

Groningen & Drenthe



The provinces of Groningen and Drenthe are far from the tourist trails. Few visitors venture this far north, and if they happen to, choose the islands of Friesland for entertainment instead. This is all well and good, but it's also a shame, for they're missing out on the Netherlands' rural heart, a place where traditions are kept alive, and remnants of prehistoric residents dot the landscape.

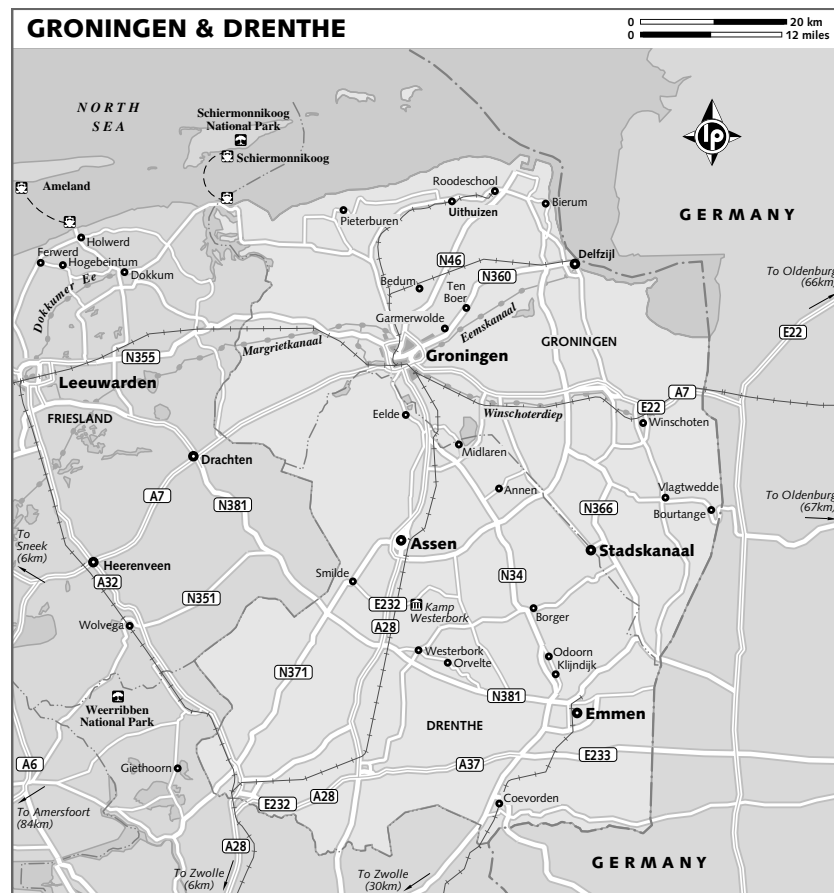
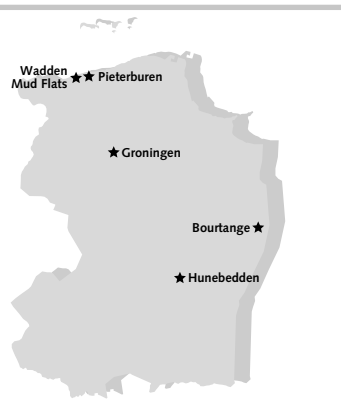
Groningen may be the smaller of the two provinces, but it has the most going for it. Its capital, from which the region gained its name, is a delightful city with a cosmopolitan buzz and plenty of youthful energy (mainly due to its substantial student population). Museums, restaurants, bars, theatre, canals, festivals – you name it, the city has it. It's the centre of culture and entertainment in the north and aptly represented by the tourist office's bright orange G-spot logo.

The rest of Groningen province – a rural landscape blessed with a handful of intriguing attractions – is in sleepy contrast. In Pieterburen, even the hardest of hearts will empty their wallets in support of the Zeehondencreche, a refuge for sick seals. The town is also the base for the bizarre pastime of *wadlopen* (mud-walking). Bourtange, on the eastern border to Germany, makes the shortlist for 'Best Fortified Town in the Land'; its hefty defences are just as forbidding now as they were in the 16th century.

