



Maastricht

Planning a short break that doesn't involve a long journey? Here's a tidy little city in The Netherlands to consider...

WHY GO?

Despite being known worldwide for the 1992 European treaty bearing its name, Maastricht can sometimes fall beneath the radar as a city destination for UK tourists. Yet there's much more to The Netherlands most southern city – a place with a unique personality having adopted characteristics from its German and Belgium neighbours. So if the idea of cafés, culture, friendliness and flan takes your fancy, then you're in for a real treat!

GETTING THERE

Take the Eurostar (www.eurostar.com) to Brussels and change for direct train services to Maastricht (Mon-Fri) – less than 4 hours from London. Weekend services require an additional change at Liege-Guillemins.

Rail Europe (www.raileurope.co.uk) can help plan the full journey, including ticket sales.

GETTING AROUND

The train station is set in the welcoming district of Wyck. Follow the trail of cafés, delicatessens and restaurants across the Saint Servatius Bridge and the River Meuse into the historic heart of the city (10-minute walk). Hotels located within Wyck can be reached by foot in minutes.

THINGS TO SEE AND DO

Unless you're planning to explore the wider Limburg region, there is no need for a car in

Maastricht. The central shopping areas are pedestrianised and the main museums and sights can be reached by foot. Bike hire is available in the city and is a popular mode of transport for locals. 'Orange Bike', just off Vrijthof Square, offers bike rental from €6 for 3 hours (www.orangebike.nl).

■ Natural History Museum

De Bosquetplein 7
www.nhmmaastricht.nl

A small museum displaying regional nature exhibits from past and present and housed in a former convent. An English information booklet is provided to guide you around. The museum's collection won't set the world alight, however, the surrounding quiet streets of the university district, Jerkerkwartier, make a walk in the direction of the museum worthwhile.

Open Monday-Friday 10am-5pm, Saturday and Sunday 2pm-5pm

Admission €4.50

■ Bonnefantenmuseum Maastricht

www.bonnefanten.nl/en

A mix of permanent and temporary exhibitions fills this bullet-shaped art gallery designed by renowned Italian architect Also Rossi.

Admission €8 – visit the tourist office to find out about available discounts

Open Tuesday to Sunday from 11am to 5pm.

Last entrance at 4.30 pm

■ Saint Servaas Basilica

www.sintservaas.nl

Although centuries of modifications determine its present-day appearance, Saint Servaas existed in some shape or form from as early as 530 AD.

The church is built over the grave of Saint Servass, the first bishop of Maastricht and the patron saint of the city, and is one of the most important churches in the region. We

recommend visiting the treasury (€3.70), however, as there are no English signs, visit the

website for information prior to travel and/or buy the guidebook on sale in the church (€3).

■ Sint Janskerk Church (St John's of Maastricht)

This Gothic church with its eye-catching 70m red tower sits adjacent to Saint Servaas Basilica in popular Vrijthof Square.

■ Onze Lieve Vrouw, Sterre der Zee (Our Lady Star of the Sea)

www.sterre-der-zee.nl

This impressive church looms over Onze Lieve Vrouweplein Square, the two towers topping the imposing west wall, giving the church a fairy-castle-like appearance. Pass through the atmospheric candle lit prayer chapel to enter the church and view its 12th century nave – the original structure dates back to around 1000.

Open Treasury open Mon-Sat 11am-5pm (Easter to All Saints day). Mon-Sat 1pm-5pm (all Saints' Day to Easter) Sun 1pm-5pm.

Admission To the treasury (€3) gives visitors access to the peaceful inner-courtyard (treasury displays not in English).

■ Museum Aan Het Vrijthof (Spanish Government Museum)

www.museumaanhelvrijthof.nl

Standing on Vrijthof Square and housing the Spanish Government Museum, the bright red façade of this 16th century building makes it easy to spot. However, the original house is in fact 14th-century, built with the purpose of housing one of the former chapter house cannons. Inside, a temporary art exhibition and small number of rooms decked out in 17th and 18th century furnishings complete this petite museum.

Open Weds to Sun 1pm-5pm

Admission €5.50

■ Helpoort (Hells Gate)

Maastricht's original city gate and the Netherlands oldest.

■ 't Bassin

www.tbassin.nl

Maastricht's historic inner harbour is a 5-10-minute walk from the Market Square (Market Square) and home to a handful of restaurants and bars. Our visit during low season allowed us to escape the city's shopping crowds, although it may be a little too quiet for some people.

■ Cruise the River Meuse

www.stiphout.nl

Take a cruise on the River Meuse passing the Bonnefanten Museum and St Pietersberg Hill, right up to the Belgian border. The one-hour cruise only covers a short distance. Other boat trips include a combination ticket with a visit to St Pietersberg Caves.

Admission €7. English-speaking tours are limited

■ Caves of St Pietersberg Hill – Zonneberg Caves (Grotten Zonneberg)

www.maastrichtunderground.nl

Go underground to explore the labyrinth of caves under St Pietersberg hill on the outskirts of Maastricht. Find out how and why humans excavated this vast network of tunnels, once spanning 200km. Temperatures in the caves are between 9-10°C so wear a cardigan or jumper.

Admission €4.90 (limited English-speaking tours)

■ City discovery by tram

This tourist tram departs from Vrijthof Square and skirts around the outer realms of the city. The 40-minute journey is a good way to discover some interesting sights and history – especially the attractive parkland outside the city walls.

An audio guide is played in each of the carriages.

