

CLOCKWISE FROM
TOP: THE RIVER MAAS;
CRUISING ON THE RIVER;
FESTIVE SHOPPING; AERIAL
VIEW OF THE VRIJTHOF,
MAASTRICHT'S MAIN
SQUARE, IN WINTER; THE
CHRISTMAS MARKET;
WINDOW-SHOPPING; THE
MEDIEVAL CITY WALLS; LA
CAVERNE DE GEULHEM;
FRUIT-FILLED TARTS ARE
A LOCAL SPECIALITY

MAASTRICHT

Its treaty might be more famous than its eateries, but Maastricht's designer boutiques, hip cafés and historic sights make for a truly memorable visit, says Heidi Fuller-Love

Why go? Sandwiched between Belgium and Germany, this cobbled and cosmopolitan Dutch city may get chilly in December but that's a great reason to get snug in one of the brown cafés (pubs), *eetcafés* and other eateries that have earned Maastricht the title of the Netherlands' culinary capital. With five Michelin-starred restaurants within strolling distance of the city centre, good food is high on the agenda here, but a plethora of designer boutiques, museums and historical sites means there's also much to explore.

What to do Maastricht has about 590 listed monuments, one of which is Vrijthof, its medieval main square and host to a lively Christmas market. Plunge into the labyrinth of cobbled streets around the Wyck district and old industrial Céramique district to discover the boutiques housed in medieval buildings that bring fashionistas flocking here from all over Holland. Buy silk suits and cashmere jackets at Christian Lagerwaard (00 31 642 654 499) or shop for clothes by cutting-edge local designers at Kiki Niesten (kikiniesten.nl). Next, stroll over to Le Salonard (lesalonard.nl) and get high on the fragrance of Rommedeo, one of the cheeses for which the Limburg region is famous. Burn off a few calories with a walk up St. Pietersberg Hill to explore the maze of caves burrowed into the hillside (maastrichtunderground.nl) that have provided shelter for centuries in times of war. Saunter back to the Bonnefantenmuseum (bonnefanten.nl), with its rocket-shaped dome designed by architect Aldo Rossi, to look at the fascinating mix of Old Masters, medieval sculpture and contemporary work. Finally, hire a pair of skates, buy some roasted chestnuts and take a spin around the temporary ice rink (magicalmaastricht.nl) on the Vrijthof, ending your stay on a festive note.

Where to stay Sleep chic in Hotelier Château St. Gerlach (00 31 436 088 888, chateauhotels.nl). Just outside of town, this – once derelict – 13th-century castle surrounded by baroque gardens is now a fairytale palace, complete with Roman-style interior pools, two excellent restaurants and spa facilities. If you prefer to be at the

heart of the city's old quarter, Derlon (00 31 433 216 770, derlon.nl) is the way to go, a hip blend of classic and contemporary chic with a breakfast room built around Roman ruins in the basement. For city style with a lower price tag, head for Hotel DuCasque (00 31 433 214 343, amrathhotels.nl). Overlooking the main square, this quirky establishment retains much of its original 1930s decor.

Where to eat and drink Get straight to the culinary heart of the city with a breakfast of a fruit-packed Limburg *vlaai*, tart, and fluffy *poffertjes*, buckwheat pancakes, at the heated terrace of Grand Café de Perroen (00 31 433 252 073, perroen.nl) on Maastricht's main square. With its five Michelin-starred restaurants, dozens of bistro-style *eetcafés* and 400-plus brown cafés, Maastricht assumes its role as the Netherlands' culinary capital with panache. For the city's classiest dining, chef Hans van Wolde's two Michelin-starred Beluga restaurant (00 31 433 213 364, rest-beluga.com) serves lavish dishes with a twist (think foie gras with puffed rice and cherry beer ice cream) in a stunning setting overlooking the river Maas. Serving meals since the 14th century, In Den Ouden Vogelstruys (00 31 433 214 888, vogelstruys.nl) is the city's oldest café and the best place to sample chunky *bloedworst*, blood sausage, and *zoervleis*, a traditional casserole of beef with a sweet and sour sauce, while Eetcafé Ceramique (00 31 433 252 097, eetcafeceramique.nl), a cosy café on Rechtstraat, is the place to go for another hearty local speciality *konijn*, rabbit, in beer. If the St. Pietersberg caves took your fancy, you can dine underground at La Caverne De Geulhem (0031 436 041 000, caverne.nl), a ten-minute taxi ride from the city centre.

Time running out? If you're short of time, an ideal way to see the main sights of the city is to take a two-hour cruise on the Maas – or Meuse, as the French would have it – river (stiphout.nl).

Trip tip Pick up an Ekoplan from the local tourist office. This handy little map shows the location of Maastricht's organic restaurants, secondhand shops and other alternative attractions.

Travel information

Currency is the euro. Maastricht is one hour ahead of GMT, and the train from London St Pancras takes about five hours.

Getting there

Rail Europe (raileurope.com) has several trains daily to Maastricht via Brussels and Liège.

P&O Ferries (poferries.com) departs twice daily from Hull for Rotterdam, two hours and 30 minutes from Maastricht by road.

Resources

Maastricht Tourism (vwmaastricht.nl) and the **Netherlands Board of Tourism** (holland.com) offer tips on planning your trip.

Further reading

Recipes from My Dutch Kitchen by Janny de Moor (Aquamarine, £8.99) features traditional recipes from around the Netherlands, Maastricht included.

AVERAGE DAILY TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Min °C	0	0	2	3	8	11	13	12	10	7	3	1
Max °C	4	5	8	12	16	20	21	21	18	13	8	6
mm	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	3

