

# Friesland (Fryslân)



For some, Friesland (Fryslân in Frisian) is the crowning glory of the Netherlands. Covering the country's northwestern corner, it has much that attracts visitors to this tiny nation – sandy beaches, flat, green open spaces, water sports galore, and a town or two with a rich historical past.

If this is all you're here to see, then enjoy. But this kind of attitude is only selling Friesland, and the Frisians, short. Scratch the surface and you'll soon discover that the locals, and the landscape, differ subtly from the rest of the country. For starters, there's the language: it's closer to Old English than Dutch, but you'll struggle to understand a word. Then there's the strong sense of self-reliance: even by Dutch standards, the Frisians are an independent, stoic bunch. The land itself is also a curious anomaly: they didn't just have to build dykes to protect their land, they had to build the land itself. North Friesland segues into the Waddenzee so subtly that, aeons ago, it was hard to tell whether you were plodding through watery mud or muddy water.

Far and away the biggest drawcard of Friesland is its four islands. These long slivers of sand and soil attract thousands by the boatload, drawn by the chance to find a pocket of island bliss away from the crowded mainland. Vlieland offers a semblance of civilisation and acres of remote sand dunes, while its neighbour Terschelling is by far the most developed, and yet still manages to pack in kilometres of lonely cycle and walking paths. Ameland is a hybrid of the two, and Schiermonnikoog stands aloof, its serene ambience intact even in the height of tourist season.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the enthralling museums and quiet back streets of **Leeuwarden** (p232)
- Take to the water around **Sneek** (p235) – whether it be fresh, salty, in it, or on it
- Kick back in **Hindeloopen** (p237), a coastal town where you can't help but relax
- Combine a cycling trip through sand dunes and farmland on **Terschelling** (p240) and **Ameland** (p241)
- Find your little piece of island solitude on **Vlieland** (p239) and **Schiermonnikoog** (p242)



## FRIESLAND



## History

Having dredged their home out of the Waddenzee armload by armload, the Frisians are no strangers to struggling with their natural environment.

Farming, fishing and nautical know-how (the building, repair and maintenance of ships) have been the area's principal activities for centuries, and in the prerepublic era made Friesland one of the wealthiest regions in the Netherlands. The Frisians became integrated further into Dutch society – not entirely willingly – in 1932 when the Afsluitdijk (Barrier Dyke; p175) opened, closing the Zuiderzee. This provided better links to Amsterdam and the south but was devastating for small fishing villages, who suddenly found

themselves sitting beside a lake. The province has, however, recently reinvented itself and is currently enjoying a revival as a domestic holiday destination.

## Language

Frisians speak Frisian, which is actually closer (in some ways) to German and Old English than Dutch; there's an old saying that goes 'As milk is to cheese, are English and Frise'. The majority of Frisians are, however, perfectly conversant in mainstream Dutch.

Most people who have lived in the region for a significant time will speak some Frisian, although you're more likely to hear Frisian coming from the mouths of older residents than younger people's. Don't worry if you

can't make head nor tail of it – even the Dutch have difficulty deciphering Frisian. You'll usually see written examples, such as street signs. You might, for example, see the word 'Snits', which is the Frisian version of Sneek, the region's second city.

A ruling in 2002 officially altered the spelling of the province's name from the Dutch 'Friesland' to 'Fryslân', the local version of the name.

## Getting There & Around

The capital, Leeuwarden, is easily reached by train from the south, from where trains can be caught to the coastal towns of the southwest, the port of Harlingen in the west, and Groningen in the east. The rest of the province requires more patience, but can be reached by bus; day passes (€12.80), available on buses, cover the entire region, and after 9am Monday to Friday and all weekend, journeys only cost €1. Cycle paths crisscross Friesland.

By car is also a good way to explore the entire province; the quickest route from Amsterdam is over the Afsluitdijk.

## LEEWARDEN (LJOUWERT)

☎ 058 / pop 90,500

Most tourists to Friesland head directly for the islands, but the majority pass through Leeuwarden, the province's capital. Therefore many see the city only as a transit point, which is a pity, as this laid-back, pretty town is worth an overnight stop, if only to explore its superb trinity of museums. A night here will also allow time to wander its peaceful old streets, and sample some northern hospitality, something easily found in its welcoming bars and clubs.

## Orientation

The old town is compact and easily traversed on foot. Much of the commercial life is on or near the network of canals that wind through the centre.

## Information

Leeuwarden is dotted with ATMs; for those arriving by train and needing cash, there's a couple located to the right as you exit the station.

**Library** (☎ 234 77 77; Wirdumerdijk 34; internet per hr €2; ☎ 12.30-5.30pm Mon & Thu, 10am-1pm & 5.30-9pm

Tue & Fri, 10am-5.30pm Wed, 10am-1pm Sat) Overlooks a canal and has a string of internet terminals.

**Post office** (☎ 213 09 98; Oldehoofsterkerkhof 4; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-1.30pm Sat)

**Tourist office** (☎ 234 75 50; www.vvleeuwarden.nl; Sophialaan 4; ☎ noon-5.30pm Mon, 9.30am-5.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Stocks loads of information on the province, has free internet access, and books accommodation for €1.75 per person.

**Van der Velde** (☎ 213 23 60; Nieuwestad NZ 57) Bookshop with a smallish but decent selection of English-language and travel books.

## Sights

Most of Leeuwarden's sights are concentrated within a leisurely 10-minute walk of Nieuwestad, predominantly on the northern side (Nieuwestad NZ) of the water.

## FRIES MUSEUM

This museum (☎ 255 55 00; www.friesmuseum.nl; Turfmarkt 11; adult/child €5/2; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun), Leeuwarden's biggest, is wonderful and concentrates on the history of Friesland from the time when locals began the necessary task of mud-stacking. Spread over two historic buildings, the Kanselarij, a 16th-century courthouse, and the Eysinghaus, a mansion from the late 1700s, it's a place to spend a couple of hours.

