

Getting Started

The Netherlands is an exceedingly user-friendly place to visit. Up-to-date information is plentiful, almost every Dutch person speaks decent English, transport links are swift, and there's an abundance of sights and activities. All this means you can add a fair amount of spontaneity to your trip.

That said, a bit of foresight is helpful to pinpoint sights that match your interests, and to get the timing right – the bulb fields aren't much to look at before the blossoms open. It's also advisable to think about accommodation beforehand, as Amsterdam's best (and sometimes worst) hotels book up months in advance, and other towns may have limited sleeping options.

WHEN TO GO

The Netherlands has a typical maritime climate, with cool winters and mild summers, so any time is a good time to visit. Be prepared for blustery and changeable weather, however, and only a handful of sunny days in summer – although global warming may be changing that. Precipitation (79cm a year) is spread rather evenly over the calendar, and spring is marked by short, violent showers.

Like much of Europe, the high season runs from June to August, which is known for its hot, sticky spells but isn't quite the Riviera shown in some tourist brochures. Hordes of tourists pulse through the Netherlands at this time, but these are the best months to sit on the canals drinking and chatting. Many Dutch take a summer holiday, and the last July weekend is deadly for traffic. You may be surrounded by other foreigners in August, but the month is crammed with events – see p291.

Mid-March to May and September to mid-October are the shoulder seasons. Spring is wonderful, as the bulbs are in bloom – April for daffodils, May for tulips. Easter is busy in Amsterdam, but if you can visit during Koninginnedag (30 April, see p291) it's worth fighting the crowds. Early October with its Indian summer can be an excellent time to come.

As the temperature drops, so does the number of tourists – things are calmest from mid-October to mid-March. Museums are quiet and you can mingle with the 'real' Dutch in cosy pubs around this time. Accommodation is also relatively cheap (except around New Year), though some hotels might be closed. The winter months (December to February) see periods of slushy snow and temperatures close to freezing.

School holidays are staggered according to region but fall around mid-February, early May, July and August, and the end of October (see p292).

COSTS & MONEY

The Netherlands really isn't a budget buy, but neither is it the most expensive European destination. If you're happy eating chips, sleeping in hostels and walking around, it's possible to hang in the country for around €35 per day. Those who prefer a couple of solid meals a day, a comfy bed with private facilities and travelling by public transport are looking at €80 per day as a starting point. Things start to feel comfortable on €110 per day. Add between €5 and €10 to each category when in Amsterdam.

There are a lot of free activities to stretch your budget, especially in Amsterdam in summer, and discount passes like the Museumkaart and the Amsterdam Pass (p290) can save loads on admission. The first Sunday of the month is free at many museums, the Concertgebouw holds lunchtime concerts for free and some restaurants have cheaper kiddie meals.

See Climate, p289, for more information.

HOW MUCH?

- 1L gas/petrol €1.40
- 1½L bottled water €0.80
- Glass of Heineken €2.50
- Souvenir T-shirt €15
- Size 37 plain/painted dogs €17.50/20.50
- Kibbeling snack €3
- Cinema ticket €7.50
- One hour of parking (Amsterdam) €3.50
- 2/15 strip card €1.60/6.70
- Day's bike hire €6-10

TRAVEL LITERATURE

My 'Dam Life by Sean Condon is a witty and hilarious true-life tale of three years in the Dutch capital, where the Australian and his wife spend much of their time looking for work and trying to define the Dutch character. It's an excellent read for anyone contemplating a trip (or a move) to the Netherlands.

Xenophobe's Guide to the Dutch by Rodney Bolt takes an irreverent look at all things Dutch and strikes a fine balance between humour and truth. A quick, fun read.

The Dutch, I Presume? by Martijn de Rooi, Jurjen Drenth and friends is another book attempting to explain the peculiarities of the Dutch psyche, and their love affair with windmills, wooden shoes and shelf toilets. It has more facts than insights, but it's still an interesting read and the photos are inspired.

Amsterdam: A Traveler's Literary Companion (edited by Manfred Wolf) is a collection of 20 short stories by Amsterdam writers, including Harry Mulisch, Cees Nooteboom, Marga Minco and Bas Heijne. The tales delve into a side of the capital that is rarely seen by tourists. The anthology contains highly readable prose, and it's accessible even for armchair travellers.

The UnDutchables by Colin White and Laurie Boucke takes a humorous look at Dutch life, from language and transport to child-rearing and social habits. Sometimes it's spot-on and sometimes it's so wide of the mark it becomes slapstick.

