



## Stuttaford Van Lines Country Guide for

# Netherlands



Country Guides: Courtesy of Overseas Moving Network International ( OMNI )

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## 1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

**Location:** Northwest Europe.

**Time:** GMT + 1 (GMT +2 from last Sunday in March to last Sunday in October).

Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions (NBTC) in the UK  
**PO Box 30783, London WC2B 6DH, UK Tel:** (020) 7539 7950 or (09068) 717 777 (brochure line; calls cost 60p per minute). Website: [www.holland.com/uk](http://www.holland.com/uk)

Royal Netherlands Embassy in the UK  
**38 Hyde Park Gate, London SW7 5DP, UK Tel:** (020) 7590 3200 or (09065) 508 916 (visa information line; calls cost £1 per minute). Website: [www.netherlands-embassy.org.uk](http://www.netherlands-embassy.org.uk) Opening hours: Mon-Fri 0900-1700; 0900-1200 (passport and visa section; by appointment only). The passport and visa section is closed on the first Wednesday of every month.

Royal Netherlands Embassy in the USA  
**4200 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008, USA Tel:** (202) 244 5300. Website: [www.netherlands-embassy.org](http://www.netherlands-embassy.org)

Consulate General of The Netherlands in the USA  
**1 Rockefeller Plaza, 11th Floor, New York, NY 10020 Tel:** (212) 246 1429. Website: [www.cgny.org](http://www.cgny.org)

Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions (NBTC) in the USA  
**355 Lexington Avenue, 19th Floor, New York, NY 10017, USA Tel:** (212) 370 7360. Website: [www.holland.com](http://www.holland.com)

## 2 OVERVIEW

'High culture in a low land'

The Netherlands is renowned for being unremittingly flat, with traditional images of canals, windmills and tulips complementing its new face as a modern European nation, so impressively demonstrated when The Netherlands co-hosted Euro 2000 with Belgium. Its eclectic past reads like a 'who's who' of European nations as everyone from the Romans and the Gauls, right through to the Hapsburgs and the Spanish, influenced its destiny before the country finally emerged with its current borders in 1830. It is easy to imagine The Netherlands as just Amsterdam; the nation's capital city is one of the most visually stunning in the world, where you can also delve through centuries of history aboard a canal boat or explore the array of excellent museums. The Netherlands is far more than just its capital, though, with a string of impressive cities including Arnhem, The Hague and Rotterdam. Rotterdam has picked itself up from almost total devastation in World War II to emerge as Europe's (and indeed one of the world's) biggest port and a leader in urban regeneration. Out in the countryside, any sense of monotony you may have is soon broken by stunning medieval towns like Utrecht and Delft. Holland's main natural attraction is its wide swathe of coastline, much of it peppered with artificial sea walls and inland seas, as The Netherlands fights its never-ending battle with the North Sea.



Robin McKelvie

### 3 GENERAL INFORMATION

**Area:** 41,528 sq km (16,034 sq miles).

**Population:** 16.3 million (UN, 2005).

**Population Density:** 392.5 per sq km.

**Capital:** Amsterdam. Population: 735,562 (2003). Seat of Government: The Hague. Population: 463,826 (2003).

**GEOGRAPHY:** The Netherlands shares borders to the south with Belgium and to the east with Germany, while the North Sea lies to the north and west. Large areas of The Netherlands have been reclaimed from the sea and consequently one-fifth of the country lies below sea level. The country is flat and level and is criss-crossed by rivers and canals. Areas reclaimed from the sea, known as polders, are extremely fertile. The landscape is broken by the forest of Arnhem, the bulb fields in the west, the lakes of the central and northern areas, and coastal dunes that are among the most impressive in Europe.

**Government:** Constitutional monarchy since 1848. Head of State: Queen Beatrix Van Oranje Nassau since 1980. Head of Government: Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende since 2002. Recent history: Various political groupings occasionally have registered strong electoral showings and managed minor representation in Government. These include the ecologist Green Party, the radical Democraten 66 (D66) and, most recently, the List Pim Fortuyn, which emerged at the election of May 2002. Taking its name from its charismatic leader, Pim Fortuyn, the List campaigned on a far-right anti-crime, anti-immigration platform. This struck a chord with a disillusioned electorate and coincided with the resurgence of the far right throughout Western Europe. At the poll, List Pim Fortuyn emerged as the second-largest party and entered Government in coalition with the CDA. However, during the campaign, Fortuyn himself was assassinated. A common feature of European far-right parties is the influence of a single dominant personality which guarantees the party's cohesion for example, Jean-Marie Le Pen of the French Front Nationale, or Jorg Haider, leader of Austria's Freedom Party and a propensity for self-destructive internal feuding. Once in office, without Fortuyn, the List almost immediately fell apart, causing the collapse of the Government. New elections were called. Held in January 2003, the CDA was returned as the largest party; it now governs in coalition with VVD and D66 with CDA party leader Jan Peter Balkenende as Premier. The List Pim Fortuyn was reduced to a handful of seats but it has left its mark on Dutch politics in the form of a hardening of the official attitude towards immigrants and asylum seekers. The Netherlands is a constitutional Monarchy with a bicameral multiparty legislature: the First (Lower) Chamber has 150 members, elected for a four-year term; and the Second (Upper) Chamber has 75 members, indirectly elected by provincial councils for the same length of term.

**Language:** Dutch is the official language. English, German and French are widely spoken.

**Religion:** 31 per cent Roman Catholic, 21 per cent Protestant; 40 per cent do not profess any religion.



**Electricity:** 220 volts AC, 50Hz. Two-pin European-style plugs are in use.

**SOCIAL CONVENTIONS:** It is customary to shake hands. English is spoken as a second language by many and is willingly used; many Dutch people will also speak German and French. Hospitality is very much the same as for the rest of Europe and the USA. It is customary to take a small gift if invited for a meal. Casual wear is widely acceptable. Men are expected to wear a suit for business and social functions. Formal wear may be required for smart restaurants, bars and clubs. Evening dress (black tie for men) is generally specified on invitation.

Passport/Visa

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
<b>British</b>	1	No	No
<b>Australian</b>	Yes	No	No
<b>Canadian</b>	Yes	No	No
<b>USA</b>	Yes	No	No
<b>OtherEU</b>	1	No	No
<b>Japanese</b>	Yes	No	No

**Note:** The Netherlands is a signatory to the 1995 Schengen Agreement. For further details about passport/visa regulations within the Schengen area, see the introductory section in How to Use this Guide.

**PASSPORTS:** Passport valid for at least three months beyond length of stay required by all except:(a) 1. EU/EEA nationals (EU + Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway) and Swiss nationals holding a valid national ID card. Note: EU and EEA nationals are only required to produce evidence of their EU/EEA nationality and identity in order to be admitted to any EU/EEA Member State. This evidence can take the form of a valid national passport or national identity card. Either is acceptable. Possession of a return ticket, any length of validity on their document, sufficient funds for the length of their proposed visit should not be imposed. (b) nationals of Andorra, Monaco and San Marino holding a valid national ID card. Note: It is now Dutch law that everyone over the age of 14 must produce a valid identity document to police officers and other law enforcement authorities on their request.

**VISAS:** Required by all except the following for stays of up to three months: (a) nationals referred to in the chart and under passport exemptions above; (b) nationals of Andorra, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Iceland, Israel, Korea (Rep), Liechtenstein, Malaysia, Mexico, Monaco, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Romania, San Marino, Singapore, Switzerland, Uruguay, Vatican City and Venezuela; (c) transit passengers continuing their journey to/from other Schengen countries within 72 hours by the same or first connecting aircraft, provided holding onward or return documentation and not leaving the airport.

**Note:** Nationals of Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Congo (Dem Rep), Eritrea, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic passing through The Netherlands always require an airport transit visa even though they do not actually enter Dutch territory, unless holding a Residence Permit for the USA or EEA countries, UK or temporary residence permit for Canada and the USA, valid on



the departure date from The Netherlands, with a confirmed onward ticket and are not leaving the transit lounge. Transit passengers are advised to check transit regulations with the relevant Embassy or Consulate before travelling.

**Types of visa and cost:** A uniform type of visa, the Schengen visa, is issued for the relevant Schengen member nationals, for tourist, business and private visits. Short-stay (for up to three months), Multiple-entry (for three months, one year or five years) and Transit visas are available for a handling fee of approximately €35, although prices are subject to change. You may also have to pay other costs incurred in processing the application. Costs must be paid in local currency. The Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy) can be contacted for further details.

**Note:** Spouses and children (under 21 years) and/or dependents of EU nationals (providing spouse's passport and the original marriage/birth certificate, mentioning name of parents with certified translation in English for Embassy in London are produced) receive their visas free of charge (enquire at Embassy or Consulate for details). Nationals of the Dominican Republic, Ghana, India, Nigeria and Pakistan should have their marriage and birth certificates verified and legalised by the relevant Netherlands Embassy or a visa fee will be charged.

**Validity:** Visas are normally valid for the duration of stay, with a maximum of three months (90 days) per six months. The visa issuing authorities will want to see the flight tickets to check arrival and departure dates. Transit visas are valid for single- or multiple-entries of maximum five days per entry, including the day of arrival. Visas cannot be extended; a new application must be made each time.

**Application to:** Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy); see Passport/Visa Information. Applications should be made in person. Travellers visiting just one Schengen country should apply to the Consulate of that country; travellers visiting more than one Schengen country should apply to the Consulate of the country chosen as the main destination or the country they will enter first (if they have no main destination).

**Application requirements:** (a) Passport (valid for at least three months longer than the validity of the visa requested) containing a blank page to affix the visa, or official travel document accepted by Schengen countries. If travelling on a new passport, the old one must also be submitted. A residence permit should be endorsed in your current valid passport and must still be valid on departure from the Schengen area. (b) Completed application form, listing full address and daytime telephone number. For minors under 18 years, it is necessary to submit approval from both parents or legal guardians, submitting a copy of each parent's/guardian's passport. (c) One passport-size photo. (d) Fee, where applicable (payable in cash or by postal order). (e) Travel insurance policy covering medical expenses, including emergency hotel treatment and repatriation, taken out in the UK, valid for the duration of stay and with a minimum cover of €30,000. (f) Evidence of sufficient funds for period of stay (eg bank statements or travellers cheques), the amount considered 'enough' will depend on the purpose of visit, accommodation and duration of visit, but usually €34 per person per day or a letter of guarantee from a national of the Netherlands who has a net annual income of €11,000, some consulates may require both. Business: (a)-(f) and, (g) An invitation from a Dutch company confirming duration and purpose of stay, and a recent letter from the applicant's employer, solicitor, bank manager or local Chamber of Commerce, plus last payslip. If unemployed, submit a letter from a solicitor, accountant or Company House or Social Security booklet. Student: (a)-(f) and, (g) A letter from the applicant's school, college or university. Airport Transit: (a)-(f) and, (g) Confirmed non-refundable and non-endorsable airline ticket.



**Note:** (a) The number of forms and photos required may vary according to the nationality of the applicant. (b) The applicant may also be asked to provide further relevant documentation in certain cases. (c) Applications must be made in person for those residing in the vicinity of London, UK, and appointments to do so must be made in advance by telephoning the automated telephone appointments booking service (tel: (09065) 540 720; calls cost £1 per minute). For those married to a Dutch national, it is not necessary to telephone the automated booking service. Those married to Dutch nationals may visit the Embassy in London from 0900-1100 on any working day, or visit another of the Dutch consulates in the UK. An original marriage certificate and original passport of Dutch spouse must be submitted. Postal applications are not accepted.

**Working days required:** Normally processes within 48 hours, but can take up to two months for certain nationals. It is essential to apply with plenty of time to spare (three weeks at the very least).

**Temporary residence:** Work permit and residence permit required for non-EU nationals. Enquire at Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy) for further information; see Contact Addresses section or visit Ministrie van Justice, Immigratie-en Nationalisatiedienst (website: [www.ind.nl](http://www.ind.nl)).