The huge collection of silver items – long a local speciality – is spectacular, as are the 19th-century period pieces. There is also a section on the efforts by locals to resist the Nazis, a sorrowful examination of the life of Mata Hari (see the boxed text, p234), a kids' corner to balance things up, and temporary exhibitions of young contemporary artists from across Europe.

## PRINCESSEHOF MUSEUM

Pottery lovers will adore the **Prinsessehof Museum** (☎ 294 89 58; www.prinsessehof.nl; Grote Kerkstraat 11; adult/child €6/3; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun), the official museum for ceramics in the Netherlands. Here you'll find the largest collection of tiles on the planet, an unparalleled selection of delftware, and works from around the globe – its Japanese, Chinese and Vietnamese sections are world class. Temporary exhibitions also come and go on a regular basis.

## NATUURMUSEUM FRYSLÂN

Even the most brow-beaten parent should let their lovely angels run rampant in the **Natuurmuseum Fryslân** (☎ 233 22 44; www.natuur

museumfryslan.nl; Schoenmakersperk 2; adult/child €5/4; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun), Leeuwarden's revamped children's museum. This well-planned, interactive museum is an engaging experience for all ages, concentrating on Friesland's flora and fauna. Highlights include spooky Captain Severein's collection of curiosities and a virtual bird-flight simulation (strap yourself into the hang-glider harness and away you go), but nothing tops the basement; here you can take in an underwater lake-scene from a fish's perspective, complete with duck bums, boat bottoms and cow snouts.

The museum's café, which occupies the inner courtyard, is topped by a glass roof, making it lovely and warm even on a cold day.

## OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Just past the west end of Bagijnestraat, the off-balance **Oldehove** dominates its unfortunate spot on the Oldehoofsterkerkhof parking lot. Things went wrong shortly after the tower was started in 1529 and it started to lean severely when it was only 40m high. While by no means a Leaning Tower of Pisa, it must still be quite worrying for the neighbours. It was closed at the time of writing due to the parking lot overhaul; check with the tourist office for opening times.

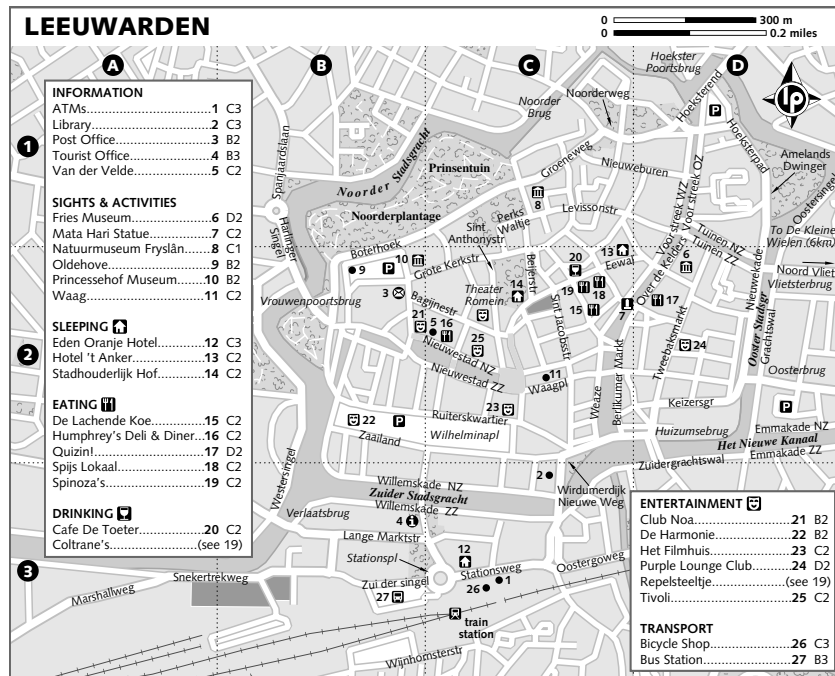
The petite **Waag** dominates Waagplein, and is now surrounded by stores. It was the weigh-house for butter and other goods from 1598 to 1884.

## Sleeping

Leeuwarden isn't swamped with accommodation options, but there's variety enough to suit everyone's tastes. For B&Bs at around €20 per person, try the tourist office.

**Stadhoudershof** (☎ 216 21 80; www.stadhoudershof.nl; Hofplein 29; r €105-285; ☎ ) The plain façade of the Stadhoudershof belies the plush interior of this one-time royal home. Inside, the red-carpeted stairwells lead to basic rooms, which have a semblance of elegance, and sumptuous suites, where those with a decadent streak can satisfy their needs.

**Hotel 't Anker** (☎ 212 52 16; www.hotelhetanker.nl; Eewal 73; s/d from €26/60) This simple hotel is a fine bet for those just looking for a bed and a clean room to rest their tired tourist bones. It's surprisingly quiet as well, considering the ground floor contains a lively bar, and a string of restaurants and bars are only a quick stroll down the street.



## MATA HARI

Had she been born a few decades later, Leeuwarden's own Gertrud Margarete Zelle probably would have been given a TV chat show. Instead, the irrepressible Margarete ended up a martyr to salacious legend.

Margarete was born in 1876. Her wealthy family fell apart in her teens, so she married and moved to Indonesia. By 1902 the marriage was on the rocks and they were back in Leeuwarden. She left her husband and child and moved to Paris, where she changed her name to Mata Hari (Malaysian for 'sun') and began a career as a dancer, achieving fame with her erotic, naked act.

Her affairs and dalliances were legendary. She favoured rich men in uniform, and when WWI broke out she had high-ranking lovers on both sides. Things inevitably became tricky; French officers persuaded her to spy on her German lovers, and German officers managed to do the same. This web of intrigue was not helped by her keen imagination, and mistrust began to rise from both sides.

In 1917, at age 40, she was arrested by the French for spying. There was a dubious trial, during which none of her former 'pals' offered any assistance – probably out of embarrassment – and later that year she was sentenced to death and shot.

