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## Holland / Maastricht

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Dating originally from pre-Roman times, this provincial capital is Hollands oldest city. Being close to both Belgium and Germany, the city has always been of strategic importance. Maastricht was besieged 21 times; 9 of the 100 castles of the province of Limburg can be found here, as well as many historical monuments. It boasts Hollands only terraced castle which is now a very good and also very expensive restaurant "Château Neercanne".

The heart of Maastricht is its central square, 't Vrijthof, ringed by numerous cafes and monuments including the 10th century St. Servaas Church, and "In Den Ouden Vogelstruys", a cafe opened in 1312. A good place for a snack, the cafe is said to be the oldest in Holland. The stone bridge spanning the river Maas, constructed in 1298, is even older.

### Telephone and time difference

Access code to USA: 001 (dial tone). To phone The Netherlands: 31; time difference (Eastern Daylight) plus 6 hrs.

### Climate

The surrounding North Sea is a major influence on the Dutch weather, it results in a temperate, if damp climate. Winters tends to be mild with the minimum average temperature in the coldest months of January and February at about 31°F (0°C). The sunniest month is June and peak average temperature throughout the summer is about 70°F (21°C). Maastricht being in the south of Holland and in the only part of it that has something resembling hills, is slightly warmer and slightly less wet than the rest of the country.

### Sights and Museums

The central square of Maastricht 't Vrijthof is surrounded by monuments, among them the St. Servaas Church with a very interesting treasury. Another attractive church is the Onze Lieve Vrouwe Basiliek (Church of Our Lady), which also has a treasury. Maastricht, being a very old city, has two sets of city walls. The second set was built when the first proved too small to protect the thriving city. Remains of both sets can still be visited, several of the gates of the second city wall are also still standing, for instance, the Waterpoort de Reek (Water Gate) through which the river Jeker enters the city. Two rivers cross this city; the Maas and the Jeker and this results in the city having several very old bridges. As is has always been a center of Catholicism, Maastricht has several monasteries one of them, the Bonnefanten klooster, now houses the university library. The Hall of the Town Hall, Markt 78 can be visited except when official receptions are in progress. Maastricht's best-known museum is the Bonnefanten Museum, Dominikanerplein 5. It has varying exhibitions.

### Theatre and Nightlife

The best place to spend an evening in Maastricht is on or near 't Vrijthof or Onze-Lieve-Vrouweplein two squares in the centre with many bars, cafes and outdoor cafes. A Casino can be found in nearby Valkenburg.

### Shopping

Shops in Holland are generally open from 8.30 or 9 am to 5.30 or 6 pm with one late night shopping a week, usually Thursdays or Fridays depending on the town till 9 pm. Maastricht has its late night shopping on Thursdays. Shops are closed on Fridays and another half day during the week, usually Monday mornings or Wednesday afternoons.

The Stokstraatkwartier, the area around the Stokstraat, is the best place to go shopping.

### Excursions

A Unique sight nearby is the 120-mile network of manmade tunnels beneath nearby St. Pietersberg hill, 2 miles south of the city. It is near the river Maas and one way of getting there is by boat. Begun by the Romans in search of Marl for building stone, the tunnels have also provided a handy refuge during the city's many times of trial. Parts of this subterranean realm date from the French occupation of 1794 and include a World War two treasure room, where Rembrandts immortal Night Watch was preserved from the Nazis. Note the signatures of Sir Walter Scott and Napoleon, among countless others.

Make a bus tour of the area and visit some of the towns nearby, like;

Vaals: At 1,000 feet, this is the highest point in The Netherlands and the meeting point of Holland, Belgium and Germany. Valkenburg; This hill town is a popular vacation spot. Approximately 40 miles of tunnels lie beneath the ruins of Hollands only hilltop castle. Several entrances lead to a coal-mine museum, a mysterious underground lake, and an exact replica of the Roman catacombs. Above ground is the provinces largest casino at Odapark.

's-Hertogenbosch, usually known by the more manageable name of Den Bosch, is the provincial capital of North Brabant. Den Bosch is especially famed for its romantic, antique centre. Its market square (markets are on Wednesday and Saturday mornings) and the 15th century St. Janskerk cathedral are among Europes most beautiful. Even the local tourist board (the VVV) housed in a small 13th century castle, Markt 77, is an attraction in this surprising city.

South of Maastricht in Belgium you will find the Ardennes. This is a hilly, gentle and green country, a bit mysterious, a countryside of legends and spirits, abbeys and castles. Liege or Luik Belgiums fifth largest city is the gateway to these Ardennes. It has been a prosperous industrial town since coal was discovered here in 1198. Most of the citizens are shopkeepers, artisans, miners, or steelworkers. The streets of this town are laid out fitfully and capriciously, it is easy to lose your way so don't plan your time too closely. The skyline shows over 100 church spires, and the river Meuse (or Maas) winds its way through every quarter, which means you will often find yourself going over one nice little bridge or another. The city has one of Belgiums most important universities so the cafe life is well catered to.