

On the Road



RYAN VER BERKMOES Coordinating Author

It was a dark and stormy day. Squalls blew in from the North Sea causing the windmills at Zaanse Schans (p146) to shake, rattle and, well, spin. Straining against the winds, the ancient timbers creaked like old sailing ships. My favourite is a windmill that still grinds paint pigments just as was done for Rembrandt, Vermeer and other worthies. The park is a short day trip northwest of Amsterdam and is easily reached by train or bike. Afterwards, you raise a little flag and a small boat picks you up for a short jaunt to the pretty village of Zandijk. On this day, however, we might as well have been on a wave-tossed journey to the New World.



KARLA ZIMMERMAN Here's a quintessential Amsterdam moment – lock up the bike, gaze at the canal, and walk over the bridge to the cafe on the other side, where a frothy beer awaits.

Destination the Netherlands

The Netherlands is a very big, small country. So much of this sea-battered, windswept, flat-as-a-pancake place has played an oversized role in history that it seems hardly possible that it is only 135th in the league table of nations' size, right after Switzerland and Bhutan.

In the world of art it's given us Rembrandt and Van Gogh. Sure, there's also Frans Hals, Hieronymus Bosch and Piet Mondrian, but when you've got the first two, why worry about the rest? OK that Vermeer guy, he's big...

Then there are icons. Classic windmills, the ultimate green machines that are back in vogue a century after the Dutch used the twirling beasties to pump the country dry. And clogs? Renewable. Affordable. Floatable (if the dykes break). And tulips? The Dutch have made a fortune from little bulbs that go in the ground, then burst forth with beauty that's universally loved. Compare that to countries who have made a fortune planting, say, landmines in the ground.

The Dutch themselves seem oversized. (Actually they are, being statistically the tallest nationality on the planet.) Gregariousness, thrift, good sense and wry humour are all national traits, as is no-holds-barred honesty. This is not the country for the neurotic to ask: 'Do you think I look fat?'

Language is another trait where they excel. Yes, the Dutch language often makes the uninitiated suspect that the speaker needs a spittoon, but at the merest hint of your native tongue the Dutch smoothly shift to flawless English, and even toss in a joke to let you know that they didn't just learn it in a book.

But the most defining aspect of the Dutch, and one that also defines the Netherlands, is the ingrained devotion to tolerance. Most non-Dutch don't realise that the country is roughly divided between Protestants and Catholics. And unlike other places where this is the case and where it's resulted in no end of trouble, it hasn't been a cause of strife here for hundreds of years.

These days, as well as tolerance, it's probably because the rather unreligious Dutch simply don't care. But go back 100 years to when people were more

FAST FACTS

Population: 16.5 million

Area: 41,526 sq km

Land in tulip bulbs:
110 sq km

Per capita GDP: €35,400

Unemployment rate:
6.8% (2009)

Inflation: 2% (2009
average)

Waterways: 5046km
(navigable for ships
over 50 tonnes)

Number of windmills:
1180

MORE DUTCH FAST FACTS

The Dutch love statistics and they're a favourite topic of conversation. Here are some esoteric stats to get you ready for any conversational gambit in a cafe. We suggest you break the ice by asking: 'Were you born at home?' (Should you want more, the government agency Statistics Netherlands has a vast amount of data on its website, www.cbs.nl.)

- The Netherlands hosted 8 million foreign overnight guests in 2008; 1.5 million were from Britain.
- From 2005 to 2008, 29% of births in the country were home deliveries.
- One person out of 50 in the Netherlands is of Moroccan descent.
- The nation exported more than 689 million kilos of cheese in 2008, which adds up to 42kg per inhabitant.
- In 2020, one in five people in the Netherlands will be aged over 65.
- Seven out of eight locals had home internet access in 2008 – the highest percentage in the EU.
- One-third of Dutch internet users won't shop online.
- One in 10 Dutch youth aged 15 to 20 years has smoked pot in the past 30 days, one of the lowest rates in Europe.

