



Maastricht & Southeastern Netherlands

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Why Go?

The Dutch southeast belies most clichés about the Netherlands: tulips, windmills and dykes are scarce. There is though plenty of beer, which is appropriate given the obvious Belgian and German influences.

Maastricht is a contender for the title of Finest Dutch City, and it even has – drum roll – hills. It’s as different from Amsterdam as it is geographically distant except in one key area: its people are just as irreverent and fun. It’s the true star of its province Limburg and fully embodies the southeastern concept of *bourgondisch*: eating and drinking with a verve worthy of the epicurean inhabitants of France’s Burgundy.

The other province in the region, Noord Brabant, is a land of agriculture and industry peppered with a few pleasant towns; Den Bosch celebrates its namesake favourite son Hieronymous Bosch with a monument and a fantastic museum that gets to the heart of his idiosyncratic art. Breda is worth a look for its cathedral and small but interesting museums, while the Efteling theme park is the biggest domestic tourist attraction.

When to Go

Maastricht can be enjoyed in any season, although its cafes have such appeal that it would be a shame to miss their outdoor vibe from late spring to early autumn. Its famed art show is in March. Noord Brabant is striped by rivers which make for curvaceous – and bodacious – cycling along their banks during the fair-weather months. The southeast doesn’t have the ascetic roots of the north, a fact made obvious during Carnaval in February when the streets fill with bands and impromptu parties, with fireworks overhead.

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Spanish and Roman ruins, sophisticated food and drink, French and Belgian twists in the architecture, a shrugging off of Dutch restraint – are we still in the Netherlands?

Maastricht is a lively and energetic place, with appeal and allure out of proportion to its size. The people are irreverent, there are

hordes of university students and the streets are steeped in history. No visit to the Netherlands is complete without a visit.

History

Just like that other great afterthought, the appendix, Maastricht hangs down from the rest of the country, hemmed in on all sides by Belgium and Germany. It was this very precarious position that saved the town from war



Maastricht & Southeastern Netherlands Highlights

- 1 Thrill in the good life in **Maastricht** (p237), a world apart from the north
- 2 Go bonkers at Maastricht's **Carnaval** (p241), one of the world's great festivals
- 3 Explore the unusual canals and charming cafes of lively **Den Bosch** (p245)
- 4 Decode the myriad messages in the paintings represented at Den Bosch's **Jheronimus Bosch Art Center** (p243)
- 5 Hop off your bike or train to tour **Breda** (p249) and its beautiful Gothic church
- 6 Have a sandwich made with flour ground in a 7th-century mill in **Maastricht** (p242)
- 7 See what the fuss is about at the tourist attraction the Dutch love most: **Efteling** (p248)