



Haarlem & North Holland

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Why Go?

Wrapping around Amsterdam like a crown, Holland's north is thick with trad Dutch culture. West of the capital, elegant Haarlem is the region's crowning glory, a charming town of 17th-century grandeur. On its western outskirts are wide, sandy beaches.

Moving north, you'll be, yes, blown away by the iconic windmills at intriguing Zaanse Schans. Twee little Edam, Volendam and Marken hold a special place in Dutch culture for cheese, traditional customs, defiance of the sea, and tourism. The Golden Age ports of Hoorn and Enkhuizen have engaging old centres; the latter is also home to the Zuiderzeemuseum, a not-to-be-missed open-air extravaganza.

On the way to the Waddenzee island of Texel is Alkmaar, famous for its kitsch but oddly compelling traditional cheese auction. Texel itself is a gem, with long, fine beaches, busy little villages, sheep-swamped *polders* (strips of farmland separated by canals) and a forest or two.

Best Places to Eat

- » Kroft (p119)
- » Freya (p128)
- » Restaurant Topido (p128)
- » Van Der Star (p129)

Best Places to Stay

- » Stempels (p106)
- » Posthoorn (p111)
- » Hotel De 14 Sterren (p128)
- » Bij Jef (p128)

When to Go

Haarlem, with its fine museums and indoor attractions such as good restaurants, is a year-round destination. The rest of North Holland is much more fair-weather country. Little burghs like Edam and Alkmaar all but hibernate in the winter. Think April to October for exploring this deeply Dutch region. Surprisingly the island of Texel actually makes a fascinating off-season destination as few things are moodier and more atmospheric as its deserted beaches when winds careen in off the North Sea (but on a sunny summer day, you can't beat time on the sand).

NORTH HOLLAND

The iconic province of Noord Holland has enough cute little towns – in addition to Haarlem – to fill a week or more of touring.

History

The peninsula now known as Noord Holland was part of Friesland until the 12th century, when storm floods created the

Zuiderzee and isolated West Friesland. By this time the mercantile counts of Holland ruled the area – or thought they did. One of the early counts, Willem II, became king of the Holy Roman Empire in 1247 but perished in a raid against the West Frisians (his horse fell through the ice). His son, Count Floris V, succeeded in taming his defiant subjects 40 years later.



Haarlem & North Holland Highlights

- 1 Explore the world-class museums of **Haarlem** (p103) and its charming Golden Age centre
- 2 Go nuts for cheese in the pastoral climes of cute little **Edam** (p112)
- 3 Experience the hardy life of North Holland's seafaring towns in the days before the Afsluitdijk (Barrier Dyke) at Enkhuizen's **Zuiderzeemuseum** (p120)
- 4 Wander the high sand dunes, quiet forests and pastures of **Texel** (p123)
- 5 Cycle the dykes of the region crowned by cosy old **Marken** (p111)
- 6 Be surprised by the fascinating **Museum Broeker Veiling** (p118) in Broek op Langedijk
- 7 Savour excellent smoked fish at **Oudeschild** (p129)
- 8 Take a trip to the captivating vast fortress at **Naarden** (p130), and enjoy an excellent lunch