Maastricht University
School of Business and Economics
Spring 2017
Preparation

Packing

I brought 2 pieces of luggage with me. The weather in Maastricht is similar to Vancouver. I went on exchange between February and June, so it was rainy and cold. I brought dawn jackets and thick clothes to stay warm, with several pieces of summer outfits. I didn’t want to bring the bulky bed package, so I paid €50 to add a bed package to my accommodation, which consisted of a duvet, duvetcover, pillow, pillowcover, and mattresscover. Since I knew I was going to buy a lot of things and souvenir during my exchange, I brought my old clothes that can be donated at the end of the exchange period so that I had space for my new stuff.

Travel and transportation

There are different ways to get to Maastricht. I opted to fly into Brussels Airport as it took a shorter time to get to Maastricht from Brussels. The train station is just located on level -1 of the terminal, at a small distance from the arrivals hall. Maastricht is 1.5-hour train ride from the Brussels Airport and it involves two transfers at Leuven and Liege. The train ticket costs €12.50, you can purchase it from the station ticket machines or service counters (for further information: https://www.brusselsairport.be/en/passngr/to-from-brussels-airport/train). Whereas, coming from Schiphol Airport, it takes about 2.5-hour train ride and the price for a one-way train ticket is approximately €25 (for further information: http://www.ns.nl/en). Make sure you double check the train schedule before you head to Maastricht as Belgian Rail and NS often change their train schedule, or even cancel it.

When you arrive at Maastricht station, you can get to the Guesthouse by bus or taxi. The bus costs €3 and taxi costs approximately €15. Or if you arrive in Maastricht within the arrival week, ISN will provide a free pick-up service from the Maastricht train station to the Guesthouse.

Financial details

The cost of living in Maastricht is similar to Vancouver, but dining out is much more expensive. Some restaurants offer student discounts, or you can have a meal costs about €4 in Mensa, which is the university restaurant located in SBE. Paying in cash and use of debit cards are common. Debit cards are widely accepted, except local markets near centre do only accept cash.

I opened a Dutch bank account with ING while I was studying at Maastricht. You must bring your passport, proof of local address and phone number to your appointment. It is better for you to have sufficient funds for the first few weeks of your stay as the bank takes about two to three weeks to process your application and activate your account. Once you get a bank account, you will be able to withdraw money from any ATM in Europe. Therefore, use of debit card is handy when you travel across Europe since you don’t need to carry around a large sum of cash.
However, you still need to bring your Canadian bank card as the ING bank card is not able to make online payments if you would like to purchase air tickets for your trips.

Visa

Since I have the Canadian nationality, UM suggested I can apply for a residence permit via their Visa Office or make use of the Working Holiday Program (WHP). Residence permit costs €317 while WHP costs only €51. Therefore, I chose to apply for the WHP. To apply for the WHP, I called for an appointment at the Immigration Front Office in Eindhoven upon arrival. However, the telephone operators only speak Dutch, so I asked the ISN staff for help with making a call. I had my photo made and fingerprints registered at the IND, and it took about 1 month to process my application. At the meantime, I got a temporary visa sticker on my passport, and I had to send a proper scan of this sticker to the UM Visa Office for confirmation. Once I received my residence permit, I made an appointment with City Hall in Maastricht to register in the Municipal Records.

Before I left Maastricht, I deregistered with the municipality again. Also, depends on the airport I leave, I have to return my residence permit to the IND. Since I left from Brussels Airport, I sent my residence permit to the IND when I returned home.

During exchange

Accommodation

The rooms are available on a first-come-first-served basis. Once nominated, the first thing I did was to find a room in the UM Guesthouse. UM recommends students to find accommodation through www.MaastrichtHousing.com. Most exchange students are staying at the UM Guesthouse, so it is a great place to meet different people. After reading the exchange reports from previous nominated students, I decided to book a room in M-building via https://www.sshxl.nl/en. The monthly rent depends on the building and the type of room you choose. Double rooms have a lower rent and are ideal if you wish to have a roommate. I lived in a furnished single room of 20m², with shared toilets in the corridor, it was €470 per month. There are shared kitchen, living room, laundry and ironing room, and shower rooms. The communal areas have every facility available, including cooking utensils in the kitchen. Remember to keep your kitchen clean, otherwise, you will be charged for €25 if your floor is complained by the cleaning ladies.
Living

Jumbo and Albert Heijn (AH) are two great places for groceries in Maastricht, both of these can be found in the Brusselsepoort shopping center, which is ten minutes walk from the Guesthouse. Every Wednesday and Friday is market day on the Market square around the City Hall, you can find a great selection of food at reasonable prices. Thursday is late night shopping night, shops will extend their opening hours until 9pm.

The easiest and common way to get around in Maastricht is to use a bike, you can buy a second-hand bicycle on Facebook, but make sure the bike has a good solid lock since bicycle theft is common. I did not buy a bike but I found there was no problem with me because you can easily get around the city on foot and it is the best way to get a real feel for the city.

“9292” is an app in which you can check for timetables and information about the public transport. If you plan to take NS train, it is always cheaper to buy a group ticket on Facebook.

Arrival and orientation

The school starts with a two-day compulsory introduction. On the first day, the school will provide you a lot of valuable information regarding the school and your stay in Maastricht, a city tour, and a library tour. On the second day, a PBL practice session is organised. I thought this practice session was quite helpful for me to get a sense of how actual PBL works. Also, introduction day is a great opportunity to meet exchange students who are in the same faculty so that you can share information and support each other during the exchange period.

Academic details

As long as you register for courses before the deadline, participation is guaranteed. The grading system and learning method of UM are totally different from SFU. The UCTS system uses grades range from 0 to 10, which 10 is the highest score and 5.5 is the passing grade. The school claims that the average grade is 7.0 to 7.5, and students must work hard in order to obtain 8.0 and
above. However, I felt UM had lighter workload compared to SFU. Even if you have failed the first exam, it is possible to do the re-sit. Under the PBL approach, students are required to participate actively in small class discussions, the learning effectiveness of PBL varies across courses, and depends on how much effort you put in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>Exceptional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.0 – 9.5</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.0 – 8.5</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.0 – 7.5</td>
<td>Good (Normal/Average)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.0 – 6.5</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Sufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤5.0</td>
<td>Insufficient</td>
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</tbody>
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Here is the Dutch grading system

Country information

Maastricht is a lovely city to live in. It is an international city with people from all cultures and backgrounds. The city has a wide variety of cafes, pubs, restaurants etc., and the waffles in Maastricht are tasty, you should definitely try it!

To exchange students, its location is perfect for travel. Take the train to conveniently travel to Brussels Airport or Eindhoven Airport, you can find low cost carriers for your trips.

Social and extra-curricular activities

Besides ISN, I also signed up for the MyBuddy SBE program. Both student organizations organised extensive activities and events for students to meet new friends and to explore the Dutch culture, including Dutch dinner, secret places in Maastricht, and discover Holland weekend, just watch out for the announcements on Facebook! It is also a good idea to get an ESN card. The ESN card gives you discounts on local restaurants, as well as ISN activities.
Reflection

You may expect what you experienced firsthand, but you will never understand until you experience them yourself. I experienced the cultural differences but not the cultural shocks. I enjoyed spending time with different people and had the opportunity to share our stories with others. I learnt to see things from multiple perspectives and to reflect on myself. If you ask me what I should not miss in university life, going on exchange is definitely one of them.
Kings Day on 27 April

Sint Servaasbrug – the oldest bridge in the Netherlands