**Passport/Visa Information:** Royal Netherlands Embassy in the UK 38 Hyde Park Gate, London SW7 5DP, UK Tel: (020) 7590 3200 or (09065) 508 916 (visa information line; calls cost £1 per minute). Website: [www.netherlands-embassy.org.uk](http://www.netherlands-embassy.org.uk) Opening hours: Mon-Fri 0900-1700; 0900-1200 (passport and visa section; by appointment only). The passport and visa section is closed on the first Wednesday of every month. Royal Netherlands Embassy in the USA 4200 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008, USA Tel: (202) 244 5300. Website: [www.netherlands-embassy.org](http://www.netherlands-embassy.org) Consulate General of The Netherlands in the USA 1 Rockefeller Plaza, 11th Floor, New York, NY 10020 Tel: (212) 246 1429. Website: [www.cgny.org](http://www.cgny.org)

## 4 MONEY

**Single European currency (Euro):** The Euro is now the official currency of 12 EU member states (including The Netherlands). The first Euro coins and notes were introduced in January 2002; the Dutch Guilder was in circulation until 28 January 2002, when it was completely replaced by the Euro. Euro (€) = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of €500, 200, 100, 50, 20, 10 and 5. Coins are in denominations of €2 and 1, and 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 cents.

**Currency exchange:** Exchange offices are indicated by the letters GWK. GWK is a national organisation with currency exchange offices at major railway stations, at Schiphol Airport and at the border crossings with Germany and Belgium. Hotels tend to charge high commissions. Verkoopt means sell, while Koopt means buy.

**Credit & debit cards:** American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa are accepted, as well as Eurocheque cards. Check with your credit or debit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available. ATMs are widely available.

**Traveller's cheques:** Widely accepted. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take traveller's cheques in Euros, Pounds Sterling or US Dollars.



**Currency restrictions:** There are no restrictions on the import and export of either local or foreign currency.

Exchange rate indicators

Date At time of publishing £1.00 = \$1.46; \$1.00 = €0.82

**Banking hours:** Mon 1300-1600; Tues-Fri 0900-1600. GWK offices are open seven days a week.

## 5 DUTY FREE

The following goods may be imported into The Netherlands without incurring customs duty by **travellers from non-EU European countries and countries outside of Europe:** 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 100 cigarillos or 250g of tobacco; 1l of liquor or 2l of sparkling wine or liqueur wines and 2l of non-sparkling wine; 50g of perfume and 250ml of eau de toilette; 500g of coffee or 200g of coffee extract; 100g of tea or 40g of tea extract; other goods to the value of €175 (if bought outside Europe).

**Note:** (a) Goods must be purchased in non-EU countries. (b) The above allowances are only for travellers aged 17 years and above. (c) Enquiries concerning current import regulations should be made to the Royal Netherlands Embassy in the country of departure, or to the national Chamber of Commerce. (d) The import of firearms and ammunition requires a licence.

**Abolition of duty free goods within the EU:** On June 30 1999, the sale of duty free alcohol and tobacco at airports and at sea was abolished in all of the original 15 EU member states. Of the 10 new member states that joined the EU on May 1 2004, these rules already apply to Cyprus and Malta. There are transitional rules in place for visitors returning to one of the original 15 EU countries from one of the other new EU countries. But for the original 15, plus Cyprus and Malta, there are now no limits imposed on importing tobacco and alcohol products from one EU country to another (with the exceptions of Denmark, Finland and Sweden, where limits are imposed). Travellers should note that they may be required to prove at customs that the goods purchased are for personal use only.

## 6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Below are listed Public Holidays for the January 2006-June 2007 period. Jan 1 2006 New Year's Day. Apr 14-17 Easter. Apr 29 Queen's Day. May 5 Liberation Day. May 25 Ascension. Jun 5 Whit Monday. Dec 25 Christmas Day. Dec 26 Boxing Day. Jan 1 2007 New Year's Day. Apr 6-9 Easter. Apr 30 Queen's Day. May 5 Liberation Day. May 17 Ascension. May 28 Whit Monday.

## 7 HEALTH

	Special Precautions	Certificate Required
<b>Yellow Fever</b>	No	No
<b>Cholera</b>	No	No



<b><i>Typhoid and Polio</i></b>	No	N/A
<b><i>Malaria</i></b>	No	N/A

**Other risks:** Rabies may be present in animals, although risk to travellers is very rare. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For more information, consult the Health appendix.

**Health care:** European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland: If you or any of your dependants are suddenly taken ill or have an accident during a visit to an EEA country or Switzerland, free or reduced-cost necessary treatment is available in most cases on production of a valid European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). Each country has different rules about state medical provision. In some, treatment is free. In many countries you will have to pay part or all of the cost, and then claim a full or partial refund. The EHIC gives access to state-provided medical treatment only and the scheme gives no entitlement to medical repatriation costs, nor does it cover ongoing illnesses of a non-urgent nature, so comprehensive travel insurance is advised. Note that the EHIC replaces the Form E111, which will no longer be valid after 31 December 2005. Some restrictions apply, depending on your nationality. Outside of the EU, The Netherlands has reciprocal health agreements with Cape Verde, Morocco, Serbia & Montenegro, Tunisia and Turkey. All other travellers are advised to take out full medical insurance. For police, fire or ambulance emergencies, dial 112 anywhere in the country. Make sure you see a doctor who is part of the health insurance scheme. Treatment is usually free. State dental care in the Netherlands is limited to treatment for children. Some prescribed medicines are free, for some you pay part of the cost, and for others you'll have to pay the full cost. These charges are not refundable. Certain strong medicines can be taken to The Netherlands if they are accompanied by a doctor's prescription. Doctors will need authorisation from AGIS Verzekeringen for you to get free hospital in-patient treatment. If you can't contact a doctor before being admitted, show the hospital authorities your European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) and ask them to contact AGIS Verzekeringen in Utrecht immediately. Ambulance travel is free only if a doctor agrees that it is necessary. The standard of health care (and other social services) is very high, with an unusually high proportion of the national income devoted to public health. More information can be obtained from AGIS Verzekeringen, PO Box 8261, 3503 RG Utrecht (tel: (30) 233 0600).

#### Travel - International

**AIR:** The Netherlands' national airline is KLM-Royal Dutch Airlines (KLM) (website: [www.klm.com](http://www.klm.com)). KLM flies direct to all major European, North American and Asia-Pacific cities. Most major international airlines, and some low-cost carriers fly to Amsterdam.

**Approximate flight times:** From Amsterdam to Belfast is one hour; to London is one hour 20 minutes; to Manchester is one hour 15 minutes and to New York is seven hours (including stopover in London).

**Main airports:** Amsterdam (AMS) (Schiphol) (website: [www.schiphol.nl](http://www.schiphol.nl)) is 15km (9 miles) southwest of the city (travel time by train 20 minutes). To/from the airport: KLM buses provide a daily service from 0600-0000 departing every 15 to 30 minutes, stopping at a selection of major hotels and returning to Schiphol. The Schiphol Hotel Shuttle operates between 0600-2100 and travels to almost all hotels in Amsterdam (tel: (0) 38 339 4741). There are many public buses available from the airport to major towns. There is a direct rail link between the airport and Amsterdam Centraal Station, with trains every 10 to 20 minutes from 0600-0000 and every hour through the night. Trains to Zuid Station (Amsterdam South) run every 15 minutes from 0525-



0015; return is from Zuid Station, Parnassusweg/ Minervalaan (via tram no. 5 from the city centre) from 0545-0040. There is also a service to the RAI Congress Centre every 15 minutes from 0525-0012. Return is from RAI station (via tram no. 4 from the city centre) from 0545-0040. Plentiful taxis are available to the city. Facilities: Restaurants, duty free shops, currency exchange machines (able to convert 17 different currencies), banks, an art gallery, baby rooms, showers, a business centre (with fax, personal computer and telephone facilities), conference rooms and car hire. Rotterdam (RTM) (Zestienhoven) (website: [www.rotterdam-airport.nl](http://www.rotterdam-airport.nl)) is 8km (5 miles) northwest of the city (travel time 15 minutes). To/from the airport: Bus no. 33 departs every 10 minutes. Return is from Central Station (travel time 20 minutes). Taxis to the city are also available. Facilities: Restaurant, bank, outgoing duty free shop, wireless Internet, meeting facilities and car hire. Eindhoven (EIN) (Welschap) (website: [www.eindhovenairport.nl](http://www.eindhovenairport.nl)) is 8km (5 miles) from the city. To/from the airport: Coaches run every 15 minutes and taxis to the city are also available. Express buses run after each Ryanair flight (except those from London Stansted and Corendon Istanbul flights) to Amsterdam Central Station. Facilities: ATMs, restaurants, car rental, wireless Internet and outgoing duty free shops. Maastricht (MST) (Aachen) (website: [www.maa.nl](http://www.maa.nl)) is 8km (5 miles) from the city. To/from the airport: From the Maastricht Aachen Airport bus stop, take bus 61 (51 on Sundays) to Sittard Station and Maastricht Station. Facilities: Restaurant, bar and outgoing duty free shop. Groningen (GRQ) (Eelde) (website: [www.groningenairpoorteelde.nl](http://www.groningenairpoorteelde.nl)) is 9km (6 miles) from the city. Enschede (ENS) (Twente) (website: [www.enschede-airport.nl](http://www.enschede-airport.nl)) is 8km (5 miles) from the city.

**Departure tax:** None.

**SEA:** Main ports: Hook of Holland (Hoek van Holland), Rotterdam and Vlissingen. Regular car and passenger ferries are operated from the UK to The Netherlands via the following routes and shipping lines: Stena Line (tel: (08705) 707 070; website: [www.stenaline.co.uk](http://www.stenaline.co.uk)): Harwich to Hook of Holland; travel time three hours 40 minutes (day), six hours 15 minutes (night); four sailings daily. P&O Ferries (tel: (08705) 202 020; website: [www.ponsf.com](http://www.ponsf.com)): Hull to Rotterdam (Europoort); travel time 12 hours; one sailing daily. DFDS Seaways (tel: (08705) 333 000 (within the UK) or (01255) 240 240 (outside the UK); website: [www.dfdsseaways.co.uk](http://www.dfdsseaways.co.uk)): Newcastle to Amsterdam; travel time 16 hours. Note: Hoverspeed UK and P&O European Ferries run services to The Netherlands via Belgium. French ports also provide connections.

