



Utrecht

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Why Go?

Don't underrate the petite province of Utrecht. Its famous namesake city – with its throngs of students, tree-lined canals and medieval quarter – deserves the limelight. No set piece, it has a plethora of edgy, fun bars and cafes. Those with calmer tastes can visit more than a dozen museums big and small. At the very least, Utrecht is an easy and evocative day trip from Amsterdam. Wandering the back streets you can revel in reminders of the 17th century.

And this is no mere city-state. By bike you can explore impressive castles and tiny towns in under a day. The splendid Kasteel de Haar on Utrecht's doorstep is one of the country's most beautiful castles. Amersfoort oozes medieval character but also honours native son Piet Mondrian and his minimalist, angular palette. Then there's Oudewater in the southwest, synonymous with witchcraft (Monty Python fans will dig it).

When to Go

At the heart of the country, Utrecht's weather is perfectly average: cold and wet in the winter, with the potential for chilly, wet days the rest of the year as well. However, you can get perfectly clear and sunny days any time, especially from April to October. These are prime times for day trips on bikes around the province. In Utrecht city, there are tasty bock beer fests in the autumn when many cafes and bars have the seasonal brew on tap.

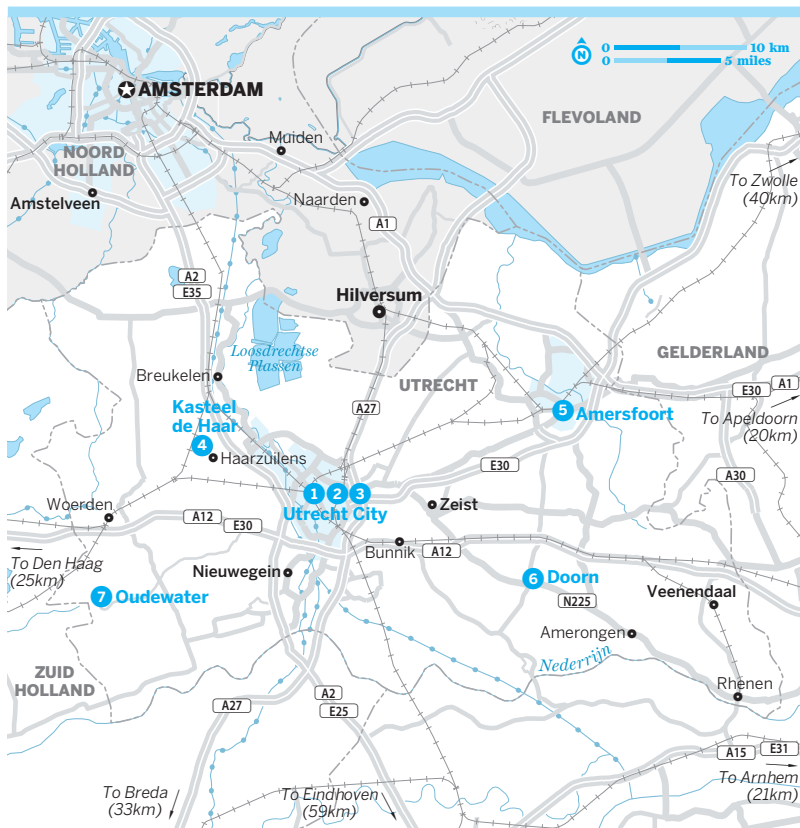
UTRECHT CITY

030 / POP 317,000

Utrecht is one of the Netherlands' oldest cities, with a compact medieval centre set out around canals unique to the country. There's a lower level where warehouses were located in the 13th century, giving the canals a split-level character and meaning that diners and drinkers can nip off the street and enjoy a snack or a drink down at water level.

Of course a drink is what many people need after arriving in Utrecht, as the train station feeds into a vast enclosed mall, the Hoog Catharijne shopping centre, which goes on and on in all its unattractive glory until you are spat out at ground level in what seems to be a construction site. Wandering east you find the old town and suddenly you realise why you came.

UTRECHT



Utrecht Highlights

- 1 Look out towards Amsterdam, 50km northwest, from the top of Utrecht's 14th-century cathedral tower, the **Domtoren** (p137)
- 2 Find your own favourite spot along Utrecht's unique **bilevel canals** (p136)
- 3 Plunge into Utrecht's vibrant student culture and revel in the **nightlife** (p142)
- 4 Feel the weight of history at the imposing **Kasteel de Haar** (p143)
- 5 Discover narrow canals and medieval confines at **Amersfoort** (p143)
- 6 Get a bike and peddle out to Doorn's **Huis Doorn** (p145), a palace that was once a castle
- 7 Find out if a witch weighs the same as gravy at **Oudewater** (p145)