A mini-guide to Nijmegen
A map of the city centre

1. Nijmegen Central Station
2. Plein 1944 (where the busses stop)
3. The Valkhof park, where the castle stood
4. The Valkhof Museum
5. Marikenstraat
6. Houtstraat
7. Lange Hezelstraat (shopping street with smaller shops)
8. The ‘Benedenstad’
9. River front
10. The city park
How to get to the University by bus

Left of the train station:
Bus 10 “Heyendaal shuttle” or “universiteit/HAN”
This bus is often very busy since it is the only bus which drives around campus and back to the station.

Right of the train station:
Bus 11 “Beuningen Aalsterveld”
Bus 12 “Druten Busstation”
Bus 13 “Wijchen”
Bus 15 “Wijchen”
Bus 300 “Nijmegen Heyendaal”

Leave the bus at the stop called “Erasmus gebouw”
Nijmegen

Nijmegen may be the oldest city in the Netherlands (it is about 2000 years old), most of the city centre is relatively new. This is a result of the bombing of the town centre in 1944 – by Allied planes, who thought they were flying over Germany. The German border is very close: a 10-15 minute drive from the centre. Nijmegen was rebuilt after the Second World War, but to commemorate the bombing disaster, a local “ground zero” was left as an open space and became Plein 1944 (‘Square 1944’, literally). For years, this place was nationally known as the ugliest of the entire country, but it has seen a drastic make-over in recent years. The Square is now bordered by apartment buildings and shops (see picture below).
One of the liveliest parts of the city centre is the equally relatively new Marikenstraat. It has two levels, both with shops. And the highest level borders on the ‘cultural quarter’, with the city library and the art house cinema. Marikenstraat is named after Mariken, the main character in a 16th-century, Faustian story of temptation. Legend has it that Mariken was seduced by the devil in the marketplace near the St Stephen’s church (the biggest in the city centre). There is a statue of Mariken in front of the Waag building.

*The Mariken statue*
Some of the ‘old’ (pre-1944 bombing) Nijmegen is preserved in the area around the big St Stephen’s church and the Waag building (the church is behind the two arches in the small photograph of the Marijen statue above). The Blaauwe Hand pub is next to the Waag building; it claims to be the oldest cafe in town.

The Waag building on the right and the St. Stephen’s church in the background
One of Nijmegen’s best kept secrets is the so-called ‘Beneden stad’ (the ‘lower parts of town’). These comprise the streets and houses leading to the riverfront. It is great to walk around, with all its alleys, steps and stairs and old buildings. The original university (pre-dating the current one) was housed in what is now a beer brewery and chocolate-making workshop (called ‘De Hemel’, or ‘Heaven’ in English). This is also a nice place to have coffee or tea.

*Images of the ‘beneden stad’*
Nijmegen is one of the few cities in the country with hills; when you approach it from the north, via one of the bridges across the Waal river, it looks quite spectacular. Because Nijmegen is situated near a bend in the river (the widest and busiest with freight ships in the Netherlands), there is always the danger of floods. A large part of Holland, mainly the Western half, is below sea level, but the rivers are great risks as well – especially with climate change. In anticipation of possible future floods, the city has decided to give the river more space to overflow. A new, emergency branch of the river has been dug across the Waal which you can see when you enter Nijmegen by train from the North (from the direction of Amsterdam, Utrecht and Arnhem).

*The Nijmegen waterfront, seen from the north*
The Romans thought the bend in the river was the most strategic place in the surroundings to build a fort. Later, a proper castle was built in almost the exact same place. This was called the ‘Valkhof’. It was demolished in the late-18th-century, but many paintings of the Nijmegen waterfront feature the old castle. There are plans to rebuild its main tower. The current site still has remnants of the Valkhof, like a small chapel. It is a great place for views of the river, the engineering works on the other side of the river, and the typically Dutch ‘polder’ to the right of Nijmegen.

*The design of the new river branch (the ‘old’ Nijmegen is on the left-hand side)*
The chapel of the former Valkhof castle, with views of the bend in the river and the Nijmegen bridge

The castle in the old days
When you are at the Valkhof castle you will also see the bridge (see picture below) which was opened in the 1930s and played a major part in the liberation of the Netherlands in the Second World War. This is where the Allied forces crossed the Waal, on their way to Arnhem, which is only 20 kilometres to the North, on the river Rhine. That is where they met more resistance from the Germans: Arnhem is the bridge they failed to take. This is the event at the heart of A Bridge Too Far, a 1970s war movie starring many famous actors of the day.

There is also a bridge for the train and another, even newer, car bridge. This second bridge is built near the place where, towards the end of the war, American troops crossed the river in small rowing boats. Veterans still visit the site; the bridge was named in their honour.
From the former castle hill, it is only a short walk to the Valkhof Museum. With its blue glass facade, it looks like an aquarium from the outside – (at least, that is what the locals think). It houses a collection of archaeological finds: with its Roman history, the Nijmegen area is a treasure trove of thousands-year-old coins, pottery, utensils, and even human remains. In fact, while constructing the new branch of the river, many new Roman artefacts were found. The museum also has some art on show, often in temporary exhibitions. At the moment, there is an exhibition of photographs by Paolo Ventura, and a small one with cartoons of Napoleon.

*The Valkhof Museum (in the back); to the left is a footbridge to the Valkhof area*
If you walk down Houtstraat (with Plein 1944 behind you), and you take a left turn, you enter Lange Hezelstraat. This is one of the best streets in Nijmegen to walk through. There are small boutiques and independent shops (no chain stores, for example) as well as many great places to have lunch or drink a cup of coffee.

At the end of this street, again to the left, is the city park, which has remnants of the old, medieval city walls.

The Kronenburger city park
Radboud University

Nijmegen University was established in 1923 as the Catholic University of Nijmegen. It started out with 35 staff members and 189 students. During the Second World War university buildings were bombed and many prominent members were lost. Amongst whom, professor Titus Brandsma who was taken to Dachau concentration camp. In 2004, the university changed its name to Radboud University Nijmegen after Saint Radboud of Utrecht, a bishop who lived around 900. Today, the university has more than 20,000 students and 2,000 staff members.

The Erasmus building

Elinor Ostrom building
(conference location)