HOLLAND VS THE NETHERLANDS: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

'Holland' is a popular synonym for the Netherlands, yet in reality it only refers to the combined provinces of Noord (North) and Zuid (South) Holland. The rest of the country (Utrecht, Limburg, Friesland etc) is not Holland, even if the Dutch themselves make the same mistake – although those doing this often seem to be from a certain two provinces...

devout and wandered around the dykes saying prayers while dressed in black, and the Dutch found a typically sensible way to deal with possible religious strife: tolerance. You don't bother me and I won't bother you.

Tolerance influences every aspect of Dutch life. For decades the nation has been governed by broad coalitions embracing parties on the right and left. Extremist parties appear, get 6% of the vote, and disappear at the next election. If you're gay you can get married; if you want to smoke pot you can. If you want to dress up like a leprechaun and have somebody ride you like a stallion, well you can do that too.

But in a country where seeking the middle ground is paramount (possibly due to a lack of high ground?), even tolerance has been found to have its limits. After political provocateur Theo van Gogh was murdered in 2004 by an immigrant angered over his anti-Muslim rhetoric, the official response was to require prospective residents to take lessons in the role of tolerance in Dutch society.

The Dutch discovered they were intolerant of the intolerant. And the 'things to be intolerant of' list has been growing. When a convicted human trafficker sentenced to 7½ years in prison was let out so he could 'take care of personal business' and then didn't return to serve the rest of his time (surprise!), there was anger over his jailers being too tolerant.

The famous coffeeshops where you can order your pot and hash off a menu are also under fire, as are the legal red light districts. The 'smart bars' where you could order magic mushrooms are already gone and even liberal governments, such as those in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, are talking about closing 50% of coffeeshops and making the rest Dutch-only.

It seems the Dutch are fed up with drug and sex tourists, and the gangs and underworld figures that profit off them. Whether this is a temporary, conservative shift fuelled by troubled times or whether it represents a fundamental change in tolerance remains to be seen.

For Amsterdam – the entire city a Dutch icon like the ones mentioned earlier – these upheavals will merely create more ripples in a city used to waves of change. Misunderstood by many, the virtual heart of the Netherlands is not what many people expect on their first visit. The sex and drugs are mostly kept to one 'hood (convenient to the train station) while the rest of the city keeps to its own beauty along the murky canals.

Amsterdam wears its rich history proudly, even if it doesn't put on the airs it could as one of the world's great cities – that would be very un-Dutch. But if you only stay in Amsterdam you will misunderstand the rest of this big, small place. Other places as old as Amsterdam have evocative beauty and come in a variety of sizes: Edam, Haarlem, Delft and Deventer to name just some.

Perhaps the best way to get to the heart of the Netherlands is to do as the Dutch do. Join them in the city centres of classic towns as far flung as Groningen, Maastricht and Den Bosch, lively places filled with cafes that heave with happy Dutch socialising on a sunny day. Or join them on the thousands of kilometres of bike routes as they add not a molecule of carbon to the atmosphere while riding through the lush countryside and past sweeping watery vistas at sea (or is it see?) level.

You don't have to travel far to find a lot.

Getting Started

The Netherlands is an easy place to visit. Up-to-date information is plentiful, almost every Dutch person speaks decent English, transport links are swift, distances are short, and there's an abundance of sights and activities. All this means you can be spontaneous and not worry about a huge amount of preparation or endless planning.

That said, a bit of foresight is essential to pinpoint sights that match your interests, and to get the timing right – the tulip fields aren't much to look at before the blossoms open or after the stems are denuded. And during the busy summer you'll probably want to book your Amsterdam accommodation, as Amsterdam's best (and sometimes worst) hotels book up well in advance, and other towns may have limited sleeping options.

WHEN TO GO

The Netherlands has a typical maritime climate, with cool winters and mild summers. Be prepared for blustery and changeable weather and limited sunny days in summer – although climate change may be changing that. Precipitation (79cm a year) is spread rather evenly over the calendar.

Like much of Europe, the high season runs from June to August, which is known for its hot, sticky spells but isn't quite the Riviera shown in some tourist brochures. In fact the moderate climes mean that the typical fan-free, non-air-conditioned hotel room can roast. Hordes of tourists pulse through the Netherlands at this time, but these are the best months to sit by the canals drinking and chatting. Many Dutch take a summer holiday, and the last weekend in July is deadly for traffic. You may be surrounded by other foreigners in August, but the month is crammed with events – see p287.

