



The Netherlands

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Best Places to Eat

- » Van Dobben, Amsterdam (p907)
- » Les Ombrellas, Den Haag (p912)
- » De Ballentent, Rotterdam (p916)
- » Blauw, Utrecht (p918)

Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Nadia, Amsterdam (p907)
- » Hotel Bazar, Rotterdam (p915)
- » Stayokay Rotterdam (p915)
- » Hotel Holla, Maastricht (p920)

Why Go?

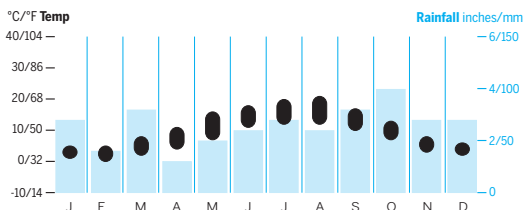
Great Dutch artists Rembrandt, Vermeer and Van Gogh have spanned the centuries and touring the Netherlands you'll see why. Discover clichés such as tulips and windmills or stroll canals in the midst of 17th-century splendour in beautiful small towns such as Leiden and Delft. Of course, enticing Amsterdam's phenomenal and diverse nightlife is world famous, from throbbing clubs to quaint brown cafes.

The locals live on bicycles and you can, too. Almost every train station has a shop to rent a bike and soon you're off on the ubiquitous bike paths heading wherever your mood takes you.

Finally there's the Dutch themselves: warm, friendly and funny. You'll have a hard time being alone in a cafe as someone will soon strike up a conversation, and usually in English. Revel in Amsterdam, don't miss exquisite Maastricht or pulsing Rotterdam, and pick a passel of small towns to add contrast. It's a very big small country.

When to Go

Amsterdam



Mar–May The country explodes in colour as billions of bulbs bloom.

Jul Mild summer temperatures and lots of daylight keep you outdoors, cycling and drinking.

Dec–Feb The Dutch passion for ice skating is on display on frozen canals nationwide.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Euro (€)
- » **Language** Dutch; English widespread
- » **Money** ATMs common; cash preferred for small purchases
- » **Visas** Schengen rules apply; see p1319

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 41,526 sq km
- » **Capital** Amsterdam
- » **Country code** 31
- » **Emergency** 112

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	€0.74
Canada	C\$1	€0.74
Japan	¥100	€0.87
New Zealand	NZ\$1	€0.56
UK	UK£1	€1.16
USA	US\$1	€0.72

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget dorm/double** €20/60
- » **Two-course evening meal** €12
- » **Heineken** (glass or bottle) €2.50
- » **Joint from a coffee shop** €3
- » **Bicycle hire** €10 per day

Resources

- » **Netherlands Tourism Board** (www.holland.com)
- » **Dutch News** (www.dutchnews.nl)
- » **Dutch Railways** (www.ns.nl)
- » **Windmill Database** (www.molendatabase.com)

Connections

Train connections to neighbouring countries are good. Amsterdam is linked to Cologne (2½ hours), in Germany, and Brussels (1¾ hours on the new Thalys/Fyra high-speed line), in Belgium, where you can connect with Eurostar to London. Maastricht is right on the Belgian and German borders. Connections to Cologne and Brussels take 1½ hours. It would be easy to put together a loop itinerary that includes the wines of the Moselle Valley in Germany and the beers of Belgium.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Spend three days canal-exploring, museum-hopping and cafe-swooping in Amsterdam. Work your way through the ancient towns of the Randstad and the modern vibe of Rotterdam and save a day for the grandeur of Maastricht.

Two Weeks

Allow four days for Amsterdam's many delights, plus a day trip to the old towns of the north such as Edam and a day or two even further north on Texel. Then allow a day each for beautiful Delft, the regal Hague, cute Utrecht and Rotterdam. Finish off with two days in Maastricht.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Vlaamse frites** *Frites* are the iconic French fries smothered in mayonnaise or other gooey sauces; they are the ultimate munchies food.
- » **Beer** While big names such as Heineken are ubiquitous, small brewers such as Gulpen, Haarlem's Jopen, Bavaria, Drie Ringen, Leeuw and Utrecht are the best.
- » **Gouda** The tastiest 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.
- » **Indonesian** The most famous dish with colonial roots is *rijsttafel* (rice table), an array of spicy savoury dishes such as braised beef, pork satay and ribs served with white rice.
- » **Erwtensoep** Served in winter, a pea soup rich with onions, carrots, smoked sausage and bacon. Ideally a spoon stuck upright in the pot should remain standing.
- » **Kroketten** Croquettes are dough balls with various fillings that are crumbed and deep-fried; the variety called *bitterballen* are a popular brown-cafe snack served with mustard. Perfect with beer.