

Noord Holland & Flevoland



In this part of the world, there's no denying that Amsterdam rules the roost. But (literally) just outside its borders lies a bountiful region of bucolic sedation sprinkled with heart-warming towns and comely villages that *must* not be overlooked by visitors.

Only 15 minutes west of the capital, graceful Haarlem is Noord Holland's crowning glory, a town of immense charm and 17th-century grandeur. Its pubs are some of the cosiest in the country, and its museums among the most inviting. On its western outskirts are the wide, sandy beaches of Zandvoort and Bloemendaal, and the varied and evocative dunescape of the Kennemerduinen nature reserve.

Moving north, the Gouwee Bay towns of Edam, Volendam and Marken hold special places in Dutch culture for cheese, traditional customs and defiance of the sea. Easily visited as day trips from Amsterdam, the towns may tempt you to linger overnight to soak up their peaceful ambience once the bus loads have dispersed. Monnickendam, in the heart of the rural Waterland region, is less frequented but has a treasury of 17th-century architecture. Not far north again, the Golden Age ports of Hoorn and Enkhuizen have engaging old centres; the latter is also home to the Zuiderzeemuseum, an open-air extravaganza that is the last remnant of life on the Zuiderzee before the intervention of the Afsluitdijk.

On the way to the Waddenzee island of Texel is Alkmaar, famous for its kitschy but unforgettable traditional cheese auction. Texel itself is a gem, with generous sand hills built generations ago, long, fine beaches, busy little villages, sheep-swamped *polders*, and a forest or two to add a bit of diversity.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the world-class museums of **Haarlem** (p147) and its charming centre
- Wonder why beautiful **Edam** (p157) isn't flooded with fellow tourists
- Cycle through the high sand dunes, quiet forests, and green pastures of **Texel** (p167)
- Experience the hardy life of Noord Holland's seafaring towns before the Afsluitdijk at Enkhuizen's **Zuiderzeemuseum** (p164)
- Get away with cutting the cheese at Alkmaar's celebrated **cheese market** (p161)





NOORD HOLLAND

History

The peninsula now known as North Holland was part of Friesland until the 12th century, when storm floods created the Zuiderzee and isolated West Friesland. By this time the mercantile counts of Holland ruled the area – or thought they did. One of the early counts, Willem II, became king of the Holy Roman Empire in 1247 but perished in a raid against the West Frisians (his horse fell through the ice). His son, Count Floris V, succeeded in taming his defiant subjects 40 years later (p166).

West Friesland was now owned by the county of Holland, a founding member of the Republic of Seven United Netherlands (1579). Northern Holland played a key role in the long struggle against Spanish domination, and the town of Alkmaar was the first to throw off the yoke. The era of prosperity known as the Golden Age ensued, and North Holland has its fair share of richly ornamented buildings from this period. The fishing and trading ports of Enkhuizen, Medemblik and Edam were at the centre of this boom.

Napoleon invaded Holland in 1795 and split it in two to break its economic power. Even after Holland came under the House of Orange in 1813, a divide remained and the provinces of North and South Holland were established in 1840.

Today North Holland's main business is agriculture.

Getting There & Around

Noord Holland is well served by the national rail service, and where the train ends the bus networks take over. All Connexion buses in the province cost €2 after 9am and all day on weekends.

Motorways run north-south from Haarlem to Alkmaar (the A9), and from Amsterdam to Den Oever (the A7), which continues on to Friesland via the 30km-long Afsluitdijk. From Enkhuizen there's another fast dyke road, the N302, running across the IJsselmeer to Lelystad in Flevoland. Bike trails lace the province in almost every direction, and you can cover the flat stretch from Amsterdam to Den Helder in two days at a leisurely pace.

HAARLEM

☎ 023 / pop 148,000

Everybody loves Haarlem, and it's not hard to see why. This achingly pretty city of cobble-stone streets, historic buildings, grand churches, even grander museums, cosy bars, top-class restaurants, and antique shops is a sure-fire heart-warmer. It's more than easy to visit as a day trip from Amsterdam, but as a place with so much on offer in such a compact area, you may find yourself turning the tables on the capital and using Haarlem as a base to explore the surrounds.

History

The name Haarlem derives from Haarloheim, meaning a wooded place on high, sandy soil. Its origins date back to the 10th century when the counts of Holland set up a toll post on the Spaarne River. Haarlem quickly became the most important inland port after Amsterdam, but suffered a major setback when the Spanish invaded in 1572. The city surrendered after a seven-month siege but worse was yet to come: upon capitulation virtually the entire population was slaughtered. After the Spanish were finally repelled by Willem van Oranje, Haarlem soared into the prosperity of the Golden Age, attracting painters and artists from throughout Europe.

Orientation

Grote Markt, the main square, is a 500m walk south of the bus and train stations. The centre has a large pedestrianised section, with lots of pubs and restaurants along Zijlstraat, Grote Houtstraat and especially Lange Veerstraat. Grote Kerk van St Bavo, the central landmark, can be seen from anywhere in the city.

Information

GWK exchange office (☎) 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) In the train station, and close to two ATMs.

Library (☎) 515 76 00; Doelenplein 1; (☎) 11am-8pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 10am-4pm Sat) Provides internet terminals that can be tapped for free.

Main post office (Gedempte Oude Gracht 2)

My Beautiful Laundrette (Botermarkt 20; ☎) 8.30am-8.30pm) Takes last loads at 7pm.

Tourist office (☎) 09006161600; www.vvvz.nl; Stationsplein 1; (☎) 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat Apr-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Nov-Mar) Sells a handy map of the city (€2), along with a useful walking guide (€2). Staff will reserve local accommodation for €5.

HAARLEM

0 400 m
0 0.2 miles

INFORMATION

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|-----------------|-------|
| ABN-Amro | 1 B3 | Grote Kerk van St Bavo | 10 B3 | SLEEPING | |
| Main Post Office | 2 A3 | Hofje van Loo | 11 A4 | Hotel Amadeus | 21 B3 |
| My Beautiful Laundrette | 3 B4 | Hofje van Staats | 12 C2 | Hotel Carillon | 22 B3 |
| Library | 4 A4 | Laurens Coster | 13 B3 | Hotel Caruso | 23 B3 |
| Tourist Office | 5 C2 | Nieuwe Kerk | 14 A4 | Joops Hotel | 24 B4 |
| | | Proveniershuis | 15 A4 | | |
| | | St Joris Doelen | 16 B4 | | |
| | | Teylers Hofje | 17 C3 | | |
| | | Teylers Museum | 18 C4 | | |
| | | Town Hall | 19 B3 | | |
| | | Verweyhal | (see 20) | | |
| | | Vleeshal | 20 B3 | | |

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|------|--|--|--|--|
| Baknesserkerk | 6 C3 | | | | |
| Brouwers Hofje | 7 A4 | | | | |
| Frans Hals Museum | 8 B4 | | | | |
| Frans Loenen Hofje | 9 A3 | | | | |

DRINKING

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------|--|--|--|--|
| Café 1900 | 32 B3 | | | | |
| Café Het Melkwood | 33 B3 | | | | |
| Café Studio | 34 B3 | | | | |
| Proeflokaal In den Uiver | 35 B3 | | | | |

ENTERTAINMENT

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|-------|--|--|--|--|
| Café Stels | 36 B3 | | | | |
| Patronaat | 37 A3 | | | | |
| Philharmonie | 38 C3 | | | | |
| Stadsschouwburg | 39 A4 | | | | |
| Toneelschuur | 40 C3 | | | | |

TRANSPORT

| | | | | | |
|------------------|-------|--|--|--|--|
| Bus Station | 41 B2 | | | | |
| Waltheus Cruises | 42 C4 | | | | |

Sights & Activities

Large **Grote Markt**, with its flanks of restaurants and cafés and a clutch of historical buildings, is a good place to start an exploration of Haarlem. At the western end stands the florid, 14th-century **town hall**, which sprouted many extensions including a balcony where judgments from the high court were pronounced. The counts' hall contains 15th-century panel paintings and is normally open during office hours.

At the opposite end looms the **Grote Kerk van St Bavo** (☎ 553 20 40; Oude Groenmarkt 23; adult/child €2/1.25; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat), the Gothic cathedral with a towering 50m-high steeple. It contains some fine Renaissance artworks, but the star attraction is its stunning Müller organ – one of the most magnificent in the world, stand-

ing 30m high with about 5000 pipes. It was played by Handel and Mozart, the latter when he was just 10. There are tours in English on request. Free organ recitals take place at 3pm on Saturday and also 8.15pm every Tuesday, April to September.

In the centre of Grote Markt stand the 17th-century Vleeshal, a former meat market, and the Verweyhal, an old fish market; both serve as modern art annexes of the Frans Hals Museum. On the square north of the Grote Kerk is a **statue** of Laurens Coster, whom Haarlemmers believe has a claim, along with Gutenberg, to be called the inventor of movable type.

Off Grote Houtstraat to the southwest stands the **Proveniershuis**, the former headquarters of St Joris Doelen (the Civic Guards of St George),

HAARLEM'S URBAN OASES

Haarlem is a peaceful city at the rowdiest of times, but even such a serene place needs its fair share of oases. Collectively known as *hofjes* – leafy courtyards enclosed by rows of sweet little homes – these green spaces initially served as monastery gardens in the Middle Ages. Eventually they took on broader roles for hospitals and inns, or as refuges for orphans, widows and the elderly. These private squares also give clues about Dutch social concerns and the origins of the modern welfare state.

Most *hofjes* date from the 15th to the 18th centuries and are open to viewing on weekends only, but you can usually take a discreet peek any time. Ask the tourist office for its walking-guide brochure, *Hofjeswandeling*, which includes the following:

Brouwers Hofje (Tuchthuisstraat 8) Lodging for members of the brewers' guild (1472).

Frans Loenen Hofje (Witte Herenstraat 24) Almshouses built from a merchant's estate (1607).

Hofje van Loo (Barvoetestraat 7) A women's hospital donated by mayor Sijmon Pieterszoon van Loo (1489); one of the most visible in Haarlem.

Hofje van Staats (Jansweg 39) One of the town's biggest, donated by a Haarlem merchant to poor women of the Reformed Church (1733), and still houses single, elderly women.

St Joris Doelen (Grote Houtstraat 144) A *proveniershuis* given as a donation; almshouse, later a gentlemen's inn (1591).

Teylers Hofje (Koudenhorn 64) Unusually grand affair, built by Pieter Teyler van der Hulst, founder of the Teyler Museum (1787).

The tourist office also runs guided tours, but at €74.50 a pop (up to 25 persons), you'll need either a lot of friends with you or to be completely bonkers for gardens.

which started life as an almshouse. Its wonderful old *hofje* (almshouse) is one of Haarlem's prettiest (see above). Around the corner to the west, down charming Korte Houtstraat, is the 17th-century **Nieuwe Kerk** (☎ 10am Sunday); the capricious tower by Lieven de Key is supported by a rather boxy design by Jacob van Campen.

Northeast of the Teylers Museum stands the striking **Baknesserkerk** (nr Vrouwestraat & Baknesserstraat), a late-15th-century church with a lamp-lit tower of sandstone. The stone was employed here when the Grote Kerk proved too weak to support a heavy steeple – hence the wooden tower of the cathedral we see today. A private firm occupies it but you can still peek inside.

MUSEUMS

The **Frans Hals Museum** (☎ 511 57 75; www.franshalsmuseum.nl; Groot Heiligland 62; adult/child €7/free; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) is a must for anyone interested in the Dutch masters. Kept in an almshouse where Hals spent his final, impoverished years, the collection focuses on the 17th-century Haarlem School, which is regarded as the pinnacle of Dutch mannerist art. Eight group portraits by Hals detailing the companies of the Civic Guard are the museum's pride and joy, revealing the painter's

exceptional attention to mood and psychological tone. Don't miss his two paintings known collectively as the *Regents & the Regentesses of the Old Men's Alms House* (1664). Among other treasures are the curious works by Hals' teacher, Flemish artist Carel van Mander: ceiling-high illustrations of the human anatomy with biblical and mythological allusions. Other highlights include short snippets of the city's history and a peaceful inner *hofje*.