Amsterdam by Geert Mak interweaves tales of ordinary citizens with the bigger picture of cultural, social and economic history. It also delves into the Dutch psyche: for instance, why the Dutch eschew nationalism for business reasons.

Girl with a Pearl Earring by Tracy Chevalier, made into a major Hollywood film, is a tale of duty and sexuality and offers a peek into life in Delft during the Golden Age, and that of painter Jan Vermeer.

The Acid House by Irvine Welsh is a collection of gritty short stories, some of which are set in Amsterdam's drug underworld. While it's not for everyone, it's a good read and a sample of life beyond the capital's touristy façade.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Checking the visa situation
- Travel insurance
- Passport/EU papers
- 220V converter for European plugs
- Ear plugs to counteract fellow hotel guests and street noise
- Cholesterol meter (*frites!*)
- Good jacket and scarf
- Appreciation for flowers
- Open mind to drugs, sex and Dutch honesty/bluntness
- Taste for bad '80s music, because you won't be able to escape it
- Quick reflexes to avoid cyclists and dodge dog doo-doo

TOP TENS

Our Favourite Festivals & Events

The Dutch have a penchant for celebrating, and some of the biggest and best festivals and events are listed below. See p291 for a full list of festivals in the Netherlands.

- Carnaval (Limburg, Noord Brabant, Gelderland) February/March (p291)
- Koninginnedag (Queen's Day) 30 April (p291)
- Nationale Molendag (National Mill Day) May (p291)
- Oerol (Terschelling) June (p240)
- Holland Festival (Amsterdam) June (p116)
- North Sea Jazz Festival (Rotterdam) mid-July (p214)
- Gay Pride Canal Parade (Amsterdam) August (p105)
- Grachtenfestival (Amsterdam) August (p117)
- Cannabis Cup (Amsterdam) November (p118)
- Sinterklaas (National) 5 December (p291)

Must-See Films

Dutch cinema has breached the upper echelons of world film with the following highly recommended releases:

- *Spoorloos* (*The Vanishing*, 1988) Director: George Sluizer
- *Turks Fruit* (*Turkish Delight*, 1973) Director: Paul Verhoeven
- *06* (1994) Director: Theo van Gogh
- *Karakter* (*Character*, 1997) Director: Mike van Diem
- *Antonia* (*Antonia's Line*, 1995) Director: Marleen Gorris
- *Abel* (1986) Director: Alex van Warmerdam
- *De Vierde Man* (*The Fourth Man*, 1983) Director: Paul Verhoeven
- *Amsterdam, Global Village* (1996) Director: Johan van der Keuken
- *Fanfare* (1958) Director: Bert Haanstra
- *Father and Daughter* (2000) Director: Michael Dudok de Wit

Memorable Museums

The Netherlands is peppered with exceptional museums. The following are some of our most beloved:

- Kröller-Müller Museum (p269)
- Rijksmuseum (p106)
- Van Gogh Museum (p106)
- Mauritshuis (p197)
- Frans Hals Museum (p149)
- Nederlands Architectuur Instituut (p211)
- Museum Boijmans van Beuningen (p209)
- Groninger Museum (p246)
- Nederlands Scheepvaartmuseum (p109)
- Zuiderzeemuseum (p164)

INTERNET RESOURCES

British Library (www.bl.uk/collections/wider/dutchinternetres2.html) Authoritative lists of links for Dutch and Flemish history, politics and culture.

Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.minbuza.nl) Wealth of background facts and information, but not officious.

Dutch Tourism Board (www.holland.com) Attractions, cultural articles and loads of practical stuff hiding amongst the PR.

Expatica (www.expatica.com/holland) Entertaining all-round guide to life in the Netherlands, with daily news and listings.

Learn Dutch (www.learn-dutch.org) Online Dutch course for those keen to learn the language.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) General information on the Netherlands and links to various useful Dutch sites.

Uitburo (www.uitburo.nl) Events site for the Netherlands. It's in Dutch but easy to navigate.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

THE LAY OF THE LOWLANDS

Begin in **Amsterdam** (p78). Visit the **Van Gogh Museum** (p106) or **Rijksmuseum** (p106) and rent a bicycle to explore the pretty neighbourhood of **Jordaan** (p100). On the second day board a **canal-boat tour** (p115) and walk the **Red Light District** (p85) before hitting a brown café or coffeeshop.

Move on to **Haarlem** (p147) – stroll the compact old quarter, and view the masterpieces of the **Frans Hals Museum** (p149) and the stained glass of the **Grote Kerk** (p148). In tulip season (April and May) witness the unbelievable colours of the **Keukenhof gardens** (p195), south of town.