Drenthe is an agricultural province, no question. Paddocks of farmland are separated by pockets of woodlands, creating a peaceful environment meant for slow exploration; the only disturbance is the occasional whiff of 'farm' smells. Drenthe's biggest draw is its *hunebedden*, prehistoric rock masses purportedly used as burial chambers, but the likes of Orvelte, a village with one foot firmly planted in the 19th century, will also interest many travellers.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Experience northern culture at its best in the museums, cafés, bars and clubs of vibrant **Groningen** (opposite)
- Join a **wadlopen** (p251) excursion and stomp out a muddy trail on the Wadden mud flats
- Support the seal-rescuing efforts of Pieterburen's **Zeehondencreche** (p250)
- Walk the fortified ramparts of 16th-century **Bourtange** (p251)
- Wonder at the **hunebedden** (p253), mighty stone constructions left behind by our long-dead ancestors



GRONINGEN

Like Utrecht, Groningen is a small province named after its primary city. Beyond the buzzing town itself, farmland dominates the landscape in every direction, but among the polders, cows and sheep are a few attributes worth seeking out. If mud, mud and more mud is your thing, then the northern coast will appeal, though the scenery is best near the German border around the fortified town of Bourtange.

GRONINGEN CITY

☎ 050 / pop 177,300

Looking at a map of the Netherlands, Groningen seems a long way from anywhere (we're

talking Dutch distances here, not Texan), but looks can be deceiving.

This vibrant, youthful city of the north is very much part of the comings and goings of the country, and has everything you'd expect of a progressive metropolis. Its student population (which has been around since 1614 when the university opened) of 20,000 ensures a healthy and hedonistic nightlife exists alongside the art museums, theatre and classical concerts its more mature, established residents demand. And like everywhere in this waterlogged country, you'll find gabled houses reflected in still canals.

Orientation

The old centre, which can be crossed on foot in 15 minutes, is nicely compact and

entirely ringed by canals. The train station is just across from the Groninger Museum, and around a 10-minute walk from Grote Markt, the main town square. Virulent anticar policies dating from the 1970s mean that the centre is pleasantly free of traffic.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Scholtens Wristers (☎ 317 25 00; Guldenstraat 20; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon, 9.30am-6pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat, 9.30am-9pm Thu) Large selection of English novels and travel titles on the ground floor.

INTERNET ACCESS

Library (☎ 368 36 83; Oude Boteringestraat 18; per hr €2; ☎ 1-8pm Mon, 10am-6pm Wed & Fri, 10am-8pm Thu, 11am-4pm Sat, 1-4pm Sun) Main city library with lines of computers offering internet access.

LAUNDRY

Handy Wash (☎ 318 75 87; Schuitendiep 58; wash & dry €7; ☎ 7.30am-8pm) Small laundry in a row of cafés and bars; perfect for dropping off the washing and grabbing a coffee next door.

LEFT LUGGAGE

Lockers can be found on platform 2b at the train station.

MEDICAL SERVICES

UMCG (☎ 361 61 61; Hanzplein 1) Teaching hospital with the added bonus of an anatomy museum.

MONEY

ATMs can be found throughout town.

GWK (☎ 8am-7pm) Currency exchange; in the train station.

POST

Post office (☎ 313 63 75; Munnekeholm 1)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 09002023050; www.vvvgroningen.nl; Grote Markt 25; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat year-round, 11am-3pm Sun Jul & Aug) Offers advice on a wide range of topics and sells tickets, tours, a handy map (€2) and more.

Sights & Activities

GRONINGER MUSEUM

Arriving by train it's impossible to miss the **Groninger Museum** (☎ 366 65 55; www.groninger-museum.nl; Museumeland 1; adult/child €8/4; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun year-round, noon-5pm Mon Jul & Aug). Occupy-

ing three islands in the middle of the canal in front of the station, the museum is, at the very least, a schizophrenic structure that will draw an opinion from any viewer. However, opinions vary wildly, from a breathtaking venture in form and design, to statements along the lines of 'Why?'

This colourful, oddly shaped museum was the brainchild of architect Alessandro Mendini, who invited three 'guest architects' to each tackle a section. This explains why, to most, the museum has little consistency and appears thrown together at a whim. Inside, things are quite different though; bright, pastel colours add life to the large, square exhibition rooms, and natural light seeps in from all angles.

Originally intended as a permanent exhibition house for historical pieces, modern applied arts and other regional artworks, the museum hit a rough patch in 1998 when its entire lower floor flooded. Fortunately, some of the precious works were saved and now appear well above the water level in the bronze tower. The rest of the museum is devoted to temporary exhibitions, which, like the curatorial direction, are a wonderfully eclectic mix; you'll see anything from classic Golden Age Dutch paintings to futuristic installations and 10m-high photographic portraits.

NOORDELIJK SCHEEPVAARTMUSEUM

Well worth an hour or two, the **Noordelijk Scheepvaartmuseum** (Northern Shipping Museum; ☎ 312 22 02; www.noordelijkscheepvaartmuseum.nl; Brugstraat 24-26; adult/child €3/1.60; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 1-5pm Sun) is well funded and well organised. The museum is laid out over several floors of buildings that once comprised a 16th-century distillery. Just getting through the labyrinth of 18 rooms is an adventure in itself and guarantees an excellent workout.