Fortunately Margarete/Mata Hari is still – in a manner of speaking – alive and well in Leeuwarden. Her **statue** as a sultry dancer can be found on a bridge over the canal close to her birthplace at Over de Kelders 33, and the Fries Museum has a large and detailed exhibit on her life. The residence where Margarete spent much of her childhood, Grote Kerkstraat 212, currently lies empty awaiting its next incarnation.

**De Kleine Wielen** (☎ 0511-43 16 60; De Groene Ster 14; camp site €10.50) Centred on a small lake some 6km east of the city off the N355, De Kleine Wielen is a pleasant, green camping ground suitable for families and nature lovers. Bus 10 and 51 pass close to the camp; ask the driver to let you off at De Skieppepoel, from where it's a five-minute walk south.

**Eden Oranje Hotel** (☎ 212 62 41; infooranjehotel@edenhotelgroup.nl; Stationsweg 4; r €55-125; 🏠) Directly opposite the train station, this business hotel has grand common spaces and comfy, highly functional rooms with a smidgen of charm. Book early to receive substantial discounts.

## Eating

**our pick Spinoza's** (☎ 212 93 93; Eewal 50-52; mains €10-17; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This large eatery attracts all walks of life with its hearty dishes, convivial atmosphere, and one thing the Dutch love above all – dim lighting. The menu features regional specialities (stews are a particular favourite), plenty of vegetarian options, and a kids' section. The private courtyard is an oasis over summer.

**Quizin!** (☎ 216 76 70; Over de Kelders 24; mains €13-20; 🍴 dinner Tue-Sat) With its warm browns and reds, attentive staff, and relaxed (but not laid-back) air, Quizin! is a fine place to enjoy an evening meal. Dishes, which loosely fall under the modern European cuisine moniker, are

prepared with care by chefs who enjoy a quick chat with their customers.

**Spijs Lokaal** (☎ 216 22 14; Eewal 54; mains €15-20; 🍴 dinner Mon-Sat) It's easy to see Spijs has nothing to hide; its chefs are on full view from the street, busily preparing what some class as the finest food in Leeuwarden. The modern European fare on the ever-changing menu is often so popular that reservations are highly recommended.

**De Lachende Koe** (Laughing Cow; ☎ 215 82 45; Grote Hoogstraat 16; mains €10-14; 🍴 dinner Tue-Sun) Covering the ground floor of three connecting houses, The Laughing Cow is an enormous place that amazingly fills up with ease. The atmosphere is more pub- than restaurant-like, but everyone seems to enjoy the hefty servings from the meat-heavy menu, although we're not sure many cows find this particularly amusing.

**Humphrey's Deli & Diner** (☎ 216 49 63; Nieuwestad NZ 60; mains from €10; 🍴 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) A chain restaurant with a surprising amount of charm, a small library, filling meals, and all manner of sauces, jams and pickles for purchase.

## Drinking

For such a small city, Leeuwarden has an excellent selection of drinking establishments. Two with more energy than most are:

**Café De Toeter** (☎ 215 79 76; Kleine Hoogstraat 2) A fine place to start the evening; expect a

warm welcome, bubbly vibe, chatty locals and a bartender who knows the meaning of good service.

**Coltrane's** (Eewal 50-52; 🍴 Wed-Sun) Below Spinoza's, this is a perfect bar to end the evening in; cavelike, with grungy corners, friendly staff, progressive tunes, and a 25-to-35 crowd.

## Entertainment

A concentration of bars, clubs and coffee-shops can be found around Doelsteeg, Kleine Hoogstraat and Grote Hoogstraat. Thursday night is 'students night' where many places offer 10 beers for €10; proving your status as a student doesn't seem a prerequisite to receive such a deal though.

**Repelsteeltje** (Grote Hoogstraat 44) If ever there was a coffeeshop to calm the fears of those tempted to try pot for the first time, this is it. Next door to Spinoza's and covering three floors of a lovely corner house, Repelsteeltje has the look and feel of a normal coffee house, a chatty owner, regular DJs and a distinct absence of paranoia.

**De Harmonie** (☎ 233 02 33; www.harmonie.nl; Ruiterskwartier 4) De Harmonie satisfies Leeuwarden's desire for highbrow entertainment by hosting an array of theatre performances, both mainstream and fringe.

**Tivoli** (☎ 212 38 87; Nieuwestad NZ 85) unspools an interesting line-up of art-house and festival films, as does **Het Filmhuis** (☎ 212 50 60; Ruiterskwartier 6).

Clubs worth checking out for a night's frivolity:

**Purple Lounge Club** (☎ 216 01 20; www.purpleclub.nl; Tweebakmarkt 49) Club-restaurant with a very purple, very eclectic décor, DJs, live bands and a healthy local following.

**Club Noa** (www.club-noa.nl; Nieuwestad NZ 63-65) Big, bold, brash club attracting pretty young things with its sexy red interior, *Saturday Night Fever* dance floor and thumping music.

## Getting There & Around

Leeuwarden is at the end of the main train line from the south; it's also the hub for local services in Friesland. Lockers can be found on platform eight. Fares and schedules:

Destination	Price (€)	Duration (min)	Frequency (per hr)
Amsterdam	25.70	160	2
Groningen	8.30	50	2
Utrecht	23.50	145	2

Buses are to the left as you exit the train station, and a **bicycle shop** (☎ 213 98 00) is to the right. The latter stays open as late as 2am over the summer months.

## AROUND LEEUWARDEN

The N357, which connects Leeuwarden with the Ameland ferry port at Holwerd, 23km north, passes some of the oldest settled parts of Friesland – an excellent route for driving or riding.

At Ferwerd, 6km southwest of Holwerd, watch for a road northeast to **Hogebeintum**, which is 3km off the N357. You'll soon see the highest *terp* (mud mound) in Friesland with a lovely old church perched on top. There are some good displays explaining the ongoing archaeological digs.