Depending on your tastes, the **Teylers Museum** (☎ 531 90 10; Spaarne 16; adult/child €4.50/1; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) may top Frans Hals. Named after philanthropist-merchant Pieter Teyler van der Hulst, it's the oldest museum in the country (1778) and contains an array of whiz-bang inventions, such as an 18th-century electrostatic machine that conjures up visions of mad scientists. At 4m long and 2m high, this amazing beast once ran on batteries the size of a milk wagon. The eclectic collection also has paintings from the Dutch and French schools and numerous temporary exhibitions. The interiors are as good as the displays: the magnificent, sky-lighted Ovale Zaal (Oval Room) contains natural history specimens in elegant glass cases on two levels. Elsewhere you'll find fossils, ancient relics and mineral crystals.

On Grote Markt, the **Vleeshal** holds contemporary art exhibitions; the **Verweyhal** next door, in a fancy Renaissance building designed by Lieven de Key, houses the Frans Hals Museum's collection of modern art, including works by Dutch impressionists and the CoBra movement. The museums are known collectively as **De Hallen** (adult/child €5/3.50; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun).

Tours

Woltheus Cruises (☎ 535 77 23; Spaarne 11a; adult/child €6.50/3.50) runs canal boat tours in English; 50-minute tours run every hour from noon to 5pm April to October.

Sleeping

The tourist office has a list of B&Bs from €24 per person.

Joops Hotel (☎ 532 20 08; www.joopshotel.com; Oude Groenmarkt 20; r/studio from €85/85; 📺) The friendly Joops Hotel has 100-plus very individual rooms spread over an entire block near the Grote Kerk. Space isn't an issue and the studios have a kitchenette. Reception is on the ground floor in the Belly & Bolly antique shop, run by a pair of amiable gents.

Hotel Carillon (☎ 531 05 91; www.hotelcarillon.com; Grote Markt 27; s/d from €38/63) Run by a friendly young crew, this small hotel has ageing but completely OK rooms in the shadow of the Grote Kerk. Breakfast can be taken in wicker chairs on the sidewalk café.

Haarlem Stayokay Hostel (☎ 537 37 93; haarlem@stayokay.com; Jan Gijzenpad 3; dm €26.75; 📺) This lakeside youth hostel has a 10pm silence rule, but there's no curfew. The super clean rooms are stripped back and basic, but the bar-café has plenty of warmth and character. Laundry and cooking facilities are available. Take bus 2 (direction Haarlem Noord) from the train station (10 minutes).

Hotel Caruso (☎ 542 14 20; www.hotelrestaurant.caruso.nl; Zijlstraat 56-58; r from €75) This hotel above the Italian restaurant of the same name is on a quiet pedestrian street in the heart of Haarlem. The no-fuss rooms are large and lightly coloured, and all come with bathroom.

Hotel Amadeus (☎ 532 45 30; www.amadeus-hotel.com; Grote Markt 10; s/d €60/80; 📺) Amadeus enjoys a brilliant spot nestled in a row of old gabled houses on the main square. Rooms are one step up from bare bones, but they're comfy and have a few mod cons, and there's a small café on the first floor.

Campsite De Liede (☎ 533 86 66; Lieoever 68; camp site €12.10, car €3.50) This leafy site 2.5km east of the old centre enjoys a lakeside location and rents canoes and paddle boats. Take bus 2 from the train station (direction Zuidpolder) and alight at Zoete Inval.

Eating

The streets around the Dom and Lange Veerstraat offer a treasure-trove of enticing restaurants. It's a good idea to reserve ahead, although the huge selection means you'll find a table somewhere.

Nas Brasas (☎ 532 88 02; Kruisstraat 13; tapas €4.95; 📺 lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Nas Brasas' is a lively tapas restaurant whose convivial, warm atmosphere suits romantic couples and groups alike. The tapas, of which there's a long, long list, are so good that it's almost impossible not to go for a second round.

Eko Eetkafé (☎ 532 65 68; Zijlstraat 39; mains €8-18; 📺 lunch & dinner) An offshoot of the Eko organic foods association, this obliging little eatery offers fish and vegetarian dishes with a clear conscience. It's a short walk from the town centre but definitely worth the effort.

De Haerlemsche Vlaamse (☎ 532 59 91; Spekstraat 3; frites €1-3; 📺 lunch & dinner) Practically on the doorstep of the Grote Kerk, this *frites* joint not much bigger than a telephone box is a local institution. Line up for its fries and choose from one of a dozen sauces.

Pieck Jacobus (☎ 532 61 44; Warmoesstraat 18; mains €10-17; 📺 lunch & dinner) This little *eetcafé* with the big front windows is stripped back and cosy, and offers a variety of delightful dishes, such as kebab sausages or spicy lamb.

Spektakel (☎ 532 38 41; Spekstraat 4; mains €18; 📺 dinner) This Dutch diner is vying for UN membership judging by its worldly menu of Australian emu fillet to Indian lamb masala. It's another of Haarlem's long, thin diners, and there's street-side seating for sunny days.

Also recommended:
Flamboyant (☎ 542 15 03; Kleine Houtstraat 3; mains €14-20; 📺 dinner Wed-Mon) Warm and cosy; Haarlem's finest Indonesian restaurant.

A la Turka (☎ 534 11 62; Zijlstraat 95; mains €14-19; 📺 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Hearty Turkish cuisine near the Grote Markt.

Drinking

Haarlem's slew of atmospheric drinking holes are perfect spots to try Jopen Kooyt, the local beer. First brewed in 1401, this dark, richly

flavoured beer is almost a meal in itself, and you may want to set a limit; its alcohol content is a healthy 8.5%.

Café 1900 (☎ 531 82 83; Barteljorisstraat 10) This authentic brown café is a little gem, with a *fin-de-siècle* interior, long bar perfect for propping up, and pleasantly mixed crowd. Live bands and DJs often feature on weekends.

Café Studio (☎ 531 00 33; Grote Markt 25) Within view of the cathedral is this café/bar, which seems a nice, calm place for a drink in the early evening (inside or on its terrace), but by 10pm it heaves with 20- and 30-somethings looking to make the most of a night out.

Proeflokaal In den Uiver (☎ 532 53 99; Riviervismarkt 13) This quirky old place has shipping knick-knacks and a schooner sailing right over the bar. There's jazz on Thursday and Sunday evenings.

Café het Melkwoud (☎ 531 35 35; Zijlstraat 63) A great place to nurse a beer with crunchy locals behind those ceiling-high windows. You can't miss the sign – a tree shaped like a woman.

Entertainment

To find out what's on, grab a copy of the free local paper *De Haarlemmer* or the listings handout *Luna* at the tourist office or pubs.

CLUBS

Café Stiels (☎ 531 69 40; Smedestraat 21) For jazz and rhythm & blues, bands play on the back stage almost every night of the week from 10pm onwards.

Patronaat (☎ 517 58 58; www.patronaat.nl; Zijlsingel 2) Haarlem's top music and dance club attracts bands with banging tunes. Events in this cavernous venue usually start around 7pm or 9pm unless it's a midnight rave.

THEATRE

Toneelschuur (☎ 517 39 10; www.toneelschuur.nl; Lange Begijnestraat 9) This bizarre multilevel stage complex (designed by a Dutch cartoonist, Joost Swarte) has a daring agenda of experimental dance, theatre and art-house cinema, and acts as a production house for up-and-coming directors.

Philharmonie (☎ 512 12 12; www.philharmonie.nl; Lange Begijnestraat 11) Haarlem's venerable concert hall, which features music from every spectrum imaginable (except perhaps Death Metal, but with the Dutch, you never know).

Stadsschouwburg (☎ 512 12 12; Wilsongsplein 23) The city's municipal theatre and sister venue

to the Philharmonie, the Stadsschouwburg is currently undergoing major renovation and should be ready – well, sometime in the future is all anyone knew. Check with the tourist office for more information.

Shopping

Monday is market day at Botermarkt and Grote Markt, and again on Saturday at Grote Markt. Friday also sees Botermarkt come alive to a local farmers' market.

Getting There & Away

The city's Art Deco station is served by frequent trains running on the Amsterdam–Rotterdam line.

| Destination | Price (€) | Duration (min) | Frequency (per hr) |
|-------------|-----------|----------------|--------------------|
| Alkmaar | 5.70 | 30-50 | 4 |
| Amsterdam | 3.60 | 15 | 5-8 |
| Den Haag | 7.00 | 35-40 | 4-6 |
| Rotterdam | 10.10 | 50 | 4 |

Bus 300 links Haarlem train station and Schiphol Airport (45 minutes, six times hourly) between 5am and midnight. Connexion bus 80 stops at Houtplein, south of the centre, and goes to/from Amsterdam Marnixstraat (40 minutes, two to four times hourly). Bus 81 goes to Zandvoort bus station by way of Overveen (15 minutes, twice hourly). IJmuiden's Dennekoplaan, close to the locks and the beach, can be reached on buses 4 and 75 (40 minutes, four times hourly).

During the tulip season from late March to late May, Connexion normally runs buses from Haarlem to the Keukenhof bulb fields via Lisse (45 minutes, two to four times hourly). Check with the tourist office (p147) for the most up-to-date information.

Getting Around

The **bus information kiosk** (☎ 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.15am-4.30pm Sat) opposite the train station has plenty of schedules, otherwise check the schedule boards at departure bays. Bus 2 from the train and bus station stops at Zijlstraat, just east of Grote Markt (five minutes).

Regular **taxis** (☎ 515 15 15) are everywhere in Haarlem, and there's a large **bicycle shop** (☎ 531 70 66) for rentals in the train station.

AROUND HAARLEM Beaches

Just 5km west of Haarlem's peaceful outskirts lies **Zandvoort**, a popular seaside resort. It's no great shakes as beach towns go, and drab apartment blocks line the main drag, but its proximity to Amsterdam ensures a steady flow of pleasure-seekers. The main pastime here is beach bumming, but you can also catch the occasional sports-car event at the **Circuit Park Zandvoort** (www.circuit-zandvoort.nl) just to the north of the resort.

About 3km north of Zandvoort is Haarlem's second beach, **Bloemendaal aan Zee**, an undeveloped spot with a handful of restaurants and cafés and uninterrupted beaches. It's frequented by those looking for a semblance of peace and quiet away from the hustle and bustle of its bigger neighbour to the south.

The closest accommodation to Bloemendaal is De Lakens (right), but Zandvoort is bursting at the seams with accommodation. Haarlem's tourist office (p147) can point you in the right direction.

Trains link Zandvoort to Amsterdam Centraal Station three times hourly (€4.70, 30 minutes) via Haarlem (€2.10, 10 minutes).

Kennemerduinen Nature Reserve

De Zandwaaijer (☎ 023-541 11 23; www.npz.nl; Zeeweg, Overveen; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, noon-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), the park's visitors centre, has nature displays and is a good source of information, with a range of detailed walking and cycling maps. At the Koevlak and Parnassia entrances are car parks, from where paths lead off into the reserve. The paths snake through hilltop copses of Corsican firs and valleys of low-lying thickets; at the western edge you come to a massive barrier of golden sand that's 1000 years old.

The dunes sprout an extra layer of colour in spring including desert orchids, the bright rosettes of the century weed and the white-blooming grass of Parnassus. Red foxes, fallow deer and many species of birds are native to the area; bats slumber in the park's abandoned bunkers before appearing at dusk.

Among main features, the **Vogelmeer** lake has a bird observation hut above the south shore. The artificial lake 't **Wed** teems with bathers in summer. Lookout points are scattered throughout with evocative names like Hazenberg (Hare Mountain). At 50m, the **Kopje van Bloemendaal** is the highest dune in the

country, just outside the eastern border of the park, with views of the sea and Amsterdam.