Highlights of the museum include an intricately carved replica of the church at Paramaribo – the capital of former Dutch colony Surinam – in a bottle (Room 3), showing just how much time sailors had to kill on long voyages, and detailed models demonstrating just how the many local shipyards operated throughout the centuries (Room 8). After Room 8, there are three rooms devoted to the **Niemeyer Tabaksmuseum** (Niemeyer Tobacco Museum), which is dedicated to the smoking habits of the Dutch through the ages. Unsurprisingly, it looks as though some of the dummies aren't just toking on tobacco.



OTHER SIGHTS

The **Grote Markt** is a big, café-ringed square with little charm, but it does feature a few eye-catching buildings. The **town hall**, which dates from 1810, is one of them, but the 16th-century **Martinikerk** (☎ 311 12 77; Grote Markt; ☞ 11am-5pm Apr-Nov, noon-4pm Dec-Mar), at the northern corner of the Grote Markt, steals the show. Its tower, the Martinitoren, is 96m tall and is considered to have one of the most finely balanced profiles in the country. A climb (€3, purchase tickets at tourist office) to the top yields stellar views.

Just southwest of the Grote Markt, **Vismarkt** is a more intimate and attractive square, and not far south of Vismarkt is one of the few working **synagogues** (☎ 312 31 51; Folkingerstraat 60; adult/child €1/free) left in the country. It began life a century ago as a mosque (the light arches and minarets are dead giveaways) but now houses a school and temporary exhibition space; its beautifully restored wooden ceiling is one of the interior's highlights. Check Tourist Office for opening times.

If you're exploring the northeastern corner of the city, take a breather at the serene **gardens** (Tursingel; admission free; ☞ 10am-dusk) of **Prinsenhof**, a 16th-century mansion.

Tours

Canal tours (☎ 312 83 79; www.rondvaartbedrijfkoop.nl; adult/child €7.50/5) Tours of the city's largest canals take approximately 60 minutes and leave from in front of the train station anywhere between one and six times daily, depending on the season.

City walks (☎ 0900-2023050; adult €4; ☞ 1pm Mon-Sat) The tourist office operates guided 90-minute walks conducted in Dutch only.

Festivals & Events

Noorderslag (www.eurosonic.nl; mid-Jan) A series of concerts by up-and-coming (they hope) bands.

Noorderzon (www.noorderzon.nl; mid-Aug) Eleven-day art festival featuring everything from theatre and music to children's entertainers and electronic installations.

Bommen Berend (28 Aug) Celebration of the day the city repelled the invading troops of the Bishop of Munster.

Studenten Cabaret Festival (www.gscf.nl; end Oct) Draws performers from around Europe.

Sint Maarten (11 Nov) Locally grown sugar beets are carved into lanterns by kids, not unlike what their US counterparts do to pumpkins two weeks earlier for Halloween.

Sleeping

The tourist office will book accommodation and carries a list of B&Bs and pensions starting at €20 per person.

BUDGET

Hotel Garni Friesland (☎ 312 13 07; www.hotelfriesland.nl; Kleine Pelsterstraat; s/d €35/50) The Garni is bare bones, but it's in a good location on a street with several cafés and the prices are unbeatable. Service is friendly and amenable, and rooms are spartan yet highly adequate.

Stadspark Camping (☎ 525 16 24; www.stads-campings.nl; Campinglaan 4; camp site €18; ☞ mid-Mar-mid-Oct) Stadspark is a spacious, green camp site surrounded by a huge park, yet is within easy shot of the city. Facilities include a shop, restaurant and playground for the kids; from the train station, take bus 4 (direction: Hoogerkerk) about 3km west to the Stadspark stop.

MIDRANGE

City Hotel (☎ 588 65 65; www.edenhotelgroup.com; Gedempte Kattendiep 25; r from €75; ☞ ☑) This must be a good hotel – even the cleaners are happy. Rooms are standard business types, but they're a good bet for those requiring a few more creature comforts. Added bonuses include a rooftop deck, free coffee and tea on every floor, free internet and a fine location.

Martini Hotel (☎ 312 99 19; www.martinihotel.nl; Gedempte Zuiderdiep 8; r from €75; ☞ ☑) Like the City Hotel, the Martini is just far enough away from all the noise, yet close enough to provide easy access to the centre. Rooms are bright and airy, though lack character and warmth, but as this is Groningen's largest hotel, there are plenty of them.

