

# Exchange Report

University College Maastricht

Spring 2016



I spent a full semester in University College Maastricht (UCM) in the Netherlands. I arrived in Paris in mid-January, spent a few days travelling there, and then headed to Maastricht. After giving myself a few days to settle in, buy everyday necessities, and get to know the city a bit more, I was ready to begin going to school and meeting new people!

## Prep

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The first thing to note about Maastricht is that University Maastricht (UM) is actually different from University College Maastricht (UCM). Although they bear nearly the same name, UCM is almost an entirely different school that offers classes in the arts and sciences, while UM is popular for its business courses.

Maastricht is a really small city, and can be a bit hard to get to at first. Wherever you come from, you will definitely have to take a train in. With that said, I would definitely recommend travelling to Amsterdam first, and there should be a direct train to Maastricht. You will most likely be carrying one or two heavy suitcases for your time abroad, so changing trains is not something you want to be doing.

The weather in the Netherlands is quite similar to Canada's so packing the usual will do. But remember you will be riding a bike and often in the rain, so bringing a rain jacket is not a bad idea. I bought most of my toiletries when I got there. Shampoo, toothpaste, some towels, and cleaning supplies are all things that you can easily get, so no need to fill your suitcase with those. Other than that, bring your important documents, carry some cash in different places (wallet, other bags, pocket), and don't forget your open mind and smile!

The cost of living is about the same as Vancouver, but depending on the exchange rate, it could end up being a bit more expensive.

I ended up saving around \$13,000CAD in order to spend 6 months abroad — 4 months studying, and around 2 months of travel.

Maastricht is a cash and debit based society, and it's really the easiest forms of payment. Setting up an account was a lot of steps, but not complicated. I had a debit account with ING, which you can set up with the store branch in the city centre (not the one closer to the Guest-house).

# During

The easiest place to stay in is the Guesthouse, which is basically dorms. You can of course venture out, and find other accommodation but I found that a more complicated process, despite the fact that I've heard it can be a bit cheaper. However, the Guesthouse was one of the places where I made my closest friends and I think it's a great experience to be surrounded by people from many different countries!

Leave a few days for you to settle in to your accommodation, and then head to school for orientation. This is where you will meet many many new people, and most likely form friendships that will last the rest of your exchange (and beyond). So definitely do attend!

All schools in Maastricht use what is called the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) system. Although not a complicated method of teaching/learning, it does take some time to get used to. Lectures are often not mandatory, but you are required to attend two tutorials weekly. These tutorials are discussion heavy, so be prepared to talk and participate lots. Doing the readings is also essential, as the discussions will all be based upon them. School was challenging, but very rewarding. Another thing to note is that the semester is broken up into two, so you only ever take two classes at once. Let's say you are taking 4 classes in a semester, you first do two classes in part 1 of the semester, and then the other two in part 2 of the semester.

Maastricht is a very small city compared to Vancouver, and the maximum bike rides I had to take were for 20 minutes. Be prepared to ride your bike everywhere! It's the best way to get around. I was never super confident on one, but I eventually got used to it. Despite its size, the city has everything you need and so much more. In the main square, Vrijthof, there will often be events happening.

You can attend these events, or always do different things in the city itself. I often went out for bike rides to explore the city, or had coffee with friends in different cafes. By night, there is always somewhere to go for drinks and dancing. You will, however, be busy with school for the most part so weekend trips to Amsterdam, Brussels, and Cologne are all very good options. I never travelled too far when school was in session — only in the semester break (after the first half of the semester), and then after the semester was over.



