In the spring of 2016 I studied at the University of Maastricht’s Business and Economics program in the Netherlands.

**Preparation**

Once nominated into the exchange program there are a few things that need to be completed or that you should be aware of in order for the trip to go smoothly.

**Accommodation:**

I would recommend staying at the Guest House. It is the easiest way to make friends as soon as you walk into the door. The day I arrived at my accommodation I made my best friend from the exchange semester in approximately 10 seconds of walking through the main door.

At Maastricht University a lot of the students are either exchange or international, meaning there are more students looking for houses then there are available accommodations. I would recommend trying to book in the guest house or to join one of Maastricht’s many Facebook groups to find accommodation. I booked approximately eight months in advance as per advice from a friend.

If you choose to go to the guest house it will make you select how many days you want to stay in advance which is extremely hard if you are booking more then a semester in advance. However, I would recommend you book minimum one week before the semester begins until the day after your last scheduled exam day. You can always extend you stay but you would be penalized if you cut it short.

The guest house offers several accommodations across the city. The main Guesthouse is the ‘C’ building. It only hosts exchange students. The other buildings are more reserved and do have better facilities but that is because they host fewer people.

If you choose to live in the ‘C’ building when booking the rooms there are four sizes, ‘A, B, C, D’. ‘A’ being the cheapest and ‘D’ being the most expensive. The difference between room types are the size and cost. My friend had an ‘A’ room, which did save him money, but it was so small you could literally touch both walls if you stretched across. Room size ‘D’ is very large and it can fit approximately 20 people comfortably.

**Getting There:**

I would try to book a flight once your fully committed because they do get more expensive the longer you wait. Flights will range in cost from $1,000- $1,500 CDN depending on where you fly into. Amsterdam is the most expensive to fly into and Brussels, Belgium is a cheaper offer. You can take a train or a bus to Maastricht.

I would recommend trying to arrive at least a week in advance. The week before classes start there are Welcome Week events hosted by Maastricht students apart of the International Student Network (ISN). They put on events and activities every night for a week to welcome us to the community and to get to know the other students. I would recommend joining their Facebook group prior to arriving. They will post all the events they host throughout the semester there as well.
Financials:

The year I went to Maastricht, the Dutch government started offering scholarships for Canadian students wishing to study in the Netherlands. It is called the Liberation Scholarship. I was awarded €3,000 from this scholarship fund and they put me in contact with the other recipients that were attending Maastricht once I arrived.

However, this is how I budgeted my funds for the trip prior to receiving the scholarship:

Accommodation @ C Building Size ‘B’ Room: 145 days * €16.75/day = €2,428.75 total ($3,534.71 CDN)

Exchange Prep Items (microfiber towel, travel items, adaptors, backpack): $200 CDN

Return Flight from Vancouver to Amsterdam = $1,500.00 CDN

Food (is inexpensive at the grocery store but expensive to eat out) = $2,000 CDN

Travel Budget = $5,500

Contingency Fund = $2,000 CDN

Total budget for the exchange $12,994.71

My budget includes traveling throughout and 30 days at the end of the semester.

Selecting Classes:

Maastricht offers 6 periods in a year. Periods 1, 2 (Fall) and 4, 5 (Spring) are regular classes which we as SFU students enroll in. Periods 3 and 6 are skills periods which we can enroll in but do not have too as exchange students. It is normal to select two classes per period and you complete two periods per exchange semester.

Once the Exchange Starts

Actually Arriving:

I arrived in Schiphol Airport Amsterdam and took a train to Maastricht. I took a cab the first time to the Guest House. However, if is really easy to take a bus and much cheaper (Busses 6 &9). You need to be aware of the check in times of the guesthouse or call them to make other arrangements. I arrived a few weeks early to travel but ISN did offer student pick up services from the train station if you signed up for it.

Once in Maastricht I started my Welcome Week hosted by the Maastricht ISN group. It was a week of networking and partying. A great way to get to know the culture and the people you live with.