On a sombre note, the WWII cemetery **Erebegraafplaats Bloemendaal** (☎ 020-660 1945; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct-Mar) is the resting place of 372 members of the Dutch resistance. Its walled compound in the dunes is isolated from the rest of the park and accessible only via the main road.

Rough camping is a no-no, but the park-run site **De Lakens** (☎ 075-647 23 93; www.kdc.nu; camp sites from €27.10, bungalows per week from €160) enjoys a sandy, grassy and certainly breezy spot just a few metres from the beach. There's a lovely kids' playground, and its wooden bungalows sleep four. Ticks in the dunes are known to carry Lyme disease, so insect repellent is a good idea.

To reach the park, visitors centre and campground, take bus 81 from Haarlem train station or cycle/drive the N200 towards Bloemendaal aan Zee.

IJMUIDEN

☎ 0255 / pop 7000

Just 5km up the coast from Haarlem at the mouth of the Noordzeekanaal (North Sea Canal) in the port town of IJmuiden is the huge **North Sea locks**. The largest is the Zuider-sluis (South Lock), some 400m long and 45m wide. Few people realise that IJmuiden is also the largest fishing port in Western Europe, home to the factory trawlers that plough the North Atlantic for weeks at a time. The huge beach is a kite-flyer's delight at low tide, but unfortunately the view is marred by the steel mills north of the locks.

Getting There & Around

It's a thrill taking the **hydrofoel** (☎ 020-639 22 47; www.fastflyingferries.nl; adult/child return €8.30/4.85; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5.30pm Sat & Sun) from behind Amsterdam Centraal Station (25 minutes, hourly on the hour, half-hourly during peak times) along the North Sea Canal to Velsen, 3km short of IJmuiden, where you catch Connexion bus 82 or 83 into town. It's a good idea to take a bicycle (an extra €4 return) because things are spread out. Cycle from Velsen along the dyke towards the locks and go across the 'small' and 'middle' locks to the big lock on the far side; along the way you'll find an information centre, **Noordzeekanaal in Zicht** (North Sea Canal in Pictures; ☎ 51 91 12; Noordersluisweg 120; ☎ 1-5pm Mon, Wed & Sun).

KENNEMERDUINEN NATURE RESERVE



If you travel by road along the North Sea Canal, you'll have the surreal experience of passing huge, ocean-going ships that float well above road level.

BEVERWIJK

☎ 0251

Every weekend up to 80,000 visitors flock to the town of Beverwijk to visit the covered **Beverwijkse Bazaar** (☎ 26 26 26; www.beverwijksebaazaar.nl; Montageweg 35; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Sat & Sun), one of Europe's largest ethnic markets. Piled high are Arabian foods and spices, Turkish rugs, garments and hand-crafted ornaments.

The liveliest of the three biggest halls is the **Zwarte Markt** (Black Market; before 9am free, after

9am adult/child €1.50/free), an enormous flea market with a carnival attitude. You can haggle with one of the 3000-plus vendors or just bask in the market chatter, live music and exotic aromas. The admission price includes entry to the **Grand Bazaar**, where the booths are larger and more professional, while the **Oosterse Markt** is free.

Getting There & Away

Parking (free before 9am, €2 on Saturday, €3 on Sunday) becomes a problem after 9.30am. From Amsterdam drive the A9 towards Alkmaar, exit at Beverwijk and follow signs to the bazaar; or take the train to Beverwijk (€4.90, 30 minutes, five times hourly) and then bus 76 (six minutes).

ZAAANSE SCHANS

☎ 075

Making a good stab at re-creating a local village from the 17th and 18th centuries is the Zaanse Schans, an open-air museum, some 10km northwest of Amsterdam. It features a grand collection of historic structures from around the country, and there's a plethora of workshops, shops and raised wooden homes, all of which sit on a sweet little tract, complete with canals and tulip gardens. On a sunny day it's a grand day out despite the inevitable crowds. The **visitors centre** (☎ 616 82 18; www.zaanseschans.nl; Schansend 1; ☎ 9am-5pm), at the far end of the village if you're coming by train, hands out the free maps you'll need.

The most striking structures are the six working **windmills** that stand along the riverbanks. One mill sells fat jars of its freshly ground mustard, while the others turn out pigments, oils, meal and sawed wood. All are open for inspection, and it's a treat to clamber about the creaking works while the mills shake in the North Sea breeze.

The cutest shops include an Albert Heijn colonial supermarket, a cheese maker and a popular **dog factory** with exhibits of pointy old footwear. The engaging **pewtersmith** will explain in several languages the story behind dozens of tiny figures while the soft metal sets in the moulds.

Near the visitors centre, the **Zaans Museum** (☎ 616 28 62; adult/child €4.50/2.70; ☎ 9am-5pm) runs temporary exhibitions of historical objects of the Zaan river communities, often with a dramatic or artsy twist such as audiovisual light shows.

When you've finished poking around the village, a **tour boat** (adult/child €5/2.50; ☎ 11am-4pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep) does 45-minute spins on the river Zaan several times a day.

Getting There & Away

From Amsterdam Centraal Station (€2.80, 20 minutes, four times hourly), take the stop train towards Alkmaar and get off at Koog Zaandijk – it's a well-signposted 400m walk to Zaanse Schans.

ZAADAM

☎ 075 / pop 25,800

A stone's throw from Zaanse Schans, Zaandam has played home to two famous residents: Russia's Peter the Great and impressionist master Claude Monet. Claude stayed in a nice

hotel while Peter preferred a rickety wooden shack, now a shrine and the main reason for visiting this commuter town.

The **Zaar Peterhuisje** (☎ 616 13 90; Krimp 23; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 1-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 1-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) is the gritty abode where Peter spent a week of his life in 1697. The Russian ruler arrived incognito as sailor Peter Mikhailov to garner support for Western forces against the Turks. Despite the hush-hush, news spread and hordes of fans practically besieged the cabin to get a glimpse of his tsariness. Peter eventually slipped away to the wharves to learn shipbuilding and swearing in Dutch, and became adept at both.

Many Russians came here on a pilgrimage in the 19th century to scrawl their graffiti. So great was the PR value that Grand Duchess Anna Paulowna (wife of Dutch King Willem II) commissioned a brick shelter over the house, which finally emerged in Russian orthodox style by the late 1800s. There's a small exhibit about the tsar and his links to the Netherlands, and marble tablets engraved with the monikers of royal visitors. Napoleon stopped by and was apparently delighted.

Getting There & Away

To get there from Amsterdam Centraal, take the train toward Alkmaar and get off at Zaandam (€2.40, 12 minutes, four hourly); from the station, follow the signs.

WATERLAND REGION

☎ 075

Time seems to move more slowly in this rural area about 9km north of Amsterdam, where some farmers still carry scythes, the meadows turn a succulent shade of green and herons stand motionless alongside watery furrows. Despite a large shipping canal nearby, it remains an important bird sanctuary, and picturesque for the mindful visitor.

Broek in Waterland is a precious little burg in the heart of the Waterland region. Some 17th- and 18th-century houses are painted a particular shade of grey, known as *Broeker grijs* after the landscapes painted here by Monet and other masters. The village church was burned by the Spanish in 1573 but restored with a pretty stained-glass window recalling the tragic event. On the lake's edge stands the so-called **Napoleonhuisje**, a white pagoda where the French emperor and the mayor met in 1811.

THE WATERLAND TICKET

If you're planning to day trip around the Waterland Region, Monnickendam, Volendam and Marken by bus, consider purchasing a Waterland Ticket (€6). Available from bus drivers, it allows a day's unlimited travel in the area north of Amsterdam (covered by buses 110, 111 and 115) and it's excellent value.

Near the town of Landsmeer, 9km north of Amsterdam, lies the nature reserve and recreational area **Het Twiske**. This is where urbanites go for a calculated dose of nature: well-marked walking trails, playgrounds and artificial but quite decent beaches, especially for families. A full one-third of the area is water and there are several hides for bird-watchers on the lakeshores. Picnic spots are marked throughout for barbecuing. The **visitors centre** (☎ 684 43 38; www.hettwiske.nl; Noorderlaak 1; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun) is next to the canoe rental shop.

Getting There & Away

The best way to experience the Waterland is by bicycle; pick up a rental in Amsterdam (p136) and explore at your leisure. Otherwise pick up a Waterland Ticket (above) and ride the buses.

MONNICKENDAM

☎ 0299 / pop 10,105

Monnickendam, which gained its name from the Benedictines who built a dam here, is a sleepy town that can trace its roots back to 1356. It originally became prosperous by moving goods inland towards Alkmaar but after the fishing industry died, it reinvented itself as a yachting resort, and today the beautiful old trawlers mainly catch pleasure-seekers. History still pervades the narrow lanes around the shipyards and fish smokehouses that have been operating for hundreds of years. Smoked eel remains a local delicacy. Eel is one of the few species still caught in bulk in the IJsselmeer.

Sights

The town's trademark building is the 15th-century **Speeltoren**, an elegant, Italianate clock tower and former town hall. The tower's carillon (glockenspiel) performs only at 11am and

noon on Saturday, when the four mechanical knights prance in the open wooden window twice before retiring. If the tone rings true it's because the bells were cast by master bellmaker Peter van de Ghein over 400 years ago.

Inside the clock tower you'll find the **Historisch Museum** (☎ 65 22 03; Noordeinde 4; adult/child €1.50/0.50; ☎ 1-4pm May-Aug, 11am-4pm Mon-Sat & 1-4pm Sun Apr, Sep & Oct), which displays various archaeological finds uncovered during the building of the Afsluitdijk (p175) and retells the history of the Waterlandse Tram that served the Waterland region up until 1956.

The Gothic **Grote Kerk** (☎ 65 06 00; De Zarken; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sat, 2-4pm Sun-Mon Jun-Aug), on the outskirts of town, is notable for its triple nave, tower galleries and a dazzling oak choir screen dating from the 16th century. It's impossible not to focus on the enormous organ (which is occasionally used for concerts) in the nave, a statement of higher glory and a striking contrast with the spartan interior.

Other stars in the architecture department include the **Waag** (Weigh-house) on the central canal. Built in 1669, this focal point of local economic life was equipped in 1905 with grand Tuscan columns, a common trick of the day to make it look much older and more impressive. **In de Bonten Os** (Coloured Ox; Noordeinde 26) is the only house that's left in its original 17th-century state. In the days before proper glass, the curious vertical shutters at street level were made to let in air and light.

The old harbour along Haringburgwal is famous for its **fish smokehouses**, and you can poke your head inside for a glimpse of the process. A bronze statue of a fisherman curing eels on a spit stands where the central canal meets the harbour.

Activities

As elsewhere on the IJsselmeer, large pleasure boats are the thing in Monnickendam. In July and August you can feel the spray in your face on day trips on an antique clipper. Reserve at **Holland Zeilcharters** (☎ 65 23 51; www.sailing.nl; Het Prooyen 4a; per person from €50, botter rental for up to 8 persons from €360).

The harbour bristles with splendid old *tjalken*, *botters* and *klippers*, historic boats available for hire (as are skippers if need be). The *botters* can be hired out for a group from around €360 per day. The sky's the limit at the top end, eg three-masted clippers for as long as you (and your wallet) see fit.

Smaller craft can be found at **Bootvloot** (☎ 06-549 42657; Hemmeland beach; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct) where two- to four-person sailboats cost €40/55 per half-day/day, with a €50 deposit. It's a 500m walk through the leafy Hemmeland recreation area northeast of Monnickendam marina – just follow the sign 'Zeilbootverhuur'.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Lake Land (☎ 65 37 51; Jachthaven 1; s/d €50/70) Aside from a smattering of B&Bs, Lake Land is all that Monnickendam offers in the way of accommodation. It's situated on the marina with harbour views and a restaurant, and though fairly anonymous is convenient and comfortable.

