

# THE HOLY BLOOD OF HOOGSTRATEN

## **PRACTICAL INFORMATION**



### **When**

1st and 2nd Sunday after Pentecost

### **Eucharistic celebrations in the church of Saint Catherine**

The 1st Saturday after Pentecost: opening of the Holy Blood Week at 19 pm.

Sundays: at 10 am.

### **Procession**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday, the procession heads north while it heads south on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday. In the event of rain, there will be a shortened procession in the church of Saint Catherine after the Holy Mass at 10 o'clock.

### **Corpus Christi**

At Thursday in the Holy Blood Week there's a shortened procession in the church of Saint Catherine after the Holy Mass at 10 o'clock

### **Entrance**

Free, spectators may stand anywhere along the route

### **The Holy Blood Committee**

In the tomb chapel, in the back of the church, you can sign up for the Brotherhood of the Holy Blood, you can order holy masses and you can buy candles, medals of the Holy Blood, prayer cards and threads of het Holy Blood (an old devotion dating from 1678).

### **Parking**

Free, parking spots are available in and around the city centre

### **LOCATION**

Hoogstraten is situated in the province of Antwerp and is the northernmost city in Flanders. The distance to Antwerp is 37 kilometres and the distance to the Dutch city of Breda is 30 kilometres. Coming from Antwerp you take the E19 highway and follow exit nr. 2 (Loenhout-Hoogstraten). Coming from Breda you take the E19 highway and follow exit nr. 1 (Meer).

### **PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

You can reach Hoogstraten easily with the help of busses of the Flemish government company De Lijn. By train you can travel to the station Noorderkempen in Brecht where a number of busses will be available that will take you to Hoogstraten

### **INFORMATION**

#### **Hoogstraten touristic service**

Vrijheid 149 | 2320 Hoogstraten | 0032 3 340 19 55  
[toerisme@hoogstraten.be](mailto:toerisme@hoogstraten.be) | [www.hoogstraten.be](http://www.hoogstraten.be)

#### **Holy Blood Committee**

Parochiesecretariaat | Vrijheid 185 | 2320 Hoogstraten | 0032 3 314 51 54  
[www.heiligbloedhoogstraten.be](http://www.heiligbloedhoogstraten.be)

## PROCESSION OF THE HOLY BLOOD



Every year, on the first and second Sunday after Pentecost, the city of Hoogstraten organizes the Procession of the Holy Blood (Dutch: de Heilig Bloedprocessie). Thousands of tourists and pilgrims gather to experience the procession and enjoy the great atmosphere and devotion that are typical to the Campine region. The flags are raised, the carillon sounds and the numerous spectators take part in the folkloristic ambience. In other words: **Hoogstraten celebrates!**

After the Holy Mass at 10 o'clock, the procession starts at the Church of Saint Catherine in the centre of Hoogstraten. This church – referred to as the ‘cathedral’ of the Campine – is also the location of the golden shrine that contains the valuable relic of the Holy Blood. More than 500 costumed volunteers solemnly parade through the street Vrijheid, acting out the miracle of the Holy Blood. The Procession of the Holy Blood is a tradition with a certain freedom of interpretation that manages to keep both pilgrims and other tourists interested every year. No wonder that it's been declared Flemish Cultural Heritage.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND



The adoration of the Holy Blood originated in Bortel in the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant around the year 1380. That year, the priest Eligius van den Aker accidentally knocked over a chalice that contained consecrated wine. The white wine spilled over the white, linen altar cloths. Immediately, the white wine turned red: the blood of Christ. After several vain attempts to rinse the cloths, he stored them in a suitcase. He confessed his secret on his deathbed. Soon after, Bortel became the most visited place of pilgrimage in the Duchy of Brabant. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the Netherlands was in the midst of religious turmoil, the cloths of the Holy Blood were first transported to the St. Michael's Abbey in Antwerp (1649). Later, in 1652, they were brought to safety in Hoogstraten which led the crowd of pilgrims here.

It may be an odd combination, but the Procession of the Holy Blood is inseparably linked to the fair, the so-called ‘Heilig Bloedfoor’. Devotion and ambience have always gone hand in hand during these celebrations. When the procession has ended, visitors wander along the many stands and attractions or take a seat on one of the lovely terraces. Parade participants, spectators and celebrators can also visit the traditional exhibition of IKO, the local art academy. Be sure to attend this student exhibition. You will be amazed by the creative talent that Hoogstraten has to offer. If you do not have a fear of heights, you can also climb the 105-metre-high tower of the Church of Saint Catherine. From there, you can look out over the surrounding areas in all directions with views of up to 40 kilometres.

## ANNUAL FAIR & STREET RUN

On the Wednesday of the Week of the Holy Blood, the **annual fair** is held in the centre of Hoogstraten. From 17 o'clock on, a pleasant bustle of market vendors and stallholders fills the centre. Hundreds of stalls are awarded a spot under the bright green lime trees of the 2 kilometre-long Vrijheid.

At 18h30, a **street run** joins the festivities. Recreational and professional runners as well as children start off the Celebrations of the Holy Blood with a bang.

As is tradition, the annual fair ends at 22 o'clock, but in and around the bars in Hoogstraten, the celebrations continue till the early morning.