Mid-March to May, and September to mid-October are the shoulder seasons. Spring is wonderful, as the bulbs are in bloom – April for daffodils, May for tulips. Easter is busy in Amsterdam, but if you can visit during Koninginnedag (30 April, see p116) it's worth fighting the crowds. Early October with its Indian summer can be an excellent time to come.

As the temperature drops, so does the number of tourists – things are calmest from mid-October to mid-March. Museums are quiet (and many are closed; note the listings in this book) and you can mingle with the 'real' Dutch in cosy pubs during this time. Accommodation rates fall, though some

See Climate, p285, for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Converter for European plugs
- Earplugs to counteract fellow hotel guests and street noise
- Abandoning your diet (*frites!*)
- Decent rain jacket
- Plans to tiptoe through the tulips
- Open mind to drugs and sex
- Thick skin for Dutch honesty/bluntness
- Taste for bad '80s music, because you won't be able to escape it
- Quick reflexes to avoid cyclists and dodge dog poo
- A smaller bag than you thought – you can buy anything you forget to pack

hotels might be closed. The short days of winter (December to February) see periods of slushy snow and temperatures close to freezing – this is a challenging time for those on a cycling holiday.

School holidays are staggered according to region but fall around mid-February, early May, July and August, and the end of October (see p288).

COSTS & MONEY

The Netherlands really isn't a budget buy, but neither is it the most expensive European destination. If you're happy eating chips, sleeping in hostels and walking around, it's possible to hang in the country for under €50 per day. Those who prefer a couple of solid meals a day, a comfy bed with private facilities, a few cafe drinks and travelling by public transport are looking at €100 per day as a starting point. Add-ons such as museums, treats, nicer digs, day trips etc will quickly lift your budget.

There are a lot of free activities to stretch your budget, especially in Amsterdam in summer, and discount passes in large cities can yield lots of discounts (see p286). And don't underestimate the pleasure of simply wandering around Dutch cities soaking up their history and beauty. It's free – at least until you yield to the temptation of that beguiling cafe.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

One of the best ways you can travel responsibly in the Netherlands is to provide your own transport power: there is no better place in the world for cycling (see p67). But even if you're not peddling away, the superb public transport system can get you almost everywhere you need to go (and most of the trains run on electricity). Cars are not needed and are a major pain to park or even simply to manoeuvre around the pedestrian-friendly city centres.

Otherwise your best way to travel responsibly is to simply mimic the locals. The Netherlands has a deep commitment to recycling and sustainability. Hotels, restaurants and other businesses tend to reflect the same national green vibe.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Girl with a Pearl Earring, by Tracy Chevalier, explores the conflict between duty and sexuality. Set in Delft, the story was made into a Hollywood movie starring Colin Firth (as Jan Vermeer) and Scarlett Johansson (as a maid in his employ), and offers insights into a painter's life during the Golden Age.

Xenophobe's Guide to the Dutch, by Rodney Bolt, takes an irreverent look at all things Dutch and strikes a fine balance between humour and truth. A quick, fun read.

The Dutch, I Presume?, by Martijn de Rooi, Jurjen Drenth and friends, is another book that attempts to explain the peculiarities of the Dutch psyche, and the Dutch people's love affair with windmills, wooden shoes and shelf toilets. It has more facts than insights, but it's still an interesting read and the photos are inspired.

Amsterdam, by Geert Mak, interweaves tales of ordinary citizens with the bigger picture of cultural, social and economic history. It also delves into the Dutch psyche: for instance, why the Dutch eschew nationalism for business reasons.

The UnDutchables, by Colin White and Laurie Boucke, is a point of reference for virtually anyone who goes to live in the Netherlands. These two Americans have observed foibles that many Dutch themselves seem not to recognise.

The Embarrassment of Riches, by Simon Schama, is an epic account of Dutch culture in the Golden Age, using art to mirror a nation with all its

HOW MUCH?

