



# Maastricht & Southeastern Netherlands

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## Best Places to Eat

- Cafe Sjiem (p241)
- Breton (p246)
- Bisschopsmolen (p241)
- Eetcafe Ceramique (p242)

## Best Places to Stay

- Kruisherhotel (p241)
- Stadshotel Jeroen (p246)
- Kaboom Hotel (p241)

## Why Go?

Things are different below the rivers. Product of their embattled histories (the Rhine formed the Romans’ northern border), the provinces of Noord Brabant and Limburg have a distinctly southern character: more Catholic, more relaxed and, in the case of Limburg, hillier. Among the obvious southern influences are a preference for good beer and food, as embodied in the concept *bourgondisch*: eating and drinking with a verve worthy of the epicurean inhabitants of France’s Burgundy.

Maastricht’s medieval ramparts and delicate brick towers, its polyglot inhabitants and its role in brokering the Eurozone all suggest a closer kinship with Europe than that of any Dutch town. And the hilly terrain to the east makes for uniquely panoramic (if strenuous) cycling and hiking.

Noord Brabant is an intoxicating combination of historically ambient towns like Den Bosch and Breda, and younger urban centres like Tilburg and Eindhoven which are forging new identities as havens of culture and technology, yet all within cycling distance of supremely tranquil landscapes.

## When to Go

- Maastricht can be enjoyed in any season, though it’d be a shame to miss the cafe terrace scene from late spring to early autumn. Noord Brabant is striped by rivers which make for curvaceous cycling along their banks during the fair-weather months. It’s also prime party time, with major jazz festivals in Breda (early May) and Den Bosch (late May) and Tilburg’s boisterous Kermis (mid-July).
- The darker months aren’t entirely sedate either: the region’s most uninhibited party, Carnival, is in February. It’s celebrated with special gusto in Maastricht.

## MAASTRICHT

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Spanish and Roman ruins, sophisticated food and drink, French and Belgian twists in the architecture, a shrugging off of the shackles 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 damage in the 20th century; the Dutch government didn't bother mounting a defence.

In previous centuries, however, Maastricht was captured at various times by most of Europe's powers. This legacy has bequeathed the city its pan-European flavour, and makes it all the more fitting that Maastricht was the



### Maastricht & Southeastern Netherlands Highlights

**1** Thrilling in the good life of **Maastricht** (p236), a world apart from the north, and going bonkers at the annual Carnival.

**2** Exploring the unusual

canals of lively **Den Bosch** and decoding the myriad messages in the artwork at the **Jheronimus Bosch Art Center** (p245).

**3** Hopping off your bike or

train to tour **Breda** (p248) and its beautiful Gothic church.

**4** Taking in the attraction the Dutch love most: **Efteling** (p248).