



Utrecht

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Drink

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Why Go?

Don't underestimate 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 hip, fun bars and cafes. Those with calmer tastes can visit more than a dozen museums big and small. Wandering the backstreets, revel in reminders of the 17th century.

And this is no mere city-state. By bike you can explore evocative castles like the splendid Kasteel de Haar on Utrecht's doorstep. To the east stretches the Randstad's largest park, the Utrechtse Heuvelrug, studded with more magnificent estates. Amersfoort radiates medieval character, but also honours native son Piet Mondrian and his minimalist, angular palette.

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 damp, chilly conditions the rest of the year as well.
- ➔ Perfectly clear and sunny days can appear any time, especially from April to October. These are prime times for bike rides round the province.
- ➔ In Utrecht city, there are tasty bock beer fests in the fall when many *cafés* (pubs) and bars have the seasonal brew on tap.



Utrecht Highlights

- ① Seeing clear to Amsterdam from the tippy-top of Utrecht's **Domtoren** (p136) or plunging into the city's vibrant nightlife.
- ② Feeling the weight of

history at the **Kasteel de Haar** (p142).

- ③ Discovering the narrow canals and medieval confines of **Amersfoort** (p143).

- ④ Getting a bike and pedalling out to **Huis Doorn** (p142), a palace in the woods.

- ⑤ Checking your weight in witchiness at **Oudewater** (p144).

UTRECHT CITY

☎ 030 / POP 334,176

Utrecht is one of the Netherlands' oldest cities, with a compact medieval centre set out around canals unique to the Netherlands: 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.

While the canals form Utrecht's restful core, elsewhere the city is busy reinventing itself, and part of the excitement is witness-

ing this ongoing transformation. Roads such as Catharijnebaan are being turned back into the canals they once were and the spectacular new train station, nearing completion, adds a vital complement to the old town, adjoined by a greatly expanded concert hall that includes five venues.

Utrecht's student population of 40,000 is the largest in the country, making the city a very vibrant place. From subterranean music cellars to movie-houses-cum-pubs to a slew of special beer *cafés*, the range of social outlets ranks among the nation's broadest.