

Faculty of Law, Maastricht University (The Netherlands)

1. Overall impression

I greatly enjoyed studying in Maastricht, where I could gain many new insights, meet many new and interesting people and see a different academic culture.

2. Making preparations

(e.g. administrative matters, finding information)

The website of Maastricht University and the information booklet that is handed out at the information event in Zurich essentially contain all relevant information. Also, Maastricht University contacts all students with the relevant information on registration, fee payment etc. already quite early on in spring.

3. Contacts/Responsibilities

(e.g. important contact persons at the Partner University and Faculty)

Faculty staff are very helpful and you can always approach the reception desk at the faculty, which can usually direct you to the relevant person. Diane Crook is the responsible for Double Degree students.

4. Housing / Finding accommodation

It is advisable to look for housing either via the maastrichthousing website or one of the many facebook groups like "Flathunting Maastricht" or "Rooms / Kamer / Zimmer Maastricht" (some of them are very active, but it's best to do a bit of searching as there are new groups appearing regularly). Some agencies and landlords ask for extra fees (e.g. a registration fee to view ads or go on viewings or an agency fee upon conclusion of a rental contract) - often those fees are not legal under Dutch law, so one should be careful when dealing with agencies. As Maastricht is rather small and the number of students at the university is steadily rising, I recommend to start looking for accommodation early, already a couple of months in advance.

5. Arrival

Upon arrival you need to pick up your student card and register with the municipality, the latter is possible at registration sessions organized by the university in the first week. The municipality asks Swiss citizens to provide a birth certificate because the place of birth is not indicated on the Swiss passport. The faculty organizes an introduction day for new students before the first semester starts.

6. Telephone

(e.g. costs, carriers)

While there are many options, I went for Vodafone where you can get a prepaid SIM with monthly data bundles which include free local calls and texts (costs between 10 and 20€ for students). Vodafone has a shop in the city center where you can just walk in and buy a SIM card that can be used immediately. Contrary to other providers they have free roaming in Switzerland, which is quite handy when returning home for holidays.

7. Bank account

At ING Bank you can open a student account in English - this is only possible upon appointment though and you usually have to wait for multiple weeks to get one. ING is the only bank that also offers their website and ebanking in English (and where employees at the counter will speak English to you), but if you can speak a bit of Dutch I recommend opening an account at SNS - depending on the promotions they have you might get a 20€ bonus for opening a student account, which is free of charge. All bank documents will be in Dutch though and you'll have to speak Dutch to the people at the bank when opening and closing your account.

8. Transport (e.g. from Switzerland, to the University)

The most convenient way to get to Maastricht is by train and Bus: there is a good connection from Zurich to Aachen where you can take the Arriva bus (Bus 350) to Maastricht - this takes about 7 hours in total. I didn't fly because the nearest airports (Brussels, Düsseldorf, Amsterdam and Cologne) are still all between one and three hours from Maastricht, and it's usually a lot more expensive to travel that way. I recommend to buy a DB BahnCard which gets you a discount with Deutsche Bahn (comparable to the SBB half price subscription), which is quite cheap and really pays off if you make the journey to Maastricht and back more than once.

In Maastricht itself, local buses only run every half hour so everyone uses either a bike or walks, even if you do not live in the city center the distances are usually not that far.

9. General information about the Partner Faculty and student life

The Faculty building, where most classes take place, is located in the city centre, very close to the main square, the Vrijthof. Some lectures with a lot of people take place at the local cinema Pathé, which is of course great if you feel like watching a movie afterwards! As Maastricht is a real student city (about a fifth of all inhabitants are students), there is quite an active student life with many different associations, from sports clubs to an English speaking theatre association. If you can't attend the INKOM week (the week before University starts where a programme is offered for all new students, organized by students - great to meet new people and learn a bit about what's going on in Maastricht), where many of them present themselves, you can always check out the university website which lists them all. Many associations are English speaking and involve international students, so it's not necessary to speak Dutch for many extracurricular activities.

10. Teaching and studying at the Partner Faculty

(e.g. program structure, methodology, exams, etc.)

The University of Maastricht follows the so-called PBL (Problem-based Learning) system. Every course is typically composed of a lecture and an accompanying tutorial. During the tutorials, the course content is further discussed in small groups of usually between 10 and 15 people. It is expected that students prepare well and read all materials before the tutorial. If one participates in the tutorials and prepares the self-study questions for each tutorial at home, the additional effort required for exam preparation is usually rather limited. The 8 weeks of each course period are divided into 7 weeks of taught courses and an exam week. Usually, the final grades for a course are composed of a grade for the written exam and a grade for written course work, either tutorial assignments that need to be handed in on a weekly basis or a research paper.

Period 3, which approximately covers the time of winter semester break in Zurich, is free to work on one's Master thesis in most Master programmes.

Maastricht offers a lot of possibilities to participate in Moot Court Competitions. As Moot Courts are very actively promoted by the Faculty, which organizes an information evening in the first course week, it is usually also easily possible to obtain ECTS credits and replace a course with a Moot Court.

11. City

(e.g. cultural activities, sports, discounts, nightlife, must-sees, short trips, etc.)

Maastricht is quite visited by tourists, especially on weekends. There are a lot of cultural events that take place during the year, ranging from the international art fair TEFAF to a gourmet festival and of course carnival, which is celebrated at multiple occasions between November and March. Moreover, there are many restaurants for all tastes and two nice albeit small art museums. The church tower of Sint Janskerk offers an amazing view over the city and its surroundings. It doesn't take long to get to Aachen, Liège or Brussels, and Amsterdam can be reached in less than two and a half hours by train. While the Dutch railways are rather expensive, people below 26 years of age can travel to any destination in Belgium from Maastricht with Belgian Rail's GoPass ticket for about 8€.