

History

For centuries the rich and turbulent history of the Netherlands, complete with wave after wave of invaders and invading waves, was inseparable from that of neighbouring Belgium and Luxembourg. This trio was long known as the Low Countries, and the founding of the modern Netherlands only took place in 1579, while its current borders were set as late as 1830.

FOREIGN DOMINATION

The territory that became the Netherlands has been inhabited since prehistoric times; *hunebedden* (p253) – stone structures used as burial mounds – are clear evidence of this. The first invaders to take note of the locals were the Romans, who, under Julius Caesar, conquered a wide region along the Rijn (Rhine) and its tributaries by 59 BC. Fiercely independent by nature, Celtic and Germanic tribes initially bowed to Caesar's rule. Over the next four centuries the Romans built advanced towns, farms and the straight roads that still shape the landscape today. Utrecht became a main outpost of the empire, but the soggy territory of Friesland was left to its own devices, and its early settlers built homes on mounds of mud (called *terpen*) to escape the frequent floods; Hogebeintum (p235) has a surviving example.

As Roman power began to fade, the Franks, an aggressive German tribe to the east, began to muscle in. By the end of the 8th century, the Franks had completed their conquest of the Low Countries and began converting the local populace to Christianity, using force whenever necessary. Charlemagne, the first in a long line of Holy Roman emperors, was by far the most successful Frankish king. He built a palace at Nijmegen (p263), but the empire fell apart after his death in 814.

For the next 200 years Vikings sailed up Dutch rivers to loot and pillage. Local rulers developed their own fortified towns and made up their own government and laws – even though, strictly speaking, they answered to the Pope in Rome.

Over time local lords, who were nominally bound to a German king, began to gain power. When one lord struggled with another for territory, invariably their townsfolk would provide support, but only in return for various freedoms. By the beginning of the 12th century these relationships were laid down in charters – documents that not only spelt out the lord's power but also detailed other bureaucratic matters such as taxation. Around the same time, Dutch towns with sea access, such as Deventer and Zwolle, joined the Hanseatic League (a group of powerful trading cities in present-day Germany, including Hamburg and Rostock). These federal towns grew wealthy through the league's single-minded development of laws, regulations and other policies that promoted trade.

Meanwhile the many little lords met their match in the dukes of Burgundy, who gradually took over the Low Countries. Duke Philip the Good, who ruled from 1419 to 1467, showed the towns of the Low Countries who was boss by essentially telling them to stuff their charters. Although this limited the towns' freedom, it also brought to the region a degree of stability that had been missing during the era of squabbling lords. By this time Utrecht had

become the ecclesiastical centre of the Low Countries, whereas Amsterdam was but a modest trading post.

The 15th century ushered in great prosperity for the Low Countries. The Dutch became adept at shipbuilding in support of the Hanseatic trade, and merchants thrived by selling luxury items such as tapestries, fashionable clothing and paintings – but also more mundane commodities such as salted herring and beer.

With their wealth tapped through taxes, the Low Countries were naturally coveted by a succession of rulers. In 1482 Mary of Burgundy, Philip's granddaughter, passed on the Low Countries to her son, Philip the Fair.

The family intrigues that followed are worthy of a costume drama: Philip married Joanna, the daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain; Philip then bequeathed the Low Countries to his son Charles, now a member of the powerful Habsburg dynasty, in 1530. Charles V was crowned Holy Roman Emperor, making him monarch of most of Europe.

Fortunately, the rule of Charles V did not stand in the way of the Low Countries' growing wealth. But this all changed in 1555, when Charles handed over Spain and the Low Countries to his son, Philip II.

THE FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE

Philip II of Spain was a staunch Catholic and suffered under a slight case of theomania. Conflict with the Low Countries was then inevitable; the Protestant reformation had spread throughout the colony, fuelled by the ideas of Erasmus and the actions of Martin Luther. However, before the Spanish arrived the religious landscape of the Low Countries was quite diverse: Lutherans wielded great influence, but smaller churches had their places too. For instance, the Anabaptists were polygamists and communists, and nudity was promoted as a means of equality among their masses (in the warmer seasons). In the end it was Calvinism that emerged in the Low Countries as the main challenger to the Roman Catholic Church, and to Philip's rule.

A big believer in the Inquisition, Philip went after the Protestants with a vengeance. Matters came to a head in 1566 when the puritanical Calvinists went on a rampage, destroying the art and religious icons of Catholic churches in many parts of the Netherlands. Evidence of this is still readily apparent in the barren interiors of Dutch churches today.

This sent Philip into action. The Duke of Alba was chosen to lead a 10,000-strong army to the Netherlands in 1568 to quell the unruly serfs; as the Duke wasn't one to take prisoners, his forces slaughtered thousands, and so began the Dutch war of independence, which lasted 80 years.

The Prince van Oranje, Willem the Silent (thus named for his refusal to argue over religious issues), was one of the few nobles not to side with Philip, and he led the Dutch revolt against Spanish rule. Willem, who had been Philip's lieutenant in Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht, began to rely on the Dutch Calvinists for his chief support. He championed the principle of toleration and this philosophy became part of the foundation of an independent Dutch state. The rebels' cause, however, was hampered by lack of money and patchy support from towns.

Changing tack in 1572, Willem hired a bunch of English pirates to fight for his cause. Known as the Watergeuzen (Sea Beggars), they sailed up the myriad Dutch rivers and seized town after town from the surprised and

The site www.history-netherlands.nl gives a detailed history of the Netherlands in a number of languages.

'Holland' is a popular term for the Netherlands, yet in reality it refers to the combined provinces of Noord (North) and Zuid (South) Holland.

The Dutch National Archive (www.nationaal.archief.nl) has almost a thousand years of historical documents, maps, drawings and photos. Access to the site is free.

TIMELINE 59 BC

Romans conquer the Netherlands

1275

Credited as the founding of Amsterdam

1579

United Provinces of the Netherlands

Late 16th century

Golden Age begins

land-bound Spanish forces. The strategy worked like a charm, and by the end of the year Willem controlled every city except Amsterdam.

The Spanish responded by sacking the Duke of Alba and sending in a new commander, Alessandro Farnese, who was a more able leader. Much of the 1570s saw a constant shift of power as one side or the other gained temporary supremacy.

THE UNION OF UTRECHT

The Low Countries split for good in 1579 when the more Protestant and rebellious provinces in the north formed the Union of Utrecht. This explicitly anti-Spanish alliance became known as the United Provinces, the basis for the Netherlands as we know it today. The southern regions of the Low Countries had always remained Catholic and were much more open to compromise with Spain. They eventually became Belgium.

Although the United Provinces had declared their independence from Spain, the war dragged on. In 1584 they suffered a major blow when their leader, Willem the Silent, was assassinated in Delft. The Dutch once again turned to the English for help, and Elizabeth I lent assistance, but it was the English victory over the Armada in 1588 that proved the most beneficial. In a series of brilliant military campaigns, the Dutch drove the Spanish out of the United Provinces by the turn of the 17th century. Trouble with Spain was far from over, however, and fighting resumed as part of the larger Thirty Years' War throughout Europe. In 1648 the Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years' War, included the proviso that Spain recognise the independence of the United Provinces, ending the 80-year conflict between the Netherlands and Spain.

Thomas C Grattan's recently updated *Holland: The History of the Netherlands* takes a detailed – if somewhat academic – look at the past of the Dutch, from the invasion of the Romans to the beginning of the 20th century.

The Embarrassment of Riches by Simon Schama is a thoughtful look at the tensions generated between vast wealth and Calvinist sobriety in the Golden Age, with implications for modern society.

The Dutch *bought* (a concept foreign to North American tribes at the time) the island of Manhattan from the Lenape in 1626 for the equivalent of US\$24 worth of beads.

THE GOLDEN AGE

Throughout the turmoil of the 15th and 16th centuries, Holland's merchant cities (particularly Amsterdam) had managed to keep trading alive; their skill at business and sailing was so great that, even at the peak of the rebellion, the Spanish had no alternative but to use Dutch boats for transporting their grain. With the arrival of peace, however, the cities began to boom. This era of great economic prosperity and cultural fruition came to be known as the Golden Age.

The Dutch soon began to expand their horizons, and the merchant fleet known as the Dutch East India Company was formed in 1602. It quickly monopolised key shipping and trade routes east of Africa's Cape of Good Hope and west of the Strait of Magellan, making it the largest trading company of the 17th century. It became almost as powerful as a sovereign state, with the ability to raise its own armed forces and establish colonies.

Its sister, the Dutch West India Company, traded with Africa and the Americas and was at the very centre of the American slave trade. Seamen working for both companies discovered (in a very Western sense of the word) or conquered lands including Tasmania, New Zealand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Mauritius. English explorer Henry Hudson landed on the island of Manhattan in 1609 as he searched for the Northwest Passage, and Dutch settlers named it New Amsterdam.

Culturally the United Provinces flourished in the Golden Age. The wealth of the merchant class supported scores of artists, including Jan Vermeer, Jan

TULIPMANIA

A bursting economic bubble is not a modern phenomenon. The first occurred in 1636–37 in the Netherlands, and over a flower everyone associates with the Dutch – the tulip.

Tulips originated as wild flowers in Central Asia. They were first cultivated by the Turks ('tulip' is Turkish for turban) and made their way to Europe via Vienna in the mid-1500s. By the beginning of the 17th century Holland was enthralled by the beautiful flower, which flourished in the country's cool climate and fertile delta soil.

It was not long before trading in tulips started to get out of hand. In late 1636 a tulip-trading mania swept the Netherlands; speculative buying and selling made some individual bulbs more expensive than an Amsterdam house, and even ordinary people sank their life's savings into a few bulbs. Speculators fell over themselves to out-bid each other in taverns. At the height of Tulipmania, in early 1637, a single bulb of the legendary *Semper augustus* fetched more than 10 years' worth of the average worker's wages. An English botanist bisected one of his host's bulbs and landed in jail until he could raise thousands of florins in compensation.

The bonanza couldn't last. When some bulbs failed to fetch their expected prices in Haarlem in February 1637, the bottom fell out of the market. Within a matter of weeks a wave of bankruptcies swept the land, hitting wealthy merchants as well as simple folk. Speculators were stuck with unsold bulbs, or bulbs they'd reserved but hadn't yet paid for (the concept of financial options, incidentally, was invented during Tulipmania). The government refused to get involved with a pursuit they regarded as gambling.

The speculative froth is gone, but passion for the tulip endures. It remains a relatively expensive flower, and cool-headed growers have perfected their craft. To this day the Dutch are the world leaders in tulip cultivation and supply most of the bulbs exported to Europe and North America.

Steen, Frans Hals and Rembrandt (see p38). The sciences were not left out: Dutch physicist and astronomer Christiaan Huygens discovered Saturn's rings and invented the pendulum clock; celebrated philosopher Benedict de Spinoza wrote a brilliant thesis saying that the universe was identical with God; and Frenchman René Descartes, known for his philosophy, 'I think, therefore I am', found intellectual freedom in the Netherlands and stayed for two decades.

The Union of Utrecht's promise of religious tolerance led to a surprising amount of religious diversity that was rare in Europe at the time. Calvinism was the official religion of the government, but various other Protestants, Jews and Catholics were allowed to practise their faith. However, in a legacy of the troubles with Spain, Catholics had to worship in private, which led to the creation of clandestine churches. Many of these unusual buildings have survived to the present day.

Politically, however, the young Dutch Republic was at an all-time low. The House of Oranje-Nassau fought the republicans for control of the country; while the house wanted to centralise power with the Prince van Oranje as *stadhouder* (chief magistrate), the republicans wanted the cities and provinces to run their own affairs. Prince Willem II won the dispute but died suddenly three months later, one week before his son was born. Dutch regional leaders exploited this power vacuum by abolishing the *stadhouder*, and authority was decentralised.

International conflict was never very far away. In 1652 the United Provinces went to war with their old friend England, mainly over the increasing

1602

Dutch East India Company created

1636–37

Tulipmania grips the country

1700

End of Golden Age

1795

French invade Holland

strength of the Dutch merchant fleet. Both countries entered a hotchpotch of alliances with Spain, France and Sweden in an effort to gain the upper hand. During one round of treaties the Dutch agreed to give New Amsterdam to the English (who promptly renamed it New York) in return for Surinam in South America. In 1672 the French army marched into the Netherlands and, as the Dutch had devoted most of their resources to the navy, found little resistance on land. The country appealed to the House of Oranje, which appointed Willem III as general of the Dutch forces.

In a single stroke Willem improved relations with the English by marrying his cousin Mary, daughter of the English king James II. Perhaps sensing he was no longer welcome in England – his opponents feared that he would restore the Roman Catholic Church there – James fled to France, and Willem and Mary were named king and queen of England in 1689. Using his strong diplomatic skills, Willem created the Grand Alliance that joined England, the United Provinces, Spain, Sweden and several German states to fight the expansionist ambitions of France's Louis XIV.

The Grand Alliance defeated the French several times. In 1697 Louis XIV agreed to give up most of the territory France had conquered. As if to drive the point home, the Dutch again joined the English to fight the French in the War of the Spanish Succession, ending with the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713.

DUTCH DECLINE & FRENCH RULE

Financially weakened by the ongoing wars with France, the United Provinces began to spiral downwards. Its maritime fleet, left battered and bleeding from the wars, lost valuable trading routes to the British, while domestically the population was decreasing. The dykes were also in a sorry state – there was little money to repair them, and widespread floods swept across the country. Merchants were more likely to spend their profits on luxuries than sensible investments in their businesses, which in turn contributed to the country's overall economic decline.

Politically, the United Provinces were as unstable as the dykes. A series of struggles between the House of Oranje and its democratic opponents led to a civil war in 1785; the dispute was settled three years later when the *stadhouders* agreed to limit their own powers. When the French revolutionary forces invaded in 1795, with the aid of those eager for constitutional reform the United Provinces collapsed and became the Batavian Republic. It survived only until 1806, when Napoleon renamed it the Kingdom of Holland and installed his brother Louis Bonaparte as king.

Louis proved to be not quite the kind of king Napoleon would have liked. He actually seemed to like his subjects and often favoured them over France; soon his position became untenable and in 1810 Napoleon forced Louis out of office. With Napoleon's attention diverted in Russia, though, the House of Oranje supporters invited Prince Willem VI back. He landed at Scheveningen in 1813 and was named prince sovereign of the Netherlands; the following year he was crowned King Willem I.

INDEPENDENT KINGDOM & WWI

With the defeat of Napoleon, Europe celebrated with the Congress of Vienna in 1815. It was here that the Kingdom of the Netherlands – the Netherlands in the north and Belgium in the south – was formed. However, the marriage

was doomed from the start. The partners had little in common, including their dominant religions (Calvinist and Catholic), languages (Dutch and French) and favoured way of making money (trade and manufacturing). Matters weren't helped by Willem, who generally sided with his fellow northerners.

In 1830 the southern states revolted, and nine years later Willem was forced to let the south go. In a nice historical twist, Willem abdicated one year later so that he could marry – surprise! – a Belgian Catholic. It's not known if he ever spoke French at home.

His son, King Willem II, granted a new and more liberal constitution to the people of the Netherlands in 1848. This included a number of democratic ideals and even made the monarchy the servant of the elected government. This document has remained the foundation of the Dutch government until the present day. Its role on the world stage long over, the Netherlands played only a small part in European affairs and concentrated on liberalism at home.

During WWI the Netherlands remained neutral, although its shipping industry was damaged by both the Allies and the Germans. It did however gain economic and financial ground by trading with both sides.

Following WWI the country, like some of its European counterparts, embarked on innovative social programmes that targeted poverty, the rights of women and children, and education. Industrially, the coal mines of south Limburg were exploited to great success, Rotterdam became one of Europe's most important ports and the scheme to reclaim the Zuiderzee was launched in 1932.

WWII

The Dutch tried to remain neutral during WWII, but in May 1940 the Germans invaded anyway. The advancing Nazis levelled much of Rotterdam in a raid designed to force the Dutch to surrender; they obliged, and the country's tiny army crumbled quickly.

Queen Wilhelmina issued a proclamation of 'flaming protest' to the nation and escaped with her family to England. The plucky monarch, who had been key in maintaining Dutch neutrality in WWI, now found herself in a much different situation and made encouraging broadcasts to her subjects back home via the BBC and Radio Orange. The Germans put Dutch industry and farms to work for war purposes and there was much deprivation. Dutch resistance was primarily passive and only gained any kind of momentum when thousands of Dutch men were taken to Germany and forced to work in Nazi factories. A far worse fate awaited the country's Jews (p30).

The 'Winter of Hunger' of 1944–45 was a desperate time in the Netherlands. The British-led Operation Market Garden (p267) had been a huge disaster and the Allies abandoned all efforts to liberate the Dutch. The Germans stripped the country of much of its food and wealth, and mass starvation ensued. Many people were reduced to eating tulip bulbs for their daily subsistence. Canadian troops finally liberated the country in May 1945.

POSTWAR RECONSTRUCTION

The Netherlands faced major concerns in the postwar years both at home and abroad. Domestically, it had to restore its money-making businesses while

Tulipomania: The Story of the World's Most Coveted Flower by Mike Dash is an engaging look at the bizarre bulb fever that swept the nation in the 17th century.

A helpful site for those tracing their Dutch heritage is www.godutch.com.

The official website of the Dutch royal family, www.koninklijkhuis.nl features mini-biographies and virtual tours of the palaces.

1814

Willem I crowned as king

1830

Belgium declares independence

1932

Zuiderzee reclamation begins

1940

Germany invades the Netherlands

DUTCH JEWS

The tale of Jews in Europe is often one of repression, persecution and downright hatred. In the Netherlands, it is more a tale of acceptance and prosperity, until the coming of the Nazis.

Amsterdam is the focus of Jewish history in the Netherlands, and Jews played a key role in the city's development over the centuries. The first documented evidence of a Jewish presence in the city dates back to the 12th century, but numbers began to swell with the expulsion of Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal in the 1580s.

As was the case in much of Europe, guilds barred the newcomers from most trades. Some of the Sephardim were diamond cutters, however, for whom there was no guild. Others introduced printing and tobacco processing or worked as street retailers, bankers and doctors. The majority eked out a living as labourers and small-time traders on the margins of society. Still, they weren't confined to a ghetto and, with some restrictions, could buy property and exercise their religion – freedoms unheard of elsewhere in Europe.

The 17th century saw another influx of Jewish refugees, this time Ashkenazim fleeing pogroms in Central and Eastern Europe. The two groups didn't always get on well and separate synagogues were established, helping Amsterdam to become one of Europe's major Jewish centres.

The guilds and all restrictions on Jews were abolished during the French occupation, and the Jewish community thrived in the 19th century. Poverty was still considerable, but the economic, social and political emancipation of the Jews helped their middle class move up in society.

All this came to an end with the German occupation of the Netherlands. The Nazis brought about the almost complete annihilation of the Dutch Jewish community. Before WWII the Netherlands counted 140,000 Jews, of whom about two-thirds lived in Amsterdam. Less than 25,000 survived the war, and Amsterdam's Jewish quarter was left a ghost town. Many homes stood derelict until their demolition in the 1970s, and only a handful of synagogues throughout the country are once again operating as houses of worship.

Estimates put the current Jewish population of the Netherlands at anywhere between 32,000 and 45,000. Their history is told in the Nationaal Oorlogs- en Verzetmuseum (National War and Resistance Museum; p284) in Overloon, Limburg, and in Amsterdam's Joods Historisch Museum (Jewish Historical Museum; p99).

rebuilding the battered infrastructure, which it did very well; trade took off once again, new wealth followed the discovery of large natural gas fields in the North Sea off the Dutch coast, and Dutch farmers became some of the most productive in Europe.