## SNEEK (SNITS)

☎ 0515 / pop 32,900

'All Frisians know how to sail, and all Frisians know how to fish', so the saying goes. This is certainly true of the residents of Sneek, but then again, they have no choice in the matter; the IJsselmeer is close at hand, as are an abundance of canals and rivers, and the town is the gateway to the Frisian Lakes. If you're seriously interested in improving your sailing technique, there are generations of expertise concentrated around here.

## Information

**Library** (☎ 42 30 23; Wijde Noorderhorne 1; internet per hr €2; 📖 1.30-8pm Mon & Thu, 10.30am-8pm Tue, 10.30am-5.30pm Wed & Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat) Has internet access.

**Main post office** (Martiniplein 15A) In the heart of town.

**Tourist office** (☎ 41 40 96; www.vvvsneek.nl; Marktstraat 18; 📖 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat) Has long lists of boat rental and charter firms, sailing schools and more, and shares its office with the ANWB.

## Sights & Activities

You won't find many conventional sights here in Sneek, given its overwhelming bias towards the water. The **Waterpoort** dates from 1613 and is the former gateway to the old port. Its twin towers are local landmarks. Across from the tourist office, the **town hall** (Marktstraat 15) is an excellent example of the breed. The town's best museum, the **Fries Scheepvaart Museum** (☎ 41 40 57; Kleinzand 14; adult/child €3/1; 📖 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun), is a maritime museum focusing on local seafaring life.

## Sleeping & Eating

The tourist office has lists of local rooms from around €20 to €25 per person.

**De Domp Camping** (☎ 41 25 59; www.dedomp.nl; Domp 4; camp site €12.50) This lush camp site is about a 20-minute walk from town; follow the signs for the *zwembad* (public swimming pool). It's very well organised and there are some sites for hikers that are well away from the vehicles.

**De Wijnberg** (☎ 41 24 21; Marktstraat 23; s/d €54/74) Directly opposite the tourist office is this standard hotel, with basic rooms that are spartan and clean, and more expensive varieties with bathtub. The restaurant-pub on the ground floor is often lively and convivial.

**Cafe De Draai** (☎ 42 28 66; Wijde Noorderhorne 13; mains €10; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat). Sneek isn't wallowing in fine restaurants, but there are a few spots along Wijde Noorderhorne which will do, including this cheap and cheerful café, which has a relaxed vibe, a barrel-load of beer varieties, and daily specials.

## Getting There & Around

From the train station (which now sports a model train museum), the centre of town is a five-minute walk along Stationstraat. Trains to/from Leeuwarden cost €4 (20 minutes, two per hour).

The friendly staff at **Rijwielhandel Twa Tsjillen** (☎ 41 38 78; Wijde Noorderhorne 8; per day €5) rents bikes.

## HARLINGEN (HARNs)

☎ 0517 / pop 15,600

Of all the old Frisian ports, only Harlingen has kept its link to the sea. It still plays an important role for shipping in the area, and

is the base for ferries to Terschelling and Vlieland.

Harlingen has also managed to retain a semblance of its architectural history; much of the attractive centre is a preserved zone of pretty 16th- and 18th-century buildings.

## Information

Several banks with ATMs can be found on Voorstraat, Harlingen's main street.

**Post office** (Grote Bredeplaats 6) Two hundred metres from the ferry terminal.

**Tourist office** (☎ 09005400001; www.vvv-harlingen.nl; Noorderhaven 50; ☺ 1-5pm Mon, 10am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat May-Oct, 10am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Nov-Apr) Offers brochures on the town and its surrounds, and will book accommodation.

## Sights & Activities

Harlingen is best enjoyed on foot. Stroll along the canals, especially Noorderhaven, with its many yachts, and Zuiderhaven.

The **Gemeentemuseum het Hannemahuis** (☎ 41 36 58; Voorstraat 56; adult/child €2.50/1; ☺ 1.30-5pm Tue-Sat Apr-Jun & Oct-Nov, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 1.30-5pm Sun Jul-Sep, closed Dec-Mar) is housed in an 18th-century building and includes material on Harlingen's past as a whaling town. Along with farming, whaling was one of the industries that made Friesland one of the most prosperous regions in the Netherlands in the 1700s. Hence the celebration of flensing and flensers – the process of stripping blubber from a whale's carcass, and the lucky chaps who got to do it.

## Sleeping

**Zeezicht Harlingen** (☎ 41 25 36; www.hollandhotels.nl; Zuiderhaven 1; s/d €60/87.50) Zeezicht may be part of a chain, but it's by no means generic. Rooms

### SNEEK'S WATERSPORTS BONANZA

Sneek is surrounded by water, and any activity associated with it – particularly if it involves wind, of which there is hardly ever a shortage – is big in Sneek.

Several sailing and windsurfing schools, where you can learn from scratch or top up existing skills, operate in the area. One of the largest is **Zeilschool de Friese Meren** (☎ 41 21 41; www.zfm.nl; Eeltjebaasweg 7), which has a range of courses. The tourist office has a long list of various operators and services available.

If you'd just prefer to watch sleek ships skip across the water, then sail into town around the beginning of August to catch **Sneekweek** (www.sneekweek.nl), the largest sailing event on Europe's inland waters. You'll be treated to plenty of racing activity and lots of frivolity.

During the summer months there are **boat cruises** on the local waters. The schedules change by whim, weather and number of operators each season. Most leave from the Oosterkade, at the end of Kleinzand, so either wander over or inquire at the tourist office.

### ATYPICAL ACCOMMODATION

For such a small town, Harlingen has some surprisingly unusual places to spend the night.

The **Havenkraan van Harlingen** (Haven; r €299), a crane turned hotel, is the easiest to book. Its one room is well above average and the sunset views from the small lounge will melt the hardest heart. Best of all, though, the crane still functions; you can turn it in any direction you wish.