**RAIL:** Eurostar operates direct high-speed trains from London (Waterloo International) to Paris (Gare du Nord) and to Brussels (Midi/Zuid). It takes three hours from London to Paris and it takes two hours 40 minutes from London to Brussels. Local trains run between Brussels and Amsterdam (travel time approximately two hours 45 minutes). Eurostar operates eight daily services to Brussels and Thalys International runs six daily trains (seven in summer) onwards to Amsterdam and other Dutch destinations. The Eurostar trains are equipped with standard-class and first-class seating, buffet, bar and are staffed by multilingual, highly trained personnel. Pricing is competitive with the airlines, and there is a large range of different tickets and prices. Children aged between four to 11 years benefit from a special fare in first class as well as in standard class. Children under four years old travel free but cannot be guaranteed a seat. Wheelchair users and blind passengers together with one companion get a special fare. For further information and reservations, contact Eurostar (tel: (0870) 600 0792 (travel agents) or (08705) 186 186 (public; within the UK) or (+44 1233) 617 575 (public; outside the UK only); website: [www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com)); or Rail Europe (tel: (08705) 848 848). Travel agents can obtain refunds for unused tickets from Eurostar Trade Refunds, 2nd Floor, Kent House, 81 Station Road, Ashford, Kent TN23 1PD, UK. Complaints and comments may be sent to Eurostar Customer Relations, Eurostar House, Waterloo Station, London SE1 8SE, UK (tel: (020) 7928 5163). Rail travellers not using the Channel Tunnel link need to make some form of sea crossing, usually by ferry or hovercraft; for details on sea crossings, see also under Sea above. The cost of the



crossing is usually included in the price of the rail ticket. There are plenty of rail passes on offer to travellers visiting The Netherlands, including discounts for young and senior citizens. For further details, contact Rail Europe (website: [www.raileurope.com](http://www.raileurope.com)). Rail passes: The Inter-Rail pass offers unlimited second-class train travel in up to 29 European countries (includes Morocco and Turkey) split into eight zones (A-H). Three different tickets are available: a ticket covering one zone (two to six countries, 16 days' validity), a ticket covering two zones (six to 10 countries, 22 days' validity) and an All Zone Pass (29 countries, one month's validity). Ferry services between Italy and Greece are included. Passengers must be resident in Europe for at least six months before the pass is used. Travel is not allowed in the passenger's country of residence. Travellers under 26 years receive a reduction of about 30 per cent. Children's tickets are reduced by about 50 per cent. Supplements are required for some high-speed services, seat reservations and couchettes. Discounts are offered on Eurostar and some ferry routes. Available from Inter Rail (website: [www.interrailnet.com](http://www.interrailnet.com)). The Eurailpass offers unlimited first-class train travel in 17 European countries. Tickets are valid for 15 days, 21 days, one month, two months or three months. The Eurailpass Saver ticket offers discounts for two or more people travelling together. The Eurailpass Youth ticket is available to those aged under 26 and offers unlimited second-class train travel. The Eurailpass Flexi allows either 10 or 15 travel days within a two-month period. The Eurail Selectpass is valid in three, four or five bordering countries and allows five, six, eight or 10 travel days (or 15 for five countries) in a two-month period. The Eurail Regional Pass allows four to 10 travel days in a two-month period in one of nine regions (usually two or more countries). Children receive a 50 per cent reduction. The passes cannot be sold to residents of Europe, Turkey, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia or the Russian Federation. Available from The Eurail Group (website: [www.eurail.com](http://www.eurail.com)).

**ROAD:** The Netherlands is connected to the rest of Europe by a superb network of motorways. All roads are well signposted with green 'E' symbols indicating international highways, red 'A's indicating national highways, and smaller routes indicated by yellow 'N's. The national speed limit is 120kph (75mph). Although frontier formalities between The Netherlands, Germany and Belgium have now all but vanished, motorists particularly on smaller roads should be prepared to stop when asked to do so by a customs official. The yellow cars of the ANWB/Wegenwacht (Royal Dutch Touring Club) (tel: (70) 314 1420) patrol major roads 24 hours a day with qualified mechanics equipped to handle routine repairs. In case of emergencies, assistance is available (tel: 60888 within The Netherlands only). The Channel Tunnel: All road vehicles are carried through the tunnel in Eurotunnel shuttles running between the two terminals, one near Folkestone in Kent, with direct road access from the M20, and one just outside Calais, with links to the A16/A26 motorway (Exit 13). Each shuttle is made up of 12 single- and 12 double-deck carriages, and vehicles are directed to single-deck or double-deck carriages depending on their height. There are facilities for cars and motorcycles, coaches, minibuses, caravans, campervans and other vehicles over 1.85m (6.07ft). Bicycles are provided for. Passengers generally travel with their vehicles. Heavy goods vehicles are carried on special shuttles and drivers travel in a separate carriage. Terminals and shuttles are well equipped for disabled passengers, and Passenger Terminal buildings contain a variety of shops, restaurants, bureaux de change and other amenities. The journey takes about 35 minutes from platform to platform and about one hour from motorway to motorway. Services run every day of the year, and there are between two and five an hour, depending on the time of day. There is a reservation system and a turn-up-and-go service. Motorists pass through customs and immigration before they board the shuttle without further checks on arrival. Fares vary according to length of stay, time of day and time of year and whether you have a reservation or not. The price applies to the car, regardless of the number of passengers or size of the car. The fare may be paid in cash, by cheque or by credit card. For further information, contact Eurotunnel Customer Services UK (tel: (08705) 353 535; website: [www.eurotunnel.com](http://www.eurotunnel.com)). Coach: Eurolines run coach services from the UK to The Netherlands and from The Netherlands to various destinations throughout Europe. They have an



office in Amsterdam at Julianaplein 5, 1097 DN (tel: (20) 560 8788; website: [www.eurolines.nl](http://www.eurolines.nl)). Further information can also be obtained by calling Eurolines in the UK (4 Cardiff Road, Luton, Bedfordshire L41 1PP; tel: (08705) 143 219; website: [www.eurolines.com](http://www.eurolines.com) or [www.nationalexpress.com](http://www.nationalexpress.com)). Car hire: Major companies can be found in all the main cities; among them are Avis, Budget, Europcar and Hertz.

#### Travel - Internal

**AIR:** KLM Cityhopper (WA) (website: [www.klmcityhopper.nl](http://www.klmcityhopper.nl)) operates between seven airports in Holland. Transavia Airlines (HV) (website: [www.transavia.com](http://www.transavia.com)) (80 per cent of which is owned by KLM) also run scheduled flights. Martinair Holland (MP) (website: [www.martinair.com](http://www.martinair.com)) operates passenger and cargo charter services. Enquire at KLM offices or at The Netherlands Board of Tourism for further information (see Top Things To Do).

**SEA:** There are regular ferry services to the Wadden Islands (Ameland, Schiermonnikoog, Terschilling, Texel and Vlieland) across the IJsselmeer (former Zuyder Sea) and Schelde Estuary. There is also a service to the Frisian Islands across the Waddenzee. Boat Tours runs excursions from Amsterdam, Arnhem, Delft, Giethoorn, Groningen, Maastricht, Rotterdam and Utrecht. Note: No cars are permitted to Vlieland. Wadden Ticket: For travellers wanting to visit any of the five Wadden Islands, the Wadden Ticket allows return travel by bus, train and ferry to an island of choice. The pass is valid for one day of the departure journey and one day of the return journey, although the period between the two must not exceed one year. Contact The Netherlands Board of Tourism for further details (see Top Things To Do).

**RAIL:** The highly developed rail network, of which about 70 per cent is electrified, is efficient and cheap, and connects all towns. Both Intercity and local trains run at least half-hourly on all principal routes. Rail and bus timetables are integrated, and there is a common fare structure throughout the country. NV Nederlandse Spoorwegen (website: [www.ns.nl](http://www.ns.nl)) is the state-owned rail company and operates all lines within the country. Regional railway companies include Syntus (website: <http://www.syntus.nl>) and Noordned (website: <http://www.arriva.nl>). Arriva runs 78 trains in the Netherlands under NoordNed, a rail and bus operator in the north of the country which was the first rail privatisation in the Netherlands. NoordNed runs regional bus and train services throughout the majority of Friesland providing a substantive network of suburban, interurban and rural services. It also operates rail services in the province of Groningen.

**Cheap fares:** Holland Rail Pass allows unlimited travel in the Netherlands for either three or five days within one month. Reduced rates exist for senior citizens (over 60), travellers under 26 years and children. Every second person travels half-price. Tickets must be purchased from International Rail before travel. Summer Trip Passes are available between July and August and give two people three days of unlimited travel within a period of 10 days for only a single fare. Summer Trip Plus Passes cover unlimited travel on all public transport buses and trams in town and country, and on the underground system in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Tickets for two cost €69 (€49 per person). Euro Passes are available for travel in The Netherlands, or The Netherlands and Belgium. Three- to eight-day passes are available. The Benelux Tourrail Card allows unlimited travel for any five days within a one-month period, covering The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Inter-Rail passes are also valid in The Netherlands. Children under four years of age travel free on all journeys within The Netherlands. Child's Railrunner tickets, which cost €1, are available for children aged between four and 11 years travelling with a fare-paying adult (19 years or older), and include up to three children travelling with any one adult. Contact the Railway Authority of any of the participating countries for prices and further information.



**ROAD:** There is an excellent road system. Visitors to The Netherlands may use credit cards when obtaining petrol. The motoring association in The Netherlands is the ANWB (Royal Dutch Touring Club), PO Box 93200, 2509 BA The Hague (tel: (263) 860 249). Bus: Extensive regional bus networks exist. Long-distance coaches also operate between the cities, but costs are generally on a par with trains. Taxi: Taxis have an illuminated 'taxi' sign on the roof and there are taxi ranks at railway stations and at various other points in the cities. Rather than hailing taxis in the street, it is more usual in The Netherlands to order a taxi by phone. Taxis should have meters inside to indicate the fare, including the tip. Taxi Trains (Treintaxis) are taxis shared with others at a reduced price per person. These run between 59 railway stations. Car hire: Available from airports and main hotels. All European car hire companies are represented. Bicycle hire: Bicycles can be hired from all main railway stations, but must be returned to the station from which they are hired. A refundable deposit is required. Driving regulations: Driving is on the right. Drivers should be particularly aware of cyclists; often there are special cycle lanes. There is a chronic shortage of parking space in central Amsterdam, and the rush hours (0700-0900 and 1700-1900) should be avoided throughout the whole country. Parking fines are severe. Headlights should be dipped in built-up areas, but it is prohibited to use sidelights only. Children under 12 years of age should not travel in the front seat. Seat belts are compulsory. Speed limits are 80kph (50mph) on major roads, 120kph (75mph) on motorways and 50kph (30mph) in towns. Documentation: An International Driving Permit is not required, as long as a driving licence from the country of origin is held. EU pink format licences are accepted. However, it is sometimes advised for non-members of the EU. Trailers and caravans are allowed in without documents. A Green Card is advisable, but not compulsory. Without it, drivers with motor insurance policies in their home country are granted only the minimum legal cover in The Netherlands; the Green Card tops this up to the level of cover provided by the driver's own policy.

**URBAN:** Public transport is very well developed in the cities and large towns. A strippenkaart national fares system exists strips of 15 tickets each are widely available at railway stations, post offices and some tourist offices. These are accepted anywhere in payment of standard zonal fares. There are also individual and multi-day tickets for the cities. For more detailed information on travel within Amsterdam, The Hague and Rotterdam, see below.

**Amsterdam:** Note: The Amsterdam Card offers free travel on trains, buses, the subway and a 25 per cent discount on a train tickets to Schiphol airport. Price per person is €33 for 24 hours, €43 for 48 hours and €53 for 72 hours. Amsterdam has an extensive network of buses, trams and underground (GVB), with frequent services from early morning to about midnight. There are less frequent services throughout the night at a higher fare. Full information on services (including a map), day tickets and strippenkaart (strip-tickets) can be obtained from the GVB office in front of the Central Station, the GVB Central Office at Prins Hendrikkade 108-114 or post offices, department stores and tobacconists. They can be purchased on board trams and buses but at a higher price. Tram: Amsterdam's 17 tram lines provide a fast, frequent and reliable service, making the tram the best way to travel around the capital. Trams operate from Mon-Fri 0600-2400 (from 0630 Saturday and 0730 Sunday). The tram system (as well as the buses and the underground) enables reasonably quick travel even during the busiest periods of the day. Trams leave from Central Station: 1 and 2 traverse the main canals, 19 takes a route to Museumplein and Concertgebouw and 9 and 14 to the Muziektheater and Waterlooplein market. The Circle Tram operates through central Amsterdam, taking in major attractions and hotels. Underground: Amsterdam's underground lines all originate at the Central Station and serve the southeastern business district and the suburbs. Trains run from Mon-Fri 0600-0015, from Sat 0630 and from Sun 0730. The GVB is easy to use. Car hire: The major European firms, including Avis and Hertz, are represented. Cars can also be hired through most hotels. Parking regulations are quite strict and failure to park in prescribed areas or to pay the parking fee can result in a fine and the prospect of the car being clamped or towed



away. Water travel: Canal Buses (every 25 to 45 minutes between Central Station and Rijksmuseum; children under the age of four travel free); Watertaxis (carrying eight to 44 passengers); Museum Boats (departing from Prins Hendrikkade every 30 minutes in summer and every 45 minutes in winter) and Waterbikes (for two to four people, with a route map provided) are all available. Boat hire: Visitors can hire pedalos (also known as canal bikes) and boats to explore the canals. Bicycle hire: This is an excellent way to travel around Amsterdam, and it seems nearly everyone is doing it. Cycle lanes are clearly marked by white lines but visitors are advised to watch out for trams, cars and pedestrians. There are numerous companies hiring out bikes.