Overseas, the colonies began to clamour for independence. The Dutch East Indies declared itself independent in 1945, and after four years of bitter fighting and negotiations the independence of Indonesia was recognised at the end of 1949. Surinam also became independent in 1975. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will shrink even further come July 2007, with the end of the Netherlands Antilles as it currently stands. Curaçao and Sint Maarten will be granted *status aparte* (home rule), Bonaire and Saba will remain part of the kingdom, and Sint Eustatius (Statia) was in two minds at the time of writing.

The same social upheavals that swept the world in the 1960s were also felt in the Netherlands. Students, labour groups, hippies and more took to the streets in protest. Among the more colourful were a group that came to be known as the Provos (opposite). A huge squatters' movement sprung up

in Amsterdam, and homeless groups took over empty buildings – many of which had once belonged to Jews – and refused to leave.

Tolerance toward drugs and homosexuals also emerged at the time. The country's drug policy grew out of practical considerations, when a flood of young people populated Amsterdam and made the policing of drug laws impracticable (see p293 for the current drug policy). Official government policy became supportive of homosexuals, who are able to live openly in Dutch cities and, since 2001, legally marry.

Queen Beatrix ascended the throne in 1980 after her mother, Juliana, abdicated. Beatrix hasn't indicated how long she will remain in the job, but in all likelihood she will pass the reins to her son, Prince Willem-Alexander, within the next decade.

All governments since 1945 have been coalitions, with parties differing mainly over economic policies. However, coalitions shift constantly based on the political climate and in recent years there have been winds of change. The most recent election, in January 2003, saw the CDA (Christian Democratic Appeal) return as the largest party, with the boyish Jan Peter Balkenende as Prime Minister in a shaky coalition with the VVD liberals and D66 democrats. The shakes became major tremors in June 2006 due to disagreements over immigration policy, and the fragile coalition collapsed when D66 withdrew; Balkenende resigned soon afterwards but formed a minority government to rule until the next early election, at the time of research set for 22 November 2006.

THE PROVOCATIVE PROVOS

The 1960s were a breeding ground for discontent and anti-establishment activity, and in the Netherlands this underground movement led to the formation of the Provos. This small group of anarchic individuals staged street 'happenings' or creative, playful provocations (hence the name) around the Lieverdje (Little Darling) on Amsterdam's Spui (p97).

In 1962 an Amsterdam window cleaner and self-professed sorcerer, Robert Jasper Grootveld, began to deface cigarette billboards with a huge letter 'K' for *kanker* (cancer) to expose the role of advertising in addictive consumerism. Dressed as a medicine man, he held get-togethers in his garage and chanted mantras against cigarette smoking (but under the influence of pot).

This attracted even more bizarre characters. Poet 'Johnny the Selfkicker' bombarded his audience with frenzied, stream-of-consciousness recitals. Bart Huges drilled a hole in his forehead – a so-called 'third eye' – to relieve pressure on the brain and expand his consciousness.

The group gained international notoriety in March 1966 with its protests at the marriage of Princess (now Queen) Beatrix to ex-Nazi Claus von Amsberg. Protestors jeered the wedding couple as their procession rolled through Amsterdam, and bystanders chanted 'bring my bicycle back' – a reference to the many bikes commandeered by the retreating German soldiers in 1945. This was broadcast live to the world on TV.

In the same year the Provos gained enough support to win a seat on Amsterdam's city council. The group began developing 'White Plans', pro-environment schemes including the famous White Bicycle Plan to ease traffic congestion with a fleet of free white bicycles. The movement dissolved in the 1970s, but it left a lasting legacy: the squatters' movement, which encouraged the poor to occupy uninhabited buildings, in turn forced the government to adopt measures to help underprivileged tenants.

1944–45

Winter of Hunger

1958

Delta Project launched following the Great Floods of Zeeland in 1953

1975

The Netherlands decriminalises marijuana

1980

Queen Beatrix ascends throne

MORE THAN TRAGEDIES

The Netherlands has for decades been seen as a land of acceptance, tolerance and liberalism, but the assassination of two public lights – Theo van Gogh and Pim Fortuyn – rocked the country's foundations and caused locals, and the ever-present international community, to take a closer look at the fabric of Dutch society.

Pim Fortuyn (pronounced fore-town) spent only five months at the head of the LPF (Lijst Pim Fortuyn) party in 2002, but his legacy may last for years to come. His campaign for parliament is best remembered for his declaration that the Netherlands was 'full' and that the government should put the needs of mainstream Dutch people first.

Fortuyn called for the end of backroom politics and for a government led by business people and visionaries. His dynamism instantly struck a chord in Dutch society, and thousands of white low-income earners in Rotterdam and other cities rallied round the gay, dandyish Pim. For a few fleeting months he was fêted as the next prime minister, even though his opponents accused him of pursuing right-wing, racist policies.

Just days before the general election in May 2002 Fortuyn was assassinated by a white animal-rights activist in Hilversum. Riots erupted in front of parliament, and for an instant the threat of anarchy hung in the air.

The LPF won a number of seats in the election and was included in the next coalition, but without a strong leader it soon lost public support and in the 2003 general election voters all but deserted the party.

Theo van Gogh, a well-known film maker and personality, was often in the limelight for his controversial statements and fine films. His 11-minute documentary *Submission Part 1*, which featured four short stories centred on Koranic verses that could be interpreted as justifying violence against women, was a collaborative effort with Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Muslim-born woman, outspoken critic of Islamic law, Somali immigrant and member of parliament.

The documentary aired in 2004 on national television, and in November of the same year Van Gogh was shot and his throat cut when he was attacked while cycling through Amsterdam in rush hour. A letter threatening the nation and its politicians (and naming Hirsi Ali) was pinned to his chest with a knife. The killer, a 27-year-old of Dutch and Moroccan descent, was apprehended close to the scene and later sentenced to life imprisonment. The fact that the killer was born and raised in Amsterdam, and professed that he would do the same again if given the chance, threw a nation already in shock.

The Netherlands now faces questions on how best to move forward. Politicians have made the first move, passing laws which require immigrants to know something about Dutch culture, and imposing an exam on prospective immigrants covering Dutch language and culture. However, it's worth remembering that, while the country may currently be rethinking its attitude towards foreigners, Dutch open-mindedness towards newcomers goes back centuries.

Tension between different colours and creeds has never been a problem in the Netherlands, until recently. The murders of Theo van Gogh and Pim Fortuyn have stirred emotions and struck fear into the hearts of some (see above). Also, the Dutch – usually enthusiastic supporters of the EU – resoundingly rejected the EU constitution in a June 2005 referendum. Several reasons for the result were noted, including fears of increased immigration and loss of self-rule to the dominant parties in the EU.

For more on current history, see p22.

2002

Politician Pim Fortuyn is shot dead

2004

Activist film-maker Theo van Gogh is assassinated

The Culture

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

In general, the Dutch have a sympathetic psyche. They are passionately liberal and believe people should be free to do whatever they want – as long as it doesn't inconvenience others. The most outrageous conduct in public might go without comment; 'Act normal, that's crazy enough' is a common Dutch saying. This high level of tolerance has, however, been put under considerable pressure as a result of two recent high-profile murders (see opposite).

Calvinist traditions have had an influence on the Dutch character, even among Catholics. The Dutch see themselves as sober, hard-working, level-headed and to a certain extent unable to enjoy themselves without feeling guilty – all traits blamed on their Calvinist background. There may be no trace of this whatsoever in crowded pubs, which can seem downright hedonistic. The Dutch also have a tendency to wag the finger in disapproval, which goes against their normally tolerant demeanour.

The country is crowded and Dutch people tend to be reserved with strangers. They treasure their privacy because it is such a rare commodity. Still, they're far from antisocial – their ingrained *gezelligheid* (conviviality) will come out at the drop of a hat. Expect chummy moments at the supermarket.

The Dutch aren't exactly hot-blooded, but given the chance they will speak their minds and expect to be looked in the eye. This manner may seem blunt or even arrogant to foreigners, but the impulse comes from the desire to be direct and, wherever possible, honest.

Subjects such as sex are discussed openly, and you might overhear a pub chat where Jan tells of making whoopee. Dutch parliament even held a debate on whether to ban a TV show called *How to Screw* (but it decided not to). Prostitution is legal, but promiscuity is the furthest thing from most Dutch minds.

Anyone who's worth their weight in bong water knows that you can easily buy marijuana in the Netherlands. This doesn't mean that every Dutch person is a pothead; on the contrary, only about 5% of the population indulges (less than in France, where drug policy is much stricter). Many Dutch people think that hanging out in coffeeshops is for slackers and tourists.

Dutch people have a great love of detail. Statistics on the most trivial subjects make the paper (eg the number of applications for dog licences, incidence of rubbish being put out early), and somewhere down the line it feeds mountains of bureaucracy. That said, when the system breaks down the Dutch aren't rigid about the rules and are happy to improvise; perhaps this comes from a strong legacy of juggling diverse interests.

Last but not least, the Dutch are famously thrifty with their money. They often don't know themselves what to think of this – they laugh at their bottle-scraping (see p34), while at the same time they don't like being called cheap.

LIFESTYLE

Many Dutch live independent, busy lives, divided into strict schedules. Notice is usually required for everything, including visits to your mother, and it's not done to just 'pop round' anywhere. Socialising is done mainly in the home, through clubs and in circles of old friends, which can make it tough for foreigners to 'break in' at first. However, if you're invited to join a family party, you have crossed a major threshold – the Dutch don't invite

DOS & DON'TS

Do give a firm handshake or triple cheek kiss.

Do take a number at the post office counter.

Do show up five to 15 minutes late on social occasions.

Do dress casually unless it's an overtly formal affair.

Do say 'goedendag' when you enter a shop.

Don't smoke dope or drink on the streets.

Don't be late for official appointments.

Don't ask about a person's salary.

Don't forget someone's birthday.

GOOD TO THE LAST SCRAPE

Arguably, no household item represents Dutch thrift better than the *flessenlikker* (bottle-scraper). This miracle tool culminates in a disk on the business end and can tempt the last elusive smears from a mayonnaise jar or salad-dressing bottle. The *flessenlikker* is a hit in the Netherlands but not, oddly, in its country of origin – Norway.

Another item you'll find in Dutch supermarkets is the traditional Grolsch beer bottle with the resealable ceramic cap. This design was first introduced in the Calvinist north where the steely-eyed imbibers considered the contents of a bottle far too much to drink in one sitting.

just *anybody* into their homes, and chances are you've made a friend for life. Birthdays are celebrated in a big way, with oodles of cake and cries of well-wishing loud enough to wake the dead.

Most Dutch families are small, with two or three children. Rents are high, so Junior might live with his family well into his 20s or share an apartment; however, Dutch housing policies have made it easier in recent years to get a mortgage, and many more *yups* (yuppies) buy homes than even a decade ago.

On average the Dutch are fairly well off – they may not flaunt it, but they now earn more per capita than the Germans. Business is no longer booming, but spending for luxury items, especially furniture and interior décor, is jogging along nicely. New cars abound and, apart from the individualists, fewer people chug around in old bombs.

The gay community is well integrated, and the atmosphere is generally relaxed in the big cities. Leading political figures and businessmen are openly gay or lesbian, and attitudes toward gay or lesbian teachers, clergy, doctors and other professionals, even among the older generation, are good. There has however been a rise in gay-bashing in Amsterdam in recent years, and some homosexuals have moved out of the city, citing concerns over safety.

That old chestnut, the weather, always makes fodder for conversation. Evening weather reports merit a timeslot of their own, with presenters waxing lyrical about the size of hailstones or the icicles on Limburg fruit orchards. Rain can last virtually for weeks on end, so when the sun comes out people hit the streets and sidewalks – often just outside their own door. Sitting on the front steps with a cup of coffee and a paper is popular on bright summer mornings, or even when it's just warm and not raining.

ECONOMY

The Netherlands has an extraordinarily strong economy for its size. It's a leader in service industries such as banking, electronics (Philips) and multimedia (PolyGram), and it has a highly developed horticultural industry dealing in bulbs and cut flowers. Agriculture plays an important role, particularly dairy farming and glasshouse fruits and vegetables. Rotterdam harbour handles the largest shipping tonnage in the world, a vital facility in a country that provides more than one-third of Europe's shipping and trucking. Large supplies of natural gas are tapped and refined on the northeast coasts.

GEZELLIGHEID

Variouly translated as snug, friendly, cosy, informal, companionable and convivial, *gezelligheid* is a particular trait of the Dutch, and it's best experienced rather than explained. To do so, grab a table with friends in the sun outside a café, hang out for a few hours (preferably the entire day), and you'll soon understand the concept.

The site www.wooden-shoes.nl is devoted to a true pillar of Dutch culture, the clog.

Dutch business is largely dependent on exports and has been caught in a larger downturn in Europe and the USA. The last five years have seen a slowdown in the economy, which is a marked change from the heady '90s when the Dutch economy was the envy of Europe. While the country's unemployment rate (6.5%) is not the best in Europe, it's still lower than those of its closest neighbours, Germany (11.6%), Belgium (8.4%) and France (10%).

POPULATION

The need to love thy neighbour is especially strong in the Netherlands, where the population density is the highest in Europe (475 per sq km). Nearly half of the country's 16 million-plus residents live in the western hoop around Amsterdam, Den Haag and Rotterdam; the provinces of Drenthe, Overijssel and Zeeland in the southwest are sparsely settled, in Dutch terms at least. Since 2002, people living in towns and cities outnumbered those living in rural areas.

Over 80% of the population are of Dutch stock; the rest is mainly made up of people from the former colonies of Indonesia, Surinam and the Dutch Antilles, plus more recent arrivals from Turkey and Morocco.

SPORT

The Netherlands is one sport-happy country. About two-thirds of all Dutch engage in some form of sporty activity, and the average person now spends 20 minutes more a week getting sweaty than in the 1970s. Sport is organised to a fault: about five million people belong to nearly 30,000 clubs and associations in the Netherlands.

Football (Soccer)

Football is the Dutch national game, and they're pretty good at it. The national football team competes in virtually every World Cup (2006 saw them knocked out in a steamy match against Portugal), and 'local' teams such as Ajax, Feyenoord and PSV enjoy international renown. The country has produced world-class players, such as Ruud Gullit, Dennis Bergkamp and the legendary Johan Cruyff. The unique Dutch approach to the game – known as Total Football (in which spatial tactics are analysed and carried out with meticulous precision) – fascinates viewers even when the teams aren't at the top of the league.

Passions for football run so high it's almost scary. The national football association counts a million members, and every weekend teams professional and amateur hit pitches across the country. Many pro clubs play in modern, hi-tech stadiums such as the Amsterdam Arena (p132), assisted by a modern, hi-tech police force to combat hooligans.

Cycling

To say the Dutch are avid cyclists is like saying the English don't mind football. In sporting terms there's extensive coverage of races in the media, and you'll see uniformed teams whiz by on practice runs in remote quarters. Joop Zoetemelk pedalled to victory in the 1980 Tour de France after finishing second six times. The biggest Dutch wheel-off is the Amstel Gold Race around hilly Limburg in late April, while the five-day Tour de Nederland, which speeds through the country at the end of August, attracts thousands of fans.

Skating

Ice skating is as Dutch as *kroketten* (croquettes; p59), and thousands of people hit the ice when the country's lakes and ditches freeze over. When the

The Dutch are the tallest people in the world, averaging 185.5cm (6ft 1in) for men and 173cm (5ft 8in) for women.

For virtual entry into the world of the Netherlands' most famous football team, Ajax, log on to www.ajax.nl.

Brilliant Orange: the Neurotic Genius of Dutch Football by David Winner has interviews with players about their personal experiences, and ties in Dutch architecture, social structure, sense of humour and even Calvinist history in a highly readable attempt to explain the Dutch psyche.

lakes aren't frozen, the Netherlands has dozens of ice rinks with Olympic-sized tracks and areas for hockey and figure skating. The most famous amateur event is Friesland's 220km-long Elfstedentocht (p238).

The Dutch generally perform well in speed skating at the Winter Olympics; in 2006 all of its nine medals (three of which were gold) were won in the discipline. International competitions are held at the Thialf indoor ice stadium in Heerenveen, Friesland. Amsterdam's main ice rink was named after Jaap Eden, a legend whose heyday was around 1900.

Swimming

Swimming is the most popular sport when it comes to the raw numbers of practitioners, edging out even football and cycling. One-third of all Dutch swim in the pools, lakes or sea, and fancy aquatic complexes have sprung up in many cities to meet demand. Today's top amphibian is Olympic gold medallist (in both the 2000 and 2004 Olympics) Inge de Bruin, queen of freestyle and butterfly.

Tennis

Tennis has been incredibly popular since Richard Krajicek fell to his knees after clinching the 1996 Wimbledon final. The national tennis club is the country's second largest after football, and many people book time on courts in all-weather sports halls. Krajicek has hung up his racket, but there's fresh blood on the circuit like Martin Verkerk, a finalist at the 2003 French Open, and Michaela Krajicek, who at only 16 entered the top 100 on the professional tour in 2005.

Other Sports

Golf is the fastest-growing sport, with about 170,000 members out on the links every year, and darts has gained an enthusiastic audience following the victories of Raymond van Barneveld, four times world champion. Also, the Netherlands has long had the world's foremost water polo league.

Over the centuries a number of sporting games have evolved in the Netherlands, some of them quaint and curious. *Kaatsen* is ancient Frisian handball played on a large grass pitch, and it's taken deadly seriously in northern towns such as Franeker. *Polstokspringen* is rural pole vaulting over the canals, a pastime known in Friesland as *fierljeppen*. *Korfbal*, a cross between netball, volleyball and basketball, enjoys a vibrant scene across the country.

MULTICULTURALISM

The Netherlands has a long history of tolerance towards immigration and a reputation for welcoming immigrants with open arms. The largest wave of immigration occurred in the 1960s, when the government recruited migrant workers from Turkey and Morocco to bridge a labour gap. In the mid-1970s, the granting of independence to the Dutch colony of Surinam in South America saw an influx of Surinamese.

In the past few years, however, the country's loose immigration policy has been called into question. Politically, there has been a significant swing towards the right and consequently a move towards shutting the door on immigration. The assassinations of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh caused tensions between the Dutch and Muslim immigrants to rise, and they made many Dutch consider whether immigrants were upholding the *polder* model or trying to force their native traditions on their newly adopted country.

While the government seems to be backtracking on its immigration policy towards developing countries, it is moving ahead with free movement of labour from the new EU countries. As of January 2007, citizens of Poland,

Burgundian duke Philip the Good most likely invented the tennis racquet in Holland in around 1500.

DOUBLE DUTCH

For better or for worse, the Dutch have maintained close ties with the English for centuries, and this intimate relationship has led to a menagerie of 'Dutch' catchphrases in the English language. Here are some of the more well known:

- Double Dutch – nonsense or complete gibberish; a jump-rope game using two skipping ropes. 'Going double Dutch' refers to using two types of contraceptive at the same time.
- Dutch courage – strength or confidence gained from drinking alcohol.
- Dutch oven – large, thick-walled cooking pot with a tight-fitting lid; the act of farting in bed, then trapping your partner – and the stench – under the covers.
- Dutch uncle – person who sternly gives (often benevolent) advice.
- Dutch wife – pillow or frame used for resting the legs on in bed; a prostitute or sex doll.
- Going Dutch – splitting the bill at a restaurant. Also known as Dutch date or Dutch treat.
- Pass the dutchie – not a phrase as such, but the title of a top-10 hit by Musical Youth in 1982. 'Dutchie' refers to an aluminium cooking pot supposedly manufactured in the Netherlands and used throughout the West Indies.