A little harder to tricky to swing (with a few-months-long waiting list) is the **Reddingsboot Harlingen** (Noorderhaven; r €229). This former life boat – that's still good to go – offers plush (albeit small) rooms with stunning extras such as a classic wooden bathtub. It's also possible to push the boat out, literally – the owners can organise trips romantic and otherwise.

The most sought-after accommodation of all is the **Vuurtoren van Harlingen** (Havenweg 1; r €279). This, Harlingen's former lighthouse, has one stunning room with all manner of luxuries and nonpareil views, and – fortunately – the light no longer works. The catch is a two-year waiting list.

For more information on all three, check the website [www.vuurtoren-harlingen.nl](http://www.vuurtoren-harlingen.nl). Bookings can be made through the **Workum tourist office** (☎ 0515-54 05 50; bc@friesekust.nl; Noard 5).

are in great order, and some have views of the town's harbour, while the downstairs café-bar is comfortable and atmospheric and comes with a warm winter garden.

## Eating

**Restaurant Noorderpoort** (☎ 41 50 43; Noorderhaven 17; mains €17-25; ☺ lunch & dinner) Noorderpoort occupies a sunny spot on one of the town's canals, and has views of the ferry port. The casual menu mixes Dutch food with French flourishes. Otherwise try the sandwiches at the adjoining café.

## Getting There & Away

Harlingen is connected to Leeuwarden (€4.50, 22 minutes) by two trains hourly; most run directly to the harbour, from where it's a short walk to the ferry terminal. For ferry details to Vlieland and Terschelling, see p239 and p241 respectively.

## FRANEKER (FRJENTSJER)

☎ 0517 / pop 21,000

About 6km east of Harlingen, the quaint town of Franeker was once a big player in education, until Napoleon closed its university down in 1810. Today its well preserved centre makes for a fine hour's stroll, but Franeker's highlight is its planetarium.

The **Eise Eisinga Planetarium** (☎ 39 30 70; www.planetarium-friesland.nl; Eise Eisingastraat 3; adult/child €3.50/2.75; ☺ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 1-5pm Sun year-round, 1-5pm Mon Apr-Oct) is the world's oldest working planetarium. The namesake owner was a tradesman with a serious sideline in cosmic mathematics and astrology, who clearly could

have been a 'somebody' in the astronomical world. Beginning in 1774, he built the planetarium himself to show how the heavens actually worked. It's startling to contemplate how Eisinga could have devised a mechanical timing system built to a viewable working scale that could encompass and illustrate so many different variables of time and motion.

The Harlingen–Leeuwarden train stops in Franeker (from Leeuwarden €3.30, 17 minutes, two hourly), 500m from the centre.

## HINDELOOPEN (HYLPEN)

☎ 0514 / pop 1100

Huddled up against the banks of the IJsselmeer, Hindeloopen has been set apart from Friesland for centuries. Until recently, the local women still wore characteristic green and red costumes that were similar to the also characteristic hand-carved furniture.

With its narrow streets, tiny canals, little bridges, long waterfront, and lack of traffic, Hindeloopen makes for a beautiful afternoon escape. In extraordinarily cold winters it is one of the key towns on the route of the Elfstedentocht (see the boxed text, p238) and has a quaint yet reverent museum devoted to the race.

Other coastal towns in the area worth a peek, if you have time, are pretty Makkum and busy Workum; both towns are north of Hindeloopen.

## Information

The staff at the **tourist office** (☎ 52 25 50; Nieuwstad 26; ☺ 10.30am-4pm Mon, Wed & Sat) can help with accommodation. For banks and supermarkets, you'll have to go 4km north to Workum.

### A DAY AT THE RACES

Skating and the Dutch culture are interwoven and no event better symbolises this than the **Elfstedentocht** (Eleven Cities Race; [www.elfstedentocht.nl](http://www.elfstedentocht.nl)). Begun officially in 1909, although it had been held for hundreds of years before that, the race is 200km long, starts and finishes in Leeuwarden and passes through 10 Frisian towns (11 including Leeuwarden): Sneek, IJlst, Sloten, Stavoren, Hindeloopen, Workum, Bolsward, Harlingen, Franeker and Dokkum. The record time for completing the race is six hours and 47 minutes, set in 1985.

While it is a marathon, what makes the race a truly special event is that it can only be held in years when it's cold enough for all the canals to freeze totally; this has only happened 15 times since 1909. The last time was in 1997. So how do you schedule such an event? You don't.

Instead, there is a huge Elfstedentocht committee that waits for the mercury to plummet. When it looks as though the canals will be properly frozen, 48 hours' notice is given. All work effectively ends throughout the province as armies of volunteers make preparations for the race, and the thousands of competitors get ready.

On the third day, the race begins at 5.30am. The next few hours are a holiday for the rest of the Netherlands as well, as the population gathers around TVs to watch the live coverage.

### Sights & Activities

Hindeloopen is best experienced at a slow pace. If, however, you need a diversion, head for the **Het Eerste Friese Schaatsmuseum** (☎ 52 16 83; [www.schaatsmuseum.nl](http://www.schaatsmuseum.nl); Kleine Weide 1-3; adult/child €1.50/1.15; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun) which focuses on the Elfstedentocht and ice skating in general. The detailed descriptions, pictures and displays of manufacturing techniques and developments in skating technology through the centuries – including clogs with spikes – is quite enthralling, as is the history of the Elfstedentocht.

The race is covered in biographical summaries for each winner of the event, and current record holder and two-time champ Evert van Benthem (in 1985 and '86), a modern-day legend, receives plenty of coverage.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Camping Hindeloopen** (☎ 52 14 52; [www.campinghindeloopen.nl](http://www.campinghindeloopen.nl); Westerdijk 9; camp site €19.50) To the south of the town behind the protective dyke is this large camping ground, with beach access, windsurfing school, and restaurant on site.

