



The Netherlands

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Ron Gastrobar (p509)
- ➔ Bisschopsmolen (p524)
- ➔ Restaurant Allard (p515)
- ➔ Tante Nel (p519)
- ➔ Brick (p513)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Hoxton Amsterdam (p509)
- ➔ King Kong Hostel (p519)
- ➔ Mary K Hotel (p523)
- ➔ Pincoffs (p519)
- ➔ Collector (p509)

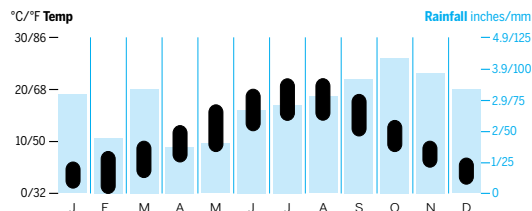
Why Go?

Old and new intertwine in the Netherlands. The legacies of great Dutch artists Rembrandt, Vermeer and Van Gogh, beautiful 17th-century canals, windmills, tulips and quaint brown cafes lit by flickering candles coexist with ground-breaking contemporary architecture, cutting-edge fashion, home-ware, design and food scenes, phenomenal nightlife and a progressive mindset.

Much of the Netherlands is famously below sea level and the pancake-flat landscape offers idyllic cycling. Locals live on bicycles and you can too. Rental outlets are ubiquitous throughout the country, which is crisscrossed with dedicated cycling paths.

Allow plenty of time to revel in the magical, multifaceted capital Amsterdam, to venture further afield to charming canal-laced towns such as Leiden and Delft. Check out Dutch cities such as exquisite Maastricht, with its city walls, ancient churches and grand squares, and the pulsing port city of Rotterdam, currently undergoing an urban renaissance.

When to Go Amsterdam



Mar-May
Colour explodes as billions of bulbs bloom.

Jul Mild summer temps and long daylight hours keep you out-side cycling and drinking.

Dec-Feb
When the canals freeze, the Dutch passion for ice skating is on display nationwide.

AMSTERDAM

📍 020 / POP 813,000

World Heritage-listed canals lined by gabled houses, candlelit cafes, whirring bicycles, lush parks, monumental museums, colourful markets, diverse dining, quirky shopping and legendary nightlife make the free-spirited Dutch capital one of Europe's great cities.

Amsterdam has been a liberal place since the Netherlands' Golden Age, when it was at the forefront of European art and trade. Centuries later, in the 1960s, it again led the pack – this time in the principles of tolerance, with broad-minded views on drugs and same-sex relationships taking centre stage.

Explore its many worlds-within-worlds, where nothing ever seems the same twice.

👁️ Sights

Amsterdam is compact and you can roam the city on foot but there's also an excellent public transport network.

👁️ City Centre

Crowned by the Royal Palace (p503), the square that puts the 'Dam' in Amsterdam anchors the city's oldest quarter, which is also home to its infamous Red Light District.

★ Royal Palace

PALACE

(Koninklijk Paleis; 📍 020-620 40 60; www.paleis.amsterdam.nl; Dam; adult/child €10/free; ⌚ 10am-5pm; 🗓 4/9/16/24 Dam) Opened as a town hall in 1655, this building became a palace in the 19th century. The interiors gleam, especially the marble work – at its best in a floor inlaid with maps of the world in the great *burgerzaal* (citizens' hall), which occupies the heart of the building. Pick up a free audio tour at the desk after you enter; it will ex-

plain everything you see in vivid detail. King Willem-Alexander uses the palace only for ceremonies; check the website for periodic closures.

★ Begijnhof

SQUARE

(📍 020-622 19 18; www.nicolaas-parochie.nl; off Gedempte Begijnensloot; ⌚ 9am-5pm; 🗓 1/2/5 Spui) **FREE** This enclosed former convent dates from the early 14th century. It's a surreal oasis of peace, with tiny houses and postage-stamp gardens around a well-kept courtyard. The beguines were a Catholic order of unmarried or widowed women who cared for the elderly and lived a religious life without taking monastic vows. The last true beguine died in 1971.

👁️ Canal Ring

Amsterdam's Canal Ring was built during the 17th-century after the seafaring port grew beyond its medieval walls, and authorities devised a ground-breaking expansion plan.

Wandering here amid architectural treasures and their reflections on the narrow waters of the Prinsengracht, Keizersgracht and Herengracht can cause days to vanish.

★ Anne Frank Huis

MUSEUM

(📍 020-556 71 05; www.annefrank.org; Prinsengracht 267; adult/child €9/4.50; ⌚ 9am-10pm Apr-Oct, 9am-7pm Sun-Fri, to 9pm Sat Nov-Mar; 🗓 13/14/17 Westermarkt) The Anne Frank Huis draws almost one million visitors annually (prepurchase tickets online to minimise the queues). With its reconstruction of Anne's melancholy bedroom and her actual diary – sitting alone in its glass case, filled with sunnily optimistic writing tempered by quiet despair – it's a powerful experience.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Spend three days canal exploring, museum hopping and cafe crawling in **Amsterdam**. Work your way through the ancient towns of the **Randstad** and the contemporary 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, and a day or two exploring some of the region's smaller towns. Then add a day each at beautiful **Delft**, regal **Den Haag** (The Hague), student-filled **Utrecht** and buzzing **Rotterdam**. Finish off with two days in historic **Maastricht**.