Slovenia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will have unrestricted work access to the Netherlands. How this will change the multicultural make-up of the country, only time will tell.

MEDIA

The Dutch value freedom of expression, and the media have an independent, pluralistic character which is guaranteed by the constitution. Newspapers, TV and radio are free to decide on the nature and content of their programmes.

The Netherlands first set up a public broadcasting system in the 1920s. In an approach that's all Dutch, the airwaves are divided up in an attempt to give everyone a say, and broadcasts are still linked to social or religious groups (air time is allocated in line with their membership numbers). Currently, the TV market is highly competitive, with public stations facing stiff competition from commercial ones. Unsurprisingly, stations are unafraid to push the boundaries of sensibility; you'll see sex tips and prostate cancer examinations (using live models...) broadcast late in the evening. The current reality-TV craze sweeping the globe was born here with *Big Brother*, and the likes of *Fear Factor*, *Extreme Makeover* and *Ready, Steady, Cook* all come from the Netherlands.

Practically every Dutch household subscribes to a daily newspaper. Some of the biggest among the 32 daily papers are the Amsterdam-based *De Telegraaf*, *Het Parool* and *NRC Handelsblad*. Many commuters also pick up copies of the free *Metro* or *Spits* from train-station racks. There's a striking lack of sensationalist rags like Britain's *Sun*; readers rely more on the pulp society mags to catch up on celebrity gossip and the Dutch royal family.

RELIGION

For centuries, religious preference was split between the two heavyweights of Western society, Catholicism and Protestantism, and if you were Dutch you were one or the other. Today, 41% of the population over the age of 18 claims to have no religious affiliation, and the number of former churches that house offices and art galleries is an obvious sign of today's attitude to religion.

The old faith may have suffered a heavy blow in recent decades (secularisation is on the increase), but it's far from dead; 31% of the population follows

The Radio Netherlands website, www.radio.netherlands.nl, has articles in English on topical social issues.

Catholicism, 20% Protestantism. Religious communities still have their say in society, and they control much of Sunday morning TV programming. Vestiges exist of a religious border between Protestants and Catholics; the area north of a line running roughly from the province of Zeeland in the south-west to the province of Groningen is home to the majority of Protestants, while anywhere to the south is predominantly Catholic. Protestants can be divided even further, into the Dutch Reformed Church, various orthodox or liberal denominations, and the Lutheran church. In general, Dutch Catholics disagree with the Pope on church hierarchy, contraception and abortion, and they don't go by the term 'Roman Catholic'.

However, church and state are quite separate. The church has little or no influence on taboo subjects such as same-sex marriage, euthanasia, and prescription of cannabis for medical purposes, all of which are legal in the Netherlands.

The latest religion to have any great impact on Dutch society is Islam. It first reached the country's shores with the arrival of immigrants from the Dutch colonies of Indonesia and Surinam in the 1950s, and a second wave broke across the country in the 1960s when immigrant workers were invited in from Morocco and Turkey. Today, approximately 5.5% of the population classes itself as Muslim. Unfortunately, tension has risen between small factions on both sides of the religious fence, but hopefully the commendable Dutch trait of tolerance will continue to prevail.

WOMEN IN THE NETHERLANDS

Dutch women attained the right to vote in 1919, and by the 1970s abortion on demand was paid for by the national health service. Dutch women are a remarkably confident lot; on a social level, equality is taken for granted and women are almost as likely as men to initiate contact with the opposite sex. It's still a different story in the workplace – fewer women than men are employed full time, and fewer still hold positions in senior management.

ARTS

The arts flourished in the Netherlands long before Rembrandt put brush to canvas. The country takes great pride in its world-class museums, the variety of classical and innovative music, and the many theatre productions staged every season. It always seems as though there's room for another arts festival, and the variety boggles the mind.

Painting

THE EARLY DAYS

The Netherlands has spawned a realm of famous painters, starting with Jan van Eyck (1385–1441), who is generally regarded as the founder of the Flemish School and credited with perfecting the technique of oil painting. Hot on his heels was the wonderfully-named Hieronymus Bosch (1415–1516), whose 15th-century religious works are as fearful as they are fascinating, and are charged with fear, distorted creatures and agonised victims. Pieter Brueghel the Elder (1525–69) is another highly acclaimed painter from Holland's early generation, and his allegorical scenes of Flemish landscapes and peasant life are instantly recognisable even by those with a minimal interest in art.

Easily the greatest of the 17th-century Dutch painters was Rembrandt (see the boxed text, opposite), a man of unearthly talent whose plays of light and shadow created shimmering religious scenes. Another great of the era was Frans Hals (1581–1666), who devoted himself to portraits; his expressive

REMBRANDT

Painting is the grandchild of nature. It is related to God.

Rembrandt van Rijn

The son of a miller, Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) was the greatest and most versatile of all 17th-century artists. In some respects Rembrandt was centuries ahead of his time, as shown by the emotive brushwork of his later works.

Rembrandt grew up in Leiden, where he became good at chiaroscuro, the technique of creating depth through light and darkness. In 1631 he moved to Amsterdam to run a painting studio, where he and his staff churned out scores of profitable portraits, such as *Anatomy Lesson of Dr Tulp*. The studio work was also good for his personal life; he married the studio owner's niece, Saskia van Uylenburgh.

After Rembrandt fell out with his boss he bought the house next door, now the Rembrandthuis (p99). Here he set up his own studio, employing staff in a warehouse in Amsterdam's Jordaan to cope with the demand for 'Rembrandts'. His paintings became all the rage and the studio became the largest in the country, despite his gruff manners and open agnosticism.

As one of the city's main art collectors Rembrandt often sketched and painted for himself. Amsterdam's Jewish residents acted as models for dramatic biblical scenes.

Business went downhill after Saskia died in 1642. Rembrandt's innovative group portrait, the *Nightwatch*, may have won over the art critics – but his subjects had all paid good money and some were unhappy to appear in the background. The artist's love affairs and lavish lifestyle marred his reputation, and he eventually went bankrupt. His house and art collection were sold and, with the debtors breathing down his neck, Rembrandt took a modest abode on the Jordaan's Rozengracht.

Rembrandt ended life a broken man and passed away a year after the death of his son Titus, largely forgotten by the society he once served. Yet 400 years after his death, the celebrated painter still manages to make headlines. The Netherlands celebrated his 400th anniversary with gusto; a plethora of museums held exhibitions celebrating the man, and the likes of Leiden and Amsterdam created Rembrandt walking routes.

Both the municipal museum in Faro and an art gallery in Liverpool recently discovered fake Rembrandts adorning their walls, and lost works rediscovered in 2006 in Warsaw caused a stir in the art world. To view some of Rembrandt's most famous works, visit the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

paintings can be seen in the Rijksmuseum (p106) in Amsterdam and the Frans Hals Museum (p149) in Haarlem.

A discussion of 17th-century art would not be complete without a mention of Johannes Vermeer (1632–75) of Delft. He was the master of genre painting, such as *View of Delft* and historical and biblical scenes, and he recently gained celluloid fame through *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, a dramatised account of the painting of his famous work of the same name. Both paintings are on display at the Mauritshuis (p197).

Jan Steen (1626–79) skilfully captured the domestic chaos of ordinary Dutch life. Lively and bold, his paintings are not only artistically eye-catching but also fun; *The Merry Family*, on display at the Rijksmuseum, is a classic example, showing adults enjoying themselves around the dinner table, blissfully unaware of the children pouring themselves a drink in the foreground.

If you were to prompt passers-by to name the first painter to pop into their head, a high majority would probably blurt out Vincent van Gogh. Although he spent much of his life in Belgium and France, he is very much claimed by the Dutch as one of their own (for more, see p40).

VINCENT VAN GOGH

Without a doubt the greatest 19th-century Dutch painter was Vincent van Gogh (1853–90). His striking use of colour, coarse brushwork and layered contours put him in a league all his own, yet, astonishingly, he was self-taught and his painting career lasted less than 10 years, from 1881 to 1890. In this time he produced a staggering 900 paintings and 1100 drawings.

Born in Zundert near the Belgian border, the young Van Gogh started off in his uncle's art dealership in 1869, but he found it hard to settle and over the next 10 years tried his hand as a teacher in England and a missionary in Belgium. By 1880 he had found his true calling, however, and threw himself into painting with abandon.

He spent much of his early career in the Low Countries, where he produced dark, heavy paintings, such as his celebrated *Potato Eaters* (1885). In the mid-1800s he moved to Paris to live with his brother Theo, a constant support for the troubled artist; it was here that his contact with impressionists such as Pissarro, Degas and Gauguin transformed the Dutchman's painting into blazing flowers, portraits and the wide-open spaces of Paris.

In 1888 Van Gogh moved to Arles and formed an artists' cooperative with Gauguin, but depression and hallucinations began to haunt him. In an argument with Gauguin, Van Gogh conducted possibly his most famous act by cutting off his left ear lobe in his despair and sending it to a prostitute.

Towards the end of his life mental ill health forced him into a psychiatric hospital, but in his lucid moments he continued to paint. His spiritual anguish and depression became more acute, however, and on 27 July 1890 he shot himself; he survived two more days before succumbing.

It is sad to note that his paintings were only appreciated towards the end of his life (he sold one painting while alive, *Red Vineyard at Arles*) and he lived a life of poverty. Today his paintings fetch millions; his *Portrait of Dr Gachet* is the second most expensive painting ever sold, going for a cool US\$82.5 million in 1990 (around US\$117 million in 2006 with inflation). His works now hang in galleries from New York to Moscow, but a number can be seen in the Van Gogh Museum (p106) and the Kröller-Müller Museum (p269).

DE STIJL & BEYOND

An Amersfoort-born painter named Piet Mondriaan (1872–1944) changed the direction of 20th-century art when he introduced the cubist De Stijl movement in 1917. De Stijl aimed to harmonise all the arts by returning artistic expression to its essence, and the artist – who changed the spelling of his name to Mondrian after moving to Paris in 1910 – did this by reducing shapes to horizontal and vertical lines. His paintings came to consist of bold rectangular patterns using only the three primary colours (red, yellow and blue), a style known as neoplasticism. The moving ode to the USA entitled *Victory Boogie Woogie* is considered the flagship work of the genre. Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum (p109) has other examples on display, such as *Composition with Red, Black, Blue, Yellow and Grey*. The movement influenced a generation of sculptors and designers such as Gerrit Rietveld, who planned the Van Gogh Museum and other buildings along De Stijl lines.

The last century also saw the perplexing designs of Maurits Cornelis Escher (1902–72), whose impossible images continue to fascinate to this day. A waterfall feeds itself, people go up and down a staircase that ends where it starts, a pair of hands draw each other. He was also a master of organic tile patterns that feed into one another while subtly changing the picture into something else; his work can be viewed at the Escher in het Paleis (p198) in Den Haag.

After WWII, artists rebelled against artistic conventions and vented their rage in abstract expressionism. Karel Appel (1921–2006) and Constant (1920–2005) drew on styles pioneered by other European artists, exploiting bright colours to produce works that leapt off the canvas. In Paris they met up with Danish Asger Jorn (1914–73) and the Belgian Corneille (1922–), and together

these artists formed the CoBrA group (Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam). Much of their work can be seen at the CoBrA Museum (p110).

Contemporary Dutch artists are usually well represented at international events such as the Biennale in Venice and the Documenta in Kassel. The ranks of distinguished contemporary artists include Jan Dibbets (1941–), Ger van Elk (1941–) and Marthe Röling (1939–).

Music

The old, dour Calvinists of the 17th century were never fans of music, dismissing it as frivolous. They only began to allow church organ music because they realised it kept people out of pubs.

Despite this inauspicious start, the music scene in the Netherlands is blisteringly good. Dutch musicians excel in the classics, techno/dance and jazz, and the high level of music appreciation means there's a steady stream of touring talent.

There has, however, been a revival in '80s music in recent years. You'll hear it in restaurants, bars and even clubs ('80s nights are all the rage). While we're not bashing the music of over two decades ago (who doesn't like early Depeche Mode?), after a week or two of listening to '80s pop you'll be ready to listen to *anything* else.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

The Netherlands has many orchestras based in cities throughout the country. Den Haag, Rotterdam and Maastricht have a full calendar of performances by local orchestras and groups, but Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra towers over them all. It frequently performs abroad, mixing and matching works by famous composers with little-known gems of the modern era.

The Orchestra of the 18th Century and the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra are well-known smaller ensembles. The classics of Bach, Handel and Vivaldi are always in sensitive hands at the Combattimento Consort Amsterdam.

The Dutch have many fine classical musicians. Among pianists, Wibi Soerjadi (who studied at Amsterdam's prestigious Sweelinck Conservatory) is one of the most successful and specialises in romantic works. Halls are always filled for Ronald Brautigam, a grand master and winner of a host of accolades, including the Dutch national music prize.

Top violinists include Isabelle van Keulen, who often collaborates with Brautigam. An engaging personality of seemingly endless vitality, Van Keulen has founded her own chamber music festival in Delft.

Cellists of note include Quirine Viersen, a powerful, intense soloist who won the International Cello Competition in Paris. The fiery bowing of Pieter Wispelwey from Leiden thrills audiences around the world.

In the voice department there's no diva greater than soprano Charlotte Margiono, who pretty much wrote the book on interpretation in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, the *Magic Flute* and other classics. Mezzo-soprano Jard van Nes has a giant reputation for her solo parts in Mahler's symphonies.

Modern Dutch composers include Louis Andriessen, Theo Loevendie, Klaas de Vries and the late Ton de Leeuw. Many of their works are forays into the uncharted waters of experimental music, and nowhere is the sense of adventure more tangible than in Amsterdam. Look out for the Trio, Asko Ensemble, Nieuw Ensemble and, last but not least, the Schönberg Ensemble, conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw. These performers often appear in Amsterdam's IJsbreker music hall.

The Netherlands Opera stages about 10 world-class performances a year at its home, Amsterdam's Muziektheater (p130). Contemporary opera forms an important part of the repertoire and inevitably stirs up a lot of controversy.

'In the voice department there's no diva greater than soprano Charlotte Margiono...'

JAZZ

In the past the Netherlands hasn't bred oodles of jazz talent. However, the phenomenal success of the North Sea Jazz Festival has sown some powerful seeds, and the Dutch jazz scene can now stand on its own two feet. Europe's largest jazzfest, the festival is held in Den Haag every summer. Amsterdam's leading jazz club, Bimhuis (p130), has a concert agenda that's all quality.

The Netherlands has fostered some gifted jazz singers. Familiar to Dutch audiences for decades, the honeyed voice of Denise Jannah finally caught the attention of Blue Note in the 1990s. Her repertoire is American standards with touches of her Surinamese homeland.

Originally a jazz and cabaret vocalist, Astrid Seriese now captures a wider public with a variety of styles, from lyrical Cole Porter to rock and soundtracks for documentaries. Soulful Carmen Gomez is as comfortable singing Aretha Franklin as Ella Fitzgerald tunes. Fleurine is another gifted young chanteuse.

Dutch saxophone romped onto the international stage thanks to Hans and Candy Dulfer, father and daughter of the reeds. On alto sax, Candy is a known commodity, thanks to her funky performances with Prince, Van Morrison, Dave Stewart, Pink Floyd and many others. Hans blows jazz standards but also incorporates hip-hop and other genres.

A great soloist on flute is Peter Guidi, who set up the jazz programme at the Muziekschool Amsterdam and leads its Jazzmania big band.

Born in Amsterdam's Jordaan district, trumpeter Saskia Laroo mixes jazz with dance and has been able to 'play for the people while still being innovative', as one critic put it. She leads a number of acts including Smoothgroovy BreakBeats with HotLicks.

For top-rate jazz piano, pick up a CD of Michiel Borstlap, a winner of the Thelonius Monk award, who has recorded with Peter Erskine, Toots Thielemans, Ernie Watts and many others. His soul and label mate is bass player Hein van de Geyn.

On guitar, Jesse van Ruller's effortless playing is the stuff of complex refinement, especially on up-tempo pieces. He snagged the Thelonius Monk award in 1996, like Borstlap.

Big-band leaders such as Willem Breuker and Willem van Manen (of Contraband) straddle modern classical and improvised music, an acquired taste for some audiences. The XLJazz Orkest, a new big band with strings conducted by composer-arranger Gerrit Jan Brinkhorst, brings together established pros and hungry young blowers.

POP, ROCK & DANCE

Amsterdam is the pop capital of the Netherlands, and bands and DJs are attracted to the city like moths to the flame. However, Rotterdam gives the capital a run for its money in the dance stakes, with a clubbing scene to rival that of most cities around the world.

In the '60s Amsterdam was the hub of counter-culture, but the epicentre of pop was in Den Haag. The Scheveningse Boulevard was the place to see bands like Shocking Blue in full view of Veronica, the radio station that broadcast tunes from a harbour ship. In 1969 Golden Earring's *Eight Miles High* album went gold in the USA.

The '70s brought a few more Dutch hits internationally. In 1973 Jan Akkerman's progressive rock band Focus conquered the charts with *Thisj van Leer* as chief yodeller. Herman Brood burst onto the scene with *His Wild Romance* and became a real-life, druggie, self-absorbed rock star, until he threw himself off the top of the Amsterdam Hilton in 2001. After his death, his remake of *My Way* went to number one in the Netherlands.

'bands and DJs are attracted to the city like moths to the flame.'

The squatters' movement spawned a lively punk scene, followed by the manic synthesizers of New Wave. By the mid-1980s Amsterdam was a magnet for guitar-driven rock bands such as Claw Boys Claw, dyed-in-the-wool garage rockers. Most vocalists stuck to lyrics in English, but the pop group Doe Maar broke through in Dutch, inspiring scores of bands such as Tröckener Kecks. Around this time Amsterdam also evolved into a capital of club music – house, techno and R&B, with its spiritual base at the überclub Roxy (which later burnt to a crisp).

Dutch bands were power-boostered by the 1991 introduction of commercial radio. In the early 1990s the best-known Dutch variant of house was gabber, which originated in Rotterdam; it's known for its stripped-back sound and monotonous beat (up to 260 beats per minute). Rotterdam Terror Corps are considered the pioneer of this genre and are still around today.

The hip grooves of Candy Dulfer (see opposite) and the hip-hoppy Urban Dance Squad made America's Top 20 during the decade. Bettie Serveert, a nod to Dutch tennis player Betty Stöve, grew into one of the biggest bands on the club circuit. Amsterdam hip-hop was spearheaded by the Osdorp Posse, who rap in their mother tongue. Following in their footsteps is the immensely popular Moroccan-Dutch rapper Ali-B.

The Netherlands has become a major centre for dance music, particularly trance. Amsterdam and Rotterdam attract top DJs from around the world on an almost weekly basis, but quite often clubs only need to scan the local market for internationally-renowned DJs. Tiësto is the undisputed trancemeister, and other top DJs include Armin van Buuren and Ferry Corsten.

Pop festivals come out of the woodwork in the warmer months: Pinkpop in Landgraaf, Parkpop in Den Haag and Dynamo Open Air at Neunen. Dance Valley near Haarlem pulls over 100 bands and even more DJs to the biggest open-air dancefest in the Benelux region.

WORLD MUSIC

Cosmopolitan Amsterdam offers a wealth of world music. Surinam-born Ronald Snijders, a top jazz flautist, often participates in world music projects. Another jazz flautist heading towards 'world' is the eternal Chris Hinze with his album *Tibet Impressions*, though most of his repertoire falls in the New Age category.