**De Stadsboerderij** (☎ 52 12 78; [info@skutsje arrangements.nl](mailto:info@skutsje arrangements.nl); Nieuwe Weide 9; s/d €45/70) With comfy rooms in a quiet corner of town, De Stadsboerderij can guarantee a peaceful night's sleep. There's also a restaurant-pub next door, with photos of boats sailing the IJsselmeer at uncomfortable angles.

There's a sprinkling of restaurants and cheap fried-fish places overlooking the town's harbour.

### Getting There & Away

The train stop is a pleasant 2.5km walk from town. There is an hourly service to Sneek (€3.70, 18 minutes) and Leeuwarden (€6.70, 40 minutes).

### FRISIAN ISLANDS

Friesland's four islands – Vlieland, Terschelling, Ameland and Schiermonnikoog – are collectively known as the Frisian Islands. Despite the fact that they're basically raised banks of sand and mud (with plenty of introduced pine forests to stabilise them), they are a popular target for many city-bound Dutch (and a fair few Germans too) looking to escape the crowds and enjoy a rural beach holiday during the warmer summer months.

Each of the islands has been developed with tourism in mind, and the number of *pensions*, hotels, and rooms and cottages for rent is staggering, considering the islands' size. Despite the development, all have large open spaces where you can get close to the sea grasses or the water itself. Any of the islands makes an interesting trip on its own and there are copious bicycle-rental options near the ferry ports. Paths suitable for hiking and biking circle each of the islands and, away from the built-up areas, you're rewarded with long sandy beaches on the seaward sides.

In summer the islands are very crowded, so don't just show up and expect to find a room; populations routinely multiply by 10 on warm weekends.

### Getting There & Away

Almost daily ferries link the islands with the mainland. Island hopping is, however, a bit of a headache, even in the busy summer months.

**Rederij Doeksen** (☎ 44 20 02; [www.rederij-doeksen.nl](http://www.rederij-doeksen.nl)) links Vlieland and Terschelling throughout the year, but times change on a frequent basis; it's best to consult the online timetable before making solid plans. Day trips are possible, but you'll have to catch the earliest ferry, although you're better off spending a couple of nights enjoying the island atmosphere.

### Vlieland

☎ 0562 / pop 1200

Historically the most isolated of the islands, Vlieland is still ignored by most tourists today. It's a windswept and wild place, with much of its western end at the mercy of sand and sea, but this is part of its charm. The sole town, Oost-Vlieland, is small, and only residents are allowed to bring cars across on the ferry.

### INFORMATION

The **tourist office** (☎ 45 11 11; [www.vlieland.net](http://www.vlieland.net); Havenweg 10; internet per hr €6; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1hr after each ferry arrival Sat & Sun) is as helpful as ever, and has internet access.

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

There's not much in the way of human-made attractions on Vlieland, and that's exactly the point: nature is the attraction. Most of the 72 sq km of island lies waiting to be explored by bike or on foot, although its 18km of beaches aren't as much fun to cycle as the untamed interior. Depending on how fit you consider yourself, cycling around Vlieland can be gen-

tle or moderately gruelling; there are many unsealed tracks that confident 'off-roaders' can opt to tackle, opening great new sightseeing possibilities.

For nature hikes and bird-watching walks, consult the tourist office.

### SLEEPING & EATING

You will certainly not starve on Vlieland, but the range of eateries on the island is quite small. Sleeping options are another story, although over the summer months, and on sunny weekends, be sure to book ahead.

**Camping Stormemelk** (☎ 45 12 25; [www.stormemelk.nl](http://www.stormemelk.nl); Kampweg 1; camp site per person/tent €5.70/4.40) Stormemelk is a typically beachy camp site, with little wind protection but close proximity to sandy beaches and introduced forest. There's a small restaurant, playground and shop on site.

**Pension Hotelletje de Veerman** (☎ 45 13 78; [www.pensiondeveerman.nl](http://www.pensiondeveerman.nl); Dorpsstraat 173, Oost-Vlieland; s/d from €40/60) Veerman is very much a homy *pension*, with friendly owners and cosy communal areas. The rooms are basic and filled with mismatching furniture, but they're fine if you're just looking for a bed for the night.

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

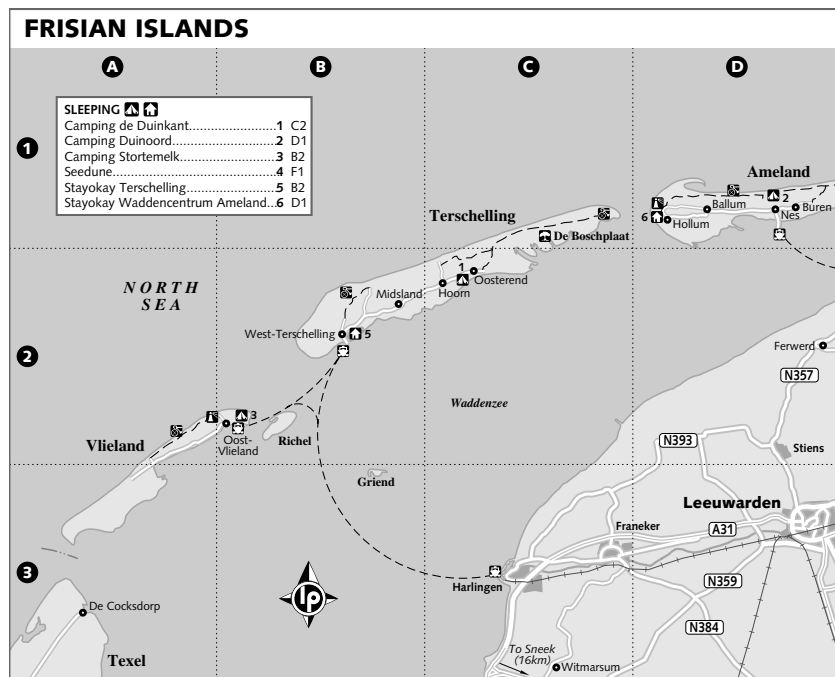
Regular ferries (return adult/child €20.85/10.95, bicycle €10.85) to Vlieland, which leave from Harlingen, take approximately 90 minutes and generally depart at 8.45am, 1.30pm and 7.30pm daily from May to September; in the winter months, there's a 2.30pm sailing Wednesday to Monday, and sometimes an extra one at 9am. A fast service (return adult/child €24.80/14.90), taking around 45

### SHIPWRECKED SHOES

Terschelling and its residents are used to all manner of flotsam and jetsam washing up on its northerly beaches, but beachcombers on the morning of 10 February 2006 were treated to an unusual sight, even for these parts – thousands upon thousands of shoes.

