



The capital of taste

This summer, Hasselt has a lot more on offer than a nip of jenever

REBECCA BENOOT

Ever since last year's immensely popular television series *De Smaak van de Keyser*, which followed the lives of three generations of women in a jenever distillery in Hasselt, this little, bubbly city has been rediscovered by the Flemish.

Dubbed the Capital of Taste by city officials, Hasselt is known for its sophisticated flavours: in addition to many good restaurants and the infamously delicious jenever, it's a fashion capital (the home of designer Stijn Helsen) and has quaint little shops, picturesque squares and numerous museums.

Seeing as most cities are going all out to lure in the crowds this summer, Hasselt could not just stand by without putting up some competition. It has, with little fanfare, put together an intricately planned programme to keep you entertained even on the rainier summer days.

Every Monday evening, carillons from the Sint-Quintinus Cathedral will chime above while you sip cold beer (or hot coffee) at one of the cosy cafés on the Grote Markt. If that sounds like taking

things too easy, you can always join the roller-skating parade, which leaves the Kolonel Dusartplein at 19.00, whisking you across the city on eight wheels.

The Grote Markt really is the place to be in Hasselt this summer. It's the spot for the über-charming Hasselt Danst every Tuesday night. After a 30-minute lesson by a local dance group, you'll be ready to take centre stage and boogie the night away. A different dance is taught every week, making you an all-around expert by summer's end.

On Wednesdays nights, meanwhile, local orchestra Toeternietoe, aided by several guest musicians, lighten the mood with upbeat melodies on the Molenpoortplein. More free music awaits, this time in Kamermolenpark, with free concerts every Thursday as part of the Parkfeesten series taking place across Flanders. Upcoming shows include Yamundo, a Flemish-Dutch trio delivering sultry, jazzy beats, and Antwerp-based light pop group Mama's Jasje.

Saturdays in Hasselt are dedicated to antiques, with a wonder-



ful little antique market on the Kolonel Dusartplein in the morning, followed by an art fair on the Groenplein (next to the tourist office) in the afternoons. Paintings, sculptures, jewellery, you name it.

Aside from glorious food and drink, Limburg provinc in general excels in pop and rock music, spitting out one great little garage band after another. We end our week, then, with the Muziekterras, live music on the Leopoldplein with an after-party at C.Bar. But what about Friday? you may be wondering. Well, that's up to you, really – choose from the scads of other ongoing activities in Hasselt this summer. Visit, for example, the surprisingly interesting fairytale exhibit *Zeg Roodkapje, waar ga je heen?* (*Say, Little Red Riding Hood, Where Are You Going?*) in the oft-overlooked

literary museum.

Also bypassed in favour of its competition in Antwerp, Hasselt's fashion museum houses the exhibition *In Her Shoes*, which follows the evolution in women's shoe design from 1900 to the present, illustrated by way of famous creations by well-known (Christian Louboutin, Jimmy Choo, Manolo Blahnik) and lesser-known designers.

What started in Ghent has now moved to Hasselt: Sunday through Thursday from 27 July to 30 August, television celebrity Marcel Vanthilt hosts his new show *Villa Vanthilt* from the "mobile villa" built on the Kolonel Dusartplein. Sit back and relax in the garden of his "estate" and take in the show starting at 22.00.

And let's not forget about Rimpelrock (Wrinkle Rock) on 15 August.

Clouseau, Billy Ocean, Lee Towers, Dana Winner and many more head to the Kiewit in Hasselt to show that summer music festivals are not just for the young. Thousands of 60-plussers turn out for this annual event, waving their arms in the air and hooting at the stage. It's one of Flanders' more surreal summer experiences, and that's saying a lot.

Last but not least, everyone is encouraged to take part in Hasselt's photo competition. If you've had a great time at one of the above-mentioned venues, and you've got the pictures to prove it, send them in via the city's website. Every week a winner will be awarded a gift certificate. Non-winners need not despair – by the end of the summer, all entries will be posted on Hasselt's new website.

→ www.hasselt.be

sports

MARTIN BANKS

Cricket in Flanders



It may not go down too well with the English, but there is compelling evidence that their national summer sport was, in fact, invented in Flanders.

Research published earlier this year indicated that Flemish weavers and shepherds who emigrated from the south of England from the 14th century onwards could have taken the game of cricket along with them.

The findings places Flemish "creckettes" and "weckettes" in the south of England in the mid-16th century, a time that coincides with a painting by the Flemish Master Pieter Bruegel The Elder which is said to show an early form of the game.

Fast forward to 2009, and you find 1,200 members of 17 cricket clubs in Belgium, 13 of them in Flanders. And three new clubs are set to launch later this year, says Martin O'Connor, a native of New Zealand who moved to Flanders in 1991. "Of course, it is still very much a minority sport, but cricket really is flourishing in

Flanders," he says.

The first Belgian Cricket Federation was founded in the early 1900s. The first record of organised cricket, however, can be found in a painting dated 1870, which now hangs in the Pavilion at Lords, the famous home of cricket in London. This shows the opening of the Brussels Cricket Club in 1866 by the Mayor of Brussels.

Next came the Antwerp Football and Cricket Club, founded in 1880 by expatriate British workers. Early in the 20th century, the football and cricket divisions of the club parted company – the football club is now in Belgium's 2nd division, while the cricket side remains one of the country's leading clubs.

From the early 1990s until 1967, both Brussels and Antwerp played in the Dutch league. More and more clubs were formed, and today there are eight cricket grounds in Belgium. An annual sixes competition is held in Ghent, and there are also youth leagues.

As O'Connor says, cricket is now "slowly raising" its image and numbers but still has to compete with a large number of other minority sports. "It's in pretty good shape here, but it can sometimes be difficult trying to promote a sport like cricket, not least because of the recent success and popularity of a sport like tennis," says O'Connor, who makes his home in Geel, Antwerp province.

These days O'Connor is a full time general manager for the Belgian Cricket Federation, which runs the game. He readily admits that the "biggest setback" for the game here was the decision several years ago by the BBC not to broadcast cricket on free-to-air TV.

"That was a real blow," he says. "Even so, we are doing our best to raise the sport's profile, and I'm confident we will."

→ www.cricket-belgium.com