Auberge Corps De Garde (☎ 314 54 37; www.corps-degarde.nl; Oude Boteringstraat 72-74; r from €121) Originally the town guard's quarters, the Corps De Garde is an attractive listed building, and would be one of the city's finest hotels if its rooms weren't so bland. They are, however, big and well-lit, and the more expensive variety come with a bath.

TOP END

Schimmelpenninck Huys (☎ 318 95 02; www.schimmelpenninckhuys.nl; Oosterstraat 53; d from €130; ☞ ☑) The Schimmelpenninck is Groningen's *grande dame*, and someone who likes to be draped in finery. The ground floor is occupied by a silver-service restaurant, pristine café, and beautician, while the rest of the building is

filled with rooms ranging from simple, stylish standard doubles to suites with antique pieces and chandeliers.

Eating

Groningen may be a student city, but it still has a sizable smorgasbord of fine restaurants; some of our favourites are listed below, but there are plenty more to explore. Those self-catering can head to the organic food market on Tuesday at Vismarkt, and those looking for a quick fix will find Gedempte Zuiderdiep lined with cheap fast-food places and cafés.

Goudkantoor (☎ 589 18 88; Waagplein 1; mains €12-20; ☞ ☑ lunch & dinner) To be honest, the quality of the food at Goudkantoor doesn't matter; the architecture of this recently restored historical haunt is sustenance enough. Dating from 1635, the 'Gold Office' is a classic example of 17th century showmanship, with a gold-tinted exterior and graceful interior, complete with striking paintings. Truth be told though, the food (Dutch standards) is quite good.

our pick De 7e Hemel (7th Heaven; ☎ 314 51 41; Zuiderkerkstraat 7; mains €15-18; ☞ ☑ dinner Tue-Sat) De 7e Hemel, a short walk north of the centre, prides itself on the quality of what it serves its customers; it even goes as far as to import Scottish mineral water direct from the Glens because of its purity. The menu, a concoction of vegan, vegetarian, fish and meat dishes, is an ever-changing delight, and the cherubs, chandeliers and calming yellow shades all help to create a cosy, romantic air.

Puur! Natural Food (☎ 311 61 75; Folkingerstraat 13; meals €3-7; ☞ ☑ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Puur! is health-food heaven; its bagels, sandwiches, salads and sweets are not only made from organic ingredients, they also taste divine. It's hard to pass over the coffee, tea and freshly squeezed juices on offer too, and everything is either eat-in or takeaway.

Four Rose's (☎ 314 38 87; Oosterstraat 71; mains €10-16; ☞ ☑ dinner) With the most authentic Mexican food in the province, and an atmosphere that amazingly suits both families and romantic couples, Four Rose's is an excellent bet for an evening meal. Its cocktails are highly rated too.

Ariola (☎ 318 19 48; Folkingerstraat 54; meals from €3.50; ☞ ☑ lunch) The head-turning smells wafting from its doorway, and crowds milling inside, speak of only one thing: Ariola is an outstanding little Italian deli. Its *broodjes* (filled bread rolls) are made to order and only topped by the home-made pastas and lasagne.

Brussels Lof (☎ 312 76 03; A-Kerkstraat 24; mains €17-22; ☞ ☑ dinner Thu-Mon) This upmarket spot concentrates on seafood and vegetarian creations, and leaves the fancy décor to other establishments. Its mussels receive special mention, but basically anything you try here will be of the highest standard, and the service is professional with a capital 'P'.

Also worth mentioning is **Ganny's** (☎ 318 91 117; A-Kerkhof NZ 43; apple tart from €1.60), which has the best apple tart to accompany a great cup of coffee or tea.

Drinking

Groningen's nightlife is centred on Poelestraat and its adjoining streets, although people flock to a multitude of bars scattered throughout the city.

O'Ceallaigh (☎ 314 76 94; Gedempte Kattendiep 13) Respected newspaper *Volkskrant* called O'Ceallaigh 'the best Irish pub in the Netherlands', and they were right; there's regular live music, even more regulars, Guinness and Murphy's on tap, and the atmosphere is thick with smoky and boisterous chatter.

Roezemoes (☎ 314 03 82; Gedempte Zuiderdiep 15) You can tell this gem of a brown café has been around a while; the bullet holes from the 1672 invasion attempt are a dead giveaway. Come evening, expect to find late-night drinking and the occasional blues band.

De Pintelier (☎ 318 51 00; Kleine Kromme Elleboog 9) The selection of beer and *jenever*s (ginlike liqueur) at this cosy bar reads like an encyclopaedia – at last count there were around 30 *jenever*s alongside 10 beers on tap. Its long wooden bar and thicket of tables date from the 1920s.

Entertainment

To find out what's going on around town, check out some of the posters that appear everywhere, or pick up a copy of either the simple and informative *Uit-Loper* (weekly) or meatier *Uit Magazine* (monthly); both are free and in Dutch.