**Rotterdam:** The city has excellent bus and tram services and a two-line underground network, which all work on a zonal system. Information is available from the Central Station. Car hire: The major European firms, including Avis, Hertz and other international agencies are represented.

**The Hague:** The Hague has bus and tram services. Information is available from the Central Station, Koningin Julianaplein. Car hire: Avis and Hertz, and other international agencies, are represented.

**TRAVEL TIMES:** The following chart gives approximate travel times (in hours and minutes) from Amsterdam to other major cities in The Netherlands.

	Air	Road	Rail
The Hague	0.400	44	Rotterdam
1.001	00	Groningen	2.002
20	Maastricht	0.402	302
30	Eindhoven	0.301	301
25	1	30	251
30			30

## 8 ACCOMMODATION

**HOTELS:** The Netherlands has a wide range of accommodation, from luxury hotels in big towns to modern motels along motorways. The Netherlands Board of Tourism issues a shield to all approved hotels by which they can be recognised. This must be affixed to the front of the hotel in a conspicuous position. Hotels which display this sign conform to the official standards set by Dutch law on hotels, which protects the tourist and guarantees certain standards of quality. Hotels are also graded according to the Benelux system, in which the standard is indicated by a row of 3-pointed stars from the highest (5-star) to the minimum (1-star). However, membership of this scheme is voluntary, and there may be first-class hotels that are not classified in this way. Benelux star ratings adhere to the following criteria. For further information, contact The Netherlands Board of Tourism (see Top Things To Do). 5-star (H5): This is a new category signifying a luxury hotel. Amenities include private bath and/or shower, toilet, radio and TV in every room; 24-hour room service; fax facilities in reception. 4-star (H4): First-class hotels. 80 per cent of rooms have a private bath. Other amenities include night reception and room service. 3-star (H3): Half of the rooms have a private bath or shower. Other amenities include day reception and the sale of tobacco products. 2-star (H2): A quarter of rooms have a private bath. Other amenities include a bar. 1-star (H1): Simple hotel. No private baths, but hot and cold water in rooms; breakfast available. Cat H: Hotel with minimal comfort. Cat O: Simple accommodation.

**GUEST HOUSES:** These are called pensions and rates vary. Book through local tourist offices.

**BED & BREAKFAST:** Not as common a form of accommodation as it is in the UK.

**SELF-CATERING:** Farmhouses for groups can be booked months in advance via the local tourist offices. Holiday chalets, especially in the relatively unknown parts of Zeeland, can be booked through the local tourist office. Bungalow parks throughout the country can be booked through The Netherlands Reserverings Centrum (NRC). Most bungalow resorts offer a full range of recreational facilities including swimming pools, golf and tennis. Prices depend on size, quality of



amenities and the time of year. To order a self-catering brochure, call The Netherlands Board of Tourism (see Top Things To Do).

**CAMPING/CARAVANNING:** There are some 2500 registered campsites in Holland. Only 500 offer advanced booking, the others operate on a first-come, first-served basis. Off-site camping is not permitted. Prices are fairly high and it is often far better value to stay more than one night. A list is available from The Netherlands Board of Tourism (see Top Things To Do) and reservations can be made through the Stichting Vrije Recreatie.

**YOUTH HOSTELS:** There are around 30 hostels in various surroundings, from castles to modern buildings. People with a Hostelling International card receive a discount of €2.50 for an overnight stay including breakfast. Information is obtainable from Stayokay (the Dutch Youth Hostel Association/Stichting Nederlandse Jeugdherberg Centrale).

**ACCOMMODATION INFORMATION:** The Netherlands Reservation Centre (NRC) (Netherlands Reserverings Centrum) Plantsoengracht 2, 1441 DE Purmerend, The Netherlands Tel: (299) 689 144. Website: [www.hotelres.nl](http://www.hotelres.nl) Bed & Breakfast Service Nederland (Online Reservations) Website: [www.bedandbreakfast.nl](http://www.bedandbreakfast.nl) Stichting Vrije Recreatie (Information on Camping/Caravanning) Scr Broakseweg 75-77, 4231 VD Meerkerk, The Netherlands Tel: (183) 352 741. Website: [www.svr.nl](http://www.svr.nl) Stayokay (the Dutch Youth Hostel Association/Stichting Nederlandse Jeugdherberg Centrale) Tel: (10) 264 6064. Website: [www.stayokay.com](http://www.stayokay.com)

## Introduction

The Netherlands today has dispelled all images of it being an archaic land of clogs and windmills, with its string of exciting cities, including the cosmopolitan capital, Amsterdam one of Europe's great cities. Elsewhere, Arnhem, Eindhoven, The Hague, Utrecht and the especially buzzing Rotterdam all boast their own charms. Away from the cities, the idyllic land of windmills and tulips does still exist in the bucolic splendour of the countryside, as do a number of coastal towns and resorts, many with fine beaches and similarly interesting heritages to The Netherlands' bigger historical cities.

## Amsterdam

Amsterdam, the capital of The Netherlands (though not the seat of Government) is one of Europe's great destinations, as popular with tourists as it is with businesspeople. Amsterdam's lifeblood is water, which courses through the city in a concentric network of canals and waterways spanned by more than 1000 bridges. As Amsterdam is inextricably linked with water, one of the most attractive ways of viewing the city is on a canal tour. Many of the houses date back to The Netherlands' golden age in the 17th century. These narrow-fronted merchants' houses are characterised by the traditionally Dutch ornamented gables. The oldest part of the city is Nieuwmarkt, located near the first canals Herengracht, Keizersgracht and Prinsengracht built to protect the city against invasion. In the 17th century, Amsterdam gained a reputation for religious tolerance, which attracted thousands of Flemish, Walloon and French Protestants, as well as Jewish merchants from Spain, Portugal and Central Europe. The city has also long been a centre for diamond cutting and it is still possible to see diamond cutters at work. Boasting 53 museums, 61 art galleries, 12 concert halls and 20 theatres, Amsterdam has a booming cultural life. A special canal boat (the 'museum boat') links 20 of the major museums. A special Museum Pass entitling holders to free entry to over 400 museums is available from participating museums and local tourist offices. One of the city's cultural Meccas is the Rijksmuseum, a voluminous art gallery that is home to the works of many of the country's artistic luminaries, as well as numerous European masters. The highlight for many visitors is Dutch master Rembrandt's epic



Night Watch, though the list of the gallery's treasures is almost endless. Fellow Dutch artist Van Gogh is celebrated throughout the city, with the Rembrandt House Museum, housed in the historical building where the great artist used to live and work. The Stedelijk Museum of Modern Art, a collection of Dutch and international art from 1850 onwards, includes works by Cézanne, Chagall, Monet and Picasso, as well as photography, video, film and industrial design. Amsterdam's most poignant museum is Anne Frank's House, where the young Jewish girl hid away from the occupying German forces, who were intent on ridding the city of all Jews and sending them to their cruel fates in the death camps. The museum illuminates the young girl's life and is of interest to everyone, whether they have read her famous diary or not. A more light-hearted attraction is the Heineken Brewery. Heineken, the Dutch national brewer, is the world's second-largest brewing empire and this brewery, which operated from 1932-1988, is now a museum. There are daily guided tours, which culminate with ice-cold samples of the famous beer. Amsterdam is justifiably famous for its nightlife with few other European cities managing to quite satisfy every conceivable taste in the same way as The Netherlands' capital. Within a few blocks, well-heeled couples idle away an evening in a canal-side gourmet restaurant, and a group of backpackers stumble across the cobbles after a night in a cheery pub, as just around the corner the local trendies pose their way through an evening in a new-style bar. Then there is the Opera House, the string of concert venues, the football stadium, some of Europe's best nightclubs and the jazz cafes, to name a few other nocturnal pastimes in Amsterdam. And, of course, there are the seedier ways to spend an evening, either exploring the infamous coffee shops of a city where soft drugs are not only allowed, but are sold over the counter, and the Red Light District, a nefarious playground where all sorts of low life mingle with the curious and the downright seedy. Wherever tourists spend their evening, there is the same relaxed, live-and-let-live ambience of a city where **almost anything goes.** **Amsterdam Pass:** This offers free admission to many museums, tourist attractions and public transport as well as up to 25 per cent discount on certain other attractions, restaurants and transportation within the city. The pass is available for one-day (&#8364;31), two-days (&#8364;41) and three-days (&#8364;51). Further details about the pass can be obtained from the Amsterdam Tourist Office (tel: (20) 201 8800; e-mail: info@atcb.nl).

**AROUND AMSTERDAM:** There are numerous possible excursions and day trips available from Amsterdam with an efficient national rail network that links the surrounding towns and cities to the metropole. Alkmaar, where there is a famous cheese market at Waagplein, open every Friday from mid-April to mid-September, is a popular day trip. There is also a good bus service from Amsterdam to Marken and Volendam, both old fishing villages largely built of wood. The former is predominantly Catholic, the latter Protestant and both easily occupy a whole day.

**HAARLEM:** Located 20km (12 miles) west of Amsterdam, Haarlem is a centre of Dutch tulip growing and the surrounding countryside affords a fine view of the bulb fields from the end of March to mid-May. The town itself has a beautiful 16th- and 17th-century town centre and two fine museums. The Teyler Museum was first established in 1784 from its world-famous Oval Room by merchant banker, Pieter Teyler van der Hulst. The museum has a very diverse collection, which includes drawings by Rembrandt, scientific instruments, fossils and coins. The ultramodern new wing offers a striking contrast with the oak-panelled rooms of the original building. The Frans Hals Museum houses paintings by the artist. Also worth visiting is St Bavo Church, containing a 5000-pipe organ, which Mozart is reported to have played.

**UTRECHT:** The city of Utrecht is a favourite destination with the Dutch, as it offers many of Amsterdam's charms on a smaller scale without the tourist hordes that fill the capital for much of the year. The fourth-largest city in The Netherlands is also one of the oldest cities in the country, the site first having been settled by the Romans. During the Middle Ages, Utrecht was often an imperial residence, and the city's bishops regularly played an important role in the secular affairs



of Europe. The city's prosperity allowed the construction of several beautiful churches, particularly the Cathedral of St Michael (13th century), St Pieterskerk and St Janskerk (both 11th century) and St Jacobkerk (12th century). Other buildings of note include the House of the Teutonic Order, the 14th-century Huys Oudaen, the Hospice of St Bartholomew and the Neudeflat, a more modern construction (built in the 1960s), but one which affords a superb view across the city from its 15th-floor restaurant. The city also has several museums, including the Central Museum (which has an excellent Department of Modern Art), the Archiepiscopal Museum, the Railway Museum, the Archaeological Collection and the Municipal Museum. The best way to explore Utrecht is by canal boat, which takes visitors on a loop of the city that opens up its different districts. Utrecht's bars and restaurants are also renowned for their quality and good value, and the lively nightlife is propelled by the large local student community. Newly opened in 2006 is the Dick Bruna Huis, home to the bunny character Miffy. The exhibition is an overview of Bruna's work.

**UTRECHT PROVINCE:** The province of Utrecht, in the very heart of The Netherlands, contains numerous country houses, estates and castles set in landscaped parks and beautiful woods. The countryside around Utrecht is very fertile and seems like one large garden. 25km (16 miles) to the northeast of Utrecht is the town of Amersfoort, set in a region of heathland and forest. The old town is well preserved, one of the most attractive buildings being the Church of St George. Just 8km (5 miles) away is the town of Soestdijk, containing the Royal Palace and the beautiful parklands of the Queen Mother. Between Soestdijk and Hilversum is Baarn, a favourite summer resort among the Dutch.