Size 37 plain/painted clogs €17.50/20.50

2/15 strip card for public transport €1.60/6.70

One day's parking in Amsterdam €50

One day's bike hire €6-10

Cinema ticket €7.50

TOP 10



MUST-SEE FILMS

The following is a shortlist of critically acclaimed Dutch films worth seeing before your trip.

- 1** *Antonia* (Antonia's Line), directed by Marleen Gorris, 1995. A strong-willed Dutch woman recalls life in a colourful village. Won an Oscar for best foreign film.
- 2** *De Aanslag* (The Assault), directed by Fons Rademakers, 1986. A physician spends his adult life investigating why his neighbours betrayed his family in WWII.
- 3** *De Tweeling* (Twin Sisters), directed by Ben Sombogaart, 2004. Touching story of twins separated in the Netherlands and Germany during WWII.
- 4** *Fanfare*, directed by Bert Haanstra, 1958. Classic satire about two amateur brass bands vying for a government grant in a small Dutch town.
- 5** *Interview*, directed by Theo van Gogh, 2003. Low-key account of a war correspondent conducting an interview with a soap-opera actress.
- 6** *Shouf Shouf Habibi* (Hush Hush Baby), directed by Albert ter Heerdt, 2004. Comedy about a Moroccan family finding its way in Dutch society.
- 7** *Simon*, directed by Eddy Terstall, 2004. A complicated friendship develops when a hetero hash dealer hits a gay man with his car.
- 8** *Turks Fruit* (Turkish Delight), directed by Paul Verhoeven, 1973. A distressed sculptor (Rutger Hauer) picks up numerous women to forget the loss of his wife; a modern classic.
- 9** *Zus & So*, directed by Paula van der Oest, 2001. Comedy about three sisters who plot to sabotage the engagement of their gay brother for material gain.
- 10** *Zwartboek* (Black Book), directed by Paul Verhoeven, 2006. This action-packed story explores some of the less heroic aspects of the Dutch resistance in WWII.

MEMORABLE MUSEUMS

The Netherlands is peppered with exceptional museums. The following are some of our favourites:

- 1** Kröller-Müller Museum (p265) One of the world's best for art, set in a vast park.
- 2** Rijksmuseum (p105) *The* museum for Dutch art.
- 3** Van Gogh Museum (p104) The man and his art.
- 4** Anne Frank Huis (p102) The book's setting is perfectly presented.
- 5** Frans Hals Museum (p141) The artist's work is shown in a setting that reflects his life.
- 6** Zaanse Schans (p146) Fun setting for windmill-mania.
- 7** Zuiderzeemuseum (p157) Amazing open-air museum of Dutch life.
- 8** Mauritshuis (p191) Art 101 in a palace.
- 9** Museum Boijmans van Beuningen (p205) Fun-filled museum with art through the ages.
- 10** Maritime & Beachcombers Museum (p162) Flotsam and jetsam are just some of the highlights.

resident neuroses and religious idiosyncrasies. Masterfully written and full of offbeat themes such as the popularity of breakfast paintings.

Tulip Fever, by Deborah Moggach, offers a feel for Amsterdam proper around the time when Rembrandt was at his peak and tulips were worth more than their weight in gold. A nice bonus is the reproductions of Dutch paintings found in some editions.

INTERNET RESOURCES

See p68 for internet resources you can use while on a cycling holiday.

Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.minbuza.nl) Wealth of background facts and information, but not officious.

Dutch News (www.dutchnews.nl) Daily headlines and news stories in English.

Expatica (www.expatica.com/holland) Entertaining all-round guide to life in the Netherlands, with daily news, listings and even singles ads.

Google Translate (translate.google.com) Many Dutch websites have English-language pages; for those that don't Google supplies instant translation.

Learn Dutch (www.learn dutch.org) Online Dutch course; learn to say 'hello, my name is Hans Brinker' in under a minute.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) General information on the Netherlands and links to various useful Dutch sites.

Netherlands Tourism Board (www.holland.com) Attractions, cultural articles and loads of practical stuff among the PR; good search function.