CLUBS

Clubs open and close regularly in Groningen, but the ones listed here are all mainstayers: **Vera** (☎ 313 46 81; www.vera-groningen.nl; Oosterstraat 44) The club to see the next big rock act at; U2 played to 30-odd people in the early 1980s here, and Nirvana later gave a performance to a crowd of about 60 people before going supernova. Concerts Thursday to Saturday.

Golden Arm (☎ 313 16 76; www.goldenarm.nl; Hardewikerstraat 7) Huge gay club with four floors of pumping dance music.

Palace (☎ 313 91 00; www.thepalace.nl; Gelkingestraat 1) Standard club attracting a predominantly young crowd with an array of music styles, and huge dance floor.

LIVE MUSIC

De Oosterpoort (☎ 368 03 68; www.de-oosterpoort.nl; Trompsingel) De Oosterpoort is *the* place in Groningen to catch many of the large musical acts passing through town. Jazz and classical concerts are the mainstay of its monthly programme.

Jazz Café De Spiegel (☎ 312 63 00; Peperstraat 11) A perennial favourite with locals – this lively brown café features regular live jazz music, a smooth sultry atmosphere, and a great bar.

THEATRE & CINEMA

Grand Theatre (☎ 314 46 44; www.grand-theatre.nl; Grote Markt 35) This, the city's premiere theatre, offers a thought-provoking array of musical and theatrical performances.

Filmtheatre Images (☎ 312 04 33; Poelestraat 30; tickets €8) With a mix of offbeat films, festival titles and classics, and a chilled café, Images is an excellent place to catch some cinema magic.

Getting There & Away

The 1896 train station, thankfully restored to its original glory, is worth seeing even if you're not catching a train.

Some train fares and schedules:

Destination	Price (€)	Duration (min)	Frequency (per hr)
Amsterdam	26.70	140	2
Leeuwarden	8.30	50	2
Rotterdam	29.60	160	2
Utrecht	24.50	120	2

The bus station is to the right as you exit the train station; the **Arriva bus office** (☎ 7am-11pm) is found opposite the train information office.

Getting Around

Groningen is easily tackled on foot or by bicycle, but if you plan to use the buses, one-day passes (€1) are available from drivers after 9am. Bus 6 connects Grote Markt to the train station, and bicycles can be rented from the **bicycle shop** (☎ 312 41 74) at the train station.

MUSEUM DE BUITENPLAATS

In the little town of Eelde, 5km south of Groningen, is this charming **museum** (☎ 050-309 58 18; www.museumdebuitenplaats.nl; Hoofdweg 76; adult/child Apr-Oct €7/3.30, Nov-Mar €5/2.50; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun) devoted to figurative art from around Europe. Opened in 1996 by the queen herself, it began as a protest to an apartment block originally planned for the site. The main organic structure, which blends into its natural surroundings, features paintings from some of the Netherlands' more progressive 20th-century artists, such as Wout Muller, Henk Helmantel, Herman Gordijn and Matthijs Röling. Its manicured gardens are peppered with sculptures, and benches aching to be used, and there's also a sun-bathed café. Poetry readings, storytelling and musical concerts are featured over the summer months on the museum's open-air stage.

To get there, take bus 52 (28 minutes, every half-hour) from Groningen.

ZEEHONDENCRECHE PIETERBUREN

Back in 1972 Lenie 't Hart, a resident of the small Groningen coastal town of Pieterburen, began caring for seals in her back yard. Pollution and tourism were taking their toll on the local seal colonies, and it was her way of doing something about it. Her efforts over the years (along with the help of the scientific community and proactive members of maritime industries) have resulted in the **Zeehondencreche** (Seal Creche; ☎ 0595-52 65 26; www.zeehondencreche.nl; Hoofdstraat 94a; admission €2; ☎ 9am-6pm), a centre for the rescue and rehabilitation of sick seals.

The centre normally houses 20 to 30 seals, which can be seen lounging and swimming in various pools. The most popular times to visit are 11am and 4pm when the seals are fed, and if one or more takes your fancy, you can 'adopt' him or her; the website also has details on becoming a donor.

To get to the Zeehondencreche, take the train from Groningen to Warffum (€4.30, 24 minutes, hourly), and then bus 68 (15 minutes, five times a day Monday to Friday) to Pieterburen.

