

Maastricht

Its History and a City Walk



Maastricht is regarded as one of the oldest towns in the Netherlands (rivaling with Nijmegen).
It was founded by the Romans.

Since we are all here for the André Rieu open air concerts on the Vrijthof, there will be plenty of time during the day to explore the city and its surroundings. Put on your sneakers. Be sure you'll be back at the Vrijthof at 5 pm (daily sound-check!!). You won't want to miss that!!

This guide gives a brief overview of the history of Maastricht.
Furthermore, it contains a walk through the historic city center.

In this walk, we'll visit places related to André. To visit his castle (named "de Torentjes", which means "little towers"), please follow the "St. Pietersberg" walk (Mount St. Peter).

The shortest way to see the castle is to walk along the river Meuse,
and keep the river at your left hand side
(about half an hour walk from the Vrijthof square).

Walking problems? Take a taxi!

History of Maastricht

If you start digging a hole in Maastricht's city center, you will make a journey through time. In the past century, archeologists had several opportunities to make such a journey.

In 1983, the design Hotel Derlon on the Onze Lieve Vrouweplein 6 (Our Dear Lady square 6) was completely rebuilt. Underneath the hotel, archeologists found remains of a Roman temple complex. Due to the significance of these findings, building plans were amended. The basement of the hotel has become a small museum (free admission for visitors, on Sunday afternoon). You can now have a firsthand view of the city's history.

Six meters below the current street level lay an ancient Roman road, which is a gravel road with several large building stones and a cistern. Most peculiar is the façade of a shrine and a temple court finished with red cement. The middle of this court was adorned with statues and altars. Fragments of one massive pillar, dedicated to the Roman god Jupiter, (Zeus in Greek) still remains visible today.

Also remains of a Roman souvenir shop were found. The actual temple is possibly located under what is now the "Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk" (Roman Catholic Church).

Roman Maastricht was small. Twenty years before the discovery of the temple complex, the remains of a Roman bath were found several meters away near the Stokstraat (Stick Street). The contours of these Roman baths can still be seen in the modern pavement of the small square "Op de Thermen".

Around these two public buildings made of stone, the local community built houses from wood and clay. Behind these houses was a small garden with a shed and a water basin or pit.

Maastricht was founded in the first century AD after the Romans had marched from the south, until they reached the river Rhine. To supply the soldiers in the various forts, the Romans built a network of roads. One of the important roads in this region was the road from Boulogne-sur-mer (France), through Bavay and Tongeren (Belgium) to Cologne (Germany). Rivers were major obstacles and this road led to a shallow and easy part to cross the river Maas (Meuse). The Roman name "Mosae Trajectum" (place to cross the Maas) turned into "Maastricht".

The Romans built a wooden bridge, the only fixed river crossing to the North Sea! This crossroad was an ideal place for a harbor, trade and lodges.

A small memorial (at the Maas Boulevard, upstream from the Servaas Bridge) still marks the place where the original bridge stood. In 2005 it was decorated with a replica of a Roman statue recovered from the river.

Initially the Roman city had no walls. For more than two centuries, the inhabitants relied on the fortifications along the river Rhine. When the influence of Rome declined in the third century, German tribes started to raid the area.

Around 270 they captured Maastricht and burned down the city.

Then the Romans reconsidered the defense of the empire. At strategic places, garrisons were stationed and fortifications built.

The river crossing at Maastricht was such a place. At the beginning of the fourth century, the bridge was rebuilt. On the left bank, next to the bridge, a "Castrum" or walled army camp was built.

The remains of the public buildings, temples and other (grave) monuments served as building material for this wall. Based on excavations, the late Roman Castrum could be mapped. It was rectangular in shape, and covered an area of around 1.5 hectare (3.7 acres). It had ten towers and the walls were between 8 and 10 meters high (26 -33 ft.). Within this area, the people were safe.

Long after the Romans had left, the Castrum kept on dominating the area. Around 1000 AD the walls and towers were taken down and houses were built. Some of the largest blocks of stone were used to build the Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk (church). Those stones can still be seen today as the last traces of Roman occupancy in modern time.

The city walk below will lead you to most of the places described above.

Duration of this walk: 3 - 5 hours. Bring some sturdy shoes because at times the pavement in the pedestrian areas can be a bit uneven.

City walk

This walk will start and end on the Vrijthof and will lead you to the historic center of Maastricht. We will not only stop at Roman and medieval points of interest, but this walk will also lead through the most important (modern) shopping areas. Furthermore, we will see some interesting “André places”.