Camping-Jachthaven Uitdam (☎ 020-403 14 33; www.campinguitdam.nl; Zeedijk 2, Uitdam; camp sites/cabins/bungalows €15/39/66; ☎ Mar-Oct) Tucked away behind a dyke on the IJsselmeer, this well-equipped site has mooring facilities, beach, laundry, snack bar and bicycle rental. Both the basic cabins and bungalows sleep up to four, but the latter has a kitchen and hot and cold running water. Take the dyke road 5km southeast of Monnickendam or bus 111.

De Roef (☎ 65 18 60; Noordeinde 40; mains €15-25; ☎ dinner) The meat cuts like butter at this Western-style steakhouse where Argentine tenderloin or sea bass is prepared over charcoal flames. Half the fun is watching dinner approach your table sizzling atop a red-hot grill.

't Markerveerhuis (☎ 65 57 69; Brugstraat 6; mains €10-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) This is easily the best place to dine on traditional Dutch fare while enjoying the comings and goings in Monnickendam's harbour. Dutch folk music emanates from the stage at weekends.

Stands selling smoked eel and other fruits of the sea are clustered around the old harbour – just follow your nose.

Getting There & Around

Connexion bus 111 (30 minutes, three to four times an hour) links the centre of Monnickendam to Amsterdam Centraal Station, harbour side, as does bus 115 (twice hourly); the 111 continues on to Marken (12 minutes, hourly). Buses 110 and 114 go north to Volendam (seven minutes) and Edam (10 minutes), but only 114 continues on to Hoorn (30 to 45 minutes, twice hourly).

Ber Koning (☎ 65 12 67; Noordeinde 12) rents out bicycles.

VOLEDAM & MARKEN

☎ 0299 / pop 20,700

Some 22km northeast of Amsterdam lies Volendam, a former fishing port turned tourist trap. It's quaint all right, with its rows of wooden houses and locals who don traditional dress for church and festive events, but the harbour is awash with souvenirs shops and cafés, and on weekends it's even hard to think with all the people swarming about. Best escape the hordes and explore some of the pretty streets behind the harbour for a glimpse of what the old Volendam was really like.

Across Gouwzee Bay lies scenic Marken with a small and determined population. It was an isolated island in the Zuiderzee until 1957 when a causeway linked up with the mainland, effectively turning it into a museum-piece village. It still however manages to exude a fishing-village vibe.

Information

Tourist office (☎ 36 37 47; www.vvv-volendam.nl; Zeestraat 37, Volendam; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Has tonnes of information, including a brochure with a walking tour of Volendam. The old harbour district is about 400m to the southeast.

Sights & Activities

The **Volendams Museum** (☎ 36 92 58; Zeestraat 41, Volendam; adult/child €2/1.25; ☎ 10am-5pm mid-Mar-Oct) is a must for cigar aficionados. Local culture is covered with traditional costumes, prints, paintings of harbour scenes and even a cramped ship's sleeping quarters, but this place is really devoted to lovers of cheap cigars: some 11 million bands are plastered on its walls.

In Marken, the colourful Kerkbuurt is the most authentic area, with tarred or painted houses raised on pilings to escape the Zuiderzee floods. A row of eel-smoking houses here has been converted to the **Marker Museum** (☎ 60 19 04; Kerkbuurt 44, Marken; adult/child €2.50/1.25; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun Apr-Oct), which delves into the island's history and includes the re-created interior of a fisherman's home, with a wealth of personal odds and ends.

Sleeping

Our pick Hof Van Marken (☎ 60 13 00; www.hofvanmarken.nl; Buurt II, 15, Marken; r from €80) It would be a hard heart that would resist the big beds, fluffy pillows and heavenly duvets at Hof Van

Marken, one of the cosiest hotels around. And it's incredible to think that such a peaceful, rural establishment in the heart of a former fishing village is only 20 minutes from bustling Amsterdam.

Hotel Spaander (☎ 36 35 95; www.spaander.com; Haven 15-19, Volendam; r €105) The town's best hotel has retained much of its atmosphere from the olden days, with traditional carved balconies and cushy rooms that have welcomed the likes of Picasso and Monet. There's an indoor swimming pool too.

Eating

Seafood is the undisputed king in Volendam, and the main street (and harbour) is lined with vendors offering smoked cod, eel and herring.

Hotel Spaander (☎ 36 35 95; Haven 15-19; mains €21-35; ☎ lunch & dinner) This grand place does a splendid job with all things fishy, be it salmon, stewed eel or bouillabaisse. The waiters fillet your fish right at your table, and the dining area is fantastically quaint, with paintings by renowned artists covering every inch of available wall space.

Old Dutch Restaurant Le Pompadour (☎ 39 98 88; Haven 142; mains €11-28; ☎ lunch & dinner) Even the name can't take away the old-world flair of a place where faded yellow light falls from Art Deco lamps. There's really only one dish to try in these parts, and this place does it well; smoked eel IJsselmeer style.

Getting There & Around

Connexion bus 110 runs between Volendam and Amsterdam via Monnickendam (30 minutes) and Edam (12 minutes) every 30 minutes until 1.30am. Bus 111 goes from Amsterdam via Monnickendam to Marken (30 minutes, half-hourly).

The **Marken Express ferry** (adult/child one way €4/3, return €6.50/3.50; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Mar-Sep) makes the 45-minute crossing from Volendam to Marken every half hour. In Volendam, the ferry leaves from the docks at Havendijkje.

EDAM

☎ 0299 / pop 7400

Once a renowned whaling port – in its 17th-century heyday it had 33 shipyards that built the fleet of legendary admiral Michiel de Ruijter – this scenic little town is another of Noord Holland's hidden gems. With its old shipping warehouses, quiet cobblestone streets, hand-operated drawbridges, and pic-

ture-perfect canals, you'd be hard pressed not to enjoy a stroll around. And it's quite astounding that so many tourists prefer Volendam, only 2km away, unless Edam's cheese market is on, and then they're like flies to, well, cheese.

Information

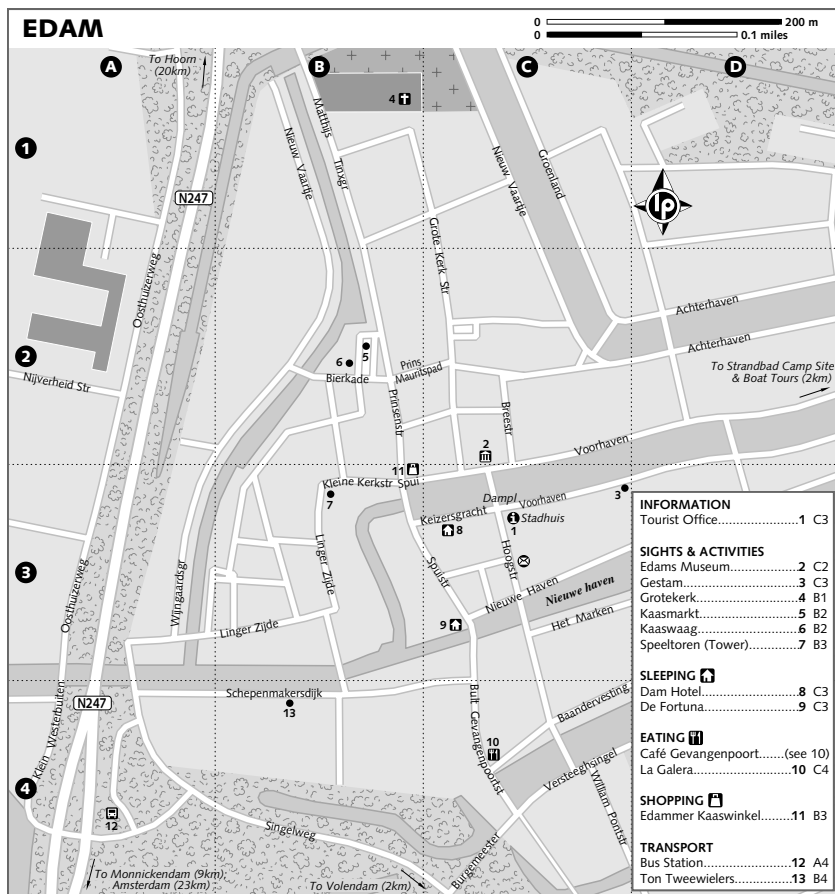
Tourist office (☎ 31 51 25; www.vvv-edam.nl; Damplein; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Mar-Jun & Sep-Nov, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat & 1-4pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-3pm Mon-Sat Dec-Feb) Housed in the splendid 18th-century town hall. Pick up the good English-language booklet for self-guided tours, *A Stroll Through Edam* (€2.50).

Sights & Activities

In the 16th century, Willem van Oranje bestowed on Edam the right to hold a **Kaasmarkt** (Cheese Market; ☎ 10am-12.30pm Wed Jul & Aug), which was the town's economic anchor right through to the 1920s. At its peak 250,000 rounds of cheese were sold here every year. On the western side of Kaasmarkt stands the old **Kaaswaag** (admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep), the cheese weigh-house, which has a display on the town's chief product. The cheese market is smaller than the one in Alkmaar but about as touristy. You can sample and buy some of the cheesy stuff at **Gestam** (☎ 37 15 30; Voorhaven 125; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed & Fri), or stop in at **Edammer Kaaswinkel** (☎ 37 16 83; cnr Spui & Prinsenstraat) and pick up a round with which to disguise any cheap wine served to guests back home.

The 15th-century **Grote Kerk** (admission free; ☎ 1-5pm Apr-Sep) has an unfortunate past that stands witness to the vagaries of Dutch weather. The stained-glass windows bearing coats of arms and historical scenes were added after 1602, when the church burned to a crisp after a lightning strike. Its tower can be climbed (admission €2) for views of the surroundings. The taller **Speeltoren**, leaning slightly over Kleine Kerkstraat about 100m further south, is all that remains of the 15th-century Kleine Kerk.

The **Edams Museum** (☎ 37 24 31; Damplein 8; adult/child €3/1; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-4.30pm Sun) has a so-so collection of old furnishings, porcelain and silverware, spread over three cramped floors. It's best known for its floating cellar, a remarkable pantry that rises and falls with the river's swell to reduce stress on the structure above. The ornate brick structure is Edam's oldest, dating from 1530.



Tours

The tourist office organises 1½-hour **boat tours** (€3; ☞ Jul & Aug) on *tuindersvelts* (small, open-topped boats) in summer, weather permitting. Departure is from the Strandbad Edam camp site (below). You can also rent a boat via the tourist office from about €450 per day.

Sleeping & Eating

In addition to the places reviewed here, the tourist office has a list of private accommodation and farm stays from €20 per person.

Strandbad Edam (☎ 37 19 94; www.campingstrandbad.nl; ☞ Zeevangszeedijk 7a; per person/tent €3.10/4.55; ☞ Apr-Sep) This sprawling seaside camp site has a swimming beach, laundry and restaurant. It's usually overrun but remains a convenient

base for boat trips into the IJsselmeer – the docks are right outside the camp site.

La Galera (☎ 37 19 71; Gevangenpoortsteeg 3; mains €6-12; ☞ lunch & dinner) If you're not eating at De Fortuna or the Dam Hotel then La Galera, with its standard pizzas and pasta, will have to suffice.

Café de Gevangenpoort (☎ 37 42 52; Gevangenpoortsteeg 1) Next door to La Galera, this pub has occasional live music and friendly staff.

Getting There & Around

Connexxion bus 110 stops twice an hour at the bus station and continues to Voldendam (five minutes), Monnickendam (25 minutes) and Amsterdam (40 minutes). Bus 114 travels to Hoorn (25 minutes, twice hourly), and 113

STAYING IN STYLE

For such a small town, Edam manages to provide some remarkably good accommodation and eating options.