Fra-Fra-Sound plays paramaribop, a unique mixture of traditional Surinamese kaseko and jazz, however the bulk of world repertoire from Amsterdam is Latin, ranging from Cuban salsa to Dominican merengue and Argentine tango. A sparkling Dutch-Brazilian band is Zuco 103, which melds bossa nova and samba with DJ rubs on the turntable. The New Cool Collective is a big band with vocals that serves up a groovy cocktail of Latin, jazz, New Age and '60s go-go. Other bands providing a taste of the Dutch world scene include Nueva Manteca (salsa), Sexteto Canyengue (tango) and Eric Vaarzon Morel (flamenco).

The Amsterdam Roots Music Festival (p117) of world music takes place in Amsterdam's Oosterpark every June.

Literature

The Netherlands has a rich literary heritage, but its gems used to be reserved for Dutch speakers. Most of its best-known contemporary authors were finally translated into English beginning in the mid-1990s.

In the Middle Ages Dutch literature stuck to epic tales of chivalry and allegories. But that changed in the 16th century with Erasmus, a name familiar to school children across the globe. The leading Dutch humanist wrote a satire on the church and society called *His Praise of Folly*.

'Pop festivals come out of the woodwork in the warmer months...'

COFFEESHOPS

Love 'em or hate 'em, it's almost impossible to avoid them, or at least the sweet smell wafting from their direction. This is the humble *koffieshop*, an establishment unique to the Netherlands (but tried in a number of European countries) that sells cannabis and, to a lesser extent, magic mushrooms and coffee.

Every major town (and a few minor) has a handful of coffeeshops, and the touristy joints are easy to spot: just look for the telling hemp leaves, Rastafarian colours (red, yellow and green) or *X-Files* alien adorning the façade. However, the better, more comfortable – and far more appealing – shops can be hard to differentiate from a regular *koffiehuis* (espresso bar or sandwich shop) or café, and usually cater to a discerning local crowd. Very few serve alcohol, which is a blessing in disguise as it's not always wise to mix the two drugs.

The range of marijuana on sale can be quite daunting, so it's best to get the advice of someone behind the bar. Be honest – if you're a novice, don't be afraid to 'fess up; it's better to start with something light (like Thai) than end up getting ill after smoking some Skunk or White Zombie. Pre-rolled joints are available for anything between €2 and €5, and these are handy for sampling various types. Most people buy small bags of dope, though, which go for around €4 to €12 (the better the quality, the less the bag will contain). Price and quality are generally OK – you won't get ripped off in a coffeeshop.

Most cannabis products used to be imported, but these days the country has top-notch home produce, so-called *nederwiet* (*nay-der-weet*), developed by diligent horticulturists and grown in greenhouses with up to five harvests a year. Even the police admit it's a superior product, especially the potent 'superskunk' with up to 13% of the active substance THC (Nigerian grass has 5% and Colombian 7%). According to a government-sponsored poll of coffeeshop owners, *nederwiet* has captured over half the market, and hash is in decline even among tourists.

Space cakes and cookies (and even chocolate!) are sold in a rather low-key fashion, mainly because of their potency and the time it takes for them to kick in; some take an hour to work, in which time you've probably consumed a couple more because you're not feeling anything... ask the staff how much you should take and heed their advice. If you do it right, you'll have a very gentle, pleasant ride for up to six hours. Many coffeeshops sell magic mushrooms, which are quite legal as an untreated, natural product.

For information on how much you can buy and at what age you can smoke, see p293.

The literary lights of the Golden Age included Spinoza, an Amsterdam Jew who wrote deep philosophical treatises. Spinoza rejected the concept of free will, contending that humans acted purely out of self-preservation. Mind and body were made of the same stuff, which he alternately called God and Nature – this got him into all kinds of trouble.

Joost van den Vondel is often regarded as the Dutch Shakespeare. His best tragedy, *Lucifer*, describes the archangel's rebellion against God. Dutch literature flourished in the 17th century under writers such as Bredero, one of the early comic writers, and Hooft, a veritable multitalent who penned poems, plays and history. The bible was also translated into Dutch in the 17th century, and the publication of *De Statenbijbel* in 1637 was a milestone in the evolution of the Dutch language.

Postwar literature was dominated by three eminent novelists, Willem Frederik Hermans, Harry Mulisch and Gerard Reve, and the war featured prominently in many works. In recent years they were joined by distinguished writers such as Jan Wolkers, Maarten 't Hart and Frederik van der Heijden, but these offerings are still tough to find in English. Many of these authors have been awarded the PC Hooftprijs, the Dutch national literary prize.

In the contemporary field, Cees Nooteboom is one of the country's most prolific writers; his novel *The Following Story* won the Aristeion European

Prize for Literature in 1991. Other authors to watch for include Simon Carmiggelt, a regular columnist for *Het Parool*, Jan Wolkers, whose *Turkish Delight* – an intense story of obsessive love – shocked Dutch readers in the late '60s, and Arthur Japin, an actor/writer with a number of novels under his belt (his latest work, *In Lucia's Eyes*, has gained plenty of international adulation).

The growing interest in Dutch literature has been no accident. The Dutch Literary Production and Translation Fund (www.nlpvf.nl) began propagating the nation's literature abroad in 1991 and the efforts have paid off. Many titles now appearing in English were already bestsellers in German and other languages.

RECOMMENDED READS

- *Max Havelaar* by Multatuli. An indictment of colonial forced-labour policy in the Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia), written in 1860. Multatuli – Latin for 'I have suffered greatly' – was the pen name of Eduard Dekker, a colonial bureaucrat.
- *Diary of Anne Frank (Het Dagboek van Anne Frank)* by Anne Frank. Possibly the most famous book penned in the Netherlands; a moving account of a young Jewish girl's thoughts while hiding from the occupying Germans.
- *A Dutchman's Slight Adventures (Een Handvol Kronkels)* by Simon Carmiggelt. Comical Amsterdam vignettes by the winner of many literary prizes including the PC Hooftprijs. Many items appeared in the Amsterdam paper *Het Parool*. Tricky to find in English.
- *The Happy Hooker* by Xaviera Hollander. An unapologetic yet upbeat look at the world of the sex worker, based on a true story. This classic 1972 novel came out when 'damn' still elicited gasps from the audience.
- *Parents Worry (Bezorgde Ouders)* by Gerard Reve. Historical novel from one of Holland's first out-and-out homosexuals about one day in the ravaged life of a poet looking for truth and a way out. Hard to find, but well worth the search.
- *In a Dark Wood Wandering (Het Woud der Verwachting)* by Hella Haase. Quirky historical novel set during the Hundred Years' War, with a cast of believable characters based on great figures from mad Charles VI to Joan of Arc.
- *The Following Story (Het Volgende Verhaal)* by Cees Nooteboom. Award-winning contemporary Dutch writer tackles a schoolmaster's journey through memory and imagination in the final seconds of his life.
- *The Discovery of Heaven (De Ontdekking van de Hemel)* by Harry Mulisch. Two friends find they were conceived on the same day, and share love, hate, a woman and a child who is destined to return the Ten Commandments to God. Made into a film of the same name in 2001.
- *A Heart of Stone (Een Hart van Steen)* by Renate Dorrestein. A terrifying Gothic-style tale of violence, childhood and madness told from inside the minds of three troubled children of a superficially idyllic family.
- *First Gray, Then White, Then Blue (Eerst Grijs, Dan Wit, Dan Blauw)* by Margriet de Moor. An intense tale of passion and deception in which a woman reappears after a two-year absence from her husband, with no explanation or remorse.
- *The Two Hearts of Kwasi Boachi (De Zwarte met het Witte Hart)* by Arthur Japin. The true story of two West African princes sent to study in Holland in the 1830s, and what becomes of them in the ensuing years.
- *The Vanishing (Het Gouden Ei – The Golden Egg)* by Tim Krabbé. Gripping psychological thriller following a man's hunt for his missing girlfriend, and a study of the banality of evil. Made into the Dutch-French film *Spoorloos* and remade as the American film *The Vanishing*.

Cinema & Television

Dutch cinema hasn't rocked the world, but that's not to say there isn't anything worth seeing. The country's small film industry produces around 20 feature films a year, often in association with other countries. Private funding is on the increase as, unfortunately, government funding was pruned in the last few years.

In recent times Dutch films have won a string of nominations for best foreign film at the Academy Awards. In 2003, it was Paula van der Oest's *Zus & So*; 2004 saw Ben Sombogaart's *Twin Sisters* make the final cut; and in 2006 *Paradise Now*, a film by Hany Abu-Assad, a Dutch-Palestinian, did the same. The latter won the Golden Globe in 2006.

Dutch filmmakers who have made it big in Hollywood include Paul Verhoeven (*Robocop*, *Basic Instinct*, *Starship Troopers*) and Jan de Bont (*Speed*, *Lara Croft II*). The former, however, has produced better work at home, such as the violent erotic thriller *De Vierde Man* (The Fourth Man), and *Turks Fruit* (Turkish Delight), a provocative tale of love and sex. George Sluizer has also made inroads into Hollywood but has yet to reach the astounding heights of his *Spoorloos* (the original *The Vanishing*).

Leading actors Rutger Hauer, Jeroen Krabbé and Famke Janssen are often not recognised as being Dutch – it's those good English skills again.

The biggest loss to Dutch cinema in recent years is Theo van Gogh. His greatest box-office success was *06*, a film about a phone-sex relationship, but he will be forever remembered for *Submission: Part 1*, a short piece showing how verses from the Koran could be used to justify violence against women, that was aired not long before his murder. Ironically, he was in the middle of filming *06/05*, a fictional version of the assassination of Pim Fortuyn, when he himself was assassinated.

Film festivals worth noting include the Rotterdam International Film Festival in February, Utrecht's Netherlands Film Festival in September, and Amsterdam's International Documentary Film Festival and Fantastic Film Festival, held in December and April, respectively.

For a snippet of information about Dutch TV, see p37.

Photography

The Netherlands has a tradition of photography committed to social themes. The first World Press Photo exhibition was held in Amsterdam in 1975, and the exhibition still opens in the city before touring 80 countries around the globe.

Documentary photography and portraits seem to be the focus of younger-generation Dutch photographers. The photos of Wubbo de Jong, one of the country's best, can range from disturbing to funny, but are always thought-provoking and powerful, while the late Ed van der Elsken had the ability to capture the world in its unguarded moments.

The list of leading lights today seems endless. At the fore is Rineke Dijkstra, with her unglamorous head-on portraits of common folk, and Marie Cecile Thijs, who adds more colour and humour to her portrait shots. The photos of Henk Braam, a top docu-shooter, are an unflinching take on some of the troubled corners of the globe. The inseparable Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin create slick shots for the advertising world, while the internationally-successful Anton Corbijn has had the privilege to photograph the likes of Johnny Depp, Tom Waits, Miles Davis, Keith Richards, Nick Cave, David Bowie and many more.

Excellent collections of photographs can be viewed at Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum and Stedelijk Museum, and at the Print Room at Leiden University. The Netherlands Photography Institute is in Rotterdam, and private galleries in all the major cities hold exhibitions.

A website devoted to the latest comings and goings in the contemporary Dutch film arena is www.hollandfilm.nl.

Theatre

The Netherlands has a rich theatrical tradition going back to medieval times. In the Golden Age, when Dutch was the language of trade, companies from the Low Countries toured the theatres of Europe. Some highlights of the era – Vondel's tragedies, Bredero's comedies and Hoof's verses – are still performed today, albeit with a modern voice.

By the end of the 19th century, however, theatre had become downright snobbish.

This trend continued until the 1960s, when disgruntled actors began to throw tomatoes at their older colleagues and engaged the audience in discussion. Avant-garde theatre companies such as Mickery and Shaffy made Amsterdam a centre for experimental theatre, and many smaller companies sprang up in their wake.

There are many professional theatre companies, including traditional repertory companies and smaller companies who are exploring new avenues of theatre, often combining music, mime and new media techniques. The language barrier can prove problematic, depending on the production.

When it's not touring abroad, De Dogtroep (www.dogtroep.nl) stages fancy and unpredictable 'happenings' in quirky venues like an Utrecht archaeological dig or Amsterdam's ship passenger terminal. Each show is supported by flashy multimedia effects and technical gadgetry. A spin-off of Dogtroep, Warner & Consorten (www.warnerenconsorten.nl) is a variation on the same theme; it stages dialogue-free shows with plenty of humour, and music is generated with everyday items.

English-language companies often visit Amsterdam, especially in summer. Glitzy big-budget musicals have won over audiences in recent years, as have English-language outfits like Boom Chicago with its fast-paced comedy.

Highlights of the Dutch theatre season include the Holland Festival (p116) and Over het IJ (www.overhetij.nl) in Amsterdam, and the edgier Robodock (www.robodock.org), held at Rotterdam's shipyards. Shows at the latter are driven by feuding robots, amoebic screen projections and choreographed pyrotechnics.

Those with a particular interest in Dutch theatre should check out the Theatre Museum in the Theater Instituut Nederland (p101).

Dance

The Netherlands is a world leader in modern dance. The troupe of the Nederlands Dans Theater (www.ndt.nl) in Den Haag leaps and pirouettes to international audiences. There are also many smaller modern dance companies such as Introdans, which can truly be described as poetry in motion.

Originally for youth audiences, Rotterdam's Scapino Ballet (www.scapino-ballet.nl) has built up a wide repertoire of contemporary dance in recent years. The city is also home to Dansacademie (www.hmd.nl), the nation's largest dance school. The National Ballet (www.het-nationale-ballet.nl) in Amsterdam performs mainly classical ballets but also presents 20th-century works by Dutch choreographers such as Rudi van Dantzig or Toer van Schayk. The biennial Holland Dance Festival (hollanddance.plant.nl) in Den Haag draws some of the world's most sophisticated productions.

'In the Golden Age, when Dutch was the language of trade, companies from the Low Countries toured the theatres of Europe.'

Environment

There's no arguing with the fact that the Netherlands is a product of human endeavour, and a well-manicured one at that. Everywhere you look, from the neat rows of *polders* (strips of farmland separated by canals) to the omnipresent dykes, everything looks so, well, planned and organised. 'God created the world, but the Dutch created the Netherlands', as the saying goes.

Much of this tinkering with nature has been out of necessity – it's hard to live underwater for any length of time. But all this reorganisation has put a strain on the Dutch environment. Whether it's from pollution, deforestation or flooding, the cumulative dangers to natural and artificial environments are arguably greater than ever. Nearly one-third of the country's surface is devoted to agriculture, while much of the rest serves towns and industry.

In the late 20th century Dutch awareness of the environment grew by leaps and bounds. Citizens now dutifully sort their rubbish, support pro-bicycle schemes, and protest over scores of projects of potential detriment – even the air miles offered at supermarket tills. City-centre congestion has been eased by cutting parking spaces, erecting speed bumps and initiating park-and-ride programmes. Country roads tend to favour bike lanes at the cost of motor vehicles.

But all this progress isn't a given. New EU environmental laws don't go as far as the Dutch would like, and the slowing economy has meant cutbacks to major clean-up schemes. Still, the Dutch now tend to monitor pollution as they do their dykes – with extreme vigilance.

THE LAND

Flanked by Belgium, Germany and the choppy waters of the North Sea, the land mass of the Netherlands is to a great degree artificial, having been reclaimed from the sea over many centuries. Maps from the Middle Ages are a curious sight today, with large chunks of land 'missing' from Noord Holland and Zeeland. The country now encompasses 41,526 sq km, making it roughly half the size of Scotland or a touch bigger than the USA's state of Maryland.

Twelve provinces make up the Netherlands. Almost all of these are as flat as a Dutch pancake, for want of a better term; the only hills to speak of in the entire country rise from its very southern tip, near Maastricht. The soil in the west and north is relatively young and consists of peat and clay formed less than 10,000 years ago. Much of this area is below sea level, or reclaimed land (half the country lies at or below sea level in the form of *polders*). The sandy, gravelly layer throughout the east and south is much older, having been deposited by rivers and then pushed up into ridges during the last ice age. This part of the country is noticeably different in appearance, with patches of forest and heath.

The efforts of the Dutch to create new land – which basically equates to reclaiming it from the encroaching sea – are almost super-human. Over the past century alone four vast *polders* have been created through ingenious engineering: Wieringermeer in Noord Holland; the Noordoostpolder (Northeast *polder*) in Flevoland; and the Noordpolder (North *polder*) and Zuidpolder (South *polder*) on the province-island of Flevoland. Much of this, just over 1700 sq km, was drained after a barrier dyke closed off the North Sea in 1932 (see p175). In total, an astounding 20% of the country is reclaimed land.

A third of the dairy cattle in the world are Holstein Friesian, a high-yielding variety from the Netherlands.

Polders form 60% of the Netherlands landscape.

It's impossible to talk about the Dutch landscape without mentioning water. Of the 41,526 sq km that the Dutch claim as the Netherlands, 7643 sq km is liquid; that amounts to around 20% of the entire country. Most Dutch people shudder at the thought of a leak in the dykes. If the Netherlands were to lose its 2400km of mighty dykes and dunes – some of which are 25m high – the large cities would be inundated by rivers as well as by the sea. Modern pumping stations run around the clock to drain off excess water.

The danger of floods is most acute in the southwest province of Zeeland, a sprawling estuary for the rivers Schelde, Maas, Lek and Waal. The latter two are branches of the Rijn, the final legs of a watery journey that begins in the Swiss Alps. The mighty Rijn itself peters out in a tiny stream called the Oude Rijn (Old Rhine) at the coast near Katwijk. The Maas is another of Europe's major rivers to cross the country. It rises in France and travels through Belgium before depositing its load in the North Sea in the Delta region.

WILDLIFE

Human encroachment has played a huge role in the wildlife of the Netherlands. Few wildlife habitats are left intact in the country, and over 10% of species are imported; since 1900, the number of imported species has doubled.

While Holland's flora and fauna will forever be in constant change, one thing remains the same – birds love the place. A great depth of species can be seen the entire year round, and bird-watching enthusiasts will be all aflutter at the abundance of opportunities to spot our feathered friends.

Animals

The Netherlands is a paradise for birds and those who love to follow them around. The wetlands are a major migration stop for European birds, particularly the Wadden Islands' Duinen van Texel National Park (p167), Flevoland's Oostvaardersplassen Nature Reserve (p176) and the Delta (p228). Just take the geese: a dozen varieties, from white-fronted to pink-footed, break their V-formations to winter here. New wind-energy parks along the routes are controversial because thousands of birds get caught in the big blades.

Along urban canals you'll see plenty of mallards, coots and swans as well as the lovely grebe with its regal head plumage. The graceful blue heron spears frogs and tiny fish in the ditches of the *polder* lands but also loiters on canal boats in and out of town. Other frequent guests include the black cormorant, an accomplished diver with a wingspan of nearly 1m. Feral pigeons are rarely in short supply, especially for handouts on town squares.

A variety of fish species dart about the canals and estuaries. One of the most interesting species is the eel, which thrives in both fresh and salt water. These amazing creatures breed in the Sargasso Sea off Bermuda before making the perilous journey to the North Sea (only to land on someone's dinner plate). Freshwater species such as white bream, rudd, pike, perch, stickleback and carp also enjoy the canal environment. You can admire them up close at Amsterdam's Artis Zoo (p108), in an aquarium that simulates a canal environment.

In the coastal waters there are 12 crustacean species including the Chinese mitten crab. This tasty little guy from the Far East has adapted so well to the Dutch estuaries that it's a hazard to river habitats. Further out, the stock of North Sea cod, shrimp and sole has suffered from chronic overfishing, and catches are now limited by EU quotas.