**ELSEWHERE:** Nearby, the casino at Zandvoort (west of Haarlem) is also the site of the annual Dutch Grand Prix. There is a famous Flower Auction in Aalsmeer; open weekday mornings. Near Lisse, south of Haarlem, are the Keukenhof Gardens, which have a lily show in late May. The Frans Roozen Nurseries & Tulip Show and the bulb fields can also be visited. Broek op Langedijk has Europe's oldest vegetable auction hall with a large and interesting exhibition of the land reclamation of the surrounding area. Enkhuizen and Hoorn are well-known watersports centres. The latter town features the National Zuyder Zee Museum, an outdoor museum with ships and reconstructed houses.

#### The North

**FRIESLAND:** The province of Friesland in the northwest of the country has its own language and its own distinct culture. A large part of the marshlands along the North Sea coast have been reclaimed from the sea. Friesian cattle are among the most famous inhabitants of the area. The Friesian lake district in the southern part of the state centres on the town of Sneek, and is a good place for watersports, particularly yachting. Near Sneek is the small town of Bolsward, which has a magnificent Renaissance Town Hall. Leeuwarden, the capital of Friesland, has several old buildings and the Friesian Museum, probably the most important provincial museum in the country. Some 6km (4 miles) to the west is the village of Marssum, which has a 16th-century manor house. There are daily ferry connections with four of the Friesian Islands and a chain of museums on the Aldfaer's Erf Route. The Hollandse and Friesian Islands (Ameland, Schiermonnikoog, Terschelling, Texel and Vlieland), on which there are bird sanctuaries and areas of outstanding natural beauty, lie north of the mainland.

**GRONINGEN:** The agricultural province of Groningen is known for its fortified country houses dating back to the 14th century. The provincial capital, Groningen, is commercially the most important town in the north of The Netherlands, as well as being a major cultural centre. The city suffered considerable damage during World War II, but many of the 16th- and 18th-century buildings have now been restored.



**DRENTHE:** This is a province of extensive cycle paths, prehistoric monuments (particularly in the area of the village of Havelte) and Saxon villages. The region is almost entirely agricultural, much of the land being drained by the system of vennis and weiks. The main town, Assen, set in an area of woodlands, was an insignificant village until the middle of the last century, and has no historical monuments. The Provincial Museum is, however, worth a visit. There are also several Megalithic tombs to be found south and southwest of the town.

**THE HAGUE & ZUID-HOLLAND:** The Hague (Den Haag, officially known as 's-Gravenhage), the seat of the Dutch government, is home to over 60 foreign embassies, the International Court of Justice and the capital of the province of Zuid-Holland. This has earned the city an unwarranted reputation for being dull and sterile, but in fact The Hague is well worth visiting and boasts a number of attractions. The central part of the Old Town is the Binnenhof, an irregular group of buildings surrounding an open space. The seaside resort of Scheveningen (which has the country's only pier) is a nearby suburb. Walking around the old parts of town is a joy in itself the local tourist office publishes a map that opens up the city and also includes most of the many antique shops in The Hague. The Parliament Buildings and Knight's Hall are 13th-century buildings where there are regular tours and slide shows that illuminate their history, while the Royal Cabinet of Paintings, housed in the Mauritshuis, is a collection that includes the Anatomical Lesson of Dr Tulp by Rembrandt, and other 17th-century Dutch works. Other attractions include the Gemeentemuseum, a recently renovated municipal museum that houses an interesting collection of modern art as well as interactive displays illustrating a wide range of subjects; the Puppet Museum, with its old and new puppets; the antique market at the Lange Voorhout; the Duinoord district built in the style of old Dutch architecture; the Haagse Bos wooded park; the 17th-century Nieuwe Kerk; and the Royal Library. On the outskirts of the city is one of Europe's most unusual attractions: Madurodam Miniature Town is a playground for the young and not so young alike, a scale model (1:5) of a typical Dutch landscape, complete with houses, motorways and even fire-fighting boats extinguishing real fires. Adjacent to Madurodam is Sand World, a recently opened collection of sand sculptures. Another bizarre local attraction is the Panorama Mesdag, the largest panoramic circular painting in the world, create by the artist Mesdag amongst others, and famous for its perfect optical illusion.

**ZUID-HOLLAND:** About 22km (14 miles) southeast of Rotterdam and about 45km (28 miles) southeast of The Hague is Kinderdijk, near Alblasserdam, a good place to see windmills. They can be visited during the week. Delft, centre of the Dutch pottery industry and world famous for its blue hand-painted ceramics, is roughly midway between Rotterdam and The Hague. Gouda, 20km (12 miles) southeast of Rotterdam, is famous for its cheese market and the Candlelight Festival in December. The town centre is dominated by the massive late-Gothic Town Hall. Nearby is the pretty old town of Oudewater, noted for its beautiful 17th-century gabled houses. Northwest of Gouda by 12km (7 miles) is the town of Boskoop, renowned for its fruit trees; a visit during the blossom season is a delightful experience. Dordrecht, 15km (9 miles) southeast of Rotterdam and about 37km (23 miles) southeast of The Hague, was an important port until a flood in 1421 reduced the economic importance of the town. The museum in the city has a good collection of paintings from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, while the most striking building is probably the Grote Kerk, begun in about 1305. Leiden, 20km (12 miles) northeast of The Hague, 40km (25 miles) north of Rotterdam), the birthplace of Rembrandt, was a famous weaving town during the Middle Ages, and played a large part in the wars of independence against Spain in the 16th century. The university was founded by William the Silent in 1575 in return for the city's loyalty. The Pilgrim Fathers lived here for 10 years (1610-1620) and The American Pilgrim Museum is found here. The town also boasts one of the most charming windmills in the country, set in a park overlooking water.



## Rotterdam

Rotterdam is no longer content to play second fiddle to Amsterdam and in recent years has rejuvenated its city centre, regenerated much of its dockside and also hosted the European City of Culture. Rotterdam is Europe's largest and, indeed, the world's second-largest, port and is the hub of the Dutch economy, but it is now also emerging as a tourist destination in its own right. Much of the city was obliterated during World War II, and only small parts of the old city remain. Historically, the city has been an important manufacturing centre since the 14th century, but its pre-eminence as a port dates only from the early 19th century. The best place to get an idea of the city layout is from the viewing level of the Euromast & Space Tower, which at 185m (605ft) is the highest point in The Netherlands. Rotterdam's pride in its maritime heritage is on show at the Maritiem Museum Prins Hendrik, where outdoor and indoor exhibits include ships, barges, harbour cranes and marine archaeological artefacts. Regular boat tours also now take tourists around the city's abundance of channels and waterways. Boat tours (Spido) through the harbour of Rotterdam are available throughout the year. In the summer, there are excursions to Europoort, the Delta Project as well as evening tours, and there are also luxury motor cruisers for hire. Rotterdam's cultural scene is also rich with the Museum Boymans van Beuningen, a unique collection of paintings, sculptures and objets d'art dating from the 14th century to the present day, and the Museum Voor Volkenkunde, an ethnological museum, amongst the highlights. For younger visitors, Dierenpark Blijdorp (Zoo) is an open-plan zoo, beautifully laid out, with a restaurant. The exotic wildlife includes bats, wolves, elephants and rhinos, all amongst tropical forest vegetation. A drive through the harbour of Rotterdam is also possible; the 100 to 150km (60 to 90 mile) journey takes in almost every aspect of this massive harbour. The route passes wharves and warehouses, futuristic grain silos and loading equipment, cranes and bridges, oil refineries, powerstations and lighthouses, all of which create a skyline of awesome beauty, particularly at sunset. The docks, waterways, canals and ports-within-ports are interspersed with some surprising and apparently incongruous features; at one point the route passes a garden city built for shipyard workers, while further on there is a village and, at the harbour's westernmost point, a beach. A visit to Rotterdam harbour is recommended. Other interesting places to visit include the 17th-century houses in the Delfshaven quarter of the city; the Pilgrimskerk; collections of maps and seacharts at the Delfshaven Old Town Hall; many traditional workshops for pottery, watchmaking and woodturning. Rotterdam has also become something of a Mecca for designers and architects, who have flocked to the city to take part in its massive rebuilding programme, and their work is often showcased both in the buildings they create and also in temporary exhibits. Rotterdam's nightlife scene has undergone something of a renaissance over the last decade with myriad new bars, trendy cafes and first-rate restaurants spicing up what was previously an unappealing scene, geared mainly towards itinerant sailors and students. Today, the waterfront is increasingly being transformed into a leisure oasis. The major concert venue is the De Doelen Concert Hall (classical music, plays), which has 2000 seats. The local soccer team, Feyernoord, play at the impressive De Kuip Stadium, which was home to the final of Euro 2000.

## The East

The wooded east consists of the provinces of Overijssel, Gelderland and Flevoland.

**OVERIJSSSEL:** The province of Overijssel is a region of great variety. In the little town of Giethoorn, small canals take the place of streets, and all transport is by boat. At Wanneperveen there is a well-equipped watersports centre. The old Hanseatic towns of Kampen and Zwolle have splendid quays and historic buildings. There are bird sanctuaries along the IJsselmeer.



**GELDERLAND:** This is The Netherlands' most extensive province, stretching from the rivers of the south to the sand dunes of the north. Gelderland is often referred to as 'the back garden of the west'.

**Arnhem:** The province's major city was heavily damaged in World War II; indeed, its important position on the Rhine has led to it being captured, stormed and occupied on many occasions during its long history. The old part of the town has, however, been artfully rebuilt. There is a large open-air museum near Arnhem showing a collection of old farms, mills, houses and workshops, all of which have been brought together to form a splendid park. Not far from the town centre, there is a zoo and a safari park.

**Hoge Veluwe National Park:** Near Arnhem is the Hoge Veluwe National Park, an extensive sandy region and a popular tourist area, which contains a game reserve (in the south), and the Kroller-Muller Art Gallery and Museum, with many modern sculptures and paintings (including a Van Gogh collection). One ticket enables the visitor to see all of this, and there are free bicycles available to cycle around the park. Almost all of the old traditional villages have been converted into holiday resorts. There are no towns of any size in the Veluwe region.

**FLEVOLAND:** Much of Flevoland was drained for the first time in the 1950-60s, and is in many ways a museum of geography; the southern part of the province is not yet completely ready for cultivation, and visitors can witness the various stages of agricultural preparation. Lelystad is the main town of the region, built to a controversial design in the 1960s. Part of the province has also been designated as an overspill area for Randstad Holland. Flevoland's 1100 sq km (425 sq miles) of land includes many large bungalow parks.

#### The Far South

**NORTH BRABANT:** This province consists mainly of a plain, rarely more than 30m (100ft) above sea level, and is mostly agricultural. The region is known for its carnival days in February and the Jazz in Duketown jazz festival. The capital of the province is the city of 's-Hertogenbosch (non-Dutch speaking visitors will welcome the use of 'Den Bosch' as a widely accepted abbreviation) situated at the centre of a region of flat pasture land which floods each winter. St Jan's Cathedral is the largest in the country; the provincial museum is also interesting. Other major cities in this large and comparatively densely populated province include Eindhoven, an industrial centre which has grown in the last 100 years; Breda, an old city with many medieval buildings it was here that the declaration was signed in 1566 which marked the start of the Dutch War of Independence; and Tilburg, an industrial centre which also has a large amusement and recreation park (to the north of the city), whose attractions include a haunted castle. In Kaatsheuvel is the De Efteling Recreation and Adventure Park, which includes a large fairytale wood and a big dipper. Overloon is home to the Dutch National War & Recreation Museum, which includes displays of heavy armament in a park setting and other exhibits devoted to the history of World War II. In Hilvarenbeek is the De Beekse Bergen Safari Park. Safari buses are available (continuous journey).