The walk is about three km (two miles) long and will take 3 - 5 hours (depending on the number of coffee stops and shops visited...).



Vrijthof to Servaas Bridge



We start at the Vrijthof at the far end corner of the stage, in front of Hotel DuCasque with its restaurant “Gauchos” (and for those who like “junk” food: McDonalds next door). The starting point is located at the cycle parking symbol on the map above.

Turn into the “Grote Staat”, one of the busiest shopping streets. At the end of the street you will see the former Gothic-style court building “Het Dinghuis”. It was built at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century. This building now houses the Tourist Information Office (VVV). Maastricht city maps and the (English) Maastricht and South Limburg travel guide, are for sale here.



At the building, turn right and after about 100 meters (yards), turn left into the “Maastrichter Brug Straat” (Maastr. Bridge Street). At this intersection (to your right), you will see the “Bijenkorf” (Beehive), a luxury department store. Follow the “Maastrichter Brug Straat” and continue on the Servaas Bridge. Walk approximately to the middle of the river Maas (Meuse) and admire the view on both sides.

This bridge replaces the original wooden (and later partially stone) Roman bridge, built in 400 AD. It was built between 1280 and 1295 and still stands today.

Is it still the original bridge? No, it has been restored numerous times, widened early 1900s, and largely destroyed in the Second World War, but still stands on the thirteenth century foundations. Therefore, it is still regarded as the oldest bridge in the Netherlands. Only recently the bridge got its current name, before that it was simply known as “aw brögk” or “old bridge”. The original Roman bridge was located around 100 meters upstream, indicated by a small monument. The picture shows the view of the Servaas Bridge from this monument.



André's castle is located 2 km upstream on the right bank of the river. On the other side of the bridge you see the jetties of the shipping company "Stiphout". It is on one of their cruise ships that we'll have our annual fan dinner.

Across the bridge is the "other side" of Maastricht. The river cuts the city in half and this area, called "Wyck", has a totally different atmosphere. If you have time cross the river and browse through the small streets. To the left behind the houses you see the "Martinus" church. This church holds the famous "Black Christ of Wyck" statue.

Return back to the shopping street you came from. Pass through the gate at the second house on the left, below the "DiFFerent" sign.

Stokstraat area and Onze Lieve Vrouweplein.

This is the area originally covering the Castrum or Roman fortified area.



After passing the gate, you enter a small square. In front of you is the entrance to the Stokstraat. This area used to be the Ceramic factory workman's living quarters. The factory itself was located across the river. This street and its surroundings have been redeveloped into a shopping area with better quality shops and antique dealers. A challenge for credit cards!

On the right-hand corner of the first side street, you see an establishment called "In de Moriaan". This is the oldest existing café in Maastricht, still in its original building.

Enjoy the full length of this street, until you come to the rear of the Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk (Our Dear Lady Church) on your right side.



From the Church, walk back to the small square and turn left into the Plankstraat. After a few meters, turn right into a small street called "Bessemstraatje" which leads to the square called "Op de Thermen".

Between 1950 and 1960 extensive excavations have been done in this area revealing much of Maastricht's early history.

In the pavement you will see the outline of several Roman structures:

- Old Roman bathhouse in grey stones
- Roman house (with heating!) in red stones
- And a fourth century bathhouse indicated in white stones.



If you are interested in a "historic" coffee break or lunch, visit the terrace at the end of the square. It is one of the oldest cafés in Maastricht, named "In de Moriaan".

Return back to the "Plankstraat" and turn right to continue the walk. After a few steps, you will enter the "Onze Lieve Vrouweplein", named after the church (basilica) dominating this square.

Walk straight on to the opposite corner of the square, then turn right into the busy shopping street "Wolfsstraat".



After a few shops, on your left you will see the Coffee and Tea shop "Maison Blanche Dael". This shop was founded in 1877, initially as a grocery store, but converted to a Coffee shop and Coffee roaster in 1928. The current store still has the atmosphere of those days. Coffee is still roasted on the premises and if you like, you can even get your own mélange of coffee. For the tea lovers, Blanche Dael also has a vast range of excellent teas and for the collectors, unique teapots!

Guess who has his own coffee mélange....

Leave the shop again and look around to the shield above the store. It bears the Dutch Coat of Arms and underneath "Hofleverancier" or purveyor to the Court. In the good old days, it meant you would deliver goods to the Royal Court, now it is an honorary title for companies who exist over 100 years and have an undisputed reputation. You don't get it for free, you have to apply for it which is a lengthy and costly procedure.

