The Maas River in the middle of Maastricht
In August 2015 I flew from Vancouver to Amsterdam to begin my exchange semester at Maastricht University. I studied with the School of Business and Economics until December for the fall semester.

**Preparation**

**Accommodation**

When planning for exchange the first thing I did, after being accepted was look into booking accommodation in Maastricht because it can be hard to find student housing. There are more students than there is accommodation so you need to book early. I booked my room for August in March.

I was planning on staying at the guesthouse which meant I had to establish the dates I wanted to go for. I booked for August 17th – December 18th. It is hard to change the dates you book with the guesthouse so it is important to make sure you book a long enough stay. However, there are penalties for cutting your stay short.

If you want to go for INKOM (which I would recommend and did) then you need to book accommodation for a week before the orientation week (2 weeks before the official start of classes).

If you’re looking for accommodation outside of the guesthouse then the dates can be more flexible and can be found on Facebook groups for the city of Maastricht.

**Travel and Transportation**

Booking my flight was fairly easy I knew I wanted to fly directly to Amsterdam and take the train down. This flight is usually around $1000 - $1500 depending on the time you book and the season you are booking it for.

**Financial Details**

I worked co-op for the two semesters leading up to exchange. Here is a rough breakdown of my expenses for exchange

- Flight: $1300.00
- Accommodation: 123 days x 17 euro = $3,136.50
- Other Exchange Prep: ~ $500 (backpack, towels, blankets, kitchen supplies, etc)
- Spending on Exchange: ~ $6500
- Total Spending: ~ $12,000 dollars

Note that Exchange can be done much cheaper than this I went traveling to a number of different places (Bruges, Ghent, Leuven, Antwerp, Brussels, Reus, Madrid, Luxembourg, Budapest, Prague, London, Vienna, Eindhoven, Amsterdam, Alicante) and a few festivals wasn’t particularly frugal.
**During Exchange**

*Arrival and Orientation*

I took the train from Schipol airport to Maastricht, then I took a cab to the guesthouse, but it was quite expensive and it’s actually quite easy to take the bus. You can only check-in to residence during certain hours so check to be sure that you’re arriving during that time. I bought the linen package and had no trouble finding my room.

I flew from Vancouver to Amsterdam one week before orientation week so that I could go to Inkom which is a fun party week for the full time students of Maastricht, though exchange students can participate. Students are placed into groups and then can attend parties and events throughout the city. It is a good way to become acquainted with the city and to make friends. I was placed initially into a bachelor group with a number of Dutch students who were 18, being 22 and a native English speaker I switched into an International Masters group which had students more my age and was a lot of fun. You can request this during registration for Inkom. Additionally I was in a group led by ISN, which is the international student network and it plans a lot of the parties and events for exchange students.

![Inkom 2015 Program](image)
Accommodation and Living

I lived in the C Building of the Guesthouse through UM Housing. It was a great way to meet people and find things to do as it is exclusively filled with exchange students. However, it is incredibly dirty and loud so it depends on what you’re willing to live with. During my exchange there were plumbing problems with the women’s toilets that ultimately resulted in sewage coming out of the showers. Our corridor was unable to use our showers for a weekend and the smell lingered for weeks. We also had mice and ants and our cooking supplies were always dirty and broke constantly (some of this due to some unpleasant people that lived in our corridor).

The C Building is also much more expensive compared to other housing options through UM housing and throughout the city of Maastricht.

Additionally, there was an incident with a guy who lived in my corridor assaulting a security guard and harassing a girl I lived with to the point that she didn’t feel safe living in our corridor anymore. This was reported to the guesthouse administration who didn’t do anything about it other than issue a warning. They did not keep the fact that she reported the harassment from him either though she asked them to when she reported it.

However, despite the negatives and the lack of help from the housing administration I wouldn’t have chosen to live anywhere else. I made really good friends and enjoyed my time there.
**Academic details**

I found classes in general much easier compared to SFU. Maastricht has their PBL style learning which focuses largely on peers working together to discuss readings. Classes tend to be heavy on the readings and the finals are generally worth more than at SFU.

Additionally, classes run for seven weeks. 1 semester at Maastricht has 2 periods, each period students can take up to 2 classes and then it switches. So if you go to Maastricht for one semester you will be there for two periods. Classes at SBE are generally two days a week each, one lecture and one tutorial component.

**Country information (culture, weather, places to visit, etc.)**

The Netherlands is a lovely country. The people are straightforward and helpful if you ask, and the culture in Maastricht is similar to other University towns. The local Dutch and Dutch students are for the most part all fluent in English and will help you if you ask for it. The Dutch, in general, are friendly and pragmatic. Maastricht is very close to Germany and Belgium and there are a lot of German students at SBE. Maastricht is a student filled with international students and there is a very international and fun vibe.

The weather in the Netherlands is similar to Vancouver and can be equally unpredictable. Rain is common.

The Netherlands has a lot to see. Amsterdam is an incredible and international city with lots of culture and things to do. Kinderdijk has the world’s highest population of windmills. There are a number of palaces that are interesting to see. There is a festival of lights in Eindhoven that is cool to see during the fall. In the spring semester there is a week for Carnival to celebrate, and Kingsday on April 27th is a big party in Amsterdam that many students go to.

Maastricht is centrally located close to a number of countries and airports. A number of the highlights of my exchange were travels across Europe which was made possible by Maastricht’s convenient location. It is located near Eindhoven Airport, Brussels Airport, Maastricht Airport, and Brussels-Charleroi airports which have a number of cheap flights with Ryanair to explore Europe. Additionally, through the trains it is easy to explore Belgium and Luxembourg for a low price. I would especially recommend traveling to Eastern Europe, specifically Budapest and Poland are cheap, easy to reach and incredible destinations. Flights to Poland leave directly from Maastricht airport and are very cheap.
Reflection

Going abroad was a wonderful experience for me. I made lots of new friends, traveled throughout Europe and made a lot of new friends.

The biggest challenge I faced was simply learning how to adjust to European standards (grocery stores being closed on Sunday, which stores sold what, and general cultural appropriateness). It was also a challenge navigating new cities and learning how to get from place to place. However, it was an exhilarating challenge that I found fulfilling. Gaining the confidence to navigate the metro system of Madrid and Vienna felt like big accomplishments for me.

If I could go back and give myself advice it would be to travel more in Eastern Europe, it’s incredibly cheap and beautiful and the people are very friendly. There is a huge depth of history and culture that I found fascinating and unexpected and I would have liked to spend more time traveling there.

Advice to future students: travel as much as you possibly can. Maastricht is located fairly close to a number of airports that have cheap flights going all over Europe. This is a rare opportunity to travel and be care free with other like-minded individuals and the University is aware that exchange students have a tendency to travel and they were very accommodating for me. This did mean occasionally I was writing an exam and then running to the train station to go and catch a flight but it was all worth it. Traveling was the biggest cost of my exchange but it was completely worth it.
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