Dam Hotel (☎ 37 17 66; www.damhotel.nl; Keizersgracht 1; s/d €59.50/110) In the very heart of the city, the boutique Dam Hotel is created with tender loving care. Rooms are individually decorated with genuine and 'new' antiques, but the unbridled theme throughout is Romance. Some rooms are a little on the small side, but this is counterbalanced by huge beds and thoroughly modern bathrooms. Its restaurant (mains around €20; open for lunch and dinner) serves classic French cuisine in silver-service surroundings, and forecourt diners enjoy views of the old town hall.

De Fortuna (☎ 37 16 71; www.fortuna-edam.nl; Spuistraat 3; s/d from €65/90) Another gem, this place might have stood model for an old Dutch painting. Its homy rooms, which overlook one of Edam's many canals, are stuffed with quilts and little perks like coffee and tea facilities. The bathrooms are on the tiny side but they have everything you need. Downstairs in the restaurant (mains €20; open for lunch and dinner), elaborate French dishes are served in a suitably Dutch arena: oil paintings, large bay windows and leather seats buffed shiny over the years. The ever-changing menu features plenty of fish and meat, along with a smattering of wild game, and the wine list would be hard to get through in a week.

makes jaunts to Volendam (10 minutes, once or twice an hour). Bicycles can be rented at **Ton Tweewielers** (☎ 37 19 22; Schepmakersdijk 6).

ALKMAAR

☎ 072 / pop 93,000

If ever there was a cheese town, Alkmaar is it. Come Friday, its picturesque ringed centre is awash with tourists, all eager to catch a glimpse of the city's famous cheese market.

But the city is more than just a purveyor of curdled milk. It holds a special place in Dutch hearts as the first town, in 1573, to repel occupying Spanish troops; locals opened the locks and flooded the area with sea water, forcing the perplexed invaders to retreat. The victory won the town weighing rights, which laid the foundation for its cheese market.

Orientation & Information

The town centre is focused on Waagplein, the main square where the famous cheese market is held. Langestraat is a pedestrianised shopping street with charming restaurants and bars around the Waag and the quay named Bierkade. The pretty, canal-bound centre is 500m southeast of the train station.

Library (☎ 51 5 66 44; Gasthuisstraat 2; internet per hr €1.50; ☞ 11am-9pm Tue-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat) Has rows of internet terminals.

Tourist office (☎ 511 42 84; www.vvwalkmaar.nl; Waagplein 2; ☞ 10am-5.30pm) In the Waaggebouw, the towering old weigh-house. Staff will book accommodation for €2.50.

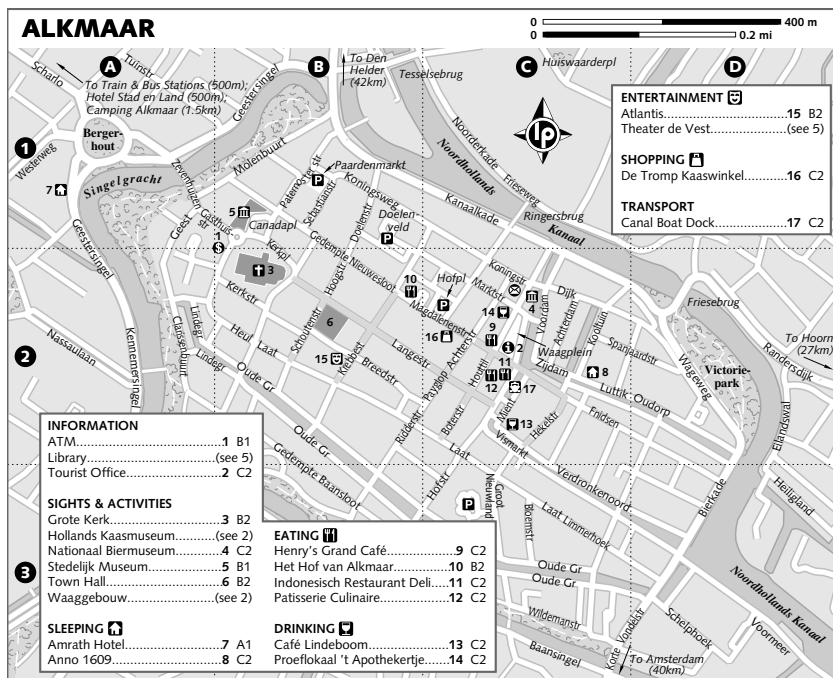
Sights

Before beginning your exploration of the city, consider purchasing a copy of the *Walking Tour of the Town among the Historic Buildings* booklet (€2) from the tourist office. It covers historical buildings like the Renaissance **town hall** in extensive detail.

Built as a chapel in the 14th century, the **Waaggebouw** was pressed into service as a weigh-house two centuries later. This handsome building houses the tourist office and upstairs, the **Hollands Kaasmuseum** (Dutch Cheese Museum; ☎ 511 42 84; adult/child €2.50/1.50; ☞ 10am-4pm, Mon-Sat Apr-Oct), a reverential display of cheese-making utensils, photos and a curious stock of paintings by 16th-century female artists.

The **Stedelijk Museum** (Municipal Museum; ☎ 511 07 37; www.stedelijkmuseumalkmaar.nl; Canadaplein 1; adult/child €4.50/free; ☞ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun) is overlooked by many visitors who don't get past the cheese market. This is a shame because its collection of oil paintings by Dutch masters, including impressive life-sized portraits of Alkmaar nobles, is alone worth the entry fee. Other works show Alkmaar in post-Golden Age decline; sombre scenes of almswomen caring for the poor recall how the church's role grew as trade declined. The few modern works on display include Charley Toorop's odd oil painting of the Alkmaar cheese market; her cheese bearers with grotesque features remain controversial.

The **Grote Kerk** (admission Jun-Aug €4, Sep-May €2.50; ☞ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) will remind visitors that Noord Holland has a particularly high concen-



tration of church organs. The most famous one here is the small 'Swallow Organ' in the north ambulatory, one of the country's oldest (1511). The huge beast in the nave was designed by Jacob van Campen, a leading organ-maker in the 16th century. Organ recitals take place from noon to 12.30pm and 1pm to 1.30pm June to August (included in admission) and Wednesday evenings in July and August (€6).

Housed in the attractive old De Boom brewery, the **Nationaal Biermuseum** (☎ 511 38 01; Houttil 1; adult/child €3.50/1.75; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, 1-4pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 1-4pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) has a decent collection of beer-making equipment and wax dummies showing how the quids were made. The rare video of Dutch beer commercials since the 1950s will have you in stitches. Choose from 30 beers (eight on draught) in the friendly bar after your tour.

Tours

Departing from Mient near the Waag are 45-minute **tours** (☎ 511 77 50; adult/child €4.70/3.20; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Sat May-Aug) with multilingual commentary. During cheese-market season boats go every 20 minutes from 9.30am.

Sleeping

The tourist office has a list of private rooms from about €20 per person.

our pick Anno 1609 (☎ 511 61 11; www.anno1609.nl; Luttik Oudorp 110; d €225) It doesn't get much more romantic than this. The sole suite of this boutique B&B (breakfast is served in the dining room or on the small balcony at the back) extends over an entire floor of a beautifully restored 17th-century granary overlooking one of the city's peaceful canals. The furnishings ooze exclusivity – a freestanding French bath, designer chandeliers, polished parquet and lead-light windows – and it's the soul of discretion: outside there's no hint that this listed monument is even a hotel.

Amrath Hotel (☎ 518 61 86; www.amrathhotelalkmaar.nl; Geestersingel 15; s/d from €105/115; ☎) Only a short walk from the centre is this new hotel, part of the Best Western chain. Its rooms are spacious and thoroughly modern, and the entire outfit is geared to the business crowd. Specials are handed out on a regular basis.

Hotel Stad en Land (☎ 512 39 11; www.stadenland.com; Stationsweg 92; s/d €52.50/75) Close to the train station with slightly dated yet comfy rooms,

NOWHERE'S AS CHEESY AS HERE

Cheese is a big thing in the Netherlands; anyone who's breakfasted in a B&B or entered a supermarket can tell you this. But in Noord Holland's Schiereiland, cheese is a very, very serious business.

Alkmaar's traditional **cheese market** (Waagplein; ☎ 10am-noon Fri Apr-Sep) goes back to the 17th century. Every Friday morning around 30,000kg of waxed rounds of Gouda, Edam and Leiden *kaas* (cheese) are ceremoniously stacked on Waagplein, and soon the porters appear in their colourful hats, ready to spring into action. The dealers (looking official in white smocks) insert a hollow rod to extract a cheese sample and go into taste-test mode, sniffing and crumbling to check fat and moisture content. This is one of the few Dutch towns where the old cheese guilds still operate, and the porters' bright green, red and yellow hats denote which company they belong to. Once deals are struck the porters whisk the cheeses on wooden sledges to the old cheese scale in a stride reminiscent of someone hurrying to the toilet. It's primarily for show: nowadays the modern dairy combines have a lock on the cheese trade. Still, as living relics go it's a spectacle not to be missed, and it's fun to see so many people excited about cheese.

Along with its own cheese market, Edam – and the surrounding regions – has a centuries-old reputation as a producer of toothsome cheese. About 8km south of Edam, there are several **cheese farms** that can be visited daily from 8.30am to 6pm (admission free): Irene Hoeve, Jacobs Hoeve (both on Hoogedijk) and Alida Hoeve (on Zaddeweg). Cheese making is a fascinating art, but prepare for a pretty cheesy experience as presenters in traditional duds run through their well-oiled routine before referring you to the shop.

Stad en Land is a good choice for those making a short, overnight visit to Alkmaar. Of the four rooms those at the rear are the quietest and overlook a little pond.

Camping Alkmaar (☎ 511 69 24; www.campingalkmaar.nl; Bergweg 201; camp site €22, cabins €35) This site lies in a pleasant copse convenient to the ring road, 1km west of the train station. Tent sites are sheltered and wooden cabins sleep two persons. Take bus 160 to Sportpark (10 minutes).

Eating

Alkmaar has a fine variety of restaurants and cafés.

Patisserie Culinaire (☎ 511 29 58; Houttil 13; mains €5-16; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Sat) This buzzing artsy café offers freshly made filled baguettes, open sandwiches, quiche and big salads that spill off your plate. It's also the perfect spot to sip a coffee at the sidewalk tables and watch the world go by.

Henry's Grand Café (☎ 511 32 83; Houttil 34; mains €12-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) A convivial place serving soups, salads, sandwiches and set meals including pork or chicken satay, backed up by a good range of beers. Its lunch menu is much easier on the wallet.

Het Hof van Alkmaar (☎ 512 12 12; Hof van Sonoy 1; mains €15-20; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Hof van Alkmaar occupies a former 15th-century nunnery with a rustic dining room overlooking the *hofje*. The menu is full of inventions like Vic-

toria bass in chilli-coconut sauce, but should your palate desire something simpler at lunch, there are chicken satays and sandwiches.

Indonesisch Restaurant Deli (☎ 515 40 82; Mient 8; mains €13-27; ☎ dinner, closed Mon & Tue) This place offers good-value dishes such as nasi goreng as well as elaborate rijsttafels. It's been around for ages, comes highly recommended and has air-con.

Drinking

Proeflokaal 't Apothekertje (☎ 512 41 07; Waagplein 16) Of the bars and brown cafés that hug the north side of Waagplein, this is the most pleasant to grab a relaxing drink in. It's an old-style drinking hole done up like a chemist's shop.

Café Lindeboom (☎ 512 17 43; Verdrunkenoord 114) Over by the old fish market is this cosy bar where talkative locals live it up on the (hopefully) sunny canal terrace.

Entertainment

Alkmaar has a lively arts scene – pick up a copy of the monthly *Alkmaar Agenda* (free) from the tourist office to see what's on.