Now turn back to the "Onze Lieve Vrouwen Square" (or walk the Wolfstraat up and down if you want to max out your credit card 😊)



When you enter the square again, to your left you will see the white building of design hotel "Derlon".



complex. Building plans were altered. The basement of the hotel is now a small museum. You can visit the museum only on Sundays from 1 to 5 PM, admission free.

This is a five star hotel. See how those stars and the coat-of-arms of Maastricht meet at the top of the building. Did you know this hotel has a special (very expensive) André Rieu suite? André gave one of his international awards to decorate the room (shown behind safety glass!). For about € 370 (\$ 530) per night you can book this room! In 1983, the hotel was completely rebuilt. Underneath the hotel, archeologists found remains of a Roman temple



When you enter the hotel, you will see the bar in front of you. In front of the bar, there is a set of steps leading down to the basement. If you politely ask, you may go down the steps (no guarantee however). Downstairs turn to the right and you will enter the room with the Roman remains.

Once outside again, go to the opposite side of the square (restaurant side). Look backwards. From left to right, you will see Hotel Derlon, the chapel of “Sterre der Zee” (Stella Maris, Star of the Sea) and the “Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk”. The chapel is worth visiting. Many people come here for a small prayer and to light a candle.



The church is one of the oldest in the Netherlands. Although information is scarce, it is thought that the predecessor of this church dates back to the fifth century. It is quite possible that when the Romans left, the old temple was re-used by the Christians.



The large façade you see today dates back to 1000 AD. At the base of the façade, you can clearly see the large stones that were once part of the Roman wall of the “Castrum” (Roman camp).

On Saturdays at 17:00 (5PM) there is an English mass in the crypt of this church. From the church, face the restaurants again. The left most is called “Charlemagne”, where

we had our fan dinners in 2006, 2007 and 2008. Remember the DVD “Love around the World”? In the bonus tracks, you can see recordings of this café and the square (“Red Rose Café” and “Ohne Sorgen”).

Leave the square on the left hand corner into the “Koestraat” (Cow Street). At the end of the street you will see a red building. Walk to the building and enter through the doorway.

You will now find yourself in the inner works of the “Bisschopsmolen” (Bishops mill), a seventeenth century watermill still in use today and regarded as the oldest still operational watermill in The Netherlands.. Leave the mill through the rear exit. Here you will have a splendid view of the waterwheel. Today three watermills remain, this “Bisschopsmolen” the “Lombok” and the “Leeuwenmolen” which we will see later on. Maastricht once had over 15 watermills on the northern and southern branch of the small river “Jeker”. If you look carefully you can see the remains of these watermills on the buildings along the two branches of the Jeker river.





Enter the mill again. On your left side, you will see a door leading to a bakery (watch the step!). Treat yourself to a cup of coffee or tea and a slice of "vlaai", a specialty of southern Limburg. It is a flat cake covered with fruit, a real treat!

All the products you see here are made with a historical type of grain called "Spelt". It has unique properties and is especially suited for people with a gluten allergy. Furthermore it requires less fertilizer and is better resistant to diseases and insects, so Spelt is having a revival in the organic food industry.

The bakery/coffee shop is opened from Mo-Sat from 09:30 (9.30PM) to 18:00 (6PM) and on Sundays from 11:00 (11PM) till 17:00 (5PM).

Historic city wall to André's parental house.



Exit the mill/bakery and return back to the “Onze Lieve Vrouweplein”.

When you reach the square, turn right passing the church and head for the “Graanmarkt” (Corn Market). On the left, at the corner of the church, you will see an ice cream parlor in a historic market building. This used to be the guard house of the city gate, which once stood on this location.

Walk a little further and turn right. To the right of the entrance to the parking lot, you will see a set of steps leading to top of the city wall (dating from 1229).

Walk to the tower at the end and enjoy the view along the wall. Do you see the guns below?

Alternative excursion: From this wall, you can see a modern pedestrian and cyclist bridge crossing the river Maas. At the far end and to the right, you will see a newly developed quarter called “Ceramique”.

Not too long ago, this was the location of a large factory of (bathroom) ceramics. When this factory was closed, Maastricht invited famous architects like the Italian Aldo Rossi and Swiss Luigi Snozzi to redevelop this area. For those who like modern architecture, this area is worth visiting! Additional information -and a detailed walk- can be obtained from the VVV Tourist Office.





Continue along the wall. When you reach the old watch tower, turn right and go down the steps, and then turn left. You now pass under the "Helpoort", the oldest remaining city gate in the Netherlands (1229) and one of the seven gates which used to be in this wall. The gatehouse contains a small museum of the history of Maastricht and is open daily from 2 - 5 PM, free admission.