Larger mammals such as the fox, badger and fallow deer have retreated to the national parks and reserves. Some species such as boar, mouflon and red deer have been reintroduced to controlled habitats. Herds of seals can

The site www.dutchbirding.nl is the online home of the Dutch Birding Society.

Where to Watch Birds in Holland, Belgium and Northern France by Arnoud van den Berg and Dominique Lafontaine is a regional guide to the best places to see your favourite species, with the locations of observation hides.

BIRD-WATCHING FOR BEGINNERS

Seen through an amateur bird-watcher's eyes, some of the more interesting sightings might include the following:

- Avocet – common on the Waddensee and the Delta, with slender upturned bill, and black and white plumage.
- Black woodpecker – drums seldom but loudly. To see it, try woodlands such as Hoge Veluwe National Park.
- Bluethroat – song like a free-wheeling bicycle; seen in Biesbosch National Park, Flevoland and the Delta.
- Great white egret – crane-like species common in marshlands. First bred in Flevoland in the early 1990s.
- Marsh harrier – bird of prey; often hovers over reed beds and arable land.
- Spoonbill – once scarce, this odd-looking fellow has proliferated on coasts in Zeeland and the Wadden Islands.
- White stork – nearly extinct in the 1980s, numbers have since recovered. Enormous nests.

be spotted on coastal sandbanks. Introduced muskrats are common in the countryside, while their cousins, the water vole and the brown rat, find shelter in the canalside nooks and crannies of cities. The cricket-like squeak of dwarf bats can be heard on summer nights – the dune reserves are a good place to see them.

Plants

Mention plant life in the Netherlands and most people think of tulips. Indeed, these cultivated bulbs are in many ways representative of much of the country's flora in that they were imported from elsewhere and then commercially exploited. A range of other flowers and fruit and vegetables – such as tomatoes and sweet peppers – fit this profile. Others, like the water pennywort, don't. This introduced water plant grows so fast over a short period of time that it often jeopardises water discharge.

Of course, the flowers of the Netherlands are not limited to exotic types. There are also thousands of wild varieties on display, such as the marsh orchid (pink crown of tiny blooms) or the Zeeland masterwort (bunches of white, compact blooms).

Much of the undeveloped land is covered by grass, which is widely used for grazing. The wet weather means that the grass remains green and grows for much of the year – on coastal dunes and mud flats, and around brackish lakes and river deltas. Marshes, heaths and peatlands are the next most common features. The remnants of oak, beech, ash and pine forests are carefully managed. Wooded areas such as Hoge Veluwe National Park are mostly products of recent forestation, so trees tend to be young and of a similar age. Even the vegetation on islands such as Ameland is monitored to control erosion.

NATIONAL PARKS

With so few corners of the Netherlands left untouched, the Dutch cherish every bit of nature that's left, and that's doubly true for their national parks. But while the first designated natural reserve was born in 1930, it wasn't until 1984 that the first publicly funded park was established.

National parks in the Netherlands tend to be small affairs – for an area to become a park, it must only be bigger than 10 sq km (and of course be

important in environmental terms). Most of the 20 national parks in the country average a mere 6400 hectares and are not meant to preserve some natural wonder but are open areas of special interest. A total of 1289 sq km, or just over 3%, of the Netherlands is protected in the form of national parks; the most northerly is the island of Schiermonnikoog, and the most southerly is the terraced landscape of De Meinweg. By 2018 the government plans to extend the network of protected areas to 7000 sq km.

The better national parks are often heavily visited, not only because there's plenty of nature to see but also because of their well-developed visitor centres and excellent displays of contemporary flora and fauna. Hoge Veluwe, established in 1935, is a particular favourite. Once the country retreat of the wealthy Kröller-Müller family, it's now open to the public, who can explore the sandy hills and forests that once were prevalent in this part of the Netherlands.

Of the 19 remaining national parks, Weerribben in Overijssel is one of the most important as it preserves a landscape once heavily scarred by the peat harvest. Here the modern objective is to allow the land to return to nature, as is the case of the island of Schiermonnikoog in Friesland, which occupies a good portion once used by a sect of monks, and Biesbosch near Rotterdam, which formerly was inhabited by reed farmers.

The most interesting national parks (NP) and nature reserves (NR) include the following:

Name	Features	Activities	Best time to visit
Biesbosch NP (p223)	estuarine reed marsh, woodland	canoeing, hiking, bird-watching	Mar-Sep
Duinen van Texel NP (p167)	dunes, heath, forest	hiking, biking, bird-watching	Mar-Sep
Hoge Veluwe NP (p269)	marsh, forests, dunes	hiking, biking, wildlife watching	all year
Oostvaardersplassen NR (p176)	wild reed marsh, grassland	hiking, biking, bird-watching, fishing	all year
Schiermonnikoog NP (p242)	car-free island, dunes, mud flats	hiking, mud-walking, bird-watching	Mar-Sep
Weerribben NP (p256)	peat marsh	boating, canoeing, hiking, bird-watching	all year
Zuid-Kennemerland NP (p152)	dunes, heath, forest	hiking, bird-watching, biking	Mar-Sep

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

As a people, the Dutch are more aware of environmental issues than most. But then again, with high population density, widespread car ownership, heavy industrialisation, extensive farming and more than a quarter of the country below sea level, they need to be.

As early as the 1980s a succession of Dutch governments began to put in motion plans to tighten the standards for industrial and farm pollution, and also made recycling a part of everyday life. Nowadays the Dutch love to debate ways to reconcile the 'triple p's' – planet, people and profit.

While people are happy to recycle, they're not so happy to give up their precious cars. Despite good, reasonably cheap public transportation, private car ownership has risen sharply over the past two decades. Use of vehicles is now about 50% above the levels of the late 1980s, which is due also to burgeoning freight transport. Some critics warn that, unless action is taken, the country's streets and motorways will become gridlocked (or should

The Netherlands is planted in 228 sq km of flower bulbs, the equivalent of around 32,500 football fields.

The site www.nationaalpark.nl/english.phtml provides a comprehensive list of national parks in the Netherlands.

Shared Spaces (www.sharedspaces.nl) is an online quarterly magazine in English that covers the Netherlands' and Europe's current environmental issues. It's published by the Netherlands Ministry of Spatial Planning, Housing and the Environment.

HIGHS & LOWS

There's no arguing that the Netherlands is a low, flat country (Netherlands in Dutch means 'low land'), but it does have some dips and bumps. Its lowest point – the small town of Nieuwerkerk aan den IJssel, near Rotterdam – is 6.74m below sea level, while its highest point, the Vaalserberg in Limburg, is a meagre 321m above.

However, if the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which consists of the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, is taken into account, the scene swiftly changes. Its lowest point remains the same, but its highest point almost triples to 862m, the top of Mt Scenery on the tiny Caribbean island of Saba.

that read 'stifflingly gridlocked?') over the next decade. Stiff parking fees, the distinct lack of parking spaces, and outlandish fines have helped curb congestion in the inner cities, however, thankfully shifting a lot of car drivers onto bicycles, trams and buses.

The country's congested motorways have proved harder to regulate. Road tolls – common practice in a number of European countries – have been suggested by various Dutch governments, but as yet nothing has been implemented. Aside from boosting the government's spending pot, tolls would help to reduce traffic jams, vehicle emissions and probably the nation's blood pressure.

The effects of global warming, a topic on the mind of everyone except the leaders of various powerful nations, are obvious in the Netherlands. Over the past century the winters have become shorter and milder, and three of the warmest years on record occurred in the past decade alone. The long-distance ice-skating race known as the Elfstedentocht (p238) may die out because the waterways in the northern province of Friesland rarely freeze hard enough. The Dutch national weather service KNMI predicts that only four to 10 races will be held this century.

The lack of ice over winter is simply annoying; a rise in sea levels is a disaster of epic proportions. If the sea level rises as forecast, the country could theoretically sink beneath the waves, like Atlantis, or at least suffer annual flooding. Extra funds have already been allocated to extend the dykes and storm barriers if necessary.

Even if the sea rises, the tenacity of the Dutch will surely keep it at bay, but this is not the only concern when it comes to the North Sea. Water quality appears to be in decline again, with pesticides, unfiltered runoff from farms and industrial waste considered to be the chief culprits. The Dutch government has put in place certain restrictions on farmers and companies, but waste still flows freely through the country and into the North Sea via the Maas and Rhine rivers, which enter the country from Belgium and Germany respectively. Dutch coastal waters meet EU standards, but the pollution can sometimes be obvious even to the casual observer. The European water-quality watchdog Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) awarded its coveted 'blue flag' to 40 Dutch beaches in 2006 – but, compared to Mediterranean countries, or even Denmark, that's not a hell of a lot.

A wave of animal diseases has raised questions about farming practices. At one point the Dutch chicken population exceeded 100 million, one of the largest concentrations in the industrialised world. That was before an outbreak of bird flu in 2002 made it necessary to destroy millions of birds to stop the spread of the disease. If the current wave of bird flu to hit Eastern Europe reaches the Netherlands, another massive cull won't be far behind it. Swine flu, foot-and-mouth disease and BSE ('mad cow' disease) have vastly reduced

pig and cattle stocks in recent years. Farmers, especially in the provinces of Noord Brabant and Limburg, are still reeling from these epidemics.

Partly to blame for such plagues, critics say, are the great numbers of animals (primarily pigs, cattle and chickens) bred and farmed together in close quarters – intensive farming is a major earner for the Dutch economy. Vaccines and stiffer rules on animal transport have been introduced to stem contagion. The crisis has a silver lining, however: fewer farm animals mean that arable lands have less nitrate-rich manure to absorb (overfertilisation is also chronic in the Netherlands).

More attention is being paid to sustainable development. Bowing to pressure by both the government and green organisations such as Greenpeace, Dutch companies are shouldering more responsibility for the impact of their operations on society and the environment. Energy giants such as Shell, Nuon and Gasunie have invested heavily in developing new sources of clean energy such as hydrogen fuel cells for cars; Amsterdam is now graced with a few hydrogen-powered buses. Wind parks in Flevoland and Noord Holland now generate a significant amount of the country's electricity, though at a cost to passing birds and the natural profile of the landscape. Demand has grown for products that are perceived as environmentally friendly, such as free-trade coffee and organic meats and vegetables. So far, however, these products are relegated to a few supermarket shelves or specialist retailers.

Jump online and check out these conservation organisations: Dutch Friends of the Earth, www.milieudefensie.nl (in Dutch); Society for Nature and Environment, www.snm.nl; and Greenpeace, www.greenpeace.org.

Architecture

The Dutch are masters of architecture and use of space, but this is nothing new. Through the ages, few countries have exerted more influence on the discipline of art and construction than the Netherlands. From the original sober cathedrals to the sleek modern structures, their ideas and designs have spread not only throughout Europe but also to the new world.

The wonderful thing about Dutch architecture is that you can time-travel through a thousand years of beautiful buildings in one city alone. The weird thing about Dutch architecture – with all its influence, cleverness and internationally renowned architects – is that you're not going to find bombastic statements like St Peter's cathedral or the Louvre. But, then again, ostentation was never in keeping with the Dutch character. It's the little surprises that charm most: a subtle joke, a flourish on a 17th-century gable or that unending flight of stairs that seems far too tight to be at all practical but still manages to transport you to the 4th floor...

ROMANESQUE

Romanesque architecture, which took the country (and Europe) by storm between 900 and 1250, is the earliest architectural style remaining in the country, if you discount the *hunebedden* (p253). Its main characteristics are an uncomplicated form, thick walls, small windows and round arches.

The oldest church of this style in the Netherlands is the Pieterskerk (p180) in Utrecht. Built in 1048, it's one of five churches that form a cross in the city, with the cathedral at its centre. Runner-up is Nijmegen's 16-sided St Nicolaaskapel (p264), which is basically a scaled-down copy of Charlemagne's chapel in Aachen, Germany. Another classic example of Romanesque is the Onze Lieve Vrouwebasiliek (p280) in Maastricht; its fortress-like tower with round turrets evokes images of Umberto Eco's novel of monastic intrigue, *The Name of the Rose*.

Holland's countryside is also privy to this style of architecture. The windy plains of the north are filled with examples of sturdy brick churches erected in the 12th and 13th centuries, such as the lonely church perched on a man-made hill in Hogebeintum (p235) in Friesland.

GOthic

By around 1250 the love affair with Romanesque was over, and the Gothic era was ushered in. Pointed arches, ribbed vaulting and dizzying heights were trademarks of this new architectural style, which was to last until 1600. Although the Dutch buildings didn't match the size of the French Gothic cathedrals, a rich style emerged in Catholic Brabant that could compete with anything abroad. Stone churches with soaring vaults and buttresses such as Sint Janskathedraal (p273) in Den Bosch and Breda's Grote Kerk (p275) were erected, both of which are good examples of the Brabant Gothic style, as it was later known. Note the timber vaulting and the widespread use of brick among the stone.

Stone is normally a constant fixture of Gothic, but in the marshy lands of the western Netherlands it was too heavy (and too scarce) to use. The basic ingredients of bricks – clay and sand – were however in abundance. Still, bricks are not exactly light material, and weight limits forced architects to build long or wide to compensate for the lack of height. The Sint Janskerk (p202) in Gouda is the longest church in the country, with a nave of 123m, and it has the delicate, stately feel of a variant called Flamboyant Gothic.

GABLES & HOISTS

Travel the length and breadth of the Netherlands and there is one architectural phenomenon you simply can't escape – the elegant gable. These eye-catching vertical triangular or oblong sections at the top of a façade are as important to Dutch architecture as *gezelligheid* is to the Dutch psyche.

The original purpose of a gable was entirely practical – it not only hid the roof from public view but also helped to identify the house (this changed when the occupying French introduced house numbers in 1795). However, the more ornate the gable, the easier it was to spot. Other distinguishing features included façade decorations, signs and cartouches (wall tablets).

There are four main types of Dutch gable. The simple spout gable – a copy of the earliest wooden gables – is characterised by semicircular windows or shutters and looks not unlike an upturned funnel; it was used mainly for warehouses from the 1580s to the early 1700s. The step gable, which literally looks like steps, was a late-Gothic design favoured by Dutch-Renaissance architects from 1580 to 1660. The neck gable, also known as the bottle gable because it resembled a bottle spout, was introduced in the 1640s and proved most durable, featuring occasionally in designs of the early 19th century. Some neck gables incorporated a step. The graceful slopes of the bell gable first appeared in the 1660s and became popular in the 18th century.

From the 18th century onwards many new houses no longer had gables but rather straight, horizontal cornices that were richly decorated, often with pseudo-balustrades.

If you find yourself wondering whether many canal houses are tipping forward, or you've simply had too much to drink or smoke, don't worry. A lot were built with a slight forward lean to allow goods and furniture to be hoisted into the attic without bumping into the house (and windows). A few houses have huge hoist-wheels in the attic with a rope and hook that run through the hoist beam.

Stone Gothic structures do exist in the western stretches of Holland, though; Haarlem's Grote Kerk van St Bavo (p148) is a wonderful example.

If Gothic tickles your fancy, take a peek at the town halls in Gouda (p202) and Middelburg (p225), both of which are nearly overwhelming in their weightiness and pomp.

MANNERISM

From the middle of the 16th century the Renaissance style that was sweeping through Italy steadily began to filter into the Netherlands. The Dutch naturally put their own spin on this new architectural design, which came to be known as mannerism (c 1550–1650). Also known as Dutch Renaissance, this unique style falls somewhere between Renaissance and baroque; it retained the bold curving forms and rich ornamentation of baroque but merged them with classical Greek and Roman and traditional Dutch styles. Building façades were accentuated with mock columns (pilasters) and the simple spout gables were replaced with step gables (see the boxed text, above) that were richly decorated with sculptures, columns and obelisks. The playful interaction of red brick and horizontal bands of white or yellow sandstone was based on mathematical formulas designed to please the eye.

Hendrik de Keyser (1565–1621) was the champion of mannerism. His Zuiderkerk (p99), Noorderkerk (p100) and Westerkerk (p102) in Amsterdam are standout examples; all three show a major break from the sober, stolid lines of brick churches located out in the sticks. Their steeples are ornate and built with a variety of contrasting materials, while the windows are framed in white stone set off by brown brick. Florid details enliven the walls and roof lines.

A World History of Architecture by Marian Moffett, Lawrence Wodehouse and Michael Fazio is an excellent introduction to the world of architecture, with many Dutch examples provided.

GOLDEN AGE

After the Netherlands became a world trading power in the 17th century, its rich merchants were able to splash out on lavish buildings.

More than anything, the new architecture had to impress. The leading lights in the architectural field, such as Jacob van Campen (1595–1657) and the brothers Philips and Justus Vingboons, again turned to ancient Greek and Roman designs for ideas. To make buildings look taller, the step gable was replaced by a neck gable, and pilasters were built to look like imperial columns, complete with pedestals. Decorative scrolls were added as finishing flourishes, and the peak wore a triangle or globe to simulate a temple roof.

A wonderful example of this is the Koninklijk Paleis (Royal Palace; p96) in Amsterdam, originally built as the town hall in 1648. Van Campen, the architect, drew on classical designs and dropped many of De Keyser's playful decorations, and the resulting building exuded gravity with its solid lines and shape.

This new form of architecture suited the city's businessmen, who needed to let the world know that they were successful. As sports cars were still centuries away, canal houses became showpieces. Despite the narrow plots, each building from this time makes a statement at gable level through sculpture and myriad shapes and forms. Philips and Justus Vingboons were specialists in these swanky residences; their most famous works include the Bijbels Museum (Biblical Museum; p101), the gorgeous Theater Instituut (p101) and houses scattered throughout Amsterdam's western canal belt.

The capital is not the only city to display such grand architecture. Den Haag has 17th-century showpieces, including the Paleis Noordeinde (p198) and the Mauritshuis (p197), and scores of other examples line the picture-perfect canals of Leiden, Delft and Maastricht, to name but a few.

From the mid-17th century onwards Dutch architecture began to influence France and England, and its colonial styles can still be seen in the Hudson River Valley of New York state.

FRENCH INFLUENCE

By the 18th century the wealthy classes had turned their backs on trade for more staid lives in banking or finance, which meant a lot of time at home. Around the same time, Dutch architects began deferring to all things French; dainty Louis XV furnishings and florid rococo façades became all the rage. It was then a perfect time for new French building trends to sweep the country. Daniel Marot (1661–1752), together with his assistants Jean and Anthony Coulon, was the first to introduce French interior design with matching exteriors. Good examples of their work can be found along the Lange Voorhout in Den Haag, near the British embassy. Rooms were bathed in light, thanks to stuccoed ceilings and tall sash windows, and everything from staircases to furniture was designed in harmony.

NEOCLASSICISM

Architecture took a back seat during the Napoleonic Wars in the late 18th century. Buildings still needed to be built, of course, so designers dug deep into ancient Greek and Roman blueprints once more and eventually came up with neoclassicism (c 1790–1850). Known for its order, symmetry and simplicity, neoclassical design became the mainstay for houses of worship, courtyards and other official buildings. A shining example of neoclassicism is Groningen's town hall (p248); of particular note are the classical pillars, although the use of brick walls is a purely Dutch accent. Many a church was subsidized by the government water ministry and so was named a Waterstaatkkerk (state water church), such as the lonely house of worship in Schokland (p177).

The Nederlands Architectuur Instituut (www.nai.nl) is the top authority on the latest developments.

CYCLING THROUGH ARCHITECTURE

For a first-hand view of how Dutch cities have developed through the ages and how they effortlessly merge with the surrounding countryside, hire a bike in Amsterdam and cycle to Haarlem (two hours).