**LIMBURG:** The province of Limburg, the most southerly in the country, is bordered by both Belgium and Germany. The rolling hills covered with footpaths make this a good place for walking holidays. It is also famous for its cuisine. In the extreme south of the province is the city of Maastricht, and its position at the crossroads of three countries makes it ideal for excursions to such nearby cities as Aachen over the border in Germany. Maastricht itself is one of the oldest towns in the country, and its Church of St Servatius is the oldest in The Netherlands. The church treasury is particularly interesting. Further north is the town of Roermond, an important cultural and artistic centre dominated by the superb Munsterkerk.



## The Coast

There are 280km (175 miles) of beaches and over 50 resorts in The Netherlands, almost all of which are easily accessible from Rotterdam, Amsterdam and The Hague. Large areas have been specially allocated for naturists and the beaches themselves are broad, sandy and gently sloping. There is surf along the coast, and those who wish to swim must be strong enough to withstand the hidden currents. Swimmers should obtain and follow local advice. In the high season, lifeguards are on duty along the more dangerous stretches of the coast.

**ZEELAND:** The province of Zeeland has several medieval harbour towns where some of the best seafood in Europe can be found. Most of the province lies below sea level and has been reclaimed from the sea. The region also includes several islands and peninsulas in the southwest Netherlands (Walcheren, Goeree-Overflakkee, Schouwen-Duiveland, Tholen, St Philipsland and North and South Beveland). The province has become renowned for a massive engineering project of flood barriers designed to protect the mainland and the results of reclamation from the devastating floods that periodically sweep the coastline. The countryside is intensively farmed. The capital of the province is Middelburg, a town that has been important since medieval times. The Town Hall is widely regarded as being one of the most attractive non-religious Gothic buildings in Europe. The small town of Veere, 8km (5 miles) to the north, retains many buildings from its golden age in the early 16th century. The North Sea port of Flushing (Vlissingen) is, for many British travellers arriving by boat, their first sight of The Netherlands. It is also the country's first town in another sense; in 1572 it became the first place to fly the free Dutch flag during the War of Independence.

## 9 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

**Cycling:** The Netherlands is rightly known as 'the land of bicycles': around 15 million Dutch people regularly travel by bicycle and there are an estimated 12 million cycles in use. The popularity of cycling is perhaps mainly due to the country's geography: distances between the cities are short and the countryside is almost totally flat, except for a few rolling hills in the east and south (the highest of which is a mere 321m/1053ft). Not surprisingly, cycling facilities are outstanding and there are approximately 17,000km (10,625 miles) of special cycling lanes and paths available. Detailed cycling maps (recommended) can be obtained for every province from local tourist information offices; as well as indicating cycling routes and tracks, the maps provide route descriptions and guides. Cycling lanes are recognisable by a round blue sign with a white bicycle in the middle. Most itineraries are circular routes, starting and ending at the same place. The province of Gelderland has the highest number of marked cycling routes. Landscapes vary from spectacular dunes (on the Duinroute in the north of the country) to wilderness and forests (on the route across the Hoge Veluwe nature reserve in the Gelderland Valley). Long-distance routes (such as the 270km-/169mile-North Sea route LF1 between the Belgian border and the northern Dutch town of Den Helder) are also available. Bicycles can be hired virtually everywhere and a list of local hire companies is available from The Netherlands Board of Tourism (see Top Things To Do). The Netherlands Railways also offer bike-rental vouchers, which can be bought at railway ticket offices. Vouchers can be used at bicycle depots at over 100 train stations throughout the country. Over 300 stations offer the facility to take bicycles onto the train. The classic Dutch upright single-speed hub-brake bicycle is the most frequent, but other types of bicycles (including mountain bikes, children's bicycles and tandems) are also available.



**Walking:** In The Netherlands, walking holidays are also very popular; the 300km- (188mile-) long coast has a number of scenic walks through sand dunes and nature reserves. Visitors can obtain maps with walking routes from the Foundation for Long Distance Walks (Stitching Lange-Afstand-Wandelpaden), PO Box 846, 3800 AV Amersfoort (tel: (33) 465 3660). Visitors can also join the annual six-day walking event (beginning of August), where participants walk from Hook of Holland to Den Helder. At Wadden Sea National Park (Europe's largest continuous national park), there is also the opportunity to take part in various types of mud walking trips on the bottom of the Wadden sea, whose shallows fall dry at low tide.

**Watersports:** The Dutch coast on the western shore is well suited and well equipped for all types of watersports, including swimming and windsurfing. Sailing is popular on Friesland Lakes, the IJsselmeer, Loosdrechtse Plassen (south of Amsterdam) and Veerse Meer. Boats can be hired without difficulty in most places. Touring Holland's canals and rivers is popular. Catamaran sailing and parachuting is possible on the islands of Ameland and Texel. Water-skiing is not permitted on inland lakes. Fishing is popular throughout the country, but while no licence is needed for sea fishing, inland fishing licences are required and are available at local post offices.

**Markets:** A visit to one of the famous Dutch flower markets is recommended. The best ones are in Amsterdam (where the famous Bloemenmarkt along the Singel canal is a major tourist attraction), Delft and Utrecht. Dutch flower bulbs are available for sale but it is essential to make sure the vendor sells them with an official export certificate. The most popular Dutch flowers are tulips and daffodils. There are also various colourful flower parades (corso), notably the Bollenstreek flower parade (the country's biggest). Many parades display spectacular flower 'floats' made of hyacinths, daffodils and dahlias. The Floriade, held every 10 years in The Netherlands, is one of the world's most famous flower exhibitions. Last held in 2002 (from mid-April to mid-October), the city of Haarlemmermeer hosted this prestigious horticultural event. Visitors may also visit one of the country's unique flower auctions, such as the ones in Aalsmeer (easy to reach from Amsterdam) and the 'Flower Auction Holland' near The Hague and Rotterdam in the Westland. The country's traditional cheese market is held in Alkmaar, every Friday from 1000, from mid-April to mid-September.

#### Entertainment

**Food & Drink:** There are few dishes that can be described as quintessentially Dutch, and those that do fall into this category are a far cry from the elaborate creations of French or Italian cuisine. Almost every large town, however, has a wide range of restaurants specialising in their own brands of international dishes including American, Balkan, British, Chinese, French, German, Italian and Spanish. Indonesian cuisine, a result of the Dutch colonisation of the East Indies, with its use of spices and exotic ingredients, is particularly delicious. Restaurants usually have table service. Bars and cafes generally have the same, though some are self-service. There are no licensing laws and drink can be bought all day. Bars open later and stay open until the early hours of the morning at weekends. National specialities: A typical Dutch breakfast usually consists of several varieties of bread, thin slices of Dutch cheese, prepared meats and sausage, butter and jam or honey and often a boiled egg. A working lunch would be koffietafel, once again with breads, various cold cuts, cheese and preserves. There will often be a side dish of omelette, cottage pie or salad. Broodjes (sandwiches) are a common daytime snack, served in the ubiquitous sandwich bars broodjeswinkels. Lightly salted 'green' herring can be bought from street stalls (they are held by the tail and slipped down into the throat). Erwtensoup (thick pea soup served with smoked sausage, cubes of bacon, pig's knuckle and brown or white bread). Groentensoup (clear consommé with vegetables, vermicelli and meatballs). Hutspot (potatoes, carrots and onions). Klapstuk (an accompaniment of stewed lean beef). Boerenkool met rookworst (frost-crisped kale and potatoes served with smoked sausage). Seafood dishes are



often excellent, particularly in Amsterdam or Rotterdam, and include gebakken zeetong (fried sole), lekkerbekjes (fried whiting), royal imperial oysters, shrimps, mussels, lobster and eel (smoked, filleted and served on toast or stewed or fried). Flensjes or pannenkoeken (25 varieties of Dutch pancake) are a favourite Dutch dessert. Wafels met slagroom (waffles with whipped cream). Offertje (small dough balls fried and dusted with sugar). Spekkoeke (alternate layers of heavy buttered sponge and spices from Indonesia), which translated means 'bacon cake'. National drinks: Coffee, tea, chocolate and fruit juice are drunk at breakfast. The local spirit is jenever (Dutch gin), normally taken straight and chilled as a chaser with a glass of beer, but it is sometimes drunk with cola or vermouth; it comes in many varieties depending on the spices used. Favoured brands are Bols, Bokma, Claeryn and De Kuyper. Dutch beer is excellent. It is a light, gassy pils type beer, always served chilled, generally in small (slightly under half a pint) glasses. The most popular brand in Amsterdam is Amstel. Imported beers are also available, as are many other alcoholic beverages. Dutch liqueurs are excellent and include Curaçao, Parfait d'Amour, Triple Sec (similar to Cointreau) and Dutch-made versions of crème de menthe, apricot brandy and anisette. Tipping: All hotels and restaurants include 15 per cent service and VAT. It is customary to leave small change when paying a bill. &#8364;0,5-1,00 is usual for porters and doormen, and around 10 per cent for taxi drivers and waiters. Hairdressers and barbers have inclusive service prices.

**Nightlife:** Large cities have sophisticated nightclubs and discos, but late opening bars and cafes are just as popular in provincial towns. There are theatres and cinemas in all major towns. Amsterdam is a cosmopolitan city, with some of the liveliest nightlife in Europe. There are legal casinos in Amsterdam, Breda, Eindhoven, Den Haag, Groningen, Nijmegen, Rotterdam, Scheveningen, Valkenburg and Zandvoort; all have an age limit of 'over 18' (passports must be shown).

**Shopping:** Special purchases include Delft (between The Hague and Rotterdam) blue pottery and pottery from Makkum and Workum, costume dolls, silverware from Schoonhoven, glass and crystal from Leerdam and diamonds from Amsterdam. Shopping hours: Mon 1100-1800; Tues-Fri 0900-1800; Sat 0900-1700. In Amsterdam, Rotterdam and other big cities, supermarkets are open from 0800-2000/2100. In large city centres, shops are open Sun 1200-1700. Shopping malls are also open on Sunday. Some cities also have late-night shopping on Thursdays or Fridays.

**Note:** Bulbs and plants may not be exported except by commercial growers, or by individuals with a health certificate from the Plant Disease Service. A reasonable number of bulbs for own personal use are allowed.