From underneath the gate, you will see a white building called the "Pesthuys" (Plague house).

The building does not deserve this name, because it has never been used as such. It was built in 1775 and served as a watermill for the manufacture of paper.

The barracks to house the plague victims stood just behind this building, on the other side of the river.

Pass the "Pesthuys" on the left side. In front of you will then see a small flight of steps leading up to the city walls, dating from 1516. Half way the steps, keep to your left. At the top, you will be on the walls and the bastion named "Vijf Koppen" (Five Heads). We view this bastion from the location where we hold the fan picnic in the Stadspark (City Park).

Continue the path on top of the walls until you come to the next bastion (on your left).

Immediately to your right you will see a white house. This is André's parental house. We will see this building in a few moments in more detail.

Follow the path until it slopes down. Just before this point there is a set of steps leading up to the 2nd bastion called "Haet ende Nyt". Continue the path sloping down and descend the steps. At the bottom turn right along the river Jeker. Follow the path, keeping the white house to your left. When you reach the "Begijnenstraat" turn left. You are now in front of André's parental home. André was raised here in the Begijnenstraat number 1. (His birth house is Plenkershoven 11 in the Maastricht quarter Jekerdal).



Continue the street for another 50 meters/yards and on the right you will see part of the historic city wall with "Pater Vinck" tower, and the houses in the former "Faliezusterklooster". This small convent was built in 1350 and was called St. Catharine Convent at the time. Later on, its name changed to Faliezuster Convent. The veils of the nuns were called "voile" (French) which over time became "Falie". "Zuster" is Dutch for "nun". The building that is there now is a more modern building. It was rebuilt in 1652, after a fire destroyed the first building. Nowadays a few artists live in the apartments.



Immediately left of the houses, you can enter (behind the barrier) the inner court of the "Minderbroederskerk". This church now houses part of the state archives. See how old and modern architecture meet.

Continue a few meters along the Begijnenstraat until you come to a T-junction. Turn left into the “St. Pieterstraat”. Stay to the left side of the street and after 200 meters/yards look for house number 31. Here you will find a passage leading to the “Leeuwenmolen” (Lions Mill), from the seventeenth century, the second remaining watermill of Maastricht.



In the window on the left, you will see a small statue of “Saint Victor”, the patron of the millers.

Return through the passage, cross the street and walk to the right. There are several art shop and antique dealers on this side of the road. Just after the junction with the “Begijnenstraat”, there is a small street to the left, called “Lang Grachtje”. Before entering this street, take a look at the building on the opposite side of the street. See something peculiar? The architect left out part of the stones to indicate where the old city wall used to stand. If you turn around you will see another section of this first city wall in “Lang Grachtje”.



The wall you see are the remains of the first city wall, built in 1229.



Lang Grachtje via Maastricht Academy of Music to the Donkey market



Continue along the “Lang Grachtje” and at the end turn left into the “Grote Looiersstraat”, with stately houses.

Halfway on the left you'll see the stately façade of the "Armen Huis" or Almshouse, built in 1755. Initially it was a girls orphanage, but in 1794 it was converted into a military hospital. The building now houses the library and ICT department of the Maastricht university. Check the unique decoration of the gate to the left of the building. Blue/white signs with U/M on it, means it is a building of the University of Maastricht.



Continue the walk until you see a statue of a man and three children. This is Fons Olterdissen writer of the Maastricht anthem.

On your left you see a stone wall with a green door. House numbers 27a to 27s. This door leads to a set of almshouses still in use today! They used to be houses for pensioned and unmarried ladies, typically belonging to a certain congregation. Today the "pensioned" and "congregation" are no longer a selection requirement, but single and ladies, yes. The inner court is private area and it is not appreciated if you enter the courtyard.



You now enter the "Bosquetplein". Cross to the right-hand side and walk into the short dead-end alley. This is the "Natuur Historisch Museum" (Museum of natural History). Have a good look at the sculptured front door.



Until 1920 this was the "Grauwzustersklooster", a convent taking care of the sick and disabled. Return back to the square and turn right around the building. After a few steps you may peek through the fence and see a skeleton of a "Prognathodor Saturator" (nicknamed "Bèr"). This skeleton of a pre-historic lizard was recently discovered in the St. Pieters mountain.

Continue walking past the museum garden you will arrive at a modern building on your right. This is the Academy of Music, where André studied. Maybe you can hear students play! The building is nothing special, but if you stand in front of the entrance, and turn around you can admire the view of the river Jeker. And as you may have guessed by now, a house with remains of a long gone watermill will be in front of you.