Start in the very heart of the capital amongst its gabled houses and grand buildings, then head west through its spacious, modern suburbs and on to the unhurried outer business parks punctuated by wide roads and glass and steel constructions; before you know it, you'll have smoothly arrived in the countryside. An hour of gentle riding is before you until it all starts again, but in reverse; Haarlem's business parks greet you first, followed by contemporary suburbs, and suddenly you're savouring a beer in the shadow of the glorious Gothic Grote Kerk.

If you can, take a few friends and something to smoke – it'll make the journey all the more interesting...

LATE 19TH CENTURY

From the 1850s onwards, many of the country's large architectural projects siphoned as much as they could from the Gothic era, creating neo-Gothic. Soon afterwards, freedom of religion was declared and Catholics were allowed to build new churches in Protestant areas. Neo-Gothic suited the Catholics just fine, and a boom in church-building took place; Amsterdam's Krijtberg (p103) is one of the most glorious.

Another wave of nostalgia, neo-Renaissance, drew heavily on De Keyser's earlier masterpieces. Neo-Renaissance buildings were erected throughout the country, made to look like well-polished veterans from three centuries earlier. For many observers, these stepped-gable edifices with alternating stone and brick are the epitome of classic Dutch architecture.

One of the leading architects of this period was Pierre Cuypers (1827–1921), who built several neo-Gothic churches but often merged the style with neo-Renaissance, as can be seen in Amsterdam's Centraal Station (p83) and Rijksmuseum (p106). These are predominantly Gothic structures but have touches of Dutch Renaissance brickwork.

Rotterdam's 12-storey Witte Huis (built 1898) was Europe's first 'skyscraper'.

BERLAGE & THE AMSTERDAM SCHOOL

As the 20th century approached, the neo styles and their reliance on the past were strongly criticised by Hendrik Petrus Berlage (1856–1934), the father of modern Dutch architecture. He favoured spartan, practical designs over frivolous ornamentation; the 1902 Beurs van Berlage (p84) displays these ideals to the full. Berlage cooperated with sculptors, painters and tilers to ensure that ornamentation was integrated into the overall design in a supportive role, rather than being tacked on as an embellishment to hide the structure.

Berlage's residential designs approached a block of buildings as a whole, not as a collection of individual houses. In this he influenced the young architects of what became known as the Amsterdam School, though they rejected his stark rationalism and preferred more creative designs. Leading exponents were Michel de Klerk (1884–1923), Piet Kramer (1881–1961) and Johan van der Mey (1878–1949); the latter ushered in the Amsterdam School (c 1916–30) with his extraordinary Scheepvaarthuis (p109).

Brick was the material of choice for such architects, and housing blocks were treated as sculptures, with curved corners, oddly placed windows and ornamental, rocket-shaped towers. Their Amsterdam housing estates, such as De Klerk's 'Ship' in the west, have been described as fairy-tale fortresses rendered in a Dutch version of Art Deco. Their preference for form over function meant their designs were great to look at but not always fantastic to live in, with small windows and inefficient use of space.

Bart Lootsma's *Super Dutch* is a slick book covering the latest in Dutch design from the country's most influential architects.

Housing subsidies sparked a frenzy of residential building activity in the 1920s. At the time, many architects of the Amsterdam school worked for the Amsterdam city council and designed the buildings for the Oud Zuid (Old South, p105). This large-scale expansion – mapped out by Berlage – called for good-quality housing, wide boulevards and cosy squares; it was instigated by the labour party, but the original designer didn't get much of a chance to design the buildings, as council architects were pushing their own blueprints.

FUNCTIONALISM

While Amsterdam School-type buildings were being erected all over their namesake city, a new generation of architects began to rebel against the school's impractical (not to mention expensive) structures. Influenced by the Bauhaus school in Germany, Frank Lloyd Wright in the USA and Le Corbusier in France, they formed a group called 'the 8'. It was the first stirring of functionalism (1927–70).

Architects such as B Merkelbach and Gerrit Rietveld believed that form should follow function and sang the praises of steel, glass and concrete. Their spacious designs were practical and allowed for plenty of sunlight; the Rietveld-Schröderhuis (p182) is the only house built completely along functionalist De Stijl lines.

After the war, functionalism came to the fore and stamped its authority on new suburbs to the west and south of Amsterdam, as well as war-damaged cities such as Rotterdam. High-rise suburbs were built on a large scale yet weren't sufficient to keep up with the population boom and urbanisation of Dutch life. But functionalism fell from favour as the smart design aspects were watered down in low-cost housing projects for the masses.

MODERNISM & BEYOND

Construction has been booming in the Netherlands since the 1980s, and architects have had been ample opportunity to flirt with numerous 'isms' such as structuralism, neorationalism, postmodernism and supermodernism. Evidence of these styles can be found in Rotterdam, where city planners have encouraged bold designs that range from Piet Blom's startling cube-shaped Boompjstorens (p211) to Ben van Berkel's graceful Erasmusbrug (p211). Striking examples in Amsterdam include the NEMO science centre (p110), which recalls a resurfacing submarine, and the new Eastern Docklands housing estate, where 'blue is green' – ie the surrounding water takes the role of lawns and shrubbery.

The website of who's who in Holland's architectural scene is www.dutcharchitects.com.

The Guide to Modern Architecture in the Netherlands by Paul Groenendijk and Piet Vollaard is a comprehensive look at 20th-century architecture, arranged by region, with short explanations and photos.

Food & Drink

Like many other countries in northern Europe, the Netherlands has never had a reputation for outstanding, or even fine, cuisine. Hearty, hefty, filling, stodgy – these are the adjectives with which Dutch cooking is usually tagged. This, however, has a historical context; traditionally, the Dutch never paid that much attention to food, as there was too much work to be done and little time to cook. It is quite revealing that, during the Golden Age, spices such as pepper were more of a currency than a culinary ingredient.

In recent years, however, these attitudes have been transformed by a culinary revolution sweeping the Netherlands. The Dutch have begun to experiment with their own traditional kitchen, breathing new life into centuries-old recipes by giving them a contemporary twist. Smart Dutch chefs now prefer to steam or braise vegetables rather than boil them, and they draw on organic ingredients as well as a generous quantity of fresh herbs and spices.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

The Dutch start the day with a filling yet unexciting breakfast of a few slices of bread accompanied by jam, cheese and a boiled egg. Coffee is always involved. Lunch tends to be more of a snack, especially for the working crowd, taken between noon and 2pm. A half-hour is common for the midday break, just long enough for employees to snag a quick sandwich or empty their lunchbox. Dinner is the main meal of the day and is usually a substantial serving, whether it be traditional Dutch cuisine or something from beyond the Netherlands' borders.

DUTCH

Van Gogh perfectly captured the main ingredient of traditional Dutch cooking in his *Potato Eaters*. Typically boiled to death, these 'earth apples' are accompanied by meat – and more boiled vegetables. Gravy is then added for flavour. It's certainly not fancy, but it is filling.

Few restaurants serve exclusively Dutch cuisine, but many places have several homeland items on the menu, especially in winter. Some time-honoured favourites:

- *stamppot* (mashed pot) – simple dish of potatoes mashed with kale, endive or sauerkraut and served with smoked sausage or strips of pork. Perfect in winter.
- *hutspot* (hotchpotch) – similar to *stamppot*, but with potatoes, carrots, onions, braised meat and more spices.
- *erwtensoep* (pea soup) – Plenty of peas with onions, carrots, smoked sausage and bacon. And the perfect pea soup? A spoon stuck upright in the pot should remain standing.
- *asperge* (asparagus) – usually white and often crunchy; very popular when it's in season (spring); served with ham and butter.
- *kroketten* (croquettes) – dough balls with various fillings that are crumbed and deep-fried; the variety called *bitterballen* are a popular pub snack served with mustard.
- *mosselen* (mussels) – cooked with white wine, chopped leeks and onions, and served in a bowl or cooking pot with a side dish of *frites* or *patat* (French fries); they're popular, and are best eaten from September to April.

Julius Caesar was a big fan of Dutch cheese.

Dutch Delights by Sylvia Pessireron, Jurjen Drenth and friends is a playful look at the eating habits of the Dutch. It's easy to digest and filled with superb photos.

DISTINCTLY CHEESY

Some Dutch say it makes them tall; others complain it causes nightmares. Whatever the case, the Netherlands is justifiably famous for its cheeses. The Dutch – known as the original cheeseheads – consume 16.5kg of the stuff every year.

Nearly two-thirds of all cheese sold is Gouda. The tastier varieties have strong, complex flavours and are best enjoyed with a bottle of wine or two. Try some *oud* (old) Gouda, hard and rich in flavour and a popular bar snack with mustard. Oud Amsterdammer is a real delight, deep orange and crumbly with white crystals of ripeness.

Edam is similar to Gouda but slightly drier and less creamy. Leidse or Leiden cheese is another export hit, laced with cumin or caraway seed and light in flavour.

In the shops you'll also find scores of varieties that are virtually unknown outside the country. Frisian Nagelkaas might be made with parsley juice, buttermilk, and 'nails' of caraway seed. Kruidenkaas has a melange of herbs such as fennel, celery, pepper or onions. Graskaas is 'new harvest' Gouda made after cows begin to roam the meadows and munch grass.

Lower-fat cheeses include Milner, Kollumer and Maaslander. One has to start somewhere: the stats show that the Dutch are gaining weight despite all that cycling.

Lamb is prominently featured on menus, but – surprisingly for such a seafaring nation – seafood is not. It is more commonly eaten as a snack, in which form it is everywhere. *Haring* (herring) is a national institution, eaten lightly salted or occasionally pickled but never fried or cooked (see opposite); *paling* (eel) is usually smoked.

Typical Dutch desserts are fruit pie (apple, cherry or other fruit), *vla* (custard) and ice cream. Many snack bars and pubs serve *appeltaart* (apple pie), which is always good. Amazingly, some Dutch eat *hagelslag* (chocolate sprinkles) on their bread for breakfast.

Finally, most towns have at least one place serving *pannenkoeken* (pancakes), which come in a huge array of varieties. The mini-version, covered in caster sugar, is *poftertjes*.

INDONESIAN

Indonesian cooking is a rich and complex blend of many cultures: chilli peppers, peanut sauces and stewed curries from Thailand, lemon grass and fish sauces from Vietnam, intricate Indian spice mixes, and Asian cooking methods. Without a doubt this is the tastiest legacy of the Dutch colonial era.

In the Netherlands, Indonesian food is toned down for sensitive Western palates. If you want it hot (*pedis*, pronounced 'p-dis'), say so, but be prepared for watering eyes and burnt taste buds. You might play it safe by asking for *sambal* (chilli paste) and helping yourself. *Sambal oelek* is red and hot; the dark-brown *sambal badjak* is onion-based, mild and sweet.

The most famous Indonesian dish is *rijsttafel* (rice table): an array of spicy savoury dishes such as braised beef, pork satay and ribs served with white rice. *Nasi rames* is a steaming plate of boiled rice covered in several rich condiments, while the same dish with thick noodles is called *bami rames*.

Peanut sauce plays a big part in Indonesian cuisine. Dishes such as *sado-gado*, a meal of crisp, steamed vegetables and a hard-boiled egg, come with lashings of the stuff, and *saté* (satay), which is basically marinated beef, chicken or pork barbecued on small skewers, would be substandard without it.

Other stand-bys include *nasi goreng*, a simple yet extremely popular dish of fried rice with onions, pork, shrimp and spices, often with a fried egg or shredded omelette, and *bami goreng*, which is much the same thing but with noodles.

Dutch Cooking: The New Kitchen by Manon Sikkels and Michiel Klonhammer is a fresh perspective on traditional Dutch cuisine, in which age-old recipes are given a modern makeover.

TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

Raw fish isn't that bad – sushi and sashimi, for instance, are delectable morsels the world is a better place for. However, the sight of a local slowly sliding a raw herring headfirst (thankfully headless) down their gullet looks, well, wrong. But the Dutch love this salted delicacy and are eager for visitors to try it. If an entire fish is too much to stomach, it can be cut into bite-sized pieces and served with onion and pickles. You'll find vendors the length and breadth of the country – look for the words *haring* or *Hollandse nieuwe* and dig in.

Another acquired taste in Holland is drop. This so-called sweet is a thick, rubbery liquorice root and Arabic gum concoction the Dutch go crazy for – a reputed 30 million kilos of the stuff is consumed each year. Its bitter taste is reminiscent of childhood medicine and some foreigners have trouble taking a second bite. There's also a liquid version; look for a bottle of Dropshot in supermarkets.

SURINAMESE

Dishes from this former colony have Caribbean roots, blending African and Indian flavours with Indonesian influences introduced by Javanese labourers. Chicken, lamb and beef curries are common menu items. *Roti*, a chickpea-flour pancake filled with potatoes, long beans, bean sprouts and meat (vegetarian versions are available), is by far the favoured choice of the Dutch.

DRINKS Nonalcoholic

More coffee is consumed per capita in the Netherlands than in any other European country bar Denmark. Ordering a *koffie* will get you a sizable cup of the black stuff and a separate package or jug of *koffiemelk*, a slightly sour-tasting cream akin to condensed milk. *Koffie verkeerd* is similar to latte, served in a big mug with plenty of real milk. If you order espresso or cappuccino, you'll be lucky to get a decent Italian version. Don't count on finding decaffeinated coffee, and if you do it may be instant.

Tea is usually served Continental-style: a cup or pot of hot water with a tea bag on the side. Varieties might be presented in a humidior-like box for you to pick and choose. If you want milk, say *met melk*, *graag*. Many locals prefer to add a slice of lemon.

Alcoholic

Lager beer is the staple drink, served cool and topped by a head of froth so big it would start a brawl in an Australian bar. Heineken tells us that these are 'flavour bubbles', and requests for no head will earn a steely response. *Een bier* or *een pils* will get you a normal glass; *een kleintje pils* is a small glass and *een fluitje* is a tall but thin glass – perfect for multiple refills. Some places serve half-litre mugs to please tourists.

Belgian beers are widely available, with strong and crisp flavours that make Dutch pilsners pale. Some good brands include De Koninck, Palm, Duvel and Westmalle (beware of their doubles and triples). The lighter *witbier* (blonde beer) is a good choice in balmy weather, and brands such as Hoegaarden are typically served with a slice of lemon and a swizzle stick.

Dutch *jenever* or gin is made from juniper berries and drunk chilled from a shot glass filled to the brim. Most people prefer *jonge* (young) *jenever*, which is smoother; the strong juniper flavour of *oude* (old) *jenever* can be an acquired taste. The aptly-named *kopstoot* (head butt) is a double-whammy of *jenever* and a beer chaser. The palette of indigenous liqueurs includes *advocaat* (a kind of eggnog) and the herb-based *Beerenburg*, a Frisian schnapps.

Access a collection of Dutch recipes in English, and online shopping for Canadian and US citizens who absolutely need Dutch products, on www.dutchmarket.com.

The Dutch drink on average 140L of coffee each a year.

The official website of the Dutch can-collectors' association is www.blik-op-blik.nl. Hunt for that rare Dutch beer can here.

A TASTY BREW

The Dutch love beer. It's seen as the perfect companion for time spent with friends in the sun or out partying till the small hours. And they've had plenty of time to cultivate this unquestioning love – beer has been a popular drink since the 14th century, and at one time the Dutch could lay claim to no fewer than 559 brewers. Most Dutch beer is pilsner (or lager), a clear, crisp, golden beer with strong hop flavouring.

Heineken is the Netherlands' (and possibly the world's) best-known beer. However, like Fosters in Australia, it has a poor name at home – 'the beer your cheap father drinks', to quote one wag. Amstel (owned by Heineken) is also well known; Grolsch and Oranjeboom can also claim a certain amount of international fame. Most beers contain around 5% alcohol, and a few of those cute little glasses can pack a strong punch.

While the big names rule the roost, the Netherlands has scores of small brewers worth trying, including Gulpen, Bavaria, Drie Ringen, Leeuw and Utrecht. La Trappe is the only Dutch Trappist beer, brewed close to Tilburg. The potent beers made by Amsterdam's Brouwerij 't IJ (p109) are sold on tap and in some local pubs – try the Columbus brew (9% alcohol). If you're around in spring or autumn, don't pass up the chance to sample Grolsch's seasonal bock beers, such as Lentebok (spring bock) and Herfstbok (autumn bock). Like Brouwerij's brews, they kick like a mule, so, depending on your mood, tread carefully or drink as though you want to spend the next day in bed.

Wine seems to be an afterthought in the Netherlands – but an afterthought that is slowly taking hold. Plenty of European and New World varieties are available, but take a second look at the prices as Dutch import duties normally keep them high.

CELEBRATIONS

The Dutch sweet tooth really comes out during the annual holidays and festivities. Early December is a good time to sample traditional treats such as spicy *speculaas* biscuits or *pepernoten*, the little crunchy ginger nuts that are handed out at Sinterklaas. *Oliebollen* are small spherical donuts filled with raisins or other diced fruit, deep-fried and dusted with powdered sugar; you can buy these calorie bombs from street vendors in the run-up to New Year.

Muisjes (little mice) are sugar-coated aniseed sprinkles served on a round *beschuit* (rusk biscuit) to celebrate the birth of a child – blue and white for a boy; pink and white for a girl.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Restaurants abound and they cater to a wide variety of tastes and budgets. Their biggest competitors are *eetcafés*, affordable pub-like eateries with a huge local following.

When the Dutch say café they're referring to a pub, also known as a *kroeg*, and there are over 1000 of them in Amsterdam alone. Coffee is served but as a sideline. Many cafés and pubs also serve food, but few open before 9am. A fixture in many cafés is an outdoor terrace that may be covered and heated in winter. Here the Dutch soak up the outdoor atmosphere and pass the time chatting, people-watching or simply taking a break from everything.

The most famous type is the *bruin café* (brown café). The true specimen has been in business for a while; expect sandy wooden floors and an atmosphere perfect for deep conversation. The name comes from the smoky stains on the walls, although newer aspirants just slap on some brown paint.

Grand cafés are more spacious than brown cafés or pubs and have comfortable furniture. They're all the rage, and any pub that puts in a few solid

DOS & DON'TS

Do round up the bill by 5% to 10% (unless the service is bad).

Do split the costs.

Do reserve ahead, especially at weekends.

Do take children to pubs and restaurants.

Do bring flowers or wine when invited home.

Don't ask to go 'Dutch'.

Don't ask for a doggie bag.

Don't cut off a tip on the cheese cart (always slice).

Don't make loud complaints about the service (usually counter-productive).

tables and chairs might call itself a grand café. Normally opening at 10am, they're marvellous for a lazy lunch or brunch.

Falling within the 'other' category are theatre cafés, which attract a trendy mix of bohemian and chic; *proeflokalen*, or tasting houses, which once were attached to distilleries (good for sampling dozens of *jenever*s and liqueurs); trendy bars with cool designer interiors; and the ubiquitous Irish pubs.

Quick Eats

Broodjeszaken (sandwich shops) or snack bars proliferate. The latter offer multicoloured treats in a display case, usually based on some sort of meat and spices, and everything is dumped into a deep-fryer when you order. Febo snack bars have long rows of coin-operated windows à la the Jetsons.

The national institution, *Vlaamse frites* (Flemish fries), are French fries made from whole potatoes rather than the potato pulp you will get if the sign only says *frites*. They are supposed to be smothered in mayonnaise (though you can ask for ketchup, curry sauce, garlic sauce or other gloppy toppings).