Theater De Vest (☎ 548 99 99; www.theaterdevest.nl; Canadaplein 2) The centre for Alkmaar's highbrow entertainment, De Vest runs the gamut from traditional plays and puppet shows to avant-garde dance. In summer Canadaplein turns into a stage for the performing arts festival Zomer op het plein (Summer on the square).

Atlantis (☎ 511 83 90; www.atlantispodium.nl; Breedstraat 33) Atlantis is the downtown music club, always with a fresh and unpredictable programme. Expect anything from a rave one night to a pop quiz the next (entry normally €3 to €10). The Creatif Centrum upstairs offers arts courses, and the Tooncafé, also upstairs, runs exhibitions.

Shopping

De Tromp Kaaswinkel (☎ 511 34 22; Magdalenestraat 11) There's not much else to buy in Alkmaar except cheese, and this place stocks an excellent range of Dutch and French varieties. You'll be amazed at how much of the yellow stuff can be stored in such a small shop.

Getting There & Away

Trains to/from Alkmaar:

| Destination | Price (€) | Duration (min) | Frequency (per hr) |
|-------------|-----------|----------------|--------------------|
| Amsterdam | 6.30 | 30-40 | 4 |
| Den Helder | 6.70 | 35 | 2 |
| Enkhuizen | 6.70 | 50 | 2 |
| Hoorn | 4.30 | 25 | 2 |

The station has left-luggage lockers and ATMs.

Getting Around

Connexxion buses 10, 22 and 127 connect the train station to Kanaalkade (five minutes).

There's a **bicycle shop** (☎ 511 79 07) at the train station, but don't bother renting on cheese market day as there're too many people on the streets, and it's likely to be nicked.

BROEK OP LANGEDIJK

☎ 0226

In the town of Broek op Langedijk, about 8km northeast of Alkmaar, the **Museum Broeker Veiling** (Museum Broeker Auction; ☎ 31 38 07; www.broekerveiling.nl; Broek op Langedijk; adult/child €6.25/3.65; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, till 9.30pm Thu, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct) bills itself as the 'oldest sail-through vegetable auction'. Only when you've entered the auction hall – a stunning Art Deco building on the water – does it become clear how this works.

The show begins as barges laden with baskets of produce float in beneath the feet of the auctioneer, who encourages visitors to

bid on the old auction clock. It's entertaining, instructive and above all easy to get carried away, so remember how many tomatoes or bunches of broccoli you can realistically consume.

The museum also runs 45-minute boat tours around the dozens of tiny island plots nearby that once supplied the auction with regular greens. Combination tickets for museum and boat cost adult/child €9.95/5.50.

From Amsterdam, take the A9 to Alkmaar and N25 to Heerhugowaard, exiting for Broek op Langedijk. By train, go to Alkmaar (€6.40, 45 minutes, four times hourly) and change to bus 155 (20 minutes, twice hourly).

HOORN

☎ 0229 / pop 65,500

With a string of museums and a busy harbour, Hoorn attracts both weekend tourists and skippers alike. It was once the capital of West Friesland and, thanks to the presence of the Dutch merchant fleet, a mighty trading city. As a member of the league of Seven Cities, it helped free the country from the Spanish who occupied the town in 1569.

Its most famous son, explorer Willem Schoutens, named South America's storm-lashed tip – Cape Horn – after his home town in 1616.

Orientation & Information

The old quarter begins about 1km southwest of the train station. From the station, walk south along broad Veemarkt to Gedempte Turfhaven, turn right and take the first left into Grote Noord, the pedestrianised shopping street. At the end is the scenic main square, Rode Steen, and the harbour area is a stone's throw further south, down Grote Havensteeg.

Library (Wisselstraat 8; internet per hr €02.80; ☎ 1-8.30pm Mon, Wed & Thu, 1-5pm Tue & Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Has internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 072-511 42 84; www.vvvhoorn.nl; Veemarkt 4; ☎ 1-6pm Mon, 9.30am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat) About 250m south of the train station; will book accommodation for a €2.50 fee.

Sights & Activities

Hoorn's heyday as a shipping centre is long gone, but the imposing **statue of Jan Peterszoon Coen**, founder of the Dutch East India Company, still watches over the Rode Steen (Red Stone or Fortress), the square named for the

blood that once flowed from the gallows. On the northeastern side of the square it's impossible to overlook the **Waag**, the 17th-century weigh-house that's home to De Waag Café-Restaurant.

On the square also stands the former seat of the **Staten-College** (States' Council), the body that once governed seven towns in North Holland (Alkmaar, Hoorn, Enkhuizen, Medemblik, Edam, Monnickendam and Purmerend). Its wedding-cake façade bears the coat of arms of Oranje-Nassau, the Dutch-German royal dynasty that the Dutch named as rulers when Napoleon left Holland. It now houses the **Westfries Museum** (☎ 28 00 28; www.wfm.nl; Rode Steen; adult/child €3.50/1.50; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sat & Sun), an absorbing museum with a rich collection of historical paintings – so rich that it was the target of art theft in 2005. Some 20 paintings were stolen, but fortunately the four large group portraits of prominent *schutters* (civic guards) by Jan A Rotius (1624–66) were left in peace. Rotius himself can be seen at the far right in one scene. The rear courtyard has a number of curious stone tablets from local façades.

The **Affiche Museum** (Dutch Poster Museum; ☎ 29 98 46; Grote Oost 2-4; adult/child €3.50/1.75; ☎ 11-5pm Tue-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun) has an extensive collection including every single poster made for the annual Holland Festival since 1948. You'll also find contemporary artwork from big-name designers like Anthon Beeke and Gert Dumbar (of Studio Dumbar fame). It's virtually opposite the old weigh-house.

Housed in two old cheese warehouses, the **Museum of the 20th Century** (☎ 21 40 01; Bierkade 4; adult/child €4/2; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun) is devoted mainly to household goods and modern inventions. Of the few eye-openers there are a 1964 Philips mainframe computer – a clunky bookcase-sized unit with a whole 1KB of memory – and a 30-sq-metre scale *maquette* (model) of Hoorn in 1650, with taped commentary in several languages.

The **Museum Stoomtram** (☎ 21 48 62; www.museumstoomtram.nl; adult/child return €17/12.80; ☎ 11am Tue-Sat mid-Apr–Oct & Mon Jul & Aug, Sat & Sun Nov, Dec & beginning of Apr) isn't a museum in the traditional sense but rather a historic locomotive that puffs an hour between Hoorn station and Medemblik. You can combine the train and boat for a route called the 'Historic Triangle': first from Hoorn to Medemblik by train and then back by boat *and* train via Enkhuizen.

Add a visit to the Zuiderzeemuseum (p164) in Enkhuizen and the whole package costs €28/22.30.

The scenic harbour is lined by stately gabled houses. Overshadowing them all is the massive **Hoofdtoren** (1532), a defensive gate that now hosts a bar and restaurant. The tiny belvedere was an afterthought.

Sleeping

Accommodation is not a high point in Hoorn, so you may be better off just spending the day here. The tourist office does however have a list of B&Bs from around €20 per person.

Hotel de Keizerskroon (☎ 21 27 17; www.keizerskroonhoorn.nl; Breed 33; s/d €62.50/75) Very much in the middle of things, this 25-room hotel-restaurant has rooms that are reasonably modern and enticing, and quite brown. Its insulated windows afford a view of the bustling market streets below.

Hotel de Magneet (☎ 21 50 21; hoteldemagneet@planet.nl; Kleine Oost 5D; s/d from €62/77) This family-run guesthouse lies in a quiet street just east of the old centre, with a bar and restaurant. Rooms are large by Dutch standards, but not particularly exciting and low on atmosphere. The proximity to the coastal paths makes the hotel popular with cyclists' clubs.

Eating

De Waag Café-Restaurant (☎ 21 51 95; Rode Steen 8; mains €16-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) With pride of place on the main square in the stunning Waag building, this restaurant is hard to beat. The international menu is heavily loaded with Dutch staples, and when the sun comes out there's no better place to be than on De Waag's terrace.

Brasserie Bontekoe (☎ 21 93 09; Nieuwendam 1; mains €10-20; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sat) This cosy, terraced brown café enjoys a strategic view of canals and marina. There's an extensive sandwich menu alongside lamb, pork and chicken dishes, and naturally a mystery 'catch of the day' option.

Hendrickje Stoffels (☎ 21 04 17; Oude Doelenkade 3-5; set menu €25-31; ☎ dinner, closed Wed-Thu) With a styled interior, progressive French and fish dishes, and a listing in *Lekker* six years in a row, Hendrickje Stoffels is sure to please.

Vishandel Leen Parlevliet (rolls from €3, meals from €6; ☎ 10am-7pm) Next to the Hoofdtoren at the harbour, this small glass pod sells wonderful seafood rolls and bigger seafood meals. Munch

and admire the graceful tall ships moored at the docks.

Open-air markets are held on Wednesday (June to August) and Saturday (year round) along Breed.

Shopping

Delikaas (☎ 21 03 52; Breed 38) This specialist vendor in an ornate colonial-style building is an excellent place to buy cheese, freshly roasted nuts, dried meats and wine.

Getting There & Around

Regular train services to/from Hoorn include the following:

| Destination | Price (€) | Duration (min) | Frequency (per hr) |
|-------------|-----------|----------------|--------------------|
| Alkmaar | 4.30 | 25 | 2 |
| Amsterdam | 6.80 | 40 | 2 |
| Enkhuizen | 3.40 | 22 | 2-4 |

The bus station is right outside Hoorn train station. Connexxion bus 135 goes twice hourly to Den Helder (a one-hour ride) and Leeuwarden (two hours, change buses at Den Oever). Connexxion bus 114 serves Edam (30 minutes, twice hourly).

Hire your two-wheelers at the **bicycle shop** (☎ 21 70 96) at Hoorn train station.

ENKUIZEN

☎ 0228 / pop 17,000

Enkhuizen may be a small, quaint town in the present day but during the Golden Age its strategic harbour sheltered the Dutch merchant fleet. It slipped into relative obscurity in the late 17th century but now possesses one of the largest fleets on the IJsselmeer – of recreational vessels. For most tourists however Enkhuizen's biggest drawcard is the Zuiderzeemuseum, one of the country's finest.

Orientation

The train station is a terminus on the line to Amsterdam and stands on the southern edge of town. The yacht-filled Buitenhaven (Outer Harbour) and the narrower Oude Haven (Old Harbour) bisect the town east to west; canals ring the old centre. Dijk is the main café-and-restaurant strip, on the northern bank of Oude Haven. About 200m further north, the long, pedestrianised Westerstraat runs parallel and is lined with impressive historic buildings.

Information

Library (☎ 31 24 92; Kwakespad 3; internet per hr €3; ☎ 1.30-9pm Mon & Fri, 1.30-5.30pm Tue-Wed, 10am-noon Thu & Sat) About 500m west along Westerstraat – turn right into the canalside road Kwakespad.

Tourist office (☎ 31 31 64; www.vvvenkhuizen.nl; Tussen Twee Havens 1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, closed Sat Nov-Mar) Just east of the train station; sells ferry tickets in summer and a self-guided tour booklet in English (€1.50).

Sights & Activities

Moving east along Westerstraat you'll spy the remarkable **Westerkerk**, a 15th-century Gothic church with a removable wooden belfry. The ornate choir screen and imposing pulpit are worth a look. Opposite the church is the **Weeshuis**, a 17th-century orphanage with a sugary, curlicued portal.

At the other end of Westerstraat stands the 16th-century **Waag** (weigh-house) on the old cheese market, and nearby the classical **town hall**, modelled after the Amsterdam town hall that once stood on the Dam. You can peek through the windows at the lavish Gobelins and tapestries, but it's closed to the public.

Between the Buitenhaven and the Oude Haven, the **Drommedaris** was built as a defence tower as part of the 16th-century town walls. Once a formidable prison, it now serves as an elevated meeting hall. Its clock-tower carillon still tinkles a playful tune on the hour.