Uitburo (www.uitburo.nl) Events site for the Netherlands. It's in Dutch but is easy to navigate.

Windmill Database (www.molendatabase.com) Pick out your favourite icon in advance.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

THE LAY OF THE LOWLANDS

One Week / Amsterdam to Kinderdijk

Begin in **Amsterdam** (p81). Visit the **Van Gogh Museum** (p104) and the **Rijksmuseum** (p105) and rent a bicycle to explore the pretty neighbourhood of **Jordaan** (p100). On the second day board a **canal boat tour** (p114) and walk the **Red Light District** (p97) before hitting a brown cafe or coffeeshop.

Head west to the town of **Haarlem** (p140) – stroll the compact old quarter, and view the masterpieces at the **Frans Hals Museum** (p141) and the stained glass of the **Grote Kerk van St Bavo** (p141).

Spend a day in **Leiden** (p184) with its old-world splendour. In tulip season (April and May) witness the unbelievable colours of the **Keukenhof gardens** (p189), north of town. Then spend a day in **Den Haag** (p189), being sure not to miss the **Mauritshuis** (p191) collection, with five-star works from everyone from Vermeer to Warhol.

In the remaining time take a harbour boat tour in **Rotterdam** (p203) and visit the **Museum Boijmans van Beuningen** (p205) and the **Maritiem Museum Rotterdam** (p208). The next morning, do a walking tour of the city's **modern architecture** (p209) before departing for **Kinderdijk** (p215) and its gaggle of Unesco-recognised windmills.



This popular route from Amsterdam through the historic Dutch cities of Haarlem, Den Haag and Rotterdam is a mere 103km; the sheer variety of charms will make a week flash by.

SOUTHERN SOJOURN

Two Weeks / Amsterdam to Utrecht

If you've two weeks to spare, start in **Amsterdam** (p81), but extend your stay to three days, and as well as a visit to the city's big museums, take time out to relax in **Vondelpark** (p106), the capital's English-style park. Once again, discover the delights of the district of **Jordaan** (p100) and add the **Southern Canal Belt** (p103), then take a load off in **Hoppe** (p127), a grand cafe on the Spui, and browse the exotic wares in the **Albert Cuypmarkt** (see the boxed text, p134). Learn about the glories of the Dutch East India Company at the renovated **Nederlands Scheepvaartmuseum** (p109) then plunge into the city's celebrated **nightlife** (p129). Escape the city by bicycle to enjoy the windmills and seascapes of the **Waterland Region** (p147).

Continue on as in the one-week tour to Haarlem, Leiden (and Keukenhof, in season), Den Haag and Rotterdam, but add a day for **Delft** (p199) and its Vermeer splendour. Take the ferry to see the windmills at **Kinderdijk** (p215), then head for **Middelburg** (p220), Zeeland's prosperous capital, and the nearby **Delta Project** (p224). Take trains through the Netherlands' southern provinces, stopping for the hidden canals of lovely **Den Bosch** (p268), before continuing to **Maastricht** (p274), a city with more panache than most; two days should be enough to sample some great cuisine and meander through the medieval centre. Head north to visit Hanseatic **Deventer** (p253) and then head east to the excellent **Kröller-Müller Museum** (p265). Polish off your trip in the cosmopolitan yet deeply historic city of **Utrecht** (p173).

A two-week tour covering 700km that passes through some of Holland's classic cities, and allows an exploration of the country's astounding Delta Project and a world-class museum.



CIRCUMNAVIGATING THE IJSSELMEER

Two Weeks / Amsterdam
to Amsterdam

A practical place to start this tour is **Amsterdam** (p81); three days in the capital will whiz by in a blur of museums, parks, canal tours and nightlife. From here, head north along the IJsselmeer coast through the **Waterland Region** (p147) to the tiny fishing village of **Marken** (p149). Cycle the dykes around the inland sea to cute-as-a-button **Edam** (p150), which comes second only to Haarlem as the prettiest town in Noord Holland. Stay overnight here before reaching **Alkmaar** (p152) early to experience its kitsch but fun cheese market, then spend the afternoon wandering through Enkhuizen's enthralling **Zuiderzeemuseum** (p157).