Seafood is everywhere. The most popular – aside from raw herring (see p61) – is *kibbeling* (deep-fried cod parings), while smoked eel has legions of fans.

Lebanese and Turkish snack bars specialise in *shoarma*, a pitta bread filled with sliced lamb from a vertical spit – also known as a *gyros* or doner kebab.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

For all their liberalism and openness, it's surprising to note that the Dutch are slow on the vegetarian uptake. Outside the major metropolises you'll be hard-pressed to find a strictly vegetarian-only restaurant in the small town you're visiting; in this case, you'll be relying on the couple of veg options available on most restaurant menus. Check their purity before ordering, though, as often you can't be sure whether they're 100% meat- or fish-free (meat stock is a common culprit).

Once you do track down a vegetarian restaurant, you'll be happy to find that they rely on organic ingredients and often make everything from bread to cakes in-house.

TOP RESTAURANTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

- Mamouche (p126), Amsterdam – top-notch Moroccan fare in stripped-back surroundings, accompanied by a decidedly sexy vibe.
- Blauw aan de Wal (p122), Amsterdam – modern French and Italian cuisine served in a delightful 17th-century warehouse; only a stone's throw from the buzzing Red Light District.
- Blits (p216), Rotterdam – exclusive international menu and cutting-edge architecture in a city famous for its cutting edges; what more can you ask for?
- De Librije (p260), Zwolle – triple-Michelin-star restaurant housed in a beautiful 500-year-old monastery library; contemporary French and Dutch cuisine.
- Parkheuvel (p216), Rotterdam – another restaurant rated by the folk at Michelin (three stars). French/International cuisine and seafood to die for.
- Bazar (p215), Rotterdam – one of the finest Middle Eastern restaurants in the land, serving the best the region has to offer in suitably Arabic surroundings.
- Vispaleis-Rokerij De Ster, Texel (p170) – nothing fancy here, just fish freshly caught and cured, and a warm Texel welcome.

The site www.recepten.nl is an exhaustive archive of Dutch recipes and cooking links. It's in Dutch but easy to decipher.

At www.dinnersite.nl you can sift through over 9000 restaurants and cafés without leaving your chair.

EATING WITH KIDS

The Netherlands is a kid-friendly country for eating out. Most restaurants and pubs will have kiddie meals on offer, if not a children's menu, and high chairs are often available. You might feel out of place taking infants into a drop-dead trendy restaurant – ask ahead when you make reservations. See p288 for more tips and information.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

At first take, it looks as though the Dutch aren't all that fussed about food. Meals tend to be rushed, and quantity appears to win over quality. These habits are slowly fading, however, and restaurant patrons are increasingly likely to linger over a multicourse dinner for a couple of hours, and to expect high standards. Social events are in a class of their own, and diners with something to celebrate might camp out in a restaurant for an entire evening.

Dinner usually takes place between 6pm and 9.30pm. Popular places fill up by 7pm because the Dutch eat early; if this doesn't suit, aim for the second sitting from around 8.30pm to 9.30pm, when films, concerts and other performances start. Bear in mind that many kitchens close by 10pm, although full-scale restaurants may still serve after midnight.

Many places list a *dagschotel* (dish of the day) that will be good value, but don't expect a culinary adventure. The trend in some places is to limit the menu to several options that change regularly; in this case the food can be quite exciting.

Coffee breaks are a national institution and occur frequently throughout the day. Restaurants will serve a single cookie or biscuit with coffee, but in homes you'll be offered one per cup.

Many restaurants don't accept credit cards; for tipping advice, see p294.

EAT YOUR WORDS

Dutch restaurants are skilled in serving foreigners, so bilingual or English menus are practically the norm. Refer to the Language chapter (p314) for tips on pronunciation.

Useful Phrases

A beer, please.

an pils/beer als-tu-bleeft

Een pils/bier, alstublieft.

A bottle of wine, please.

an fles wayn

Een fles wijn, alstublieft.

Waiter!/Waitress!

o-bay/sar-veer-stor

Ober!/Serveerster!

May I see the menu/wine list?

makh ik het mē-nu/də wayn-kaart zeen

Mag ik het menu/de wijnkaart zien?

Do you have a menu in English?

hebt u an mē-nu in het eng-als

Hebt u een menu in het Engels?

Is that dish spicy?

is dit gā-rekht pit-takh

Is dit gerecht pittig?

I'm a vegetarian.

ik ben vay-khay-taa-ree-yar

Ik ben vegetariër.

Bon appétit.

ayt sma-kā-leek

Eet smakelijk.

It tastes good/bad.

het smakt le-kar/neet le-kar

Het smaakt lekker/niet lekker.

May I have the bill, please?

makh ik də ray-kā-ning als-tu-bleeft

Mag ik de rekening, alstublieft?

Windmills in my Oven by Gaitri Pagrach-Chandrabay is a mix of Dutch baking, social commentary and regional customs, and a few tasty recipes are thrown in for good measure.

Food Glossary

appelmoes

a-pāl-moos

apple sauce

beenham

bayn-ham

leg ham

belegd broodje

bā-lekht broa-tye

filled sandwich

boerenomelet

boo-rān-ōa-mā-let

omelette with vegetables and ham

dagschotel

dakh-skhoa-tal

dish of the day

drop

drop

liquorice

frikandel

free-kan-del

deep-fried meat snack, like a sausage

hagelslag

haa-khāl-slakh

chocolate sprinkles

Hollandse nieuwe

hōl-land-sā nee-wā

salted herring, first of the season

hoofdgerecht

hoaft-khā-rekht

main course

kroket

kroa-ket

meat croquette

nagerecht

naa-khā-rekht

dessert

pannekoek

pā-nā-kook

pancake

patat

pā-tāt

chips/French fries

poffertjes

pō-fār-tyas

mini pancakes

speculaas

spay-ku-laas

spiced biscuit

tosti

tos-ti

toasted sandwich

uitsmijter

āyt-smay-tār

fried egg, ham and cheese on bread

Vlaamse frites

vlaam-sā freeet

thick chips/fries made from whole potatoes

vlammetjes

vla-mā-tyās

spicy spring rolls

voorgerecht

voar-khā-rekht

starter

COOKING TERMS

gaar

khaar

well done

gebakken

khā-bā-kān

baked/fried

gebraden

khe-braa-dān

roasted

gefrituurd

khā-free-tuurt

deep fried

gegratineerd

khā-khra-tee-nayrt

browned on top with cheese

gegrild

kh?-khrilt

grilled

gegrild aan 't spit

khā-khrilt aant spit

spit-roasted

gekookt

khā-koakt

boiled

gepaneerd

khā-pā-nayrt

coated in breadcrumbs

gepocheerd

khā-pō-shayrt

poached

gerookt

khā-roakt

smoked

geroosterd

khā-roas-tārt

toasted

gesauteerd

khā-soa-tayrt

sautéed

gestoofd

khe-stoaft

braised

gestoomd

khā-stoamt

steamed

gevuld

khā-valt

stuffed

half doorbakken

half doar-bā-kān

medium

peper

pāy-pār

pepper

rood

roat

rare

suiker

sāy-kār

sugar

zout

zout

salt

DESSERTS

amandelbroodje

a-man-dāl-broa-tya

sweet roll with almond filling

appelgebak

a-pāl-khā-bak

apple pie

cake

kayk

cake

ijs

ays

ice cream

slagroom

slakh-roam

whipped cream

taart

taart

tart, pie, cake

vla

vlaa

custard

wafel

waa-fāl

waffle

DRINKS

<i>bier</i>	beer
<i>brandewijn</i>	<i>bran-də-wayn</i>
<i>genever (or genever)</i>	<i>yə-nay-vər</i>
<i>jus d'orange/sinaasappelsap</i>	<i>zhu do-ranzh/see-nas-a-pəl-sap</i>
<i>koffie</i>	<i>ko-fee</i>
<i>koffie verkeerd</i>	<i>ko-fee ver-kayrt</i>
<i>melk</i>	melk
<i>met melk/citroen</i>	met melk/see-troen
<i>rood/wit</i>	<i>roat/wit</i>
<i>spa blauw (a brand)</i>	<i>spaa blow</i>
<i>spa rood (a brand)</i>	<i>spaa roat</i>
<i>thee</i>	<i>tay</i>
<i>water</i>	<i>waa-tər</i>
<i>wijn</i>	wayn
<i>zoet/droog</i>	<i>zoot/droakh</i>

FRUIT, VEGETABLES, STAPLES & SPICES

<i>aardappel</i>	<i>aart-a-pəl</i>
<i>appel</i>	<i>a-pəl</i>
<i>artisjok</i>	<i>ar-tee-shok</i>
<i>asperge</i>	<i>as-per-zhə</i>
<i>aubergine</i>	<i>oa-bər-zheen</i>
<i>boon</i>	boan
<i>champignon</i>	<i>sham-pee-nyon</i>
<i>courgette</i>	<i>koor-zhet</i>
<i>erwt</i>	<i>ert</i>
<i>groene paprika</i>	<i>khroo-nə pa-pree-ka</i>
<i>groente</i>	<i>khroon-tə</i>
<i>kers</i>	<i>kers</i>
<i>knoflook</i>	<i>knof-loak</i>
<i>komkommer</i>	<i>kom-komər</i>
<i>koal</i>	koal
<i>mais</i>	maees
<i>olijf</i>	<i>o-layf</i>
<i>peer</i>	<i>payr</i>
<i>perzik</i>	<i>per-zik</i>
<i>peterselie</i>	<i>pay-tər-say-lee</i>
<i>pompoen</i>	<i>pom-poon</i>
<i>prei</i>	pray
<i>pruim</i>	praym
<i>rijst</i>	<i>rayst</i>
<i>rode paprika</i>	<i>roa-də pap-ree-ka</i>
<i>selderij</i>	<i>sel-da-ray</i>
<i>sinaasappel</i>	<i>see-nas-a-pəl</i>
<i>sla</i>	slaa
<i>spinazie</i>	<i>spee-naa-zee</i>
<i>spruitje</i>	<i>spray-tyə</i>
<i>ui</i>	əy
<i>witlof</i>	<i>wit-lof</i>
<i>wortel</i>	<i>wor-təl</i>

MEAT & POULTRY

<i>eend</i>	aynt
<i>ei</i>	ay

beer
brandy
Dutch gin
orange juice
coffee
latte
milk
with milk/lemon
red/white
still mineral water
fizzy mineral water
tea
water
wine
sweet/dry

potato
apple
artichoke
asparagus
eggplant/aubergine
bean
mushroom
zucchini/courgette
pea
green pepper (capsicum)
vegetable
cherry
garlic
cucumber
cabbage
sweet corn
olive
pear
peach
parsley
pumpkin
leek
plum
rice
red pepper (capsicum)
celery
orange
lettuce
spinach
Brussels sprout
onion
chicory
carrot

<i>everzwijn</i>	<i>ay-vər-zwayn</i>
<i>fazant</i>	<i>fa-zant</i>
<i>gevogelte</i>	<i>khə-voa-khəl-tə</i>
<i>beenham</i>	<i>bayn-ham</i>
<i>hert</i>	hert
<i>kaas</i>	kaas
<i>kalfsvlees</i>	<i>kalfs-vlays</i>
<i>kalkoen</i>	<i>kal-koon</i>
<i>kip</i>	<i>kip</i>
<i>konijn</i>	<i>ko-nayn</i>
<i>lamsvlees</i>	<i>lams-vlays</i>
<i>lever</i>	<i>lay-vər</i>
<i>paard</i>	paart
<i>parelhoen</i>	<i>paar-rəl-hoon</i>
<i>ribstuk</i>	<i>rip-stak</i>
<i>rookworst</i>	<i>roak-worst</i>
<i>rundvlees</i>	<i>rənt-vlays</i>
<i>schapenvlees</i>	<i>skhaa-pə-vlays</i>
<i>slak</i>	slak
<i>spek</i>	spek
<i>tong</i>	tong
<i>varkensvlees</i>	<i>var-kəns-vlays</i>
<i>vlees</i>	vlays
<i>vleeswaren</i>	<i>vlays-waa-rən</i>
<i>wild</i>	wilt
<i>worst</i>	worst

SEAFOOD

<i>ansjovis</i>	<i>an-shoa-vis</i>	anchovy
<i>baars</i>	baars	bream
<i>forel</i>	<i>foa-rel</i>	trout
<i>garnaal</i>	<i>khār-naal</i>	shrimp, prawns, scampi
<i>haring</i>	<i>haa-ring</i>	herring
<i>inktvis</i>	<i>ingt-vis</i>	squid
<i>kabeljauw</i>	<i>kaa-bəl-jow</i>	cod
<i>krab</i>	krap	crab
<i>kreeft</i>	krayft	lobster
<i>maatjes</i>	<i>maa-tyas</i>	herring fillets
<i>makreel</i>	<i>ma-krayl</i>	mackerel
<i>oester</i>	<i>oos-tər</i>	oyster
<i>paling</i>	<i>paar-ling</i>	eel
<i>rivierkreeft</i>	<i>ree-veer-krayft</i>	crayfish
<i>roodbaars</i>	<i>roat-baars</i>	red mullet
<i>St. Jacobsschelp</i>	<i>sint-yaa-kop-skhelp</i>	scallop
<i>schol</i>	<i>skhol</i>	plaice
<i>tong</i>	tong	sole
<i>tonijn</i>	<i>to-nayn</i>	tuna
<i>vis</i>	vis	fish
<i>zalm</i>	zalm	salmon
<i>zeebaars</i>	<i>zay-baars</i>	bass/sea bream

INDONESIAN DISHES

<i>ayam</i>	<i>a-yam</i>	chicken
<i>babi pangang</i>	<i>baa-bee pang-gang</i>	suckling pig with sweet and sour sauce
<i>bami goreng</i>	<i>baa-mee gaa-reng</i>	stir-fry dish of noodles, veggies, pork and shrimp

boar
pheasant
poultry
ham on the bone
venison
cheese
veal
turkey
chicken
rabbit
lamb
liver
horse
guinea fowl
rib steak
smoked sausage
beef
mutton
snail
bacon
tongue
pork
meat
cooked/prepared meats, cold cuts
game
sausage

<i>daging</i>	<i>da-ging</i>	beef
<i>gado-gado</i>	<i>gaa-doa gaa-doa</i>	vegetables with peanut sauce
<i>goreng</i>	<i>gaa-reng</i>	fried
<i>kroepoek</i>	<i>kroo-pook</i>	deep-fried prawn crackers
<i>loempia</i>	<i>loom-pee-ya</i>	spring roll
<i>nasi</i>	<i>na-see</i>	rice
<i>nasi goreng</i>	<i>na-see gaa-reng</i>	fried rice with meat and veggies
<i>pedis</i>	<i>pay-dis</i>	very spicy
<i>pisang</i>	<i>pee-sang</i>	banana
<i>rendang</i>	<i>ren-dang</i>	stewed beef in dry hot sauce
<i>rijsttafel</i>	<i>rayst-taa-fal</i>	a selection of spicy meats, fruits, vegetables and sauces served with rice
<i>sambal</i>	<i>sam-bal</i>	chilli paste
<i>saté</i>	<i>sa-tay</i>	peanut sauce
<i>seroendeng</i>	<i>sa-roon-deng</i>	fried coconut
<i>taugé</i>	<i>tow-gay</i>	bean sprouts

Cycling in the Netherlands

No matter what shape you're in – or what age you are – the Netherlands is a country to explore by bicycle. Even if it's only a day pedalling along Amsterdam's canals, or a couple of hours rolling through green *polder* landscape, it's more than worth it, and you'll be rewarded with the sense of freedom (and fun) only a bicycle can offer.

With around 20,000km of bike paths and a largely flat landscape, there's even more reason to hop on a bike and do as the locals do. And every local seems to be doing it; the Netherlands has more bicycles than its 16 million citizens. You'll see stockbrokers in tailored suits riding alongside pensioners and teenagers, and mutual tolerance prevails. Many Dutch own at least two bikes, a crunchy beast for everyday use and a nicer model for excursions. No mistake, bikes rule and almost everyone is satisfied with the status quo.

INFORMATION

Your first stop is the ANWB, the Dutch motoring association, with offices in cities across the country. Its website, www.anwb.nl (in Dutch), lists all its national offices; choose Contactformulier from the drop-down menu at the top left of the page, then click on Adressen to locate the one nearest you. Otherwise, call ☎ 08000503 for information.

ANWB has a bewildering selection of route maps as well as camping, recreation and sightseeing guides for cyclists. Its 1:100,000 series of 20 regional maps includes day trips of 30km to 50km, all well signposted (look for six-sided signs with green or red print on a white background). Other maps include *Topografische Atlases*, with scales of 1:25,000 and 1:50,000.

Staff will help once you prove membership of your own motoring association, or you can join the ANWB for €16.50 per year. Many tourist offices also sell ANWB materials and book cycling holidays.

A good starting point online is fiets.startpagina.nl (in Dutch); it lists every conceivable website associated with cycling in the Netherlands (and a handful of other countries too), whether the specific subject be cycle routes, clubs or children's bikes.

CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

Wind and rain are all-too-familiar features of Dutch weather. A lightweight nylon jacket will provide protection, and a breathing variety (Gore-Tex or the like) stops the sweat from gathering. The same thing applies to cycling trousers or shorts.

A standard touring bike is ideal for the Netherlands' flat arena, and for toting a tent and provisions. Gears are useful for riding against the wind, or for tackling a hilly route in Overijssel or Limburg – though the Alps it ain't. Other popular items include a frame bag (for a windcheater and lunch pack), water bottles and a handlebar map-holder so you'll always know where you're going. Few locals wear a helmet, although they're sensible protection, especially for children.

Make sure your set of wheels has a bell: paths can get terribly crowded and it becomes a pain if you have to ask to pass every time. Another necessity is a repair kit. Most rental shops will provide one on request.

Bicycle Touring Holland by Katherine Widing details over 50 bike excursions throughout the country; it's heavy on practical information and very comprehensive.

HIRE

Rental shops are available in abundance. Many day trippers avail themselves of the train-station hire points, called Rijwiel shops, where you can park and rent bikes and buy bicycle parts from early until late. Bike rental costs anything from €4 to €7 per day and €25 to €30 per week. You'll have to show a passport or national ID card, and leave a credit-card imprint or pay a deposit (usually €25 to €100). The main drawback is you must return the bike to the same station – a problem if you're not returning to the same place. Private shops charge similar rates but may be more flexible on the form of deposit. In summer it's advisable to reserve ahead, as shops regularly rent out their entire stock.

For a full list of Rijwiel shops around the country, go to www.ov-fiets.nl/waarhuur (in Dutch); Getting Around sections under individual towns also list local rental options.

ON THE TRAIN

You can take your bike on the train, but it's often more convenient to rent one wherever you're going. A *dagkaart fiets* (bicycle day ticket) costs €6 regardless of your destination. Collapsible bikes are considered hand luggage and go for free, provided they're folded up.

Dutch trains have special carriages for loading two-wheelers – look for the bicycle logos on the side of the carriage. Remember that you can't take your bike along during rush hour (6.30am to 9am and 4.30pm to 6pm Monday to Friday). The Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS; Netherlands Railways) publishes a free brochure, *Fiets en Trein (Bike and Train)*, in Dutch, which provides plenty of information on rental, storage and transport of bicycles around the Netherlands – pick one up at the NS ticket counter.

ROAD RULES & SECURITY

Most major roads have separate bike lanes with their own signs and traffic lights. Generally, the same road rules apply to cyclists as to other vehicles, even if few cyclists seem to observe them (notably in Amsterdam). In theory, you could be fined for running a traffic light or reckless riding, but it rarely happens. Watch out at roundabouts, where right of way may be unclear.

