

No-frills Norwegian can take the strain to LA

I'm looking at flights to Los Angeles, and Norwegian comes out as the cheapest by far – though it charges extra for baggage and inflight meals. Do you know anything about them? Their short-haul flights get good reviews but I'm not sure about long-haul. Christine McC, Rotherhithe

NORWEGIAN is a successful and rapidly expanding airline, which has just overtaken its Scandinavian rival, SAS, in passenger numbers. It is the third-biggest budget carrier in Europe after Ryanair and easyJet. Unlike them, it has a range of long-haul flights using state-of-the-art Boeing 787 Dreamliners – the most modern aircraft on the London-LA route, with good standards of comfort.

As with the early days of Freddie Laker's Skytrain, with the basic economy product "you're only buying the flying". Anything else, from meals (£8-£9) to inflight



SIMON CALDER

blankets (£4), costs more. But compared with most other airlines to Los Angeles, Norwegian still works out cheaper even if you buy lots of extras – partly because flying from Gatwick is much cheaper than it is from Heathrow.

You could also consider the Premium cabin, which offers 46 inches of legroom and comes with all the extras: two

checked bags, seat reservations, meals and drinks. Note, though, that anything other than basic economy means Air Passenger Duty for the outbound flight doubles.

One possible drawback is that from time to time Norwegian's hard-worked fleet of 787s can encounter technical issues, with delays endured in the past. Another option is Air New Zealand, which has excellent daily flights from Heathrow and fares that are often below those on British Airways and Virgin Atlantic.

■ Email queries to s@hols.tv



Scandi time: Norwegian flies cheaply to LA, but watch for extra charges



Café-bar society: a terrace on the busy, central Vrijthof square. Below: the Dominicanen book store

Maastricht's a treat

WEEKEND AWAY MAASTRICHT, NETHERLANDS

YORK MEMBERSY

IF THERE'S one thing Maastricht is famous for, it is the treaty of the same name. Signed 25 years ago in February 1992, it created the European Union, paved the way for the euro ... and arguably sowed the seeds of last year's shock Brexit vote.

But despite being known for little else in the UK, this charming Toytown-sized city of 120,000 people, tucked away in the south-eastern corner of the Netherlands, is well worth a visit no matter how you voted last June. Offering ancient ruins, distinctive cuisine and French-influenced architecture, it is a very different prospect to the better-known Dutch cities.

Maastricht dates back to the Romans – they built a bridge over the River Maas here in the first century – and has since been fought over and conquered by the Spanish, the French (twice) and finally the Germans in 1940. Around one in 10 of the population are students at Maastricht University, and many of them are from overseas, which helps explain the city's youthful cosmopolitan vibe.

Bed down: French fancy

The **Boutique Hotel Grote Gracht** (00 31 43 203 0040; boutiquehotelgrotegracht.nl) is a well-located, 25-room hotel just a few minutes' walk from the central Vrijthof square's busy café-bars, and is within easy reach of Maastricht's main attractions. A converted 18th-century house, the hotel underwent a refurbishment three years ago, adding mod-cons while preserving the historic ambience. Some of the rooms have an art deco look but the superior rooms have an authentic French classical feel, with repro furniture that wouldn't have been out of place in the original house. Doubles start from €109 per room, room only.

Fed and watered: hot and hearty

You've got to sample the popular local dish, **Zuurvlees**, at the delightful **Café Sjiem** (cafesjiem.nl; 00 31 43 321 0158) in Pieterstraat, on the edge of the old city and cosy and full of character. **Zuurvlees** might not sound very appetising – the dish consists of a horse meat stew served in a sweet-and-sour gravy – but it's surprisingly tasty.

If horse meat isn't your thing, head down the road to trendy **Café Forum** (00 31 43 851 9475; cafeforum.eu), where a hip, young crowd gathers for salads and burgers paired with a good selection of craft beers from the Netherlands and Belgium.

For a locally brewed Brand Pilsener, try **Café de Knijnsiep** (00 31 43 321 4065; knijnsiep.nl), a wood-panelled pub that dates back over a century. Another must is **Café In de Karkol** (00 31 43 321 7035; indekarkol.nl), voted the Netherlands' best pub last year by Dutch magazine *Misset Horeca*.

Maastricht is also famous for its frituuren (fry shops). One of the best is **Tuutsje van Teunsje** (00 31 88 434 600; tuutsje.nl) in Wyck, on the eastern side of the Maas, which serves fries Dutch-style – that is, with gravy or mayonnaise.

In the bag: grace and flavour

If you're into strong cheese, try a small block of **Rommedoe** – a locally produced soft cheese – at specialist fromagerie **Rommedoeke** (00 31 43 343 0308; rommedoeke.nl). Be warned: you'll need to wrap it up in two or three plastic bags.

If you've got more of a sweet tooth, head to **Pâtisserie Royale** (00 31 43 785 0498; royale.nl) to buy a **Limburg vlaai** – a delicious tart with an apricot jam-like filling.

Bibliophiles, on the other hand, should visit the vaulted, temple-like **Dominicanen** book store (00 31 43 410 0010 libris.nl/dominicanen), situated in a 700-year-old Gothic church.

Cultural agenda: subterranean secrets

Medieval-looking **Helppoort** (Hell Gate) might sound a bit frightening but the Netherlands' oldest fortified city gate dates from 1229, when the city shut itself up each night to keep out unsavoury marauders. Be sure not to miss the fascinating underground cave system (maastrichtunderground.nl) in St Pietersberg and Cannerberg, where generations of Jesuit monks left amazing art, including reliefs, frescoes and wall paintings. The old medieval city wall overlooking pretty **Nolenspark** is also worth a visit, as is the excavated Roman street hidden away in the basement of the **Derlon Hotel** (00 31 43 321 6770; derlon.com).

Finally, head for **Plein 1992** (1992 Square) in the Ceramique district. The square is home to a mix of sleek modern buildings, including the city library, and offers a fine view of the Maas.

Perhaps the biggest surprise is the lack of overt EU symbolism. So while this Dutch city will forever be linked in our minds to a treaty, rest assured: no one is going to bang on about Brexit as you tuck into your **Zuurvlees**.

Details: Maastricht

Eurostar offers tickets to Liège from £34.50 one-way (03432 186 186; eurostar.com). From here, it's a 30-minute train ride to Maastricht, with departures around once every hour.

■ holland.com



London Gatwick →

Canada

Toronto

from **£333** pp
return
incl. taxes

Vancouver

from **£386** pp
return
incl. taxes

Direct flights

Luggage & meals included

020 3424 6963
airtransat.co.uk

Price is per person based on flying on selected dates from London Gatwick to Toronto in March 2017 and London Gatwick to Vancouver in May 2017 and October 2017. Prices for other routes may vary. Correct at the time of going to print and can change at any time. Flights from other airports available with Air Transat, see online for details and prices.

Fashion

Stay on trend with the capital's hottest style section every Tuesday