The old harbour is chock-a-block with polished schooners, smacks and *tjalks* of a slower era, some of which are available for hire (p287). More modest skippers can hire kayaks, canoes and electric boats at **De Waterspiegel** (☎ 31 74 56; www.dewaterspiegel.com; Olifantsteiger 3; kayaks/canoes/electric boats per hr €5/7/15), mainly for use on the inner canals.

ZUIDERZEEMUSEUM

This very impressive **museum** (☎ 35 11 11; www.zuiderzeemuseum.nl; Buiten & Binnen museums adult/child €11.50/9; Binnenmuseum only €7/6.50, parking €5; ☎ 10am-5pm, Buitenmuseum only Apr-Oct) consists of two parts: the open-air or Buitenmuseum with 130-odd rebuilt dwellings and workshops, and an indoor Binnenmuseum devoted to farming, fishing and shipping. The two parts lie about 300m from each other, but to relieve congestion visitors are encouraged to leave their vehicles at a car park at the edge of town. A ferry (fare included in your ticket) then takes you across the bay to the outdoor

displays. Plan a half-day for an unhurried visit to both sections.

The Buitenmuseum is captivating. Opened in 1983, it was carefully assembled from houses, farms and sheds trucked in from around the region to show Zuiderzee life as it was from 1880 to 1932. Every conceivable detail has been thought of, from the fence-top decorations and choice of shrubbery to the entire layout of villages, and the look and feel is certainly authentic. An illustrated guide (in English), included in the ticket price, is an essential companion on your tour of the entire museum.

Inhabitants wear traditional dress, and there are real shops such as a bakery, a chemist and a sweet shop. Workshops run demonstrations throughout the day. Though varying in character, the displays join seamlessly: lime kilns from Akersloot stand a few metres from Zuidende and its row of Monnickendam houses, originally built outside the dykes. Don't miss the **Urk quarter**, raised to simulate the island town before the Noordoostpolder was drained. For a special postmark, drop your letters at the old post office from Den Oever. The **Marker Haven** is a copy of the harbour built in 1830 on what was then the island of Marken.

Exit at the rear and walk 300m to reach the Binnenmuseum, which occupies a museum complex adjoining the **Peperhuis**, the former home and warehouse of a Dutch shipping merchant. The displays include a fine shipping hall: paintings, prints and other materials relating the rise and fall of the fishing industry, and the construction of the dykes. Here too are cultural artefacts such as regional costumes, porcelain, silver, and jewellery that indicate the extent of Holland's riches at the time.

Sleeping

The tourist office has a list of private rooms from about €18.

Hotel Gami Recuerdos (☎ 56 24 69; www.recuerdos.nl; Westerstraat 217; s/d €60/85) Owned by a warm and welcoming music society patron, this stately manor house is the picture of calm, with three immaculate rooms overlooking a manicured garden. The atmosphere is so friendly even the neighbours chime in with a greeting.

Het Wapen van Enkhuizen (☎ 31 34 34; wapen.vanenkhuizen@wanadoo.nl; Breedstraat 59; r €65-79) Close to the Zuiderzeemuseum and harbour is this small hotel, with comfy rooms, a quiet location, and a restaurant on the ground floor.

Appartement Hotel Driebanen (☎ 31 61 81; www.hoteldriebanen.com; Driebanen 59; s/d from €65/85) Driebanen is a tranquil canalside guesthouse with an old-fashioned look and feel to it, right down to the host who is big on personal welcomes, and is a goldmine of local information. Rooms are cheerful and bright.

Camping Enkhuizer Zand (☎ 31 72 89; www.campingenenkhuizerzand.nl; Kooizandweg 4; camp sites €21.50; ☎ Apr-Sep) Next to the Zuiderzeemuseum, this popular site is a model of self-sufficiency with an indoor pool, sandy beaches, tennis courts and grocery.

Eating

De Brasserie (☎ 32 28 58; Westerstraat 164; light meals €8-10; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun) With its own turret, roof-top terrace overlooking a quiet canal, and pavement seating, this chilled teahouse is an excellent choice for coffee and cake in the warmer months. When it's cold, take a pew indoors by a window and watch the Dutch ignore the weather.

Restaurant De Boei (☎ 31 42 80; Havenweg 5; mains around €20; ☎ lunch & dinner Mar-Oct) Occupying a peaceful corner near the harbour, De Boei is a place to head for superfluous amounts of food, but in this case quantity equals quality. Fish of course is a good option in these parts.

Restaurant de Drie Haringhe (☎ 31 86 10; Dijk 28; mains €21-25; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Tue) This upmarket locale excels in Dutch and French-inspired cuisine, and has been receiving rave reviews for years. Though next to a main street, the walled garden is an oasis of calm at mealtimes.

Dikke Milk (☎ 31 64 04; HJ Schimmelstraat 10; mains €10-16; ☎ lunch & dinner) In warm weather the quay fills with aromas of spare ribs, mixed grill, Mexican chicken and a fish stew that'll stick to your ribs; in winter the clientele holes up in the cosy *eetcafé*.

Getting There & Away

Regular train services to/from Enkhuizen:

| Destination | Price (€) | Duration (min) | Frequency (per hr) |
|-------------|-----------|----------------|--------------------|
| Alkmaar | 6.70 | 52 | 2 |
| Amsterdam | 9.30 | 60 | 2-4 |
| Den Helder | 10.50 | 90 | 2 |
| Hoorn | 3.40 | 22 | 2-4 |

Den Helder connections mean a train change at both Hoorn and Heerhugowaard, which is

inconvenient but the fastest option for public transport. The bus station behind Enkhuizen train station serves mainly local destinations. Of the few useful bus links, 150 goes five times daily to Lelystad (35 minutes).

Up to three ferries daily from April to September (and on weekends in October) link Enkhuizen-Spoorhaven to Urk (adult single/return €8/12, child single/return €7/9, 1½ hours), Stavoren (adult €8.50/11.50, child €5/6.70, 1¼ hours) and Medemblik (adult €8.50/11.50, child €5/6.70, 1¼ hours).

DYKE ROAD

The N302 between Enkhuizen and Lelystad deserves a special mention because it runs along a 32km-long dyke, completed in 1976 as the first step of the reclamation of the Markerwaard (p175). As you get under way you'll pass below a high-tech causeway that connects Enkhuizen harbour with the IJsselmeer, with ships floating surreally over the motorway.

Sights are few along the route, apart from the boats bobbing on the IJsselmeer and a stone monument at the halfway mark in the form of a chain link symbolising the joining of West Friesland with Flevoland.

MEDEMBLIK

☎ 0227 / pop 7900

About 12km northwest of Enkhuizen lies Medemblik, the oldest port on the IJsselmeer, dating back to the 12th century. It's not a pretty town but its busy harbour and medieval fortress are worth a few hours of your time.

Orientation & Information

The castle stands on the eastern side and is signposted from the harbour. The richly decorated façades on Kaasmarkt, Torenstraat, Nieuwstraat and along the Achterom canal are impressive. The old town is only 1km across and thus quickly absorbed.

Tourist office (☎ 54 28 52; www.vvv-medemblik.nl; Kaasmarkt 1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) A folksy all-in-one place, with a good stock of maps at the back of the local stationers. Will book accommodation for a €2.50 fee.

Sights & Activities

The rather twee **Kasteel Radboud** (☎ 54 19 60; adult/child €3/2; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 2-5pm Sat) at the head of the harbour looks for all the world like a well-fortified mansion rather than the castle it's purported to be. Built by Count Floris V in the 13th century to keep the feisty

natives under his thumb, the fortress served as a prison before a 19th-century restoration by Pierre Cuypers, the designer of Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum. The original floor plan has been preserved and the imposing **Ridderzaal** (Knights' Hall) still looks much as it did in the Middle Ages. The self-guided tour gives details of the castle's long history and the count's undoing.

Ever wondered what drove the industrial revolution? Part of the answer lies at the **Stoommachine Museum** (Steam Engine Museum; ☎ 54 47 32; Oosterdijk 4; adult/child €4.80/2.40; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Feb-Oct), in the old pump station outside Medemblik. Thirty handsome old steam engines from Holland, England and Germany are fired up for demonstrations in summer months, and kids can stoke small coal-fired models on Wednesdays and weekends.

The **Museum Stoomtram** (p162) departs from the old train station where there's a small display of railway artefacts (free).

Sleeping & Eating

The tourist office has a list of private rooms from €20 to €25 per person, although you're better off making Medemblik a day trip.

Hotel Medemblik (☎ 54 38 44; www.hetwapen.vanmedemblik.nl; Oosterhaven 1; s/d from €65/90) Directly opposite the tourist office on one of the town's harbour canals is this slightly dated hotel with friendly staff and adequate rooms. The attached restaurant is one of its best features.

De Driemaster (☎ 54 30 20; Pekelharinghaven 49; mains €12-24; ☎ lunch & dinner) Ahh – lovely views of the harbour and IJsselmeer as you relish a braised turbot or launch into a filled croissant. The best spots are canalside for watching the big pleasure boats drift under the drawbridge.

Getting There & Around

The nearest real train station is in Hoorn, from where bus 39 (twice hourly) makes the hour journey to Medemblik. A ferry links Medemblik with Enkhuizen-Spoorhaven (p165).

Ted de Lange (☎ 57 00 93; Vooreiland 1) on the eastern side of town has a huge selection of bicycles for hire.

DEN HELDER

☎ 0223

Before you reach Texel, the only attraction in the unspectacular naval town of Den Helder is the **Marine Museum** (☎ 65 75 34; Hoofdgracht 3;

adult/child €4.50/3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun). It's housed in a suitable town in a suitable spot, the former armoury of the Dutch Royal Navy. The display covers naval history mainly after 1815, the year the Netherlands became a kingdom. You can run rampant through several vessels moored on the docks outside, including an ironclad ram ship and a submarine left high and dry (not for the claustrophobic). Note that parents will tire long before their progenies.

See p170 for information on trains to Den Helder. Bus 135 (one hour, hourly) is an alternative to changing trains to reach Hoorn.

TEXEL

☎ 0222 / pop 13,450

About 3km north of the coast of Noord Holland lies Texel (pronounced *tes-sel*), the largest and most visited of the Wadden Islands. It's a remarkably diverse place, with broad white beaches, lush nature reserves, forests and picture-book villages. Now 25km long and 9km wide, it actually consisted of two islands until 1835 when a spit of land to Eyerland Island was pumped dry.

Before the Noordzeekanaal opened in the 19th century, Texel was a main stop for ships en route to Asia, Africa and North America: the first trade mission to the East Indies began and ended here. It was also the scene of a spectacular maritime disaster: on Christmas Day 1593, hurricane-force winds battered a merchant fleet moored off the coast and 44 vessels sank, drowning about a thousand seamen.

Texel relies chiefly on tourism, with the majority of visitors being either Dutch or German. The local wool is highly prized and there are sheep everywhere, lazing, grazing or tippee-toeing along the dykes.

Orientation

Ferries from the mainland dock at 't Horntje on the south side of the isle, from where buses head north to Texel's six main villages. Den Burg, 6km north of 't Horntje, is the island's modest capital and home to the tourist office, while De Koog, another 5km north again, is Texel's tourist mecca with a distinctly tacky streak.

Den Hoorn, only 5km northwest of the ferry terminal, is handy to tulip fields and windswept sand dunes, and Oudeschild, 7km northeast of 't Horntje, has the best harbour facilities on the island. Oosterend, 6km north-

east of Den Burg, is a quiet hamlet with distinctive architecture far from the beaches.

Tiny De Cocksdorp, at the northern end of the island, is a launch pad to the island of Vlieland (p239).

Information

Two handy booklets – *Texel in a Alikruuk* (nutshell) and *Travel Guide Texel* – have accommodation and activity listings, and are available from the tourist office.