Walk around the Academy of Music and follow the “Bonnefantenstraat” (the name comes from the French words “bonnes enfants”, which means “good children”, for once there was an orphanage) until you reach the “Looiersgracht”. Turn right for a few meters and walk up to the statue of a donkey. This part is called the “Ezelsmarkt” (Donkey market). Have a look at the river, and you will have a nice view of the only house in Maastricht built over the river.



The donkey is facing a door. There is a Latin text above the door. Some characters are gilded and represent Roman numerals. From what year does this building date?
Hint: M = 1000, D = 500, C = 100, L = 50, X = 10, V (U) = 5, I = 1

Donkey market back to the “Vrijthof”.



From the Donkey statue, walk back into the “Ezelsmarkt” and continue uphill into the “Bouillonstraat”. At the T-Junction turn right and immediately left onto the “Sint Servaas Klooster”, the street leading up to the rear of the churches at the Vrijthof.

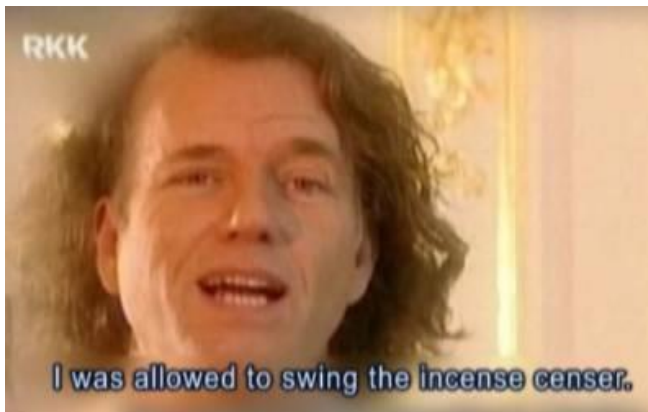
Here you will find two churches. The first one is a protestant church called “Sint Janskerk”. From the top of its red painted tower, you have a magnificent view of the city.

The second church is the first Roman Catholic basilica in the Netherlands, the “Sint Servaas basiliek”.



Saint Servaas was born in Armenia and traveled via the Holy Land (Jerusalem) to Tongeren in Belgium, which, at that time, was the center of Catholicism in this area. When Tongeren was besieged, Servaas traveled to Rome. At the grave of St. Peter, he experienced a vision telling him to move the basilica from Tongeren to Maastricht. So he did.

Saint Servaas died in 384 AD. Around 550 AD the first stone church was built on the current spot of the Basilica. The remains of Saint Servaas were brought here and can still be visited. In his youth, André served as a choirboy in this church. During services and processions he was assigned to carry the famous and precious incense censer from the Saint Servaas. Carry, careful.... You can swing it around with the purpose of hitting fellow choir boys! The censer ended-up with a big dent. The censer has been repaired and is on display in the treasury.



The full story can be found on our website: <http://www.andrerieu-movies.com/Kruispunt.html>

For a small admission fee you can visit the church, treasury and the crypt where Saint Servaas has been buried.

The entrance is at the "Keizer Karelplein" at the other side of the church. From here you can walk back to the Vrijthof.

This is the end of the city walk

Important links:

History of Maastricht:

This splendid site is unfortunately in Dutch only, but even so worth a visit:

<http://www.zichtopmaastricht.nl/files/index.php?suid=4>

Basilica of St. Servaas (also in English)

<http://www.sintservaas.nl/indexf.html>

Sterre der Zee and Basilica

<http://www.sterre-der-zee.nl>

Bonnefanten museum

<http://www.bonnefanten.nl/>

Wikipedia on Maastricht

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maastricht>

Tourist information of Maastricht (German/English/French)

<http://www.vvvmaastricht.nl>

In historic days, houses did not have numbers, but were identified by depictive stone tablets above the doorways. Many of these tablets still survive today. Visit <http://www.gevelstenen.net/maastricht/index.htm> to see the remaining tablets in Maastricht (see “adressen”)

Acknowledgements:

Many thanks to Ruth, Jim, Bobbie and John for the final correction of the text.

All pictures in this document are taken by Ruud and Ineke with the exception of:

(Part of) VVV Maastricht City map. Full maps can be obtained from the VVV Tourist Office (VVV) for a nominal fee.

Page 5: Roman Castrum, taken from website: www.zichtopmaastricht.nl

Page 7, “Sterre der Zee” taken from <http://www.sterre-der-zee.nl>

This document made by Ruud and Ineke, seventh edition, March 2017