The next morning catch a bus to **Den Helder** (p160), and from there a ferry to **Texel** (p160). Spend two days (or the entire two weeks...) dividing your time between the beach and bike exploration, then take another ferry to **Vlieland** (p235) to appreciate the wilder side of the Frisian Islands. From Vlieland, a ferry will take you back to the mainland and dump you at **Harlingen** (p232), from where **Leeuwarden** (p228) is only a short train ride away. Friesland's capital is an entertaining place, as are the nearby chain of captivating coastal towns highlighted by **Hindeloopen** (p233) on the IJsselmeer.

Break the train trip from Leeuwarden to Amsterdam at beguiling **Zwolle** (p255) and add more stops in **Naarden** (p166) and **Muiden** (p165), two of Noord Holland's historical fortress towns.



This two-week trip, covering 570km, provides a taste of Dutch life on the sea. It passes through historically important nautical towns, holiday islands and old fortresses.

ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

ISLAND ESCAPES **One to Two Weeks / Amsterdam to Schiermonnikoog**

The necklace of low-lying Wadden Islands (Texel, Vlieland, Terschelling, Ameland and Schiermonnikoog) is recognised by Unesco and makes for good island-hopping, preferably with your bicycle in tow. Some ferry links require advance planning; with precise planning you can link all five by boat (p235) but for most there will be connections via the mainland. From Amsterdam, head to **Texel** (p160). Hop on your bike and snake along the island's western coast from sleepy Den Hoorn through dark copses to the **Ecomare** (p161) seal and bird refuge. Comb the eastern side of the island, admiring pretty thatched houses in Oosterend and visiting the superb **Maritime & Beachcombers Museum** (p162) in Oudeschild.

From De Cocksdorp at the northern end of Texel, board the morning ferry to car-free **Vlieland** (p235) to explore its nature and hiking trails before catching the boat to **Terschelling** (p236), Friesland's main tourist island. Hole up in peaceful **Oosterend** (p236) and cycle the untouched dunes, then hightail it by ferry to **Harlingen** (p232), a pretty little port on the Frisian coast, and on to **Holwerd** (p231), to ferry across to somnolent **Ameland** (p237). Stay in the whaling port of **Nes** (p237). Return via the ports of Holwerd and **Lauwersoog** (p245) and back on a ferry to **Schiermonnikoog** (p237), the smallest of the Frisian Islands and featuring a windswept, evocative national park.

This hop along the Wadden Islands covers just 200km, but you will be tempted to spend from one to two weeks soaking up the island's wild, enchanting beauty.



EASTERN EXPERIENCE

One Week / Groningen to Dordrecht

The Netherlands' eastern expanse is largely ignored by tourists who settle for the big guns of the Dutch lowlands, but there are myriad highlights among the *polders* (strips of farmland separated by canals) waiting to be discovered.

Begin your trip in **Groningen** (p240), a vibrant city filled with students, bars, cafes and a couple of fine museums. Cycle southeast to **Bourtange** (p247), a perfectly preserved 17th-century fortified town on the border with Germany, before moving on to Borger and its prehistoric **hunebedden** (see the boxed text, p249), stone arrangements once used as burial chambers. Cycle through the woods to **Kamp Westerbork** (p248) and encounter its moving, horrible heritage. Catch a train to **Zwolle** (p255), a compact, easygoing town. A bike trip through the beautifully natural expanse of nearby **Weerribben National Park** (p251) should include renting a canoe.

From Zwolle it's only a short train ride to **Deventer** (p253), an unhurried Hanseatic town that's ideal for backstreet meanders. Next, explore the **Hoge Veluwe National Park** (p264), a natural oasis that's home to one of the finest art museums in the country. Then head for **Den Bosch** (p268), a city ringed by unusual canals and defensive walls. **Breda** (p272) is your next stop, where a day and a night can be spent appreciating the city's cafe-filled centre. Go back to nature at **Biesbosch National Park** (p218) before finishing up on the lovely old streets and canals of **Dordrecht** (p216).