Admission €5

SHOPPING

You can shop until you drop in one of The Netherlands best shopping cities. Surprises hide around every corner with an alluring mix of boutiques, antiques, galleries, and shopping centres – all interspersed with cafés and restaurants. Stroll around the city's Roman district, Stokstraatkwartier, with its tempting restaurants and exclusive shops, many housed in 'Maasland' renaissance styled buildings – characterised by tall saddle roofs and blue stone framing around windows and doors.

Which? Holiday's favourite shops

■ De Bisschopsmolen (Bishop's Mill) is a traditional bakery powered by an 11th-century water mill. The *vlaai* (sweet flan) is a must-try (www.bisschopsmolen.nl).

■ Selexyz Dominicanen – books replace pews in this unique conversion of a 13th-century church into a majestic bookshop. Coffee Lovers (a chain café) now sits where the altar once stood – coffee from €2, sandwiches from €5 (www.selexyz.nl).

■ Chocolaterie Boulanger (Spilstraat, 23) head here for a bag of *Maastrichter steerkes* (chocolate stars).

A guide to shopping opening hours

Monday 1pm to 6pm.

Tuesday to Friday 10am to 6pm

Thursday open until 9pm.

Saturday from 10am to 5pm

Sunday every first Sunday of the month (some exceptions)

GOOD PLACES TO STAY

■ Hotel d'Orangerie

☎ 0031 433261111

www.hotel-orangerie.nl

Character and history envelops this centrally located hotel, with its beautiful mosaic entrance and feature-filled breakfast room. Stylish furnishings graced our small rear-facing double room. The hotel's location, set back from the River Meuse and a minute's walk from the market square, make this good choice as a central base.

Double room B&B from €135 (£117). Special offers and discounted rates available online.

■ Hotel de Pauwenhof

☎ 0031 433503333

www.pauwenhof.nl

The origins of this historic mansion house date back to the 17th century. Through the generations it has been restored and remodelled yet the essence and evidence of its historic past remain – the exquisite terrazzo and tiled flooring are particularly worthy. The friendly staff and good location (5 minutes from the main shopping districts) make this an ideal choice.

Double room B&B from €144 (£125). Special offers and discounted rates available online

■ Kruisherhotel

☎ 0031 433292020

www.chateauhotels.nl

From Gothic church to ultra modern hotel, this unusual and highly successful conversion sees vibrant orange sofas and contemporary walkways neighbouring original stain glass windows. Each room is unique but all are contemporary in design. For those on a budget a drink in the bar will showcase the best of the hotel at a fraction of the room price. **Double room B&B from €432 (£376). Discounted rates available online – we paid €246 (£214)**

GUIDEBOOK AND WEBSITES

■ *Maastricht Step by Step* (available from the tourist information office, €1.50). This leaflet style walking guide takes a circular route around the city providing brief information on some of Maastricht's key sights. Although the directions are a little confusing at times, some sights and pretty cobbled streets may be missed without it.

■ www.vvv-maastricht.eu

■ www.zichtopmaastricht.nl



GOOD PLACES TO EAT

■ La Bonne Femme,

Graanmarkt 1

www.labonnefemme.nl

☎ 0031 43321 6861

Delicious French and regional Limburg cuisine served inside or out at this friendly 17th-century restaurant in the Roman heart of Maastricht. Set back from the river (no real views) the outside terrace provides plenty of seating for alfresco dining. The interior is equally appealing, with fresh flowers on tables and relaxing jazz music. A good choice of specials make the most of local seasonal produce. Mains from €15. Three-course set menu €27.50.

■ Pieke Potloed

www.piekepotloed.nl

Spaarestraatsje 5

☎ 0031 43321 5968

Tucked away down a quite side street this traditional Dutch restaurant/bistro is a good choice for an authentic slice of regional Limburg cuisine. You can choose to dine in the popular bar area or head to the light and bright covered courtyard at the rear of the property. There are plenty of traditional hearty dishes to choose as well as a small selection of specials – we opted for the restaurant's signature dish of pickled rabbit, an unusual but tasty sweet and sour dish. Three-course set menu €25.50.

■ Brassarie Van Buuren

www.bvbmaastricht.nl

☎ 0031 43321 2233

This friendly bistro is one of a glut of restaurants on Onze Lieve Vrouweplein and serves a large selection of reasonably priced French and regional Limburg dishes. Inside, the warm woods and vibrant red leathers of the modern interior complement the building's historic features with exposed brickwork and delightful cornicing. Outside, the restaurant tables join the masses on the densely packed square – perfect for dining in the summer months. Mains around €12





Photo Album

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT Kate Shipp spent three days taking in the sights, smells and sounds of Maastricht, The Netherlands most southern city.



Markt Square (above) is dominated by the Baroque town hall and is home to a twice weekly market (Weds 8am-1pm and Fri 8am-1pm). Friday's larger general market is famous for fish.

De Bisschopsmlen (Bishop's Mill) is a traditional bakery (below) powered by an 11th-century water mill. Take a break from shopping and stop here for a tasty lunch, rounding off with a delicious piece of *vlaai* (sweet flan).



The elegant dining room at Hotel de Pauwenhof, a former mansion house, retains the essence of its historic past.



Maastricht's pretty cobble streets (below) are a real delight. Follow the *Step by Step* sightseeing walk available from the tourist information office (€1.50) or explore on your own.



Maastricht is a great destination for some alfresco dining and some retail therapy.



A mix of permanent and temporary exhibitions fills the Bonnefanten Museum (above), a bullet shaped art gallery designed by renowned Italian architect Aldo Rossi. Set on the banks of the River Meuse, contemporary art and works by old masters are on display. Visit the tourist office to see if any discounts are available for your visit.

You can also view this striking museum from the water as you cruise the River Meuse right up to the Belgian border on an organised boat trip.