

meringue and strawberry sauce. It's no surprise to learn that chef Hans Sniijders has held a Michelin star for 26 years; his menu is superb.

Culinary credentials

The following morning I visit Coffee Lovers Cafe, housed in a stunning 13th-century former church, for a cappuccino, before heading to new hotspot in town, Harbour Club, for lunch. This modern restaurant is sleekly decked out in stylish red, white and dark wood with a flickering fire and impressive views of the harbour. The lunch menu is limited to two choices per course, meat or fish, allowing for the utmost care and attention to be lavished on each dish. The gambas ravioli with sundried tomatoes is light and lovely, the duck ensemble (liver, fillet and wing) is richly delicious, and the chocolate mousse is luxurious and beautifully complemented by a mouthwatering fruit salad.

My final dinner is a local affair at Beaumont, where chef Rick Bartelink sources all produce from the surrounding area, including the delectably tender rack of lamb which I'm told was springing through the Geul valley just days ago. The menu here changes weekly and with the seasons, offering an ever-changing array of original dishes to tempt local diners.

Just before I return home the next morning, I make a quick stop at Oliviers Bonbons chocolate shop for a box of their beautifully handcrafted dark, milk and white chocolates, all made on the premises. Fortunately this is one of Maastricht's culinary treats that can be boxed and taken home. For the others, you'll need to visit.

● 2 nights 3* from £185 with lastminute.com

WORK UP AN APPETITE

Once you've feasted on the culinary credentials of Maastricht's fine foodie scene, soak up the rest of what this historic city has to offer.

Walk off that gourmet lunch with a wander around the city's **Bonnefanten Museum**. Designed by Italian architect Aldo Rossi, its distinctive circular tower reigns over the city skyline. Art of all ages is represented in this spacious arts mecca, from medieval woodcarvings and traditional paintings to cutting edge contemporary artwork.

The **Centre Céramique** hosts a variety of exhibitions from photography to natural history in its modern confines.

If you prefer the great outdoors, set sail on the river Maas with **Rederij Stiphout**. Take in the beautifully varied cityscape, stunning historic architecture, and even the Belgian border on a 50-minute city tour.

lastminute.com



For more information and to book your city break to Maastricht visit lastminute.com/holland



Succulent dishes and fine street and château dining await visitors to culinary Maastricht

Dutch treats

Looking for a culinary break with a dollop of flair, a dash of originality and a splash of ingenuity? Helen Ochyra checks out Holland's gastronome's playground, where history and modernity fuse in every menu

Maastricht, I'm told, is the least Dutch city in Holland. Its citizens refer to themselves and their lifestyle as Burgundian, an endearing insistence which goes some way to explaining the city's searing passion for fine food.

My culinary exploration begins at the Bisschopsmlen bakery, a 12th-century water mill complete with functioning water wheel. I select a delicious apple-filled pastry from the spread of local Limburg pies on offer, washing it down with a delightfully creamy coffee.

Set up for the day, I wander through the charming cobbled streets to the oldest wine importer in Holland, Thiessen wine boutique. This cavernous cellar is an oenophile's dream. Established in the 14th century and with a bottling heritage dating back to 1742, its credentials are undoubtedly vintage. Here quality is everything, and revered European wines such as Burgundies and Bourdeaux reign supreme.

With five Michelin-starred restaurants in town, quality cuisine is firmly on the menu. But if it's historical kudos you're after, the clear choice is Château Neercanne. The short drive to the château is the perfect

romantic start to dinner, passing verdant rolling hills, atop one of which is lauded local winery Apostelhoeve, home to Europe's northernmost red wine grapes.

On arrival I'm served a glass of Maily Grand Cru champagne in the atmospheric Roman caves, now the wine cellar. Upstairs, in the opulent dining room with its traditional furniture and fine views of the Unesco-listed Baroque terraced gardens, I start with the langoustines 'robed' in local potatoes (or langoustines rolled in fine strips of potato to you and me) and served with courgette chutney, a dish created for the European leaders who lunched here while negotiating the Maastricht Treaty in 1991. The restaurant's signature main course is a decadent, melt-in-the-mouth cheek of veal served with black truffles, while the French Bresse pigeon with sweet peppers and polenta is delectably succulent. Everything is beautifully presented, of the freshest and highest quality and served with silver service aplomb. Even the tea is ordered from an extensive selection of leaves and served with a sublime coffee pie filled with apricot mousse, topped with

For more information and to book your city break to Maastricht visit lastminute.com/holland