My Erasmus Semester abroad - Maastricht University, Netherlands by Lilli Renner

You are thinking about spending your Erasmus in the Netherlands, maybe Maastricht? Do it! I have spent my fall semester at Maastricht University in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (short FASoS) studying the Minor/ Pre- Master Program European Studies. This was a great experience, not only studying in this program, but in this city and this region.

First of all the city of Maastricht is beautiful, it is not too big and divided by the river `Maas`. Most of the Faculties and University Buildings are in the old town on the one side of the river. Everything is easily accessible by the Dutchs favorite form of transportation: The Bike or so called `fiets`. It takes some time to get used to go everywhere by bike and to have a garage for your bike at the faculty, but in the end it is great because you are flexible and you can reach everything very quickly. But of course in a city where everyone rides a bike and a lot of students arrive at the beginning of the semester all the bike shops were empty, but online you will find students who want to trade their bikes, that is where I found one as well. The city itself has a lot of bikeways and even traffic lights just for bikers. So grab a bike and ride along! Another great aspect of Maastricht is the location of the city. The city itself lies in the most southern corner of the Netherlands, close to the German and Belgian border, in the so called province of `Limburg`. Maastricht is a very old and beautiful city, with a lot of churches and places you can visit. It also has a lot of shops and stores where you find everything you need and even more. The night- life is great as well, as you have a variety of Pubs, Bars and Clubs open every day but especially packed on the weekends. Of course you have to try the Dutch beer and specialities like French fries, `Kibbeling fish` which is deep fried and battered fish filet or `Frikandel`, which is basically a meat ball shaped like a sausage and tastes delicious. Concerning the region, by taking the train, you can be in Belgium in half an hour, where you can visit Liège, Brussels, Antwerp and Bruges which is perfect for a great day trip. But of course you can also travel very easily by train to Rotterdam or Amsterdam, visiting the more famous Dutch cities. Taking the bus you are in Germany within half an hour, in Aachen and Düsseldorf, which is another great opportunity for a day trip.
So not only Maastricht itself is great, but also the region surrounding it, and definetely worth experiencing.

What may be an obstacle to overcome is finding a place to stay. Because there are so many students in this city the prices are often high and it is hard to find a room or apartment that is fair in what is offered and demanded as price. What might be helpful and worked great in my case is the Maastricht University Guesthouse. You can reserve for exactly the months you will be staying and the service and accommodation is great. Another option would be looking online and searching for roommates, which works perfectly fine as well.

Moving on to the University, which is awesome. It has a lot to offer and provides you with everything you need at Uni. With you UM Card (Student ID) you can enter every faculty, lend in the library and even transfer money to pay for printing or in the cafeteria. Although they practice a different system of learning which I was not used to before it was great. At Maastricht University they teach in the so called `PBL` manner. `PBL` is short for Problem- Based- Learning, which essentially means that you have two courses for approximately six to eight weeks and then take an exam and continue again with two other courses for again six to eight weeks take an exam etc. This means that you learn two courses very intensely and are examined in it immediately, and then go on with two other courses in the same pattern. The courses are also taught in a very different style.

Although you have one lecture per week for the course, the focus lies on the tutorials. They are structured in a way, that the students have to make the tutorials and the tutor just advises and gives tips some times. Therefor every week one student is chair and is responsible for the tutorial, the basis of every tutorial are mandatory readings which you have to read beforehand. In the tutorial you discuss them with the other students and pose relevant questions. `PBL` was a great experience, as you learn to interact with each other and learn and try to solve problems as a team. It is definetely worth trying it out!

But by far the greatest experience of the Erasmus stay was the possibility to meet a lot of new people from places all over Europe and even the world. Being able to have fun and experience all these memories with student from different countries and universities made this stay even more interesting and great. So no matter where you end up going, if Maastricht or another city in the Netherlands or in the end another country definetely do an Erasmus semester, you will get to know a new University and style and content of learning, meet new people, live in another country and find out more about a different culture, which is a wonderful experience!