

Welcome to the Netherlands

Tradition and innovation intertwine here: artistic masterpieces, windmills, tulips and candlelit cafés coexist with groundbreaking architecture, cutting-edge design and phenomenal nightlife.

Art & Architecture

The legacies of Dutch Masters such as Rembrandt, Vermeer, Van Gogh, Frans Hals, Hieronymus Bosch, Piet Mondrian and MC Escher hang on the walls of the Netherlands' world-renowned museums, along with contemporary Dutch works.

The Dutch influence on construction spans more than a millennia, from Romanesque and Gothic medieval magnum opuses to Dutch Renaissance creations, revolutionary Golden Age gabled houses and engineering endeavours including canals, neoclassicism, Berlage and the Amsterdam School, functionalism, modernism, structuralism, neorationalism, postmodernism and neomodernism, with trailblazing structures making their mark on the cityscapes.

Landscapes

Geography plays a key role in the Netherlands' iconic landscapes. More than half the pancake-flat country is below sea level, and 20% has been reclaimed from the sea, making rows of *polders* (areas of drained land) omnipresent. Uninterrupted North Sea winds have powered windmills since the 13th century, pumping water over the dykes, and milling flour and more. Some two-thirds of the surface is devoted to agriculture, including fields of tulips.

Cycling

The flat, fabulously scenic landscapes make cycling in the Netherlands a pleasure (headwinds notwithstanding). Cycling is an integral part of life and locals live on their *fiets* (bicycle): more than a quarter of all journeys countrywide are by bike, rising to more than a third in big cities.

Experiencing the wind-in-your-hair freedom of cycling is a breeze. Bike-rental outlets are ubiquitous, and the country is criss-crossed with some 32,000km of cycling paths, including the Dutch 'motorways' of cycling, the long-distance LF routes. Grab some wheels and start exploring.

Café Culture

When the Dutch say *café* they mean a pub, and there are thousands of them. In a country that values socialising and conversation more than drinking, *cafés* are places for contemplation and camaraderie. Many *cafés* have outdoor terraces, which are glorious in summer and sometimes covered and heated in winter. Most serve food, from bar snacks to fabulous meals. The most atmospheric is a *bruin café* (brown *café*), named for the nicotine stains of centuries past – the ultimate place to experience the Dutch state of *gezelligheid* (conviviality, cosiness).



Why I Love the Netherlands

By Catherine Le Nevez, Writer

Visionary architecture, vintage-meets-contemporary fashion and interiors, street markets selling rainbows of fresh flowers, *haring* (raw herring), caramel-filled *stroomwafels* (waffles) and cheese, and *borrel* (drinks) at canal-side *cafés* are all reasons I love the Netherlands. But what I love about the country above all is its spirit. If something doesn't exist, the Dutch will design it, build it, manufacture it, recycle it, craft it, launch it (the Netherlands is one of the world's hottest start-up hubs) and make it a reality. There's a sense that anything's possible here (and it invariably is).

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