Spend one day each in **Leiden** (p190), for its old-world splendour, and **Den Haag** (p195) – don't miss the **Mauritshuis** (p197) collection, with works from Vermeer to Warhol.

In the remaining time take a harbour boat tour in **Rotterdam** (p208) and visit either the **Museum Boijmans van Beuningen** (p209) or the **Maritiem Museum Rotterdam** (p212). The next morning do a walking tour of **modern architecture** (p211) before departing for **Kinderdijk** (p219) and its picturesque windmills.

This popular route from Amsterdam through the historic Dutch cities of Haarlem, Den Haag and Rotterdam is a mere 103km; the sheer variety of charms will make a week flash by.



SOUTHERN SOJOURN

If you've two weeks to spare, start in **Amsterdam** (p78), but extend your stay to three days, and alongside a visit to the city's big museums, take time out to relax in **Vondelpark** (p107), the capital's English-style park. Once again, discover the delights of the **Jordaan district** (p100) by foot or bicycle, then take a load off in a grand café on the **Spui** (p127), and browse the exotic wares in the **Albert Cuypmarkt** (p134). Divide the rest of your time in Amsterdam between viewing the wild kingdom of **Artis Zoo** (p108), learning about the glories of the Dutch East India Company at the **Scheepvaartmuseum** (p109), and escaping the city by bicycle to enjoy the windmills and seascapes of the **Waterland Region** (p154).

Continue as on the one-week tour to Haarlem (Keukenhof in season), Den Haag, Delft and Rotterdam, but add a day for **Leiden** (p190) and its student vibe and old-world splendour. Stop in to see the spinning sails of the windmills at **Kinderdijk** (p219), then head for **Middelburg** (p224), Zeeland's prosperous capital, and the nearby **Delta Project** (p228). Take a train through the Netherlands' southern provinces to **Maastricht** (p278), a city with more panache than most; two days should be enough to sample some great cuisine and meander through the medieval centre. Head north to visit **Hoge Veluwe National Park** (p269) whose lush forests and dunes make an enchanting setting for the excellent **Kröller-Müller Museum** (p269), and polish off your trip in the cosmopolitan city of **Utrecht** (p178).

A two-week tour covering 700km that passes through some of Holland's biggest and boldest cities, and allows an exploration of the country's astounding Delta Project, and its most acclaimed national park.



CIRCUMNAVIGATING THE IJSSSELMEER

A practical place to start this tour is **Amsterdam** (p78); three days in the capital will whiz by in a blur of museums, parks, canal tours and nightlife. From here, head north along the IJsselmeer coast through the **Waterland Region** (p154) to the tiny fishing village of **Marken** (p156) where a ferry will transport you across the inland sea to **Volendam** (p156). Enjoy a meal overlooking the harbour, but escape the crowds to **Edam** (p157), which comes second only to Haarlem as the prettiest town in Noord Holland. Overnight here before reaching **Alkmaar** (p159) early to experience its kitsch but fun cheese market, then spend the afternoon wandering through Enkhuizen's enthralling **Zuiderzeemuseum** (p164).

The next morning catch a bus to **Den Helder** (p166), and from there a ferry to **Texel** (p167). Spend two days (or the entire two weeks...) dividing your time between the beach and bike exploration, then take another ferry to **Vlieland** (p239) to appreciate the wilder side of the Frisian Islands. From Vlieland, a ferry will take you back to the mainland and dump you at **Harlingen** (p236), from where **Leeuwarden** (p232) is only a short train ride away. Friesland's capital is not only a good spot to enjoy Frisian hospitality, but it's also a fine base for exploring the surrounding area; the water sports centre of **Sneek** (p235) is close at hand, as are a chain of captivating **coastal towns** (p237) on the IJsselmeer.

The train trip from Leeuwarden to Amsterdam completes the circumnavigation of the IJsselmeer, but it's worth breaking your journey in **Naarden** (p172) and **Muiden** (p171), two of Noord Holland's historical fortress towns.