The previous night the P&O ship *Mondriaan* was hit by a particularly nasty storm and lost a load of containers overboard. The currents took the booty – which consisted not only of shoes but also briefcases, toys and meat – directly to Terschelling's beaches. Most containers remained sealed, but some had spilled a purported 100,000 pairs of shoes into the North Sea. News soon spread of the veritable goldmine, and locals rushed to find a pair of hiking boots and trainers that would fit (which, when hunting through 200,000 shoes, isn't that easy).

Such a find is a rarity, however – prior to this, the last good opportunity for beachcombing occurred around 15 years ago. But you may still be able to get in on the action; some B&B owners managed to collect dozens of pairs and will sell them to guests (no questions asked, of course) for as little as €5.



minutes direct and 90 minutes via Terschelling, also operates from Harlingen; it's very irregular, so check the timetable online before making plans. Ferries also sail to nearby Texel over the summer months; see Texel (p170) for more details.

You can cycle (bike hire around €6) around the island, and there is also a little bus that wanders the few roads of Oost Vlieland.

### Terschelling

☎ 0562 / pop 4800

At 110 sq km, Terschelling is the largest of the Frisian Islands; it's also the most visited and commercial. Its small villages, of which West-Terschelling is the largest, are strung out along the southern edge of the island, while its northern coast is all sand dunes and white beaches. The eastern end of the island is a wild and isolated place, and perfect for escaping the crowds.

The smaller villages of Hoorn and Oosterend are east of West-Terschelling and much less commercial, but closer to the very pretty natural parts of the island. Like the other islands, cars are best left on the mainland.

### INFORMATION

The **tourist office** (☎ 44 30 00; www.vv-terschelling.nl; Willem Barentszkade 19A, West-Terschelling; internet per hr €6; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) is incredibly helpful, with a great range of maps for cycling or walking (around €3.40). They will book hotels and *pensions* for €7.50.

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

**De Boschplaat**, a huge car-free natural reserve at the eastern end of the island, is the highlight of the island. It is the only EU-designated European Natural Monument in the Netherlands.

The **Terschelling Museum 't Behouden Huys** (☎ 44 23 89; www.behouden-huys.nl; Commandeurstraat 30-32; adult/child €3/2; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1-5pm Sat Apr-Oct, also 1-5pm Sun mid-Jun-Sep, closed Oct-Mar) covers the island's maritime past.

### FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The annual **Oerol** outdoor performance festival on Terschelling is revered nationwide as a perfect excuse for going offshore. It started years ago with farmers letting their cows run loose one day each year (hence the name *oerol*, which means 'everywhere' or 'all over') –



these days, *everybody* gets into the spirit of things. It's a wild, arty party, piercing the otherwise unflappable northern façade for 10 days towards the end of June.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Camping de Duinkant** (☎ 44 89 17; camp sites per person/tent €3.20/2.75) This basic camping ground at the eastern end of the main road is just a farmer's field, with no cooking facilities. It is, however, lovely and remote, with nothing but green pastures and sand dunes as neighbours.

**Stayokay Terschelling** (☎ 44 23 38; terschelling@stayokay.com; Burg van Heusdenweg 39, West-Terschelling; dm/s/d €25/45/66) Just outside West Terschelling's borders, this suitably standard Stayokay hostel has rooms in good nick, a small restaurant, and a kids' playground.

**Hotel Buren** (☎ 44 22 26; Mentzstraat 20, West-Terschelling; s/d €50/60) On a quiet street in the heart of West-Terschelling is Buren, a welcoming little B&B. Its rooms are spotless and bright, with personal touches like heart-shaped sinks.

Also recommended:

**Zeezicht** (☎ 44 22 68; Willem Barentszkade 20, West-Terschelling; mains €12-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) Views

of the sea and harbour, large scale tall-ship models, and plenty of seafood specials.

**De Heeren Van Der Schelling** (☎ 44 87 80; Oosterend; mains €11-20; ☎ lunch & dinner Thu-Mon) One of the quietest spots on the island in peaceful Oosterend, with a large sun-drenched patio.

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

Ferries (return adult/child €20.55/9.85, bicycle €10.85) leave from Harlingen for Terschelling and are operated by **Rederij Doeksen** (☎ 44 20 02; www.rederij-doeksen.nl). The large car ferries take two hours and generally depart at 9.45am and 3pm daily, with an extra couple of services in July and August. The faster hydrofoil service (return adult/child €24.50/13.80) takes around 45 minutes and normally sails at 7.30am, 11.15am and 4.30pm from May to October, and 10am, 4.30pm and 6.20pm November to April.

Hourly buses (day-ticket €5) run the length of the main road; bicycles can be hired for as little as €4.50, and some bicycle rental places will also deliver bikes to the ferry, and transport your luggage to your accommodation.

### Ameland

☎ 0519 / pop 3600

If the Frisian Islands were given personalities, Ameland would be the person sitting on the fence. Its four peaceful villages – Buren, Nes, Ballum and Hollum – are less developed than those on Terschelling and Texel, but they provide enough social structure for the majority of tourists. Its large swaths of untouched natural splendour offer places to escape the crowds, but Mother Nature doesn't rule the roost as on Schiermonnikoog or Vlieland.

All in all, Ameland is an island for those looking for a nice balance.

