eaves that prevent sunlight from reaching the interior.

You can feed the koi from the "pebble beach" next to the pond, while tea ceremonies are often given at the garden's tea house, and there's a chrysanthemum festival in the autumn.

Fietsroute Graffiti Street Art

Hasselt is understandably proud of the mesmerising and often hyper-realistic art that enlivens some 80 facades around the city centre.



In fact the tourism office has even put together a cycling and pedestrian route to help you see it all. This is a canvas for some of the top street artists and graphic designers in Belgium and around the world, going by aliases like CAZN, INTI, MYMO, Sneaky Jay, Animalito, Smates and DZIA.

Each work is itemised and a leaflet with accompanying map offers an explanation and information about the artist.



Kiewit Action Park

If you looking for an adventurous team building activity then come to Kiewit Action Park, the place for groups looking for an adrenaline boost.

There, you will find a rope-climbing course, a water course, death ride, climbing wall, BMX track, orienteering route and much more.

You can choose 4 activities during your 3-hour visit. A supervisor is always present.

PLACES TO EAT AND DRINK

Pattos Demerstraat 69

They serve fresh daily It is located in the pleasant shopping-walking street of Hasselt. In good weather you not only enjoy the conviviality, but also to spoil your taste buds after a day of shopping.

Their concept is based around a potato. After slow roasting, the potato is further flavoured with chicken, meat, fish or vegetables with emphasis on freshness and quality.

Tarte Tatin Walputstraat 19A

tarte tatin is a very tasty, very simple and yet very special cake. And the cake house Tarte Tatin is just the same! It is located behind the old town hall in the heart of Hasselt.

When you enter you immediately feel the atmosphere of grandmother's living room. A cozy sitting area by the fireplace sets the tone.

Everything is made in a small kitchen, home base for mother & daughter. Marleen and Liesbeth love cakes, and prepare everything with love and a big smile. And you can taste it.



Pizzeria That's Amore, Lombaardstraat 14

From outside the interior is very basic, and the pizza oven is directly behind the counter in view of the restaurant.

However when you are in Hasselt you must visit this place just to have the Bruschetta!



Bar Hemelrijk, Hemelrijk 11

If Belgium is heaven for beer lovers, then there's a spot in Hasselt that's heaven on earth.

In a quiet corner of the historic centre, on a tiny street named Hemelrijk, is a café with the same name. Hemelrijk, translated into Latin as Regnum Celestis over the door, means Heavenly Kingdom and most likely comes from the street's proximity to the cathedral, Saint Quintus.

Founded 30 years ago, Het Hemelrijk is known for its extensive beer selection. The bar's proprietor, claims to have approximately 630 beers in stock. There are two Beers of the Month on tap. The menu is helpfully divided into sections: white beer, Trappist beer, abbey beer, blonde and amber, dark, stout, kriel, fruit beer, gueuze and Christmas beer. Most of the beer is Belgian, but there is a small selection of foreign imports. Het Hemelrijk is one of the few places where you can order Westvleteren, that most elusive of the Trappist beers, widely considered the best beer in the world.

In addition to the overwhelming beer selection, the café offers a large selection of jenever and whiskeys. The focus is clearly on drinking: the only food on the menu is a small selection of bar snacks.

The café is charming and attractive, with wooden tables, a bright back section lit by skylights during the day and a baby Grand tucked into one corner. On Sundays, students from the nearby music academy treat patrons to informal performances on the piano.



SHOPPING

Hasselt is recognised as a tourist centre, so the shops can always be open, even on Sundays. In addition to their 'big shopping Sundays' such as spring shopping and autumn shopping, there are shops that have decided to open the first Sunday of the month.

We've shown some of them below...



Just For The Record, Diesterstraat 18

Small record store and coffee house in the centre of Hasselt.

Here they also serve great coffee, home made lemonade and ice tea, some nice Beers and a few cocktails.

So while searching for that exclusive vinyl copy or browsing through long lost memories you can take a break on one of the comfortable sofa's and order a drink. Love the 'een beetje oorlog' lemonade!



Oma's Olifant, Aldestraat 24

For more than 25 years, Oma's Olifant, formerly In Den Olifant, has been the reference in Hasselt for quality toys.

In 2009, the building was rebuilt from the ground up, in order to create more space on the upper floors as well. The store is much larger than just the ground floor. On the next mezzanine you will find inspiration in the games room. On the first floor, the children can indulge in a world of imagination, discovery and construction. And a few steps higher, your princesses can dream away in the doll's room.