This two-week trip, covering 570km, provides a taste of Dutch life on the open sea. It passes through historically important nautical towns, holiday islands and water-sports centres.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

ISLANDS ESCAPES

The necklace of low-lying Wadden Islands (Texel, Vlieland, Terschelling, Ameland and Schiermonnikoog) is just the ticket for a week of island-hopping, preferably with bicycle in tow. Some ferry links require advance planning, but if you've time and energy, it shouldn't prove too big a problem. A full day on **Texel** (p167) is a good starting point; hop on your bike and snake along the western coast from sleepy **Den Hoorn** (p167) through dark copses to the **Ecomare** (p167) seal and bird refuge. Take a catamaran ride near **De Cocksdorp** (p167) before bedding down here for the night. The next day comb the eastern side of the island, admiring pretty thatched houses in **Oosterend** (p167) and visiting the **Maritime & Beachcombers Museum** (p168) in **Oudeschild** (p167).

From De Cocksdorp board the morning ferry to car-free **Vlieland** (p239) to explore its nature and hiking trails before catching the boat to **Terschelling** (p240), Friesland's main tourist island. Hole up in peaceful **Oosterend** (p240) for the night and cycle through untouched **De Boschplaat** (p240), then hightail it by ferry to **Harlingen** (p236), a pretty little port on the Frisian coast, and on to Holwerd, where you ferry across for a stay on **Ameland** (p241). Its four towns are pretty for a brief stroll, and the eastern end is ideal to bike away from it all. Return to the former whaling port of **Nes** (p242) for the night. The next day stay put for a boat tour to the sea lions, and to commune with nature. Your last stop, via the ports of Holwerd and Lauwersoog, is **Schiermonnikoog** (p242), the smallest of the Frisian Islands and a wild national park.



This week-long hop along the Wadden Islands covers just 200km, but you will be tempted to spend longer soaking up their wild, enchanting beauty.

EASTERN EXPERIENCE

The Netherlands' eastern expanse is largely ignored by tourists who settle for the big guns of the Dutch lowlands, but there are some hidden highlights among the polders waiting to be discovered.

Begin your trip in **Groningen** (p245), a vibrant city populated by students, bars, cafés, and a couple of fine museums. Spend the morning roaming the inner city, the afternoon in the first-rate **Groninger Museum** (p246), and the evening enjoying the city's thriving nightlife. If your hangover allows, greet the next day early and bus southeast to **Bourtange** (p251), a perfectly preserved 17th-century fortified town on the border with Germany, before moving on to Borger and its prehistoric **hunebedden** (p253), stone arrangements once used as burial chambers. From nearby **Emmen** (p254), catch a train to **Zwolle** (p260), capital of Overijssel province and a compact, easy-going town. A bike trip through the eerie expanse of nearby **Weerribben National Park** (p256) is a good way to spend the afternoon.

From Zwolle, it's only a short train ride to **Deventer** (p258), an unhurried town that's big on relaxation and small on tourism. Deventer is also a good base for exploring the **Hoge Veluwe National Park** (p269), a natural oasis that's home to one of the finest art museums in the country. After a night in Deventer, head for **Den Bosch** (p272), a city ringed by canals and defensive walls; its quiet back streets are a pleasure to stroll. **Breda** (p275) is your next stop, where a day and a night can easily be spent appreciating the city's compact centre. To round the trip off, it's back to nature at **Biesbosch National Park** (p223).

This seven-day excursion through the Netherlands' eastern provinces covers 530km and touches on the country's less-visited towns, cities and natural attractions.



TAILORED TRIPS

FAMILY FORAYS

The Netherlands is made for family holidays – beaches, parks, cycling (with no hills!), museums, it's all here to entertain parents and their prodigies.

Aside from canal tours and bike rides, **Amsterdam** (p113) is filled with family attractions. The likes of the **Scheepvaartmuseum** (p109), with its tall-ship replicas, and **Tropenmuseum** (p109), featuring a separate children's section, will spark the imagination of both young and old, while excess energy can be spent running wild in **Vondelpark** (p107) or **TunFun** (p99), a large underground playground.

Close to the capital, the windmills and boat rides of **Zaanse Schans** (p154) will surely delight, as will the sand dunes and pristine beaches of the **Kennemerduinen Nature Reserve** (p152).

Gelderland has a legion of zoological parks, including Harderwijk's aquatic park, **Dolfinarium** (p263), Apeldoorn's primarily primate zoo, **Apenheul** (p263), and Arnhem's well laid-out **Burger's Zoo** (p263). The cute seals and interactive nature displays of Texel's **Ecomare** (p167) and Pieterburen's **Zeehondenreche** (p250) never fail to please.

De Efteling (p275), with scary rides aplenty, is the 'Dutch Disneyland', while a miniaturised Netherlands at **Madurodam** (p199) may be far more sedate, but no less entertaining. Maas-tricht's **underground caves** (p281) are perfect for the entire family, as is the **Waterland Neeltje Jans** (p227) in the heart of the Delta Project.



