

Zuid Holland & Zeeland



Think Holland and you're thinking about these two provinces where tulips, cheese, plucky tall Dutch people standing up to the sea, Vermeer and tulips avoid cliché simply by their omnipresence.

The Keukenhof gardens are a place of pilgrimage for lovers of tulips. Not much further west, the beaches are great for biking and hiking, with trails and paths everywhere along the coast.

Zuid Holland's major cities are the biggest attractions: there's Leiden, with its university culture and old town (and proximity to the bulb fields); Den Haag, with its museums, stately air, fun shopping and kitsch beach; charming, beautiful Delft, the home of Jan Vermeer; and mighty Rotterdam, blessed with an edgy urban vibe, surprising cultural scene and striking architecture.

Several smaller places are also worth your time: Gouda is a perfect old canal town, while Dordrecht has its own surprises amid canals and charm. Just east and south of Dordrecht is Biesbosch National Park, a sprawling natural area along the border with Noord Brabant.

Further south, Zeeland (Sea Land) is the dyke-protected province that people often associate with the Netherlands when they're not thinking of tulips, cheese and windmills. Middelburg is the main town, with a serenity belying its proximity to the tragedies that spawned the Delta Project.

Cycling in this flat, mostly near- and sub-sea-level region is unparalleled. Ferries offer chances to get out on the water and short distances between towns, especially in Zuid Holland, mean that you can pick a town you fancy as a base and see the rest via quick and frequent trains.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Realise that Holland's second city should be its first in **Rotterdam** (p203)
- Pop off for posies at **Keukenhof Gardens** (p189)
- Get your Art 101 in splendid form at Den Haag's **Mauritshuis** (p191)
- Look for girls wearing pearl earrings in old-world **Delft** (p199)
- Go for a spin in **Kinderdijk** (p215)





ZUID HOLLAND

Along with Noord (North) Holland and Utrecht, Zuid Holland is part of the Randstad, the economic and population heart of the Netherlands. Two of the nation's most important cities are here: Den Haag, the seat of the royal family and the government; and Rotterdam, Europe's busiest port. You could easily make a trip just exploring these classic Dutch destinations.

LEIDEN

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Lovely Leiden is a refreshing, vibrant town, patterned with canals and attractive old buildings. It also has a few claims to fame:

it's Rembrandt's birthplace, and it's home to the Netherlands' oldest university (and 20,000 students), the alma mater of René Descartes.

The university was a gift from Willem the Silent for withstanding two Spanish sieges in 1574. It was a terrible time, ending when the Sea Beggars arrived and repelled the invaders. According to lore, the retreating Spanish legged it so quickly, they abandoned a kettle of *hutspot* (hotchpotch) – today it's still a staple of Dutch menus in restaurants, and in homes.

Decades later, Protestants fleeing persecution elsewhere in the Low Countries, France and England arrived in Leiden to a somewhat warmer welcome. Most notable was the group led by John Robinson, who would sail