Noord Brabant & Limburg

The Dutch southeast belies most clichés about the Netherlands: tulips, windmills and dykes are scarce. Although there’s still plenty of beer. However the Belgian and German influences are felt. Even the French have influence, especially in the wider array of culinary treats on offer.

Noord Brabant is primarily a land of agriculture and industry peppered with a few pleasant towns, such as Den Bosch. It’s also home to the Netherlands’ most popular domestic tourist draw, the Efteling theme park, and the biggest street fair in Benelux, the Tilburgse Kermis. It’s striped by rivers which make for curvaceous – and bodacious – cycling along their banks.

Meanwhile, Limburg is home to beautiful Maastricht, contender for the title of Finest Dutch City, as well as – drum roll – hills. The one outstanding attraction in these two provinces, Maastricht, is as diametrically different from Amsterdam as it is geographically distant from it except in one key area: its people are just as irreverent and just as interested in fun.

Neither province has its roots in the asceticism of the north, a fact made obvious during carnaval, when the streets fill with bands and impromptu parties, with fireworks overhead. And both provinces’ proximity to Belgium and all those indulgent Catholic monasteries – most of which double as excellent microbreweries – mean there are many chances to imbibe.

In fact, the Dutch call the southeastern lifestyle bourgondisch: like the epicurean inhabitants of Burgundy in France, people in these parts love to eat and drink heartily.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Thrill to the good life in Maastricht (p274), a world apart from the north
- Go bonkers at Maastricht’s Carnaval (p277)
- Explore the unusual canals and charming cafes of lively Den Bosch (p268)
- Hop off your bike or train to tour Breda (p272) and its boffo church
NOORD BRABANT

The country’s largest province, Noord Brabant, spans the bottom of the country, from the water-logged lands of the west to the hilly lands of the east. Den Bosch is its main city and an interesting place to spend the day. Breda is also worth a look. However, despite its size, Noord Brabant won’t fill your schedule. It’s primarily a land of agriculture and industry.

DEN BOSCH (‘S-HERTOGENBOSCH)

The full name of Noord Brabant’s capital is ‘s-Hertogenbosch (Duke’s Forest), which is understandably not used often. Den Bosch has a remarkable church and a good museum.

It has fun cafes and unique tunnel canals you can explore.

The significance of the city’s full name held true in the 12th century when there was a castle and large forest here. Both are long gone. It was hotly contested during the Eighty Years’ War and you can still see where the lines of fortifications followed the shape of the canals. It’s the birthplace of the 15th-century painter Hieronymous Bosch, who took his surname from the town. Today, Den Bosch (den bosch) is a regional shopping and industrial town.

Orientation

The town’s pedestrianised centre is based around the Markt, 600m east of the train station.