ADULT ENTERTAINMENT

There is no denying that the Netherlands is a playground for grown-ups. Breweries, brown cafés, coffeeshops, red light districts, world-class clubbing, and the old masters' art are just waiting to be enjoyed.

There's no better place to start than Amsterdam. Its centre is full to overflowing with **brown cafés** (p127), but if you want to get to the source of the matter, the **Heineken Experience** (p107) is the place to head. If this isn't to your taste, try **Brouwerij 't IJ** (p129), a small brewery with potent beers. With over 250 **coffeeshops** (p129), the capital offers ample opportunity to partake in a spliff or two, and no one, but no one (unless they suffer from erythrophobia) should miss a stroll through Amsterdam's legendary **Red Light District** (p85). **Clubs** (p129) abound, as do museums devoted to the likes of Van Gogh and Rembrandt.

Rotterdam's **clubbing scene** (p217) is world-renowned, as are its **summer festivals** (p214), and Groningen's **nightlife** (p249), fuelled by thousands of students, is a lively hedonistic mix.

Beer is a particular Dutch delight. **Maastricht** (p278), with its close proximity to Belgium and Trappist breweries, should be the first stop for any beer connoisseur, while the best of the Low Countries' amber brew can be sampled at Alkmaar's **Nationaal Biermuseum** (p160). Small, local breweries, like Texel's **Bierbrouwerij** (p169) and Nijmegen's **De Hemel** (p266), dot the country.



Snapshot

The Netherlands is in a state of flux. Recent events have challenged Dutch society and its axiom of 'live and let live', and the Dutch talent for tolerance has been attacked on a number of fronts. Parties on both sides of the political partition are calling for change, and at present it seems as though the pendulum of power is swinging to the right.

The hottest topic on many Dutch lips today is the country's new immigrants, or how to limit their numbers. It seems the assassinations of Theo van Gogh and Pim Fortuyn (p32) were the straws that broke the camel's back; once taboo, public discussions about quotas, dress codes and language requirements are now commonplace. Would-be immigrants must currently sit an entrance exam, in Dutch, covering the language and culture of the Netherlands, and watch a video which includes images of two men kissing and a topless woman bather.

The public debacle over Ayaan Hirsi Ali's right to Dutch nationality hasn't helped matters either. The Somalian-born former MP and outspoken critic of Islam (she co-wrote the short film *Submission: Part 1* with Theo van Gogh and received death threats for her efforts) revealed that she had used a false name and date of birth on her naturalisation decree; the Minister for Immigration and Integration, Rita Verdonk (known as 'Iron Rita'), ruled that Ali was 'deemed not to have received Dutch nationality'. The subsequent public and political outcry forced Verdonk to reconsider her judgment, but by then the damage was done. Within a matter of weeks the ruling coalition collapsed over the issue, a minority government was formed under Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende, and early elections were called. At the time of research, Ali was set to move to the US sometime in September 2006 and the next round of national elections were to be held on 22 November 2006.

Without question, the Netherlands is still one of the most liberal countries in the world; a quick run-through of its policies on recreational drugs, euthanasia, same-sex marriage and prostitution is proof alone. However, recent court approval of a political paedophilia party is pushing things too far. The campaign manifesto of the Brotherly Love, Freedom and Diversity party (PNVD) includes a call for a reduction in the age of consent from 16 to 12 (and eventually doing away with it altogether), and the legalisation of child pornography and sex with animals. The court's decision has caused widespread disapproval throughout the country.

Normally avid supporters of the European Union (EU), the Dutch resoundingly rejected the EU constitution in a referendum held in 2006 (almost 62% voted no), the first national referendum in 200 years. Dissatisfaction with recent governments and the economies of key European players, along with concerns over immigration, loss of national identity and EU expansion were all cited as reasons for the rejection.

The Dutch economy is one of the most open and outward looking in the world, and the Netherlands has an enviable track record for such a small country. It experienced a rough patch from 2001 to 2005, however, during which time parliament made deep cuts in the welfare state – the generous health care system went under the knife, and early retirement is no longer a soft option. But, given the fact that the Dutch are some of the sharpest traders on the planet, it's no surprise to learn that the economy is presently rebounding.