Seeing the Accommodations for the First Time:

The accommodations in the C building is like first year dorms at SFU except you share a kitchen, living room, bathroom, and showers with 10-15 people. Some people did not like their experiences there
because the accommodations are very basic considering what you pay compared to other places in Maastricht. However, I must stress that the C building is for students who want to meet other students to travel with and party. If you are a very studious person and have no interest in these things you may find this living arrangement difficult. I enjoyed meeting people at the nightly events and parties but I found myself not able to study in my room. Which is not a terrible thing because Maastricht University has plenty of absolutely beautiful study spaces.

**Tips for Arrival:**

Buy a bike from one of the for sale Facebook groups. You should pay €50 - €70.

ISN has a mini second hand garage sale where you can buy things to decorate your room to make it feel more at home.

**Academic tips for Success:**

The PBL (Problem Based Learning) style learning is either a student run facilitation or presentation to start off a tutorial followed by group discussion of learning goals also led by students. This puts heavy emphasis on students to be prepared having completed all the readings. This method allows you to learn as little or as much as you want. I found I loved this method for some classes and not so much for others. Depending on which classes you are in there will be zero to five/six lectures and the rest tutorials. They believe students do not retain very much from lectures and try to put students in charge of their education. All in all, I liked it for the semester but I wouldn’t do a whole degree with this learning method.

**Information on the Netherlands and other Travel tips:**

The Dutch people are very friendly, super welcoming, and speak good english as a whole. ISN hosted several Dutch culture nights and organized a trips to see the Country. Such as a trip for students to see some small and major cities in the Netherlands including Votterdam, Volderdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht. ISN also organized a trip to Amsterdam for Kings Day in April and events during Carnival in February.

The city of Maastricht has a lot of culture in itself. It is one of the oldest cities in the Netherlands. One of my favourite things about Maastricht was the city tries its best to not tear down old buildings but to repurpose them. For example, the Business building is in an old Monastery, the accommodation I was in was a mental hospital at one point, and my favourite bookstore was a church. The school also requires a certain percentage of renovations to be spent on art. If you love old brick buildings with art everywhere then you will really enjoy your time at Maastricht.

If you would like to travel, there are inexpensive ways to do it. Maastricht is very centrally located. It is located near Eindhoven Airport, Brussels Airport, Maastricht Airport, and Brussels-Charleroi airports which have a number of cheap flights with Ryanair, Wizz Air, Vueling, Transavia, etc. to explore Europe. I would recommend not using the trains in the majority of Europe but using the buss system instead. Bus companies such as Flixbuss are most of the time cheaper and faster then using the train. Keep in mind you can walk to Belgium and bike to Germany from Maastricht.
**Reflection**

I really enjoyed my time in Europe on exchange. I will say it as many have said before me, it was the best time of my life. I really enjoyed making lifelong friendships while in Maastricht as well as the other people I met traveling at hostels. My best advice is to go in with an open mind, listen to people and their stories, and to try as many new things that your uncomfortable with as possible. It may put you in some awkward situations but in those moments you learn the most about yourself and you meet the best people. Enjoy your time there because once you leave you’ll start planning your next adventure. And a little bit of practical advice, you can always do your readings and prepare for presentations on a bus, plane, or train.

Photos of my friends and I dressed up on Kings Day in Amsterdam. Its okay to look silly because everyone else does too.

ISN Trip ‘Discover Holland Weekend’ Dressed in traditional Dutch farm attire. One of the cool things you can do when you attend ISN trips/events.
Carnival in February

If you go in the Spring save yourself some money and bring some costume supplies with. There was more then a few occasion.

These are a collection of some of my favourite spots in Maastricht. They range from the roman wall near my favorite Jazz bar (Jazz every Sunday, Monday and Wednesday) to the library and the town hall.
Be prepared to bike, this is the C building’s bike shed. I would recommend investing in a good bike lock. Bikes get stolen a lot.

This is my favorite spot in Maastricht to read or to go on a walk to. It’s a roman wall near the large park where festivals are held. It is also around the corner from my favourite Blues bar (every Sunday).