### INFORMATION

The island's main **tourist office** (☎ 54 65 46; www.vv-ameland.nl; Rixt van Doniastraat, Nes; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) is seven minutes' walk, or one bus stop, from the ferry terminal. It has plenty of information on the island, including an excellent map (€3.75), and internet access (per hour €3), but doesn't book B&Bs.

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

At only 85 sq km in size, Ameland is easily tackled by pedal power. **Bicycle paths** cover the

entire island, and include a 27km bicycle path that runs almost the entire length of northern shore just south of protective sand dunes. The eastern third of the island is given over to a combination of wetlands and dunes, with not a settlement in sight; it's by far the best place to take time out for yourself.

Of the villages, the 18th-century former whaling port of **Nes** is the prettiest and most carefully preserved (although all are interesting for a brief stroll), its streets lined with tidy little brick houses. **Hollum**, the most western village, has windswept dunes within easy walk, and is in sight of a famous red and white **lighthouse** (adult/child €3.50/2.50; ☎ 10am-5pm & 7-9pm Tue-Sat, 1-5pm & 7-9pm Sun) with expansive views.

### SLEEPING & EATING

All four villages have accommodation options, although Nes is the most convenient, being a hop, skip and a jump from the ferry port.

**Stayokay Waddencentrum Ameland** (☎ 55 53 53; ameland@stayokay.com; Oranjeweg 59; dm/s/d €25/45/66) This Stayokay establishment is 200m west of the lighthouse outside Hollum. The atmosphere is decidedly summer-camp, rooms are basic but in great condition, and sand dunes are literally outside the doorstep. Meals, pack lunches and bicycles can also be ordered.

**Zeewinde** (☎ 54 65 00; www.zeewinde.nl; Torenstraat 22, Nes; r from €75) It may be a Best Western, but Zeewinde has just as much character as most hotels on the island. Its brand new rooms are neither large nor small, but do include a kitchenette and bathtub, which is welcome relief after a day on a bike (which can be rented from reception).

**Camping Duinoord** (☎ 54 20 70; Jan van Eijckweg 4; camp site/car €12.40/1.50) This camp site is only 2km north of Nes, right near the beach. It's exposed to the wind and has very few facilities, but shops, restaurants and an expansive playground (ie the beach) are all close by.

**Herberg De Zwaan** (☎ 55 40 02; Zwaneplein 6; mains €16-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) De Zwaan is a quaint restaurant in the heart of Hollum and has a menu heavily laden with fish dishes, which is always a good sign for an island eatery. The building dates from 1772, which equates to wood-beam ceilings and plenty of arches.

### GETTING THERE & AROUND

**Wagenborg** (☎ 54 61 11; www.wpd.nl; adult/child return €11.25/5.95, bicycle €7.45, car €75.85) operates ferries between Nes and the large ferry port at Hol-

werd on the mainland. The latter has a large parking area for people who sensibly forgo taking cars to the island. The ferries run almost every two hours (45 minutes) all year from 7.30am to 7.30pm, hourly on Friday and Saturday from June to August.

To reach the Holwerd ferry terminal from Leeuwarden, take bus 66 (40 minutes, hourly); a ticket covering this bus, the ferry and a bus ride on the island, can be purchased at the Leeuwarden train station (p235) for €23.10.

Taxis and a small network of public buses that serve the island's four towns meet the ferries. Bicycles can be rented all over the island.

### Schiermonnikoog

☎ 0519 / pop 1000

The smallest and most serene of the Frisian Islands, Schiermonnikoog is the place to get away from it all; the feeling of sheer isolation as you move through Schiermonnikoog's 40 sq km, or along the 18km of beaches, can be quite moving. Its name means 'grey monk island', a reference to the 15th-century clerics who once lived here; however all traces of these folk are gone and the island is mostly wild. The Dutch government made Schiermonnikoog a national park in 1989, so the wilderness should remain unfettered.

The island's sole town, Schiermonnikoog, is quiet, even when crowded. Nonresidents are not allowed to bring cars onto the island.

### INFORMATION

The **tourist office** (☎ 53 12 33; www.vvvschiermonnikoog.nl; Reeweg 5; internet per hr €3; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sat) is in the middle of town and can fill you in on all you need to know about the island.

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The sights and activities on the island revolve around one thing – the great outdoors. The best idea is to grab a map, rent a bike, pack a picnic, and head off in any direction that takes your fancy. You'll come back pleasantly refreshed and ready to face the crowds back on the mainland.

If you require a little more information, head for the national park's **visitors centre** (☎ 53 16 41; Torenstreek 20; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 1.30-5.30pm Sat Nov-Mar) in an old power station in town. It reveals the natural features of the island.

The island is the most popular destination for *wadlopers*, or 'mud-walkers' from the mainland (p251).

### SLEEPING & EATING

Schiermonnikoog has very few hotels and B&Bs, but plenty of bungalows and apartments; cafés line the few streets of downtown Schiermonnikoog.

**Seedune** (☎ 53 13 98; www.schiermonnikoog.net/seedune; Seeduneweg 1; camp site per person/tent €4.10/2.90) Just north of town, this huge camp site (room for 800 tents) is, as expected, sandy, windswept and isolated, which for many will be absolutely perfect.

**Pension Lulu** (☎ 53 13 06; www.pensionlulu.nl; Langestreek 70; r per person €28.50) Lulu is a quiet, family

*pension* with simple, comfortable rooms. Each room has a sink, but the toilet and shower is shared with other guests.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Wagenborg** (☎ 09004554455; www.wpd.nl; adult/child return €11.85/6.55, bicycles €7.45) runs ferries between Schiermonnikoog and the port of Lauwersoog in Groningen province. At least three ferries daily make the 45-minute voyage; the first sails at 6.30am, the last at 5.30pm. A bus meets all incoming ferries, which arrive at the island's port, for the 3km run into the town of Schiermonnikoog.

Bus 163 and bus 50 make the one-hour run to Lauwersoog five times daily from Groningen and Leeuwarden respectively.

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