## Business

**Economy:** GDP: \$606.7 billion. (OECD, 2004). Main exports: Machinery and equipment, chemicals, fuels and foodstuffs. Main imports: Machinery and transport equipment, chemicals, fuels, foodstuffs and clothes. Main trading partners: EU countries (mainly Germany, France, UK and Belgium). **ECONOMY:** The Netherlands has a typical developed European economy. It is also the world's third-largest exporter of farm produce (after the USA and France), accounting for 16 per cent of total export earnings. Dairy products, meat, vegetables and flowers are the main products. Industry is concentrated in petrochemicals and plastics, pharmaceuticals, synthetic fibres and food processing. There is also a wide range of light industries, including the manufacturing of electronic goods, although the historically strong textiles has been in long-term decline. By contrast, The Netherlands has developed a strong base in advanced technological industries including computing, telecommunications and biotechnology. Deposits of natural gas (the only mineral resource of any size) meet much of the country's energy needs. Service



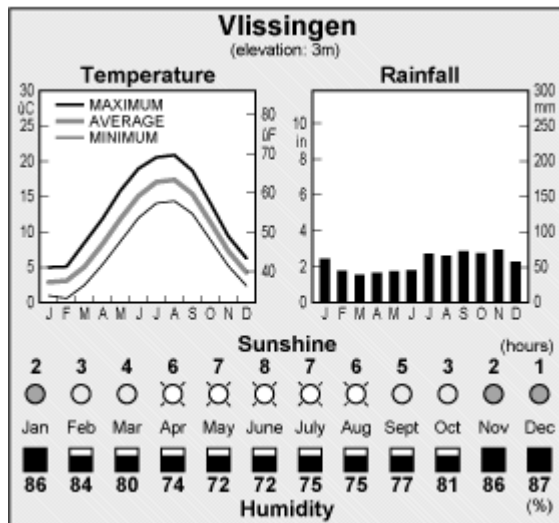
industries are also important representing 70 per cent of the economy, notably transport through the world's busiest container port at Rotterdam. The Netherlands has derived substantial benefits from its membership of the EU, with whose members the bulk of its trade takes place. It has generally been a strong proponent of further economic integration within Europe and joined the Eurozone upon its inception in January 1999. In 2003, the government was forced to increase taxes and cut spending in order to stay within the limits imposed by Maastricht criteria which govern the operation of the Eurozone. The global economic slow-down which took hold in 2001 reduced annual GDP growth to 1.5 per cent, and in the following year to just 0.2 per cent. In 2003, the Dutch economy contracted but in 2004 growth improved to 1.2 per cent. Inflation has declined from 5.1 per cent in 2001 to its present level of 1.25 per cent; unemployment has climbed gently to 6.75 per cent. The Netherlands is a founder member of the Benelux Economic Union and of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Appointments are necessary and visiting cards are exchanged. The Dutch expect a certain standard of dress for business occasions. Best months for business visits are March to May and September to November. Practical information can be obtained from the Economic Information **Service in The Hague** (tel: (70) 379 8933; website: [www.hollandtrade.com](http://www.hollandtrade.com)). The majority of Dutch businesspeople speak extremely good English, and promotional literature can be disseminated in English. However, interpreters can be booked through Conference Interpreters, Jan van Goyenkade 11, NL-1075 HP Amsterdam (tel: (20) 625 2535; website: [www.conferenceinterpreters.com](http://www.conferenceinterpreters.com)). Alternatively, they can be booked through The Netherlands Chamber of Commerce in the country of departure. (There are Netherlands-British Chambers of Commerce in London, Manchester and The Hague, and Netherlands-US Chambers of Commerce in New York and Chicago.) There are also many secretarial agencies in The Netherlands, such as International Secretaries, who will be able to supply short-term help to visiting business travellers. The principal venue for trade fairs is the RAI Exhibition Centre in Amsterdam. Office hours: Mon-Fri 0830-1700. The largest conference and exhibition centres are RAI in Amsterdam and the Jaarbeurs in Utrecht. There are smaller centres in The Hague, Rotterdam and Maastricht, as well as many hotels with facilities. The fourth-largest conference centre in The Netherlands is Noordwijk, where the largest hotel has a helipad; this small seaside town has won prizes for its clean beaches. Amsterdam and The Hague both have business centres. For further information, contact The Netherlands Board of Tourism in London (see Top Things To Do).

**Commercial Information:** The Hague Chamber of Commerce and Industry Koningskade 30, 2502 LS Gravenhage, The Hague, The Netherlands Tel: (70) 328 7100. Website: [www.denhaag.kvk.nl](http://www.denhaag.kvk.nl) Amsterdam Chamber of Commerce and Industry De Ruijterkade 5, 1000 CW Amsterdam, The Netherlands Tel: (20) 531 4000. Website: [www.amsterdam.kvk.nl](http://www.amsterdam.kvk.nl) The Netherlands Chamber of Commerce Imperial House, 7th floor, 15-19 Kingsway, London WC2B 6UN, UK Tel: (020) 7539 7960. Website: [www.nbcc.co.uk](http://www.nbcc.co.uk) The Hague Convention Bureau (Information on Conferences/Conventions) PO Box 85456, 2508 CD The Hague, The Netherlands Tel: (70) 361 8888. E-mail: [conventionbureau@spdh.net](mailto:conventionbureau@spdh.net)



## 10 CLIMATE



Mild, maritime climate. Summers are generally warm with changeable periods, but excessively hot weather is rare. Winters can be fairly cold with the possibility of some snow. Rainfall is prevalent all year.

**Required clothing:** European according to season, with light- to mediumweights worn in warmer months and medium- to heavyweights in winter. Rainwear is advisable all year.

## 11 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

**History:** Since the early Middle Ages, the region of the Low Countries had not only established itself as one of the most prosperous parts of Europe but also, paradoxically, as one of the most politically unstable. At various times, the ambitions of both the kings of France and the Holy Roman Emperors threatened to annexe the region, although neither was powerful enough to permanently subdue the proud municipalities, which had grown up during the medieval period, largely as a result of the wool trade. By the early 16th century, imperial influence had gained the upper hand; the Low Countries had become, partly through dynastic ties, annexed to the far-flung empire of the Hapsburgs. It was against Hapsburg rule that the largely protestant northern provinces of the Low Countries, led by William of Orange and Nassau, rebelled in 1568. The struggle for independence, which lasted until 1648, also saw a remarkable growth in Dutch sea power (a phenomenon never satisfactorily explained by historians), as many Spanish and Portuguese possessions in the New World and the East Asia were seized. The 17th century, the so-called 'Golden Age', also witnessed a flowering of art and culture, which placed the tiny but rich country at the forefront of European culture. In 1689, William III of Orange also became King of England, although the association was severed on his death in 1702. During the 18th century, the power of The Netherlands was on the wane and it was absorbed into Napoleon's empire in 1810. Subsequently, the whole area of the Low Countries was briefly reunited (1814-30). In 1848, the constitution was amended, leaving the monarch only limited powers. The Netherlands took no part in World War I but suffered badly as a result of the Nazi invasion of 1940. Post-war Dutch diplomacy has concentrated on increasing European unity. These efforts culminated in 1957, when The Netherlands became one of the six founder members of the



European Community. In the second half of 1991, the Dutch held the Presidency of the EC and were responsible for organising the crucial summit at Maastricht in December 1991, which was set up to decide the future of EU integration in economic and monetary policy, as well as other areas. By and large, the Dutch are enthusiastic Europeans and the EU is the main focus of Dutch foreign policy. Interests further afield are largely concerned with former colonial possessions in the Caribbean (the Dutch Antilles, Surinam) and the East Indies. Domestic politics for much of the post-World War II period have been dominated by the customary Western European blend of conservative and social democratic governments, frequently in coalition. The two leading parties are the centre-right Christen-Democratisch Appel (Christian Democrat Appeal, CDA) and the social-democratic Partij van de Arbeid (Labour Party, PvdA). The centrist Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (People's Freedom and Democracy, VVD) often joined one or the other of the pair, to form a coalition government. Various other political groupings occasionally have registered strong electoral showings and managed minor representation in government. These include the ecologist Green Party, the radical Democraten 66 (D66) and, most recently, the List Pim Fortuyn, which emerged at the election of May 2002. Taking its name from its charismatic leader, Pim Fortuyn, the List campaigned on a far-right anti-crime, anti-immigration platform. This struck a chord with a disillusioned electorate and coincided with the resurgence of the far right throughout Western Europe. At the poll, List Pim Fortuyn emerged as the second-largest party and entered government in coalition with the CDA. However, during the campaign, Fortuyn himself was assassinated. A common feature of European far-right parties is the influence of a single dominant personality which guarantees the party's cohesion for example, Jean-Marie Le Pen of the French Front Nationale, or Jorg Haider, leader of Austria's Freedom Party and a propensity for self-destructive internal feuding. Once in office, without Fortuyn, the List almost immediately fell apart, causing the collapse of the government. New elections were called. Held in January 2003, the CDA was returned as the largest party; it now governs in coalition with VVD and D66 with CDA party leader Jan Peter Balkenende as premier. The List Pim Fortuyn was reduced to a handful of seats but it has left its mark on Dutch politics in the form of a hardening of the official attitude towards immigrants and asylum seekers.

**Government:** The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral multiparty legislature: the First (Lower) Chamber has 150 members, elected for a four-year term; and the Second (Upper) Chamber has 75 members, indirectly elected by provincial councils for the same length of term.

#### Travel Advice

Most visits to The Netherlands are trouble-free but you should be aware of the global risk of indiscriminate international terrorist attacks, which could be against civilian targets, including places frequented by foreigners. This advice is based on information provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK. It is correct at time of publishing. As the situation can change **rapidly, visitors are advised to contact the following organisations for the latest travel advice:** British Foreign and Commonwealth Office Tel: (0845) 850 2829. Website: [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk) US Department of State Website: <http://travel.state.gov/travel>

#### Top Things To See & Do

**The Netherlands is rightly known as 'the land of bicycles':** around 15 million Dutch people regularly travel by bicycle and there are an estimated 12 million cycles in use. The popularity of cycling is perhaps mainly due to the country's geography: distances between the cities are short and the countryside is almost totally flat, except for a few rolling hills in the east and south (the highest of which is a mere 321m/1053ft). Not surprisingly, cycling facilities are outstanding and there are approximately 17,000km (10,625 miles) of special cycling lanes and



paths available. Detailed cycling maps (recommended) can be obtained for every province from local tourist information offices; as well as indicating cycling routes and tracks, the maps provide route descriptions and guides. Cycling lanes are recognisable by a round blue sign with a white bicycle in the middle. Most itineraries are circular routes, starting and ending at the same place. The province of Gelderland has the highest number of marked cycling routes. Landscapes vary from spectacular dunes (on the Duinroute in the north of the country) to wilderness and forests (on the route across the Hoge Veluwe nature reserve in the Gelderland Valley). Long-distance routes (such as the 270km-/169mile-North Sea route LF1 between the Belgian border and the northern Dutch town of Den Helder) are also available. Bicycles can be hired virtually everywhere and a list of local hire companies is available from The Netherlands Board of Tourism (see Tourist Information). The Netherlands Railways also offer bike-rental vouchers, which can be bought at railway ticket offices. Vouchers can be used at bicycle depots at over 100 train stations throughout the country. Over 300 stations offer the facility to take bicycles onto the train. The classic Dutch upright single-speed hub-brake bicycle is the most frequent, but other types of bicycles (including mountain bikes, children's bicycles and tandems) are also available. In The Netherlands, walking holidays are also very popular; the 300km- (188mile-) long coast has a number of scenic walks through sand dunes and nature reserves. Visitors can obtain maps with walking routes from the Foundation for Long Distance Walks (Stitching Lange-Afstand-Wandelpadsen), PO Box 846, 3800 AV Amersfoort (tel: (33) 465 3660). Visitors can also join the annual six-day walking event (beginning of August), where participants walk from Hook of Holland to Den Helder. At Wadden Sea National Park (Europe's largest continuous national park), there is also the opportunity to take part in various types of mud walking trips on the bottom of the Wadden sea, whose shallows fall dry at low tide. Party hard in Amsterdam, justifiably famous for its nightlife. Within a few blocks, well-heeled couples idle away an evening in a canal-side gourmet restaurant, and a group of backpackers stumble across the cobbles after a night in a cheery pub, as just around the corner the local trendies pose their way through an evening in a new-style bar. Then there is the Opera House, the string of concert venues, the football stadium, some of Europe's best nightclubs and the jazz cafes, to name a few other nocturnal pastimes in Amsterdam. And, of course, there are the seedier ways to spend an evening, either exploring the infamous coffee shops of a city where soft drugs are not only allowed, but are sold over the counter, and the Red Light District, a nefarious playground where all sorts of lowlife mingle with the curious and the downright seedy. Wherever tourists spend their evening, there is the same relaxed, live-and-let-live ambience of a city where almost anything goes. See the pretty canals of Amsterdam, the capital of The Netherlands (though not the seat of Government), and one of Europe's great destinations, as popular with tourists as it is with businesspeople. Amsterdam's lifeblood is water, which courses through the city in a concentric network of canals and waterways spanned by more than 1000 bridges. As Amsterdam is inextricably linked with water, one of the most attractive ways of viewing the city is on a canal tour. Many of the houses date back to The Netherlands' golden age in the 17th century. These narrow-fronted merchants' houses are characterised by the traditionally Dutch ornamented gables. The oldest part of the city is Nieuwmarkt, located near the first canals Herengracht, Keizersgracht and Prinsengracht built to protect the city against invasion. In the 17th century, Amsterdam gained a reputation for religious tolerance, which attracted thousands of Flemish, Walloon and French Protestants, as well as Jewish merchants from Spain, Portugal and Central Europe. In towns such as Giethoorn in the province of Overijssel, small canals take the place of streets, and all transport is by boat. The Netherlands provide a veritable feast for those artistically-inclined. In conjunction with The Netherlands having produced many great cultural figures, including artists such as Rembrandt and Van Gogh, Amsterdam alone boasts 53 museums, 61 art galleries, 12 concert halls and 20 theatres. A special canal boat (the 'museum boat') links 20 of the major museums. A special Museum Pass entitles holders to free entry to over 400 museums is available from participating museums and local tourist offices. One of the city's cultural Meccas is the Rijksmuseum, a voluminous art gallery that is home to the works of many of the country's artistic luminaries, as