Weekly markets

There are quite a few markets in Hasselt, here's a list of where and when they are:

Kolonel Dusartplein market: every Tuesday and Friday from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Kuringen neighbourhood market (Gildezaal car park): every Tuesday from 2:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Banneux neighbourhood market (Banneux church car park): every Thursday from 2:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Kermt neighbourhood market (Kermetaplein): every Friday from 2:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Godsheide neighbourhood market (Kiezelstraat): every Tuesday from 2:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.

NIGHTLIFE

Grote Markt is jammed full of cafe-bars, with several more on Fruitmarkt and on Witte Nonnenstraat leading to the jenever museum, at whose delightful bar you can sample a great range of Flemish gins without paying the entry ticket.

GETTING THERE

If you choose to fly there are several options. The nearest airport is Eindhoven Airport is 46 miles away. Brussels Airport is 50 miles away. Charleroi is 76 miles away. Dusseldorf Airport is 86 miles away.

There is just one airline that flies into **Eindhoven** from the UK and Ireland. That is [Ryan Air](#) with departures from Dublin, Edinburgh, London-Stansted and Manchester.

Brussels Airport has more choice; [Aer Lingus](#) from Dublin, [British Airways](#) from London-Heathrow, [Brussels Airlines](#) from London-Heathrow and Manchester and [Ryan Air](#) from Dublin.

The only airline that flies into **Charleroi** is [Ryan Air](#) with departures from Edinburgh, Glasgow and Manchester.

The airlines the fly into **Dusseldorf Airport** are: [Aer Lingus](#) from Dublin. [British Airways](#) from London-City and London-Heathrow. [easyJet](#) from London-Gatwick. [Eurowings](#) from Birmingham, Dublin, Edinburgh, Jersey, London-Heathrow, Manchester, Newquay and Newcastle.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The voltage on outlets in Belgium is 230 volts. Hotels may also have a 110-volt or 120-volt outlet for shavers. Travellers are advised to bring along a power converter and an adapter for round two-prong plugs with side grounding contacts.

The currency in Belgium is the euro.

Dial 112 for the fire brigade, an ambulance or the police. When in Belgium, dial 101 for urgent police assistance. Listen to the message and make a choice : "Emergency call centre.

British Embassy: If you're in Belgium and you need urgent help (for example, you've been attacked, arrested or someone has died), call +32 2 287 62 11.

Irish Embassy: If something goes wrong when you're visiting Belgium and you need help, you can contact the Embassy in Brussels or your local Honorary Consulate or call the Consular Assistance Unit at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Dublin on +353 1 408 2000.

HOW DO I MAKE A TELEPHONE CALL IN BELGIUM?

To call a phone in another country, dial 011, and then the code for the country you are calling, the area or city code, and the phone number. For example, if you are trying to call someone in England (country code 44), in the city of Birmingham (city code 121), you would dial 011 - 44 - 121 - XXXX-XXXX.

Your mobile phone will probably work just fine in Belgium, as long as your mobile can handle GSM 1800MHz so do check with your provider before putting it in the suitcase. However, you will be paying roaming fees for incoming calls and outgoing calls, which could quickly cost you a fortune.

OTHER THAN CASH HOW CAN I PAY FOR THINGS?

While it's true that the majority of payments in Belgium are made with cards, it's always a good idea to have some cash. You will find some smaller vendors that only accept cash.

ATMs widely available. Credit cards accepted in most hotels but not all restaurants. Non-European credit cards are sometimes rejected.

IS TIPPING MANDATORY?

Tipping in Belgium isn't a standard practice, as service is typically included in the final bill. For instance, most restaurants add a 10 to 15 percent service charge to the bill, so there is no need to tip anything extra.

HOW CAN I GO ONLINE AND CHECK MY E-MAIL?

There are many public places with Internet access so there will be sure to be somewhere close to wherever you are!

HOW CAN I SEND A LETTER OR A POSTCARD?

Until a couple of years ago, postage stamps were a monopoly of the Belgian Post Office, so you would always have to go to a post office to buy them. Since they started closing post offices in 2008, supermarkets etc. have been permitted to sell stamps, though relatively few retail outlets seem to have taken up the opportunity - presumably there isn't much profit in it.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS 2022

New Years Day Saturday 01st January 2022

Easter Monday Monday 18th April 2022

Labour Day Sunday 01st May 2022

Ascension Day Thursday 26th May 2022

Whit Monday Monday 6th June 2022

Belgian National Day Thursday 21st July 2022

Assumption of Mary Monday 15th August 2022

All Saints Day Tuesday 01st November 2022

Armistice Day Friday 11th November 2022

Christmas Day Sunday 25th December 202