MENKEMBORG

Some 25km northeast of Groningen in the small farming town of Uithuizen is one of the Netherlands' most authentic manor houses, **Menkemaborg** (☎ 0595-43 19 70; Menkeweg 2; adult/child €4.50/2; ☎ 10am-5pm May-Sep, 10am-noon & 1-4pm

POUNDING MUD

Some folk pay a pretty penny for mud treatments and organised walks; Groningen and Friesland have an activity that combines both. When the tide retreats across the mud flats off the north coast of Groningen, locals and visitors alike attack it with abandon, marching, and inevitably sinking, into the sloppy mess. This mudtastic pastime is known as *wadlopen* (mud-walking), and you'd be a stick-in-the-mud if you didn't give it a try while in the area.

The mud stretches all the way to the Frisian islands offshore, and treks across to the islands are quite popular. Because of the treacherous tides, and the fact that some walkers can become muddled and lose their way, *wadlopen* can only be undertaken on a guided tour. Those who enjoy *wadlopen* say that it is strenuous but enlivening; the unchanging vista of mud and sky has an almost meditative quality, and the sense of achievement on traipsing across the sea bottom with a rising tide hot on your heels brings upon a natural high.

The centre for *wadlopen* is the tiny village of Pieterburen, 22km north of Groningen, where several groups of trained guides are based; **Wadloopcentrum** (☎ 0595-52 83 00; www.wadlopen.org; Hoofdstraat 105) and **Dijkstra's Wadlooptochten** (☎ 0595-52 83 45; www.wadloop-dijkstra.nl; Hoofdstraat 118) are two of the better known. Guided walks, which take place between May and September, range from a short 5km jaunt across the mud flats (€8.50, 2½ hours) to a gruelling, yet exhilarating, 20km pound to Schiermonnikoog (€22.50, five hours); the latter, for some unknown reason, is the most popular. The ferry ride back from the islands is not included in the price and it's essential to book around a month in advance. You'll be told what clothes to bring depending on the time of year, but always take a semblance of balance and plenty of perseverance.

See opposite for public transport details to Pieterburen.

Tue-Sun Oct-Dec & Mar-Apr, closed Jan & Feb). Originally a fortified castle dating back to the 14th century, Menkemaborg received its present gentrified appearance – a moated estate of three houses surrounded by immaculate gardens – early in the 18th century, and it has barely been altered since. Inside, the rooms retain all the pomp and ceremony of 18th-century aristocratic life, complete with carved oak mantelpieces, stately beds and fine china.

Hourly trains run between Uithuizen and Groningen (€5.30, 34 minutes); the train station is a 1km walk west of Menkemaborg.

BOURTANGE

☎ 0599 / pop 1200

Bourtange, a tiny town near the German border, is home to one of the best-preserved fortifications in the country. While rather small and best seen from the air, it is nonetheless a sight to behold, with its flooded moats, stolid defences, and quaint houses protected from all sides. The region around Bourtange is also worth exploring; off the beaten path, it consists of pretty countryside and tree-shaded canals, ideal for tackling by bike.

History

Built in the late 1500s, Bourtange represents the pinnacle of the arms and fortification of

the time. Behind its walls and moats it could withstand months of siege by an invading army. However, by the early 1960s its walls had been mostly breached or levelled and the moats were largely filled in. A road even ran through the present town centre.

In 1964, however, the regional government decided to restore the battlements and the town itself to its 1742 appearance, when the fortifications around the citadel had reached their maximum size. It took three decades, during which time roads were moved and buildings demolished or reconstructed. Archaeologists generally had a party.

The results are impressive and Bourtange is stunningly pretty. The star-shaped rings of walls and canals have been completely rebuilt and the village has been returned to a glossier version of its 18th-century self. It's a cliché, but a visit to Bourtange is truly a step into the past, a time when rogue armies wandered the lands and villagers hid behind defences designed to keep them at bay.

Orientation & Information

From the parking area and tourist office, you pass through two gates and across three drawbridges over the moats before you reach the old town proper. From the town's central square, the Marktplein, cobblestone streets

lead off in all directions; the pentagram-shaped inner fortification can be crossed in a matter of minutes by foot. The town's **tourist office** (☎ 35 46 00; William Lodewijkstraat 33; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 12.30-5pm Sat & Sun) has more than enough information on the town, including detailed displays showing the reconstruction and restoration. Aerial photographs show the remarkable changes between 1965 and the late 1990s. It also sells a handy English-language booklet (€1.50).

Sights & Activities

Inside the walls at the core of the fortification, brick houses make good use of what little space the five bastions afford. **Marktplein** is a good spot to start exploring, with its two restaurants, small craft shops and tree-shaded benches.