well as numerous European masters. The highlight for many visitors is Dutch master Rembrandt's epic Night Watch, though the list of the gallery's treasures is almost endless. Van Gogh is also celebrated throughout the city, with the Rembrandt House Museum, housed in the historical building where the great artist used to live and work. The Stedelijk Museum of Modern Art, a collection of Dutch and international art from 1850 onwards, includes works by Cézanne, Chagall, Monet and Picasso, as well as photography, video, film and industrial design. Throughout The Netherlands are frequent markets, ranging from farmer's produce to knick-knacks. Amongst the best include a famous cheese market at Waagplein, open every Friday from mid-April to mid-September and another famous cheese market at Gouda, 20km (12 miles) southeast of Rotterdam. See The Netherlands' many tulips; most spectacular glimpses of these flowers can be seen in Haarlem, 20km (12 miles) west of Amsterdam. Haarlem's surrounding countryside affords a fine view of the bulb fields from the end of March to mid-May. The town itself has a beautiful 16th- and 17th-century town centre and two fine museums. There is also a famous Flower Auction in Aalsmeer, open weekday mornings, the Keukenhof Gardens, which have a lily show in late May, and the renowned fruit trees of Boskoop, which is especially delightful during the blossom season. There are also some spectacular flower markets in Amsterdam, such as the famous Bloemenmarkt along the Singel canal, which is a major tourist attraction. Delft and Utrecht also have lovely flower markets. Dutch flower bulbs are available for sale but it is essential to make sure the vendor sells them with an official export certificate. There are also various colourful flower parades (corso), notably the Bollenstreek flower parade (the country's biggest). Many parades display spectacular flower 'floats' made of hyacinths, daffodils and dahlias. The Floriade, held every 10 years in The Netherlands, is one of the world's most famous flower exhibitions. Last held in 2002 (from mid-April to mid-October), the city of Haarlemmermeer hosted this prestigious horticultural event. Visitors may also visit one of the country's unique flower auctions, such as the Flower Auction Holland near The Hague and Rotterdam in the Westland. Explore the many churches of Utrecht, a city that is a favourite destination with the Dutch, offering Amsterdam's charms on a smaller scale without the tourist hordes that fill the capital for much of the year. During the Middle Ages, Utrecht was often an imperial residence, and the city's bishops regularly played an important role in the secular affairs of Europe. The city's prosperity allowed the construction of its beautiful churches, which include, in particular, the Cathedral of St Michael (13th century), St Pieterskerk and St Janskerk (both 11th century) and St Jacobkerk (12th century). The best way to explore Utrecht is by canal boat, which takes visitors on a loop of the city that opens up its different districts. See the seat of the Dutch government, home to over 60 foreign embassies, the International Court of Justice and the capital of the province of Zuid-Holland: The Hague. The central part of the Old Town is the Binnenhof, an irregular group of buildings surrounding an open space. Walking around the old parts of town is a joy in itself the local tourist office publishes a map that opens up the city and also includes most of the many antique shops in The Hague. The Parliament Buildings and Knight's Hall are 13th-century buildings where there are regular tours and slide shows that illuminate their history, while the Royal Cabinet of Paintings, housed in the Mauritshuis, is a collection that includes the Anatomical Lesson of Dr Tulp by Rembrandt, and other 17th-century Dutch works. Watch the windmills of Kinderdijk, which can be visited during the week. Leiden, 20km (12 miles) northeast of The Hague, 40km (25 miles) north of Rotterdam, was not only the birthplace of Rembrandt, a famous weaving town during the Middle Ages, and a large-part player in the wars of independence against Spain in the 16th century, but also boasts one of the most charming windmills in the country, set in a park overlooking water. If you decide to explore The Netherlands' maritime history, your first stop should be Rotterdam. Rotterdam is Europe's largest and, indeed, the world's second-largest, port and is the hub of the Dutch economy, but it is now also emerging as a tourist destination in its own right. Much of the city was obliterated during World War II, and only small parts of the old city remain. The best place to get an idea of the city layout is from the viewing level of the Euromast & Space Tower, which at 185m (605ft) is the highest point in The Netherlands. Rotterdam's pride in its maritime heritage is on show at the



Maritiem Museum Prins Hendrik, where outdoor and indoor exhibits include ships, barges, harbour cranes and marine archaeological artefacts. Regular boat tours also now take tourists around the city's abundance of channels and waterways. Boat tours (Spido) through the harbour of Rotterdam are available throughout the year. In the summer, there are excursions to Europoort, the Delta Project, as well as evening tours, and there are also luxury motor cruisers for hire. A drive through the harbour of Rotterdam is also possible; the 100 to 150km (60 to 90 mile) journey takes in almost every aspect of this massive harbour. The route passes wharves and warehouses, futuristic grain silos and loading equipment, cranes and bridges, oil refineries, powerstations and lighthouses, all of which create a skyline of awesome beauty, particularly at sunset. The docks, waterways, canals and ports-within-ports are interspersed with some surprising and apparently incongruous features; at one point the route passes a garden city built for shipyard workers, while further on there is a village and, at the harbour's westernmost point, a beach. A visit to Rotterdam harbour is recommended. Other interesting places to visit include the 17th-century houses in the Delfshaven quarter of the city; the Pilgrimskerk; collections of maps and seacharts at the Delfshaven Old Town Hall; many traditional workshops for pottery, watchmaking and woodturning. Rotterdam has also become something of a Mecca for designers and architects, who have flocked to the city to take part in its massive rebuilding programme, and their work is often showcased both in the buildings they create and also in temporary exhibits. Today, the waterfront is increasingly being transformed into a leisure oasis. See the largest Cathedral in the country, St Jan's Cathedral in 's-Hertogenbosch (non-Dutch speaking visitors will welcome the use of 'Den Bosch' as a widely accepted abbreviation). Visit the province of Zeeland's several medieval harbour towns, where some of the best seafood in Europe can be found. Most of the province lies below sea level and has been reclaimed from the sea. The region also includes several islands and peninsulas in the southwest Netherlands (Walcheren, Goeree-Overflakkee, Schouwen-Duiveland, Tholen, St Filipsland and North and South Beveland). The small town of Veere, 8km (5 miles) to the north, retains many buildings from its golden age in the early 16th century. The North Sea port of Flushing (Vlissingen) is, for many British travellers arriving by boat, their first sight of The Netherlands. It is also the country's first town in another sense; in 1572 it became the first place to fly the free Dutch flag during the War of Independence.

**Tourist Information:** Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions (NBTC) in the UK PO Box 30783, London WC2B 6DH, UK Tel: (020) 7539 7950 or (09068) 717 777 (brochure line; calls cost 60p per minute). Website: [www.holland.com/uk](http://www.holland.com/uk) Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions (NBTC) in the USA 355 Lexington Avenue, 19th Floor, New York, NY 10017, USA Tel: (212) 370 7360. Website: [www.holland.com](http://www.holland.com)

## Overview II

The Netherlands has almost dispelled the notion of simply being an archaic land of clogs and windmills with its string of exciting conurbations, including the cosmopolitan capital, Amsterdam one of Europe's great cities. Even towns such as Eindhoven, The Hague, Utrecht and Rotterdam are instilled with a genuine buzz. Away from the cities, the idyllic land of windmills and tulips still exists in the bucolic splendour of the countryside, as do a number of stunning medieval towns and beach resorts on its wide swathe of coastline. The Netherlands is renowned for being unremittingly flat, but this does have its advantages, providing excellent terrain for cycling and walking, plus opening up sweeping, vast skies that celebrated painters past and present of which The Netherlands boasts many - have sought to capture on canvas. Essentially, what The Netherlands offers is high culture in low land. Amsterdam alone enables you to delve through centuries of history aboard a canal boat or explore an exhaustive array of museums and galleries. The Netherlands' roots in the arts stem from the 17th century, the so-called 'Golden Age', which placed this tiny but rich country at the forefront of European culture. The gaining of the upper



hand by imperial influence and the annexing of The Netherlands to the far-flung empire of the Hapsburgs in the 16th century resulted in the rebellion of the largely Protestant northern provinces of the Low Countries, led by William of Orange and Nassau this struggle for Independence would last until 1648. This was compounded by a remarkable growth in Dutch sea power, as many Spanish and Portuguese possessions in the New World and the East Asia were seized. This reached its acme in 1689 when William III of Orange became King of England - although the association was severed on his death in 1702. William III of Orange's death portended The Netherlands' 18th century wane and its eventual absorption into Napoleon's empire. The whole area of the Low Countries was briefly reunited (1814-30) and, in 1848, the constitution was amended, leaving the Monarch only limited powers. The Netherlands took no part in World War I but suffered badly as a result of the Nazi invasion of 1940. Post-war Dutch diplomacy has **concentrated on increasing European unity**: the Dutch are enthusiastic Europeans and the EU is the main focus of Dutch foreign policy. Although recent years have seen bad publicity surrounding the rise and murder of far-right politician Pim Fortuyn, in 2002, and increased public debate about tighter immigration controls (somewhat denting the city's reputation for tolerance), The Netherlands in particular, Amsterdam is still a haven for many nationalities, sexualities and radically different political and religious persuasions. It also just happens to be incredibly exciting, enchanting and interesting.

#### Communications

**Telephone:** Full IDD is available. Country code: 31 (followed by 20 for Amsterdam, 10 for Rotterdam and 70 for The Hague). Telephone information is given in French, English and German. There is a cheaper rate from Mon-Fri 2000-0800. Calls can be made from public booths or post offices. Most booths only accept cards, which can be bought at post offices, VVV offices, and shops displaying the PTT-telephone card poster; and, sometimes, coins.

**Mobile telephone:** Roaming agreements with many international mobile phone companies. Coverage is good.

**Internet:** Internet is available; there are many Internet cafes and some Internet access centres. Business centres also provide public access. Using the Internet is very straightforward in Amsterdam, where PCs are available free of charge in libraries and public buildings.

**Post:** Stamps are available from all post offices as well as from tobacconists and kiosks selling postcards and souvenirs. Mail within Europe takes approximately five days. Post office hours: Mon-Fri 0900-1700. Some post offices in major towns are also open on late shopping nights (Thursday or Friday night) and Sat 0900-1200/1230. There are all-night post offices in Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

**MEDIA:** The Dutch have a unique approach to public broadcasting. Programmes are made by a variety of groups, some reflecting political or religious currents in society, others representing interest groups. These organisations are allocated airtime on TV and radio, in line with the number of members they have. The TV market is very competitive, with many private stations also currently flourishing. The Dutch also have one of the highest cable take-up rates in Europe. Every province has at least one local public TV channel. Freedom of press and free speech is guaranteed by the constitution. Newspaper ownership, however, is highly concentrated, and most titles are broadsheets. Press: The main newspapers are NRC Handelsblad (an evening paper), De Telegraaf, Trouw and De Volkskrant. Foreign newspapers are widely available. TV: NOS oversees the country's three national public networks; RTL operates commercial channels, as does SBS. Radio: NOS oversees public radio stations, including news and information station



Radio 1, music network Radio 2, pop station 3FM and cultural station Radio 4. Radio Netherlands is an international broadcaster.