This seven-day excursion through the Netherlands' eastern provinces covers 550km and touches on the country's less-visited towns, cities and natural attractions.

TAILORED TRIPS

FAMILY FORAYS

Aside from canal tours and bike rides, **Amsterdam** (p113) is filled with family attractions. The **Nederlands Scheepvaartmuseum** (p109), with its tall-ship replicas, and **Tropenmuseum** (p108), featuring a separate children's section, will spark imaginations young and old, while excess energy can be spent running wild in **Vondelpark** (p106) or **TunFun** (p100), a large underground playground. Then kids can settle back down with the butterflies in **Hortus Botanicus** (p107).

Close to the capital, the windmills and boat rides of **Zaanse Schans** (p146) will surely delight, as will the sand dunes and pristine beaches of the **Zuid-Kennemerduinen National Park** (p145).

Further north, the old toys you can try at the **Zuiderzeemuseum** (p157) in Enkhuizen are fun, while kids love bidding for apples at **Museum Broeker Veiling** (p155) in Broek op Langedijk.

In Gelderland, shiver with the critters at Arnhem's well laid-out **Burgers' Zoo** (p262). The cute seals and interactive nature displays of Texel's **Ecomare** (p161) and Pieterburen's **Zeehondencreche** (p246) never fail to please.

Efteling (p272), with scary rides aplenty, is the 'Dutch Disneyland'. Enjoy a pint-sized Holland at **Madurodam** (p193) or **RailZ Miniworld** (p208).

Maastricht's spooky **underground caves** (see the

boxed text, p277) are perfect for the entire family, as is the **Waterland Neeltje Jans** (p223).

ADULT ENTERTAINMENT

There is no denying that the Netherlands is a playground for grown-ups. Breweries, brown cafes, coffeeshops, red light districts, world-class clubbing, and the old masters' art are just waiting to be enjoyed.

Start in Amsterdam. Its centre overflows with **brown cafes** (p127), but to get straight to the source, go for a quality beverage at **Brouwerij 't IJ** (p129), a small brewery with potent beers. With scores of **coffeeshops** (p129), the capital offers ample opportunity to partake in a spliff or two, and no one, but no one (unless they suffer from erythrophobia) should miss a stroll through the legendary **Red Light District** (p97). **Clubs** (p131) abound, as do museums devoted to great masters, such as Rembrandt and Van Gogh.

Rotterdam's **clubbing scene** (p212) is renowned, as are its **summer festivals** (p209), and Groningen's **nightlife** (p244), fuelled by thousands of students, is a lively hedonistic mix. **Utrecht** (p178) has a rollicking nightlife thanks to its ancient university.

Beer is also a Dutch delight. **Maastricht** (p279), close to Belgium and Trappist breweries, should be the first stop for a beer connoisseur, while the best of the Low Countries' amber brew can be sampled at Alkmaar's **Nationaal Biermuseum** (p153). Small, local breweries, such as Texel's **Bierbrouwerij** (p162) and Nijmegen's **De Hemel** (p261), dot the country.



The Authors



RYAN VER BERKMOES

Coordinating Author

Ryan Ver Berkmoes worked on the first edition of Lonely Planet's *The Netherlands*, a country where the people pronounce his name better than he can, possibly because his ancestors are lurking about there somewhere. Ryan was thrilled to see it's still the same charming, amusing, idiosyncratic place it was last time. These days he lives in Portland, Oregon, which is another place with very good bars. Learn more at ryanverberkmoes.com. For this edition of *The Netherlands*, Ryan wrote all chapters except Amsterdam.



KARLA ZIMMERMAN

Amsterdam

During her Amsterdam travels, Karla admired art, bicycled crash-free, ate an embarrassing number of Droste chocolates and bent over to take her *jenever* (Dutch gin) like a local. She has been visiting Amsterdam since 1989 – two decades that have seen her trade space cakes for *stroopwafels*, to a much more pleasant effect.

Based in Chicago, Karla writes travel features for newspapers, books, magazines and radio. She has authored or co-authored several Lonely Planet guidebooks covering the USA, Canada, the Caribbean and Europe.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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