

Introduction

The Dutch aren't bogged in their clichés, even though bikes, dykes, windmills and blazing flower fields are pretty much the norm outside the major cities. Do as the locals do – grab a bike and explore.

One of the chief pleasures of the Netherlands is its lively contrast between pragmatic liberalism and the buttoned-up just-so primness of a culture founded on Calvinist principles. In Dutch society, ostentation is anathema and fuss of any kind is regarded as undignified.

The locals are friendly and speak excellent English, but the towns are still surrounded by canals and castle walls, the endlessly flat landscape which inspired the nation's early artists still stretches unbroken to the horizons, and the dykes still occasionally threaten to give way.



Destination Facts

Full country name: Kingdom of the Netherlands

Population: 16,105,000

Area: 41,526 sq km

Capital city: Amsterdam (population 725,000)

People: Over 95% of the population are Dutch (Germanic and Gallo-Celtic stock); most of the rest are Indonesian, Surinamese or Moroccan

Languages: Nederlands, Frisian, English

Religion: 60% Christian (Roman Catholic and Protestant), 3% Muslim. Nearly 40% of the Dutch say they have no religious affiliation.

Government: Constitutional Monarchy

Queen: Beatrix van Oranje Nassau

For more information, check out Lonely Planet's range of Europe books (<http://shop.lonelyplanet.com>).

Activities

If it involves water, frozen or not, you'll find scores of enthusiasts doing it in the Netherlands. Other activities aided by flat land – biking and walking – are naturals and part of the national image. Skaters of both the inline and the ice variety will find plenty of opportunities for a quick skim, especially after a hard winter when canals freeze over.

Contents

Introduction	1
Activities	1
Public Holidays	2
Spectator Sports	2
Events	2
Culture and Life	2
School Life	3
Practicalities	4
Money	5
Communications	5
Shopping	5
Your Well-Being	6
Resources	7
Luggage	7
About Home	8
Gifts from Oz	8
Important Information	8

'School was great. It gave me the opportunity to quickly learn Dutch, make friends, and also travel to Barcelona, Spain, for a week on excursion! My host family and I were a perfect match from the first day. My three host siblings became like real brothers and sisters to me and also helped greatly with my language development.'
(Andrew Sward – The Netherlands 2002)