Global warming (p52) is a matter of concern for the Dutch populace. Unseasonably high temperatures in summer (and an increasing number

of heat waves) mean not only that quite a few peat-based dykes dry out but also that some of the country's annual events are severely affected: two heat-related deaths at Nijmegen's Internationale Wandelvierdaagse (p265) forced the race's cancellation, something previously accomplished only by a world war. The effects of global warming are not limited to rising temperatures, however: the spring of 2005 saw record snowfalls and freezing temperatures (minus 21°C in Marknesse, Flevoland).

H5N1 – or its more comprehensible moniker, bird flu – has raised fears in the Netherlands, one of the world's biggest meat exporters. In 2005 there were outbreaks of the deadly virus in a number of European countries, causing sweeping panic in the rest. The Dutch government took pre-emptive steps to stop the spread of the virus by vaccinating chickens and confining them indoors (the outdoor ban was later lifted), a move at odds with the EU's normal policy of culling.

Despite the desire to keep the social peace, the government has made moves to ban smoking in public places. Initially the service industries were allowed to draw up their own plans to protect employees and the public at large from second-hand smoke, but legal action has been threatened by a government tired of feet-dragging in the hotel and catering sector. Coffeeshops are up in arms; as Arjan Roskam, chairman of the Union for Cannabis Retailers, put it, 'The whole point of going to a coffeeshop is to smoke'. All establishments are required to have a non-smoking section by 1 January 2009.

The Netherlands' liberal drugs policy continues to be a reliable source of controversy, in particular rankling with France and the USA. The Dutch, in turn, point to relatively low rates of drug-related crime and argue that decriminalisation is the way to go for soft drugs. But the government has stepped up pressure against trafficking in cannabis, hard drugs and designer drugs (the Netherlands is a major producer of ecstasy), and the Amsterdam council has introduced a temporary ban on cannabis use in the Baarsjes district of the city, citing problems of public disturbances by youths.

Dutch national pride is muted except on the soccer field. The national team habitually participates in European championships and World Cups, and the country rallies behind them with unquestioning support. Otherwise, the Dutch love to downplay their place in the world, and often prefer to speak English with foreign visitors.

FAST FACTS

Population: 16.3 million

Land in tulip bulbs:

110 sq km

Per capita GDP: €26,500

Unemployment rate:

6.5% (2005)

Inflation:

1.7% (2005 average)

Religion: Catholic 31%,

Protestant 21%, Muslim

5.5%, other 1.5%,

not religious 41%

Number of mobile

phones: 14.8 million

Waterways: 5046km

(navigable for ships over

50 tons)

Height of the average

male: 185.5cm (6ft 1 in)

Number of windmills:

1180

The Authors



NEAL BEDFORD

**Coordinating Author, Front chapters,
Noord Holland & Flevoland, Friesland,
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Neal's first memory of the Netherlands occurred early in childhood – a postcard, sent by his father's former work colleague on his return to his native land, showed a middle-aged Dutchman in solid yellow shoes with no laces plugging a leaking dyke with his butt. Neal found the Dutch not only instantly funny but also highly practical. Since then, he's left his homeland of New Zealand and settled in Europe, which has offered ample opportunity to travel to the Netherlands in search of bottom-plugged dykes. He's yet to find one, but hopes to on his future jaunts to this wonderful country.

Neal's Favourite Trip

It's a given but still has to be said – **Amsterdam** (p78) is the place to begin any trip to the Netherlands. After a few days wallowing in culture and hedonism, I'd slowly make my way north through **Edam** (p157) and on to **Alkmaar** (p159; timing it just right for the cheese market), before settling into a bit of island hopping – first **Texel** (p167), then **Vlieland** (p239) and on to **Ameland** (p241). While I'm up north, it would be rude not to stop into **Groningen** (p245) to enjoy all the city has to offer, but then the south would beckon. First **Den Haag** (p195), then **Rotterdam** (p208), and on to Middelburg and the **Delta Project** (p228), after which I'd end my travels in **Maastricht** (p278) with my feet up, enjoying a fine Trappist beer and a bit of *gezelligheid*.



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SIMON SELLARS

**Amsterdam, Utrecht, Zuid Holland & Zeeland,
Overijssel & Gelderland, Noord Brabant & Limburg**

A few years ago, when Simon worked in London, he took the opportunity to visit the Netherlands on a number of occasions, for he's been fascinated by the country ever since he was old enough to fashion his own Dutch oven. He can't forgive the Dutch for killing off the dodo, although the phenomenon of Johan Cruyff and Total Football went some way to making up for it. Simon wishes Paul Verhoeven would stop mucking about and make another dystopian sci-fi blockbuster, preferably starring Rutger Hauer.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on www.lonelyplanet.com.