Be sure you have one or two good locks. Hardened chain-link or T-hook varieties are best for attaching the frame and front wheel to something solid. However, even the toughest lock won't stop a determined thief, so if you have an expensive model it's probably safer to buy or rent a bike locally. Many train-station rental shops also run *fietsenstallingen*, secure storage areas where you can leave your bike for about €1.10 per day and €3.80 per week. In some places you'll also encounter rotating bicycle 'lockers' which can be accessed electronically.

Don't ever leave your bike unlocked, even for an instant. Second-hand bikes are a lucrative trade, and hundreds of thousands are stolen in the Netherlands each year. Even if you report the theft to the police, chances of recovery are virtually nil.

ACCOMMODATION

Apart from the camping grounds listed in this book, there are plenty of nature camp sites along bike paths, often adjoined to a local farm. They tend to be smaller, simpler and cheaper than the regular camping grounds, and many don't allow cars or caravans. The Stichting Natuurkampeertreinen (Nature Campsites Foundation; www.natuurkampeertreinen.nl, in Dutch) publishes a map guide to these sites, on sale at the ANWB.

'Dutch trains have special carriages for loading two-wheelers – look for the bicycle logos on the side of the carriage.'

You may also wish to try *trekkershutten*, basic hikers' huts available at many campsites. See p285 for more information.

Many hostels, B&Bs and hotels throughout the country are well geared to cyclists' needs; often those on some of the more popular cycle routes, particularly along the coastline, market directly to tourists on two wheels.

ROUTES

You're spoilt for choice in the Netherlands; a good starting point is the easy day trips found in the *Er-op-Uit* book (€5), available from train station bookshops and tourist information offices. The more detailed *Fietsgids Nederland* (€9.95, in Dutch), produced by the ANWB, is another handy publication; it lists 50 popular cycle routes countrywide.

If you're seeking more of an odyssey, there are droves of cross-country and international routes to harden your calves. Most have a theme – medieval settlements, say, or some natural feature such as rivers or dunes.

The ANWB sells guides to signposted paths. These include the Noordzeeroute, a coastal trek from Den Helder along dunes and delta to Boulogne-sur-Mer in France (470km), or the Saksenroute from the Waddenzee coast to Twente in eastern Overijssel (230km).

Listed below are five excursions that provide a taster of what is available in the country; our best advice however is simply to rent a bike and head off in a direction that looks appealing.

Waterland Route

37km, 3½ to five hours

The eastern half of Waterland is culture-shock material: 20 minutes from central Amsterdam you step centuries back in time. This is an area of isolated farming communities and flocks of birds amid ditches, dykes and lakes.



The site www.fietsplatform.nl (in Dutch) has comprehensive information on *landelijke fietsroutes* (LF routes; long-distance routes) through the country.



It takes a few minutes to get out of town. First, take your bike onto the free Buiksloterwegveer ferry behind Amsterdam's Centraal Station across the IJ river. Then continue 1km along the west bank of the Noordhollands Kanaal. Cross the second bridge, continue along the east bank for a few hundred metres and turn right, under the freeway and along Nieuwendammerdijk past Vliegenbos camping ground. At the end of Nieuwendammerdijk, do a dogleg and continue along Schellingwouderdijk. Follow this under the two major road bridges, when it becomes Durgerdammerdijk, and you're on your way.

The pretty town of Durgerdam looks out across the water to IJburg, a major land-reclamation project that will eventually house 45,000 people. Further north, the dyke road passes several lakes and former sea inlets – low-lying, drained peatlands that were flooded during storms and now form important bird-breeding areas. Colonies include plovers, godwits, bitterns, golden-eyes, snipes, herons and spoonbills. Climb the dyke at one of the viewing points for uninterrupted views to both sides.

The road – now called Uitdammerdijk – passes the town of Uitdam, after which you turn left (west) towards Monnickendam (p155). Alternatively, you could turn right and proceed along the causeway to the former island of Marken (p156). After visiting Marken, you could take the summer ferry to Volendam (p156) and backtrack along the sea dyke to Monnickendam. Or you could return over the causeway from Marken and pick up our tour again towards Monnickendam. These diversions to Marken and (especially) Volendam would add significantly to the length of your trip (55km, seven to 10 hours).

From Monnickendam, return the way you came (if you came by the first route, not by one of the Marken diversions), but about 1.5km south of town turn right (southwest) towards Zuiderwoude. From there, continue to Broek in Waterland (p154), a pretty town with old wooden houses. Then cycle along the south bank of the Broekervaart canal towards Het Schouw on the Noordhollands Kanaal. Cross the Noordhollands Kanaal (the bridge is slightly to the north); bird-watchers may want to head up the west bank towards Watergang and its bird-breeding areas. Otherwise, follow the west bank back down to Amsterdam Noord. From here it's straight cycling all the way to the ferry to Centraal Station.

Mantelingen Route

35km, three hours

Depart from 't Groentje, an eastern suburb of Domburg (p227), a popular beach resort in the southwest coastal province of Zeeland; its tourist office has a list of bicycle-hire shops.

If you're up for the full tour via Westkapelle (making the trip 48km and about 3½ to 4½ hours long), head west along the coastal path past the golf course. Relish a split view of the earth atop the Westkapelse Zeedijk, a protective sea wall erected following the great flood of 1953. Once you're in the former fishing village of Westkapelle, take note of the odd church-lighthouse; the church burnt down in 1831, but the lighthouse was rebuilt on the solitary tower. Head east out of Westkapelle towards Aagtekerke and keep to the path marked Dorpenroute, which follows Prelaatweg. The area suddenly becomes a green and pleasing pastureland, and the tall hawthorn hedges part to reveal the lovely pension De Ark about a third of the way along.

For the shorter tour, turn south from Domburg along the signposted 'Mantelingenroute' path. This region explodes with flowers in season and is rightfully known as 'the garden of Zeeland'. The meadows are typically dotted with *schuren*, tarred farmhouses with green doors. Sticking to the

'After visiting Marken, you could take the summer ferry to Volendam and backtrack along the sea dyke to Monnickendam.'



Mantelingenroute will lead you to the village of Serooskerke and, just to the east, a cheerily renovated windmill and farmyard tavern, De Hoop. It's a great spot for an afternoon snack of strawberry waffles.

From De Hoop, continue on along Gapingse Dreef towards Veere (p226), and you'll soon stumble across a *vliedberg*, an artificial rise laid in the 12th century as a defence post and refuge in times of floods. Veere itself sits on the south shore of the Veerse Meer, a large lake created when an arm of the North Sea was closed off.

The route swings past the town's enormous Vrouwekerk to the Markt; turn right to glimpse the Campveerse Toren, towers which formed part of the old city fortifications. Continuing west along the quay in Veere, you'll pass a row of handsome 19th-century houses; at the bridge, turn around for an idyllic scene worthy of a snapshot.

From the town head northwest along the Veerse Meer and cross over the N57 road; here begins the chain of dunes that protect the Walcheren Forest from the North Sea. This leafy expanse between the coast and *polders* (drained lands) gives the route its name, Manteling, which roughly translates as mantle or overcoat. The path then turns west (left) along the southern edge of the dunes and becomes dark and leafy in the Slikkenbosch forest.

Near the end of the journey, as you turn left (south) away from the dunes, you'll pass close by Kasteel Westhove (p227), a 16th-century fort that was once the pride of powerful local deacons. Today it houses a youth hostel; in the adjacent orangery there's the Zeeuws Biologisch Museum (Zeeland Biology Museum) and a garden of local flora.

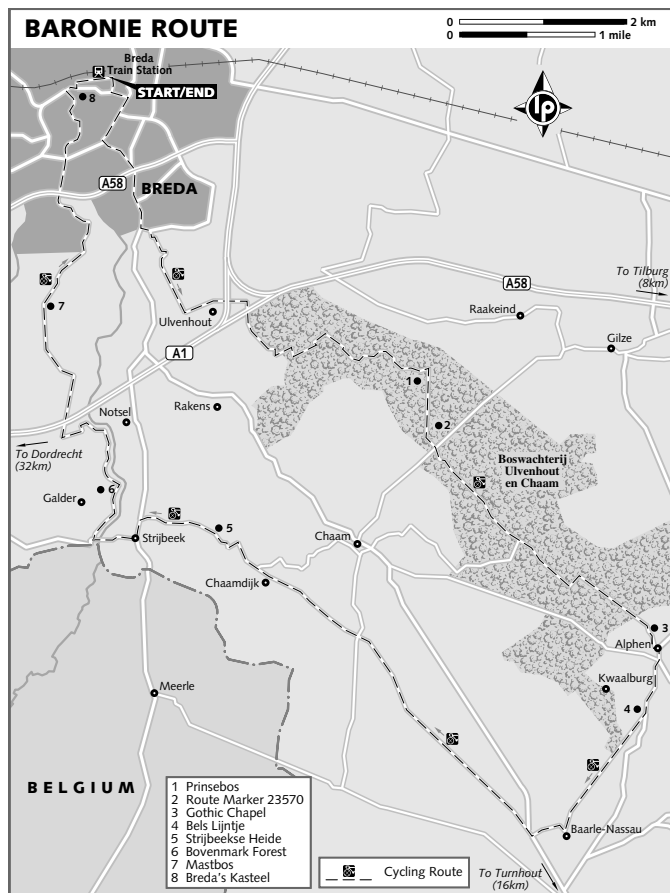
Baronie Route

52km, four to five hours

The province of Noord Brabant in the south of the country has a definite Flemish-Belgian feel to it, in the cuisine and the ornate architecture. The Baronie is the area around the town of Breda (p275), which belonged to the principedom of Brabant until the 17th century; the counts of Nassau resided here between 1403 and 1567.

The starting point is Breda train station, which has a bicycle-hire shop (p277). The gravel and sand Baronieroute (well signposted) leads alongside the municipal park to Breda's 16th-century *kasteel* (fort), which houses a military academy. It takes a while to get out of town, as you pass through the

'The route swings past the town's enormous Vrouwekerk to the Markt; turn right to glimpse the Campveerse Toren...'



'follow the Maastrichtse Baan (Maastricht Route) towards Alphen, the birthplace of artist Vincent Van Gogh.'

suburb of Ginneken, but eventually you'll reach a lush forest, Boswachterij Ulvenhout en Chaam, which lies southeast of the town. Between Ulvenhout and Alphen you can pedal about 15km on continuous forest paths. In the Prinsebos (Prince's Forest), planted in the early 20th century, you may see sturdy Brabant horses at work hauling timber.

At route marker 23570 you can either turn right to reach Chaam, a Protestant village amid predominantly Catholic Brabant, or follow the Maastrichtse Baan (Maastricht Route) towards Alphen, the birthplace of artist Vincent Van Gogh. Shortly before Alphen you'll pass a Gothic chapel from the 16th century – but the tower was built after WWII. From here a number of routes cross over into Belgium, including the Smokkelaarsroute (Smugglers' Route).

The path here is pretty and follows the old Bels Lijntje (Belgium Line), the train line opened in 1867 to link Tilburg with Turnhout. The last passenger train ran in 1934; the route was converted to a cycle path in 1989.

If you have time, stop off for a look around the town of Baarle-Nassau, which has been the subject of border disputes since the 12th century. The

Belgian and Dutch governments finally settled a 150-year difference in 1995; as a result, Belgian territory grew by 2600 sq metres.

Before you reach Baarle-Nassau, veer right and you'll eventually pass the village of Chaamdijk and a pretty heath, the Stribeekse Heide. Just beyond, at the village of Galder, you can cross the bridge and turn right into the Bovenmark Forest before doubling back to the main path, the Frieslandroute (LF9). Cross highway A1 to reach the forestry station at Mastbos, but take care with the loose sand and rocks on the final stretch back into Breda.

Plateau Route

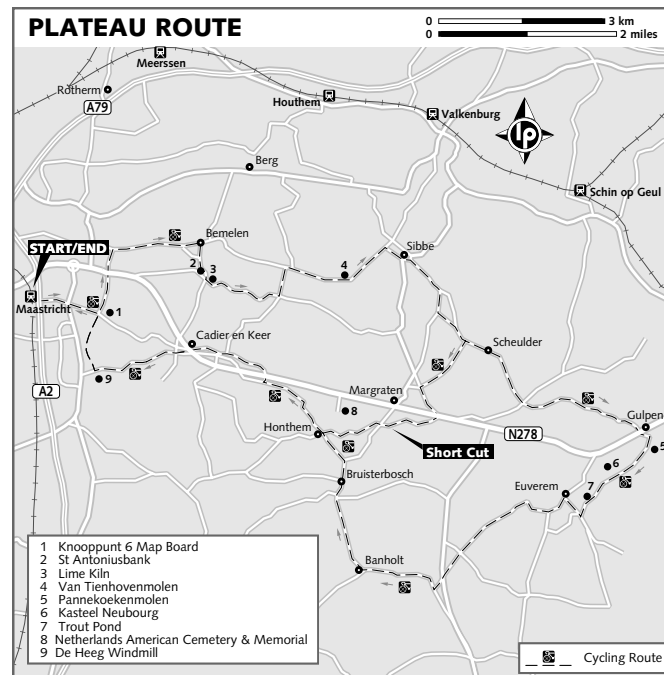
35km, three to four hours

The suggestion is it's flat as a Dutch pancake, but make no mistake, this route is the hilliest in our selection. Most ascents are merciful and easily conquered with the aid of gears. Defining features of this trip include windmills, sprawling castles and lovely rolling farmland.

From the bike shop at Maastricht train station, head southeast beneath the underpass and follow the bike route marked 'LF6a' and/or 'Bemelen'. It's a 10-minute ride to the city limits. At the ANWB map board Knooppunt 6 you join the Plateauroute; follow the route north (left), then east (right), to the small town of Bemelen.

At the hamlet St Antoniusbank you leave the paved road behind, passing an abandoned lime kiln on your ascent to the panorama over a limestone quarry. It's no surprise, then, that Limburg is peppered with structures built from the ochre-coloured mineral. A few kilometres on stands the cheery Van Tienhovenmolen windmill (open every second and fourth Saturday of the month).

'Defining features of this trip include windmills, sprawling castles and lovely rolling farmland.'



At the roundabout that's watched over by a limestone sculpture about 1km on from the windmill, take a right into Sibbe. The imposing pile on your left is the Sibbehuis, a 14th-century castle that's now a private residence. The route is a bit unclear in the village; follow signs to Gulpen. From Scheulder – where, if desired, you can halve the journey via a short cut labelled 'Route Afkorting' – you whiz through planted fields and finally downhill into the beer-brewing town of Gulpen. Lunchtime is wisely spent at the Pannekoekenmolen, a pancake house in a historic water mill tucked away at Molenweg 2a. To get there, turn left off Rijksweg/N278 at the traffic light onto Molenweg.

Here we suggest a detour to avoid the busy main road. From the pancake house, proceed southeast along cycle path 85, a leafy trail that affords glimpses of the turreted Kasteel Neubourg, a medieval castle (closed to the public). After the trout pond, take the first right towards Euverem, where you turn left to rejoin the Plateauroute.

The home stretch to Maastricht is quite countrified, with memorable views of mixed woodlands and livestock wandering the pastures. Pretty half-timbered houses grace the tidy farm villages where fresh potatoes, apples and strawberries are sold to passers-by. In tiny Banholt sheep graze peacefully in the town square.

Reminders of a grim era lie in Margraten, about 2km northeast of Honthem, at the Netherlands American Cemetery and Memorial (p283).

Onward from the hamlet Cadier en Keer you can coast downhill towards Maastricht, taking care not to miss the sharp right at the windmill in De Heeg. At the Knooppunt 6 map board, bear left on Bemelerweg towards Maastricht train station.

Southern Texel Route

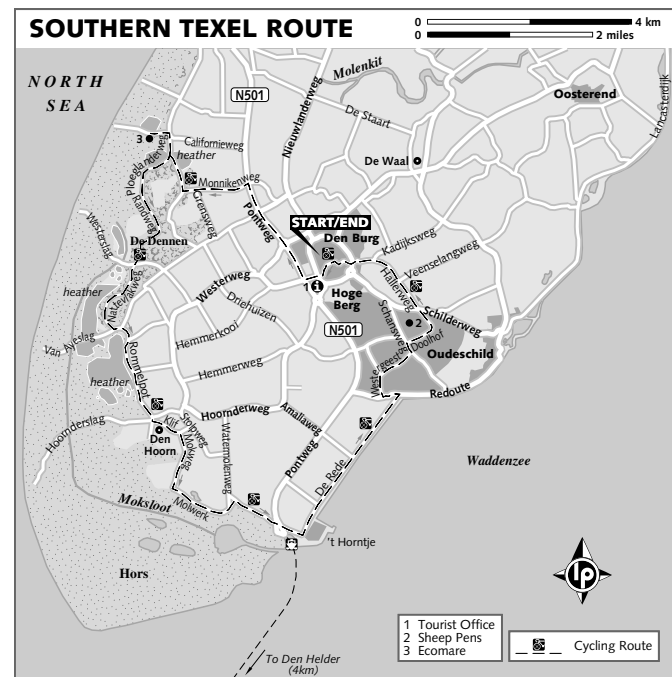
30km, three hours

The Wadden islands are a cyclists' paradise. Long stretches of sand dunes are complemented by pockets of woodland and large swaths of fertile farmland, and the North Sea and Waddenzee are never very far away. Of the five islands, Texel (p167) is easily the biggest and far and away the most visited, but it also offers the most diversity.

Begin this tour around the southern reaches of the island in Den Burg, Texel's quiet capital, where you'll find a couple of bike-rental shops. Head west out of the town past the tourist office (p167) and right (north) onto the island's main road, the N501; its bike path is quite separate from what little traffic the island receives. Grazing sheep and fluorescent green *polders* mark the path to your left and right, and at Monnikenweg turn west (left) in the direction of the North Sea. Before you know it you'll enter De Dennen, Texel's peaceful pine forest; it was initially planted for timber but has thankfully been left to run its own course. Not far into the forest turn right onto Ploeglanderweg and make a beeline for Ecomare (p167), an outstanding nature centre and refuge for sick seals found in the surrounding waters. After a mesmerising hour watching the seals' effortless water play, head south towards De Dennen, this time taking Randweg, a little-used road that meanders through the forest. Randweg soon turns into Nattevlakweg, which makes a dogleg and leaves the forest to join Rommelpot. Come springtime along this path, bright fields of tulips on your left are juxtaposed with the expansive heath to the right, which holds back the encroaching sand dunes.

At the junction of Rommelpot and Klif the route turns left into Den Hoorn, arguably the island's prettiest village. This is a good place to recharge the batteries, before following Mokweg south to rising sand dunes; here the path turns left on Molwerk and hugs the dunes until Texel's port, 't Horntje. From 't Horntje, take De Rede northeast along one of the island's protective dykes; when it hits Redoute, turn left and then take the first right to enter

'Lunchtime is wisely spent at the Pannekoekenmolen, a pancake house in a historic water mill...'



'Of the boulder clay mounds dotting the island, Hoge Berg is the most distinctive...'

the Hoge Berg region. Of the boulder clay mounds dotting the island, Hoge Berg is the most distinctive; it still sports *stolp* farms, garden walls and sheep pens reminiscent of times past. Look for the Texelroute sign and keep to the right – this will lead you up Westergeest, left onto Schansweg, then right into Doolhof. Along Doolhof is one of the few sheep pens (large, A-frame houses which look as though they've been sliced in two) whose front is not facing east.

At the next junction turn left up Skillepaadje and cross Schilderweg into Hallerweg, which will lead you back to Den Burg.

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