

EUROPEAN TRAVEL

Somewhere for the weekend...

Maastricht

Forget tulips and windmills – the oldest city in the Netherlands has a flair for food, and offers an irresistible blend of French, Belgian and Dutch culinary influences, says **CLARE THOMSON**

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It's typical of the city's multicultural outlook that its most individual hotel draws inspiration from the land of *la dolce vita*. Botticelli, at Papenstraat 11 (00 31 43 352 6300, www.hotelbotticelli.com), a short walk from the Vrijthof, is done up in flamboyantly Tuscan style – friezes, stencilling and warm terracotta tones – while spidery metal lamps and DVD players are understated nods to contemporary design. The breakfast buffet offers sun-dried tomatoes, salamis and Italian cheeses, and the hotel's

trump card is its deliciously tranquil courtyard, complete with fountain. Doubles start at €88.50 (£62).

For a kitsch take on Renaissance Italy, try the Mabi, at Kleine Gracht 4 (00 31 43 351 4444, www.hotel-mabi.nl), where gigantic blow-ups of Raphael's cherubim dominate the cheaper doubles, with romantic results. Housed in a former cinema, the hotel's public spaces are plastered with photos of stars from Hollywood's heyday, while the pricier rooms are cool, simple and spacious. Doubles start at €85 (£60).

Maastricht is a happy exception to the rule that hotels near stations are always dank and seedy. Designhotel La Bergere at Stationsstraat 40 (00 31 43 328 2525, www.la-bergere.com), offers fashionably spare, monochromatic rooms with quirky modern furnishings and softly erotic photos adding colour; the blue-lit brasserie and rooftop gym add to the appeal. Doubles start at €79 (£55). Less fashionable but fun is De Poshoorn, at Stationsstraat 47 (00 31 43 321 7334), offering clean, simple rooms above an earthy-brown café voted the city's finest in 2002; take a top-floor room if you plan to turn in early. Doubles start at €73 (£51).