Of the old buildings, six have been turned into museums, which open from 10am to 5pm Monday to Friday and from 11am Saturday and Sunday; tickets (adult/child €5.50/3.50), covering entry to all, can be purchased at the tourist office. Two museums – the **Captain's Lodge** and **De Dagen van Roam** – cover the life and times of the militia stationed at Bourtange in the 17th and 18th centuries, while the **Museum de Baracquen** displays artefacts and curios uncovered during the fort's reconstruction. **De Poort** has an excellent model of Bourtange, and the town's **synagogue**, built in 1842, explains the life and times of its Jewish population, and includes a plaque listing the 42 local people taken away to their deaths by the Nazis, a huge number given the town's small size.

However, the best thing to do in Bourtange is traipse up and down its defensive walls. More often than not you'll have whole stretches to yourself, and the view of the small village huddled behind its unbreachable walls is just crying out to be photographed.

Sleeping & Eating

It's possible to stay within the walls, in the original soldiers' (€65) or captains' (€75) quarters. Bookings are taken at the tourist office; the digs aren't particularly plush, but they're warm and comfortable, and breakfast is included.

Albertha Hoeve (☎ 35 47 37; www.alberthahoeve.nl; Vlagtwedderstraat 57; camp sites/d €12.50/47) Just outside the walls, Albertha is one of several small family-run places that has homely rooms and fields for camping. Snacks are also available.

The two small eateries on Marktplein are the only places to eat within the old town:

't Oal Kroegie (☎ 35 45 80; Marktplein; snacks €2-6; 🕒 10am-10pm) Provides light meals, sandwiches, pancakes, a few beer varieties, shaded outdoor tables, and friendly service.

's Lands Huys (☎ 35 45 14; Marktplein; mains €14-17; 🕒 10am-10pm) A more cosy option housed in a former officers' inn, with full meals and outdoor seating.

Getting There & Away

Bourtange is not easy to get to without your own wheels. From Groningen, take the hourly train east to Winschoten (€5.70, 33 minutes), then bus 14 south to Vlagtwedde (25 minutes, at least one every hour) and transfer to (mini)bus 72 for Bourtange (12 minutes, 10 daily). With waiting time and transfers, count on the trip taking about two hours – bus 72 only runs before 9am and after 1pm, at half-hour intervals. The return service from Bourtange leaves from the Marktplein at 15 and 45 minutes after the hour, once again before 9am and after 1pm.

If touring by bike, combine Bourtange with visits over a few days to the *hunebedden* (opposite) in Drenthe, some 30km to the west.

DRENTHE

If ever there were a forgotten corner of the Netherlands, this is it. With no sea access or major city to call its own (Emmen, with just over 100,000 people, is its largest), not a national park in sight, and little of the charm the country is so famous for, Drenthe is the Netherlands' black sheep. But that's exactly why this small backwater deserves a little of your time, simply to experience something different in a land where one pretty town follows another and seascape after seascape lines the horizon.

ASSEN

☎ 0592 / pop 60,700

With a close proximity to Groningen, Assen, the capital of Drenthe, will be the first stop on most people's tour of the province. It's a modern, working city with some surprisingly good restaurants, a handful of so-so museums, and a well-informed **tourist office** (☎ 24 37 88; www.vvdrenthe.nl; Marktstraat 8; 🕒 1-6pm Mon, 9am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) that can book B&Bs in the town.

The **Drents Museum** (☎ 37 77 73; www.drentsmuseum.nl; Brink 1; adult/child €5/3; 🕒 11am-5pm Tue-Sun), near the centre, has *hunebedden* artefacts and various artworks and furnishings from Drenthe's history. If you've time to kill, or need to booster the energy levels, head to **De Tijd** (Time; ☎ 30 06 42; Beilerstraat 28; mains €12-18), an eccentric restaurant with hearty Dutch portions big enough for two, and an astounding 2346 clocks (thankfully not wound). Take a pew and chat with the owner, whose charm is quite disarming.

The tourist office and museum are 500m from the station by way of Stationsstraat. Frequent trains connect Assen with both Groningen (€4.80, 15 minutes) and Zwolle (€11.60, 40 minutes).

Buses depart from the area to the left as you exit the train station. The **bicycle shop** (☎ 3104 24) is right next door.

KAMP WESTERBORK

About 10km south of Assen, near the tiny village of Hooghalen, is this, a reminder that the atrocities of the holocaust were not confined to Central and Eastern Europe.

Kamp Westerbork (☎ 0593-59 26 00; www.kampwesterbork.nl; Oosthalen 8, Hooghalen; adult/child €4.50/2.25;

🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri year-round, 1-5pm Sat & Sun Sep-Jun, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug), ironically, was built by the Dutch government in 1939 to house German Jews fleeing the Nazis. When the Germans invaded in May 1940, they found Westerbork ideal for their own ends. At first the camp remained relatively benign, but beginning in 1942 it became a transit point for those being sent to the death camps. More than 107,000 Jews and 250 Roma were shipped through Westerbork. The vast majority never returned.

