

Utrecht - Where the

Utrecht, in the physical center of the Netherlands, is quietly becoming the heart of Dutch cultural diversity and modern urban living. This 2000-year-old city is brimming with talent and innovation... a great place to experience the future.

R“Over the last years, Utrecht has developed from a provincial town into a European city. Things are going really well and we are increasingly feeling the need to promote our attractiveness to other cities; not in order to compete with them, but to cooperate,” says Hans Sakkers, Head of the Department of Public, International and Subsidy Affairs.

Culture

Utrecht is a young city; a full 20% of its population is made up of students attending one of its institutes of higher education. Almost 60% of the working population has a higher professional education or academic degree. “The city’s ambition in the last few years has been to develop its programming to cater to this highly educated population - to be internationally oriented and offer a high quality and wide variety of cultural programs. Everyone knows what’s on offer in Amsterdam, for instance. The thing with Utrecht is that we are quiet about what we do, but there are several cultural niches that have an international quality and are well worth the visit.”

For example, Utrecht’s Cultural Sundays are unique. These day-long, generally free festivals are organized once a month and are subsidized by the City Council. They highlight local, national and international talent in every artistic expression - music, dance, theater, film, the visual arts, etc. “A really exciting edition was the No Label Festival,” explains Mr. Sakkers. “It was inspirational in its presentation of cross-over music, street art, theater and documentaries from a new generation of talented artists who wished not to be labeled by their ethnicity or creative influences. Their logo said it all: Young, diverse, in a new playing field; no compartmentalization, no labels - free art, for everyone.”

Urban planning

Though Utrecht remains the smallest of the G-4 (the four largest urban centers in the Randstad), the city has almost doubled in size over the last 10 years, growing from 230,000 to 400,000 inhabitants. “The students end up staying here. That is pretty special because many cities in Europe are shrinking.”

Mr. Sakkers’ office is on the third floor of City Hall, a building which developed organically over 500 years into a symbol of the harmony between history and current times. It is an appropriate place from which to discuss the future development of the city, which has actively sought new solutions for its large-scale development needs.

This massive growth spurt has had major urban planning implications. For example, a completely new city district is currently under construction to the west of Utrecht - the area of Leidsche Rijn. This is the largest new housing development in the Netherlands. The area will provide homes for around 80,000 people and work space for 40,000, and will form a second city center.

The city has sought to share experience and knowledge with other cities in Europe in the field of city renewal to ensure a high quality environment. “We’re an active member of Eurocities, a network of approximately 130 large cities that exchange expertise, work together to influence policy, and seek structural cooperation. It is a very effective way of sharing knowledge, expertise and experience.”

Multiculturalism

Utrecht’s development has had an impact on more than just the physical size of the city. It is also increasingly a multicultural community. The institutes of higher education have consciously attracted foreign students which form a large part of the international community in the city. Utrecht University, for instance, offers 46 undergraduate programs, two of which are also English-taught, and 196 graduate programs, 89 of which are English-taught. This is the widest range of English-taught graduate programs in the Netherlands. Every year, more than 2,000 international students and researchers stay in Utrecht for variable periods of time. In the Shanghai Ranking, Utrecht University ranks 1st in the Netherlands, 9th in Europe and 47th worldwide.

The city council has looked for a variety of ways to stimulate the development of ideas around diversity issues. Utrecht University has established the Center for the Humanities, which

Future Begins





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functions as a top international think tank on cross-border issues such as diversity, freedom of speech, and human rights. They have a public lecture series given by internationally recognized researchers in their field. "Many of the projects link theoretical research and academic debate with practical applications in society - how we live together in the diverse communities of the 21st century."

International relations are an important part of Utrecht's history. In 1713, the 'Treaty of Utrecht' was signed, ending a century and a half of war. Up to and during 2013, the city will celebrate this historic event by hosting a program of national and international cultural events. The theme of the yearly events is the relationship between culture and society in areas such as war and peace, conflict and intercultural dialogue, participation and community art.

In 1713, Utrecht was host to Europe's negotiators who ironed out a new pact for the future of Europe. Now, 300 years later, Utrecht will use the lessons of history to host a discussion on the future of Art, culture, meeting and intercultural dialogue in Europe.

For general tourist information on Utrecht: www.utrechtyourway.nl

For more information on the Center for the Humanities:
www2.hum.uu.nl/English

For more information on the Cultural Sundays:
www.culturelezondagen.nl (in Dutch only).

What not to miss in Utrecht

Springdance is the international platform for new developments in (inter)national contemporary dance and performance. It supports the development of Dutch as well as foreign dance artists, of dance as an art form, and of dance audiences. This is a progressive festival that is unique in the Netherlands in that it focuses on the most current developments in international contemporary dance. For more information see www.springdance.nl/en.

The Community Art Lab (CAL) is a research workshop that studies how Utrecht-based arts partners practice community art. It is also an experimental production center that stimulates the development of new art forms in which the power and creativity communities are given voice to express their cultural and physical environmental influences. CAL organizes public events and encounters between artists, students, policy makers and others interested in community art. For more information see vredevanutrecht.com/community-art.

The Europa Cantat festival for amateur singers will be held from July 17-26 in Utrecht. This festival takes place once every three years, in a different European city. It is an international meeting place for singers and music lovers. Along with the ateliers there will be many concerts from classical, vocal jazz, show choir, folk singing and musicals. More than 300 participants are expected at this year's event. For more information see www.ec2009.nl/.

BAK (Basis voor Actuele Kunst) is a venue for contemporary art production. BAK initiates cooperative projects with artists and other professionals to explore the possibilities and potential of the contemporary arts. It stimulates experimentation, the study of contemporary culture, art education and the search for new audiences in order to make the art of the present, and its developments towards the future. For information on workshops, lectures, debates, exhibitions and master courses see www.bak-utrecht.nl.