Today the camp is a memorial to the murdered and a holocaust museum. Most of the buildings are gone, but the remaining monuments are emotionally moving. Consisting mainly of documents and personal effects, the displays are intimate and evocative. Anne Frank was interned here before meeting her own fate at Bergen-Belsen, though undue attention on Westerbork's most famous detainee is thankfully avoided. The camp itself is about 3km from the museum; either walk or take the bus provided (€1.75).

Bus 22 (12 minutes, every 30 minutes Monday to Friday, and 12.14pm, 4.14pm and 8.14pm Saturday and Sunday) from Assen stops in Hooghalen, 2km west of the camp, otherwise take a taxi.

HUNEVEDDEN

People have been enjoying the quiet in Drenthe since as early as 3000 BC, when prehistoric tribes lived here amid the bogs and peat. These early residents began cultivating the land, a pastime still enjoyed by many in the province, and created what is arguably the most interesting aspect of Drenthe today, the *hunebedden*.

Hunebedden, which predate Stonehenge, are prehistoric burial chambers constructed with huge grey stones, some of which weigh up to 25,000kg. It is thought the stones arrived in the Netherlands via glaciers from Sweden some 200,000 years ago, but no one can be certain of the fact. Little is also known about the builders of the *hunebedden*, except that they took burying their dead very seriously, burying people, along with their personal items and tools, under the monolithic stones. Theories as to how the chambers were constructed have been bantered about by the scientific community, but once again, a definitive answer is yet to be found. A total of 54 of these impressive groupings of sombre grey stones can be seen in Drenthe and Groningen.

The **Nationaal Hunebedden Informatiecentrum** (☎ 0599-23 63 74; www.hunebedden.nl; Bronnegerstraat 12; adult/child €4.75/3; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) in Borger, a little town 17km northwest of Emmen, is the centre for the *hunebedden*, and the logical place to start a tour. Here there are many displays relating to the stones as well as excavated artefacts, and the largest *hunebed* is located just outside its doors. Maps of all the sites in Drenthe are also available; most are clumped around the villages of Klijndijk, Odoorn, Annen and Midlaren, which are strung out along N34, a picturesque road linking Emmen and Groningen.

It's best to explore the *hunebedden* with your own transport; pick up a map from the Emmen tourist office or Borger Informatiecentrum and look out for the large brown signs showing a pile of rocks while driving or biking. Bus 300 operates hourly between Emmen and Groningen, stopping at Borger.

ORVELTE

☎ 0593

A foundation governs the tiny village of Orvelte, 17km south of Assen. Its goal, to preserve the feel of a 19th-century Drenthe community, is alive and well here, and visitors are welcome to join them in the past for a day from Easter to the end of October.

No cars are permitted (aside from those of the residents) and owners are forbidden to alter the old buildings in uncharacteristic ways. Residents mainly engage in traditional activities; there's the butcher, the baker... you get the idea. During summer, there are lovely vegetable gardens growing near every house.

The **tourist office** (☎ 32 23 35; www.orvelte.net; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Tue-Sun Easter-Jun & Sep-Oct, daily Jul & Aug, closed Nov-Easter) has brochures and maps of the village, and can inform you about what's on when; it can also arrange B&B accommodation in one of the traditional houses (€25 per person).

To get to Orvelte from Assen, take a train to Beilen (€3.20, eight minutes, every half-hour) and change to bus 22 (16 minutes, every 30 minutes Monday to Friday, and

12.14pm, 4.14pm and 8.14pm Saturday and Sunday).

EMMEN

☎ 0591 / pop 108,200

A modern city of industry, Emmen is a useful transportation centre for the *hunebedden*. The **tourist office** (☎ 64 17 92; www.vvvenmen.nl; Hoofdstraat 22; 🕒 1-5.30pm Mon, 9.30am-5.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) has a good range of bike maps for exploring the *hunebedden*, and the pleasant staff can help with finding accommodation.

The town's zoo, **Noorder Dierenpark** (☎ 85 08 50; www.zoo-emmen.nl; Hoofdstraat 18; adult/child €17/15; 🕒 10am-5.30pm) is a short walk from the train station. It's noted for its apes and African animals displayed in a 'natural' setting. Of course, few areas of the savanna have weather like this.

Emmen is at the end of the train line from Zwolle (€11.20, 55 minutes, every half-hour); for information on buses between Emmen, Groningen and Borger, see the boxed text, p253. The station has lockers and is 600m from the tourist office. Buses leave from in front of the station. The station has a **bicycle shop** (☎ 61 37 31).