ABN-Amro (Parkstraat 20, Den Burg) It's 50m east of the imposing Hervormde Kerk (Dutch Reform Church), and has an ATM. Other banks can be found in De Koog and De Cocksdorp.

Tourist office (☎ 31 47 41; www.texel.net; Emmalaan 66, Den Burg; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) Signposted from the ferry terminal; on the southern fringe of town. Has free internet access, plenty of information, and staff book accommodation for a fee.

Sights

DUINEN VAN TEXEL NATIONAL PARK

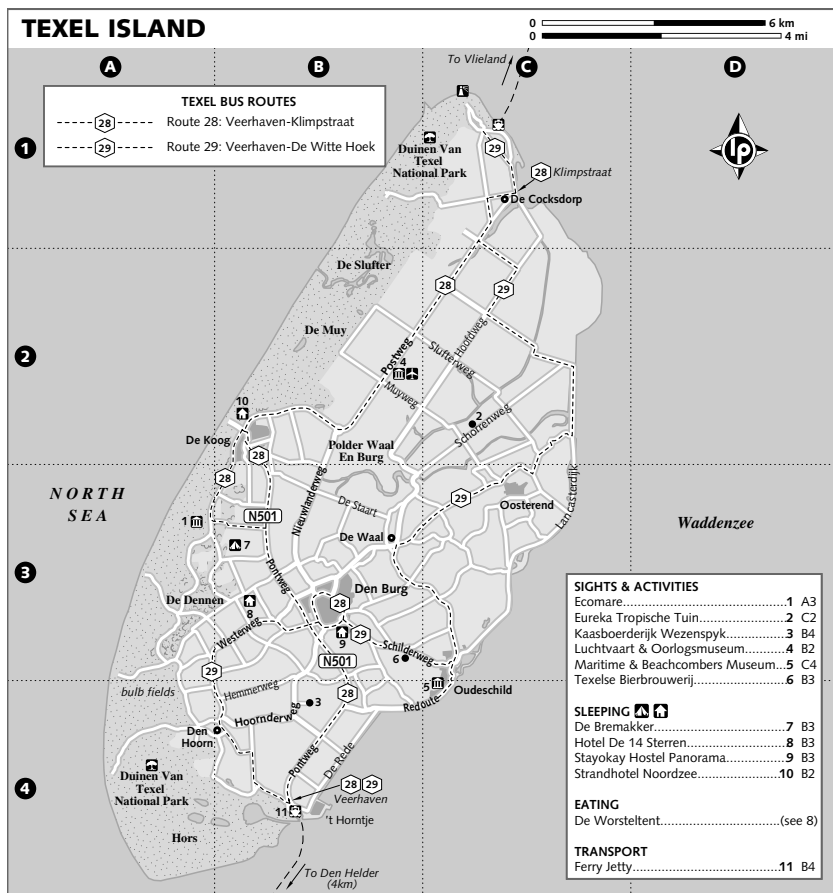
For many nature lovers this patchwork of varied dunescape running along the entire western coast of the island is the prime reason for visiting Texel. Salt fens and heath alternate with velvety, grass-covered dunes, and you'll find plants endemic to this habitat, such as the dainty marsh orchid or sea buckthorn, a ragged shrub with bright orange berries. Much of the area is bird sanctuary and accessible only on foot.

De Slufter became a brackish wetland after an attempt at land reclamation failed; when a storm breached the dykes in the early 1900s the area was allowed to flood and a unique ecosystem developed. To the south, **De Muy** is renowned for its colony of spoonbills that are monitored with great zeal by local naturalists.

Only a stone's throw from the windswept beach lies the dark, leafy forest of **De Dennen** between Den Hoorn and De Koog. Originally planted as a source of lumber, today it has an enchanting network of walking and biking paths. In springtime the forest floor is carpeted with snowdrops that were first planted here in the 1930s.

ECOMARE

Initially a refuge for sick seals retrieved from the Waddenzee, **Ecomare** (☎ 31 77 41; www.ecomare.nl; Ruyslaan 92, De Koog; adult/child €7.75/4.75; ☎ 9am-5pm) has expanded into a nature centre devoted to the preservation and understanding



of Texel's wildlife. Contained within its walls are displays on Texel's development since the last ice age, islander's interaction with the sea, large aquariums filled with fish from the Wadden and North Seas (including sharks and seaskates), and a national park exposé.

The highlight for young and old, however, is the seals themselves; their playful water ballet lacking in any apparent effort will delight all but the most jaded visitor. Try to catch a feeding at 11am or 3pm. Rescued birds are the other main tenants.

MUSEUMS

Of the six museums on the island, which are covered by the **Texel Museum Combination Card** (adult/child €15/8.50) available from the tourist of-

fice, the **Maritime & Beachcombers Museum** (☎ 31 49 56; Barentsstraat 21, Oudeschild; adult/child €4.50/3.25; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) will interest most visitors. Its extraordinary variety of junk recovered from sunken ships is mind-boggling – it's a bit like perusing flotsam from the *Titanic*. In the outdoor section there are demonstrations by rope-makers, fish-smokers and blacksmiths, while the indoor displays cover everything from underwater archaeology to windmill technology.

Next to the airfield, the **Luchtvaart & Oorlogsmuseum** (Aviation Museum; ☎ 31 16 89; adult/child €3/1.85; ☎ Tue-Sun 11am-5pm Easter-Oct) revisits the glory days of the island's pint-sized squadron. Artefacts include old aircraft or bits thereof, such as the cockpit of a 1913 Fokker

OTHER SIGHTS

June is the time to see wild orchids on Texel – a rarity in the country; outside this month, dress lightly and head for the steamy **Eureka Tropische Tuin** (☎ 31 83 64; Schorrenweg 20, Oosterend; adult/child €3.50/2.50; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat). A number of native orchid species can be viewed in all their tender, quivering glory alongside exotic specimens, and a menagerie of tropical birds fill the greenhouse with their colourful plumes.

The isle's only brewery, the **Texelse Bierbrouwerij** (☎ 31 32 29; www.speciaalbirer.nl; Schilderweg 214b, Oudeschild; adult/child €6/2.50; ☎ 1.30-6pm Wed & Sat) divulges the secrets of its suds including its tasty *Speciaalbirer*. The former dairy on the property has a terrace ideal for downing a few.

Kaasboerderijk Wezenspyk (☎ 31 50 90; Hoondernweg 29), a small cheese farm between Den Hoorn and Den Burg, is the place to scoop up tasty rounds produced from the local cows, sheep and goats.

Activities

Swimming, cycling, walking, boating, relaxing; Texel is an island to enjoy all these. Its pristinely white **beaches**, lining the northwestern shore, are numbered and marked (with a *paal*, or piling) from south to north. Lifeguards are on duty from No 9 southeast of Den Hoorn to No 21 near De Koog in summer. There are two nudist beaches, at No 9 and at No 27 in the north. Swimming is prohibited between Nos 31 and 33 near the lighthouse at De Cocksdorp due to treacherous riptides.

The tourist office sells a useful booklet (in Dutch; €2.50) of **cycle routes** and **hiking trails** that crisscross the island, as well as **horse riding** schools which operate between April and October. The well-marked 80km-long 'Texel Path' takes you through the dunes and over the mud flats before veering inland through the island's villages; the circular local routes along the way make for nice one- to three-hour hikes or bike trips.

Boat trips (leaving from Oudeschild) are conducted by shrimp trawlers such as the **Emmie TX 10** (☎ 31 36 39; Oudeschild; adult/child €8/7; ☎ 10.30am & 2pm Mon-Sat). The two-hour trip around the island sails close to an endangered seal colony on the sandbanks. Some shrimp caught on the journey are prepared fresh for passengers. Try your luck or book at the tourist office or directly by phone. Other boats such as **Rival** (☎ 31 34 10; anglers/observers €15/7.50)

do outings for sports fishermen, complete with fishing equipment. If there's a late tide, some boats also go out at around 4.30pm.

Catamarans can be hired from **De Eilandier** (☎ 0620634413; www.deeilandier.nl; Paal 33, De Cocksdorp; catamaran hire for 5hr €112.50; ☎ May-Oct) near the Vlieland boat dock. You can board as a passenger for €27.50 per hour – recommended for novices when the North Sea is rough (ie most of the time). Five-hour sailing courses cost €135.

To gather your own beach treasure, board a horse-drawn wagon run by **Jutters Plezier** (☎ 31 62 25; De Cocksdorp; adult/child €7.50/4.25). The 1½-hour trips are more for the journey than the treasure really, and end at the owner's private lair for a round of herbal schnapps. Tours (minimum 15 persons) depart from the lighthouse – check with the tourist office for times.

Tessel Air (☎ 31 14 36; www.paracentrumtexel.nl; Texel Airport) offers pleasure flights over Texel from €30 per person (15-minute flight, minimum two persons), and for a bit more cash they'll explore the other Wadden Islands. To really feel the wind in your face, try a tandem jump (€190 per jump); it includes all the thrill of freefall without the fear of screwing things up.

Festivals & Events

Lammetjes Wandeltrocht (Lamb Walking Route; Easter) Popular walk around the island, attracting plenty of mainland Dutch.

Ronde om Texel (www.roundtexel.com; mid-Jun) The largest catamaran race in the world; spectators line the beaches for hours on end watching boats jive back and forth on the sea.

Sleeping

There are an astounding 46,000 beds on the island, but surprisingly it pays to book ahead, especially in July and August. De Koog has by far the most options, but hamlets such as Den Hoorn or De Cocksdorp are more peaceful and relaxing.

The tourist office has a list of B&Bs from around €25 per person per night; otherwise pick up a copy of *Travel Guide Texel* and strike out on your own. Note that prices drop in the low season (October to April) when island life slips into a lower gear. Texel's 11 main camp sites teem in summer; the tourist office can tell you which ones have vacancies. Many farms also offer rooms and camp sites.

Hotel De 14 Sterren (☎ 32 26 81; www.14sterren.nl; Smitsweg 4, Den Burg; s/d €55/110; ☎) You couldn't

wish for a nicer spot than this place, on the edge of De Dennen forest. Each of its 14 rooms is decorated in warm Mediterranean hues, and most have a terrace or balcony with garden views.

t Anker (☎ 31 62 74; t-anker@texel.com; Kikkertstraat 24, De Cocksdorp; d €45) This small, family-run hotel is full of charm and cheer, and has basic yet comfy rooms in quiet De Cocksdorp. Its lush garden is just an appetiser for the Roggesloot nature reserve close by.

Bij Jef (☎ 31 96 23; www.bijjef.nl; Herenstraat 34, Den Hoorn; s/d €72.50/90) The simple yet stylish red rooms here come with a bath tub, well-stocked mini bar, views of the countryside, and a sun drenched balcony (when the sun's out).

Strandhotel Noordzee (☎ 31 73 65; webmaster@noordzee.nu; Badweg 200; s/d €80/125) This newly built establishment is possibly the only hotel directly on Texel's sandy beaches. Its rooms are fairly standard and lack flair, but they're suitably comfy and the view of the North Sea uninterrupted. There's a restaurant on site and a two-night minimum stay policy.

Stayokay Hostel Panorama (☎ 31 54 41; www.stayokay.com; Haffelderweg 28, Den Burg; dm €25, d €65; ☒) Texel's HI hostel was in the process of moving to the edge of Den Burg at the time of research, but expect to find a brand-spanking new establishment with clean, colourful rooms and a restaurant when it reopens.

Loodman's Welvaren (☎ 31 92 28; www.welvaart.texel.nl; Herenstraat 12, Den Hoorn; s/d/ste from €66/83/105) Rooms in this renovated skipper's inn are cheery and spacious with mod cons like mini-bar, phone and TV, and the plush top-floor suite affords a wonderful feeling of privacy. The owner could be a little friendlier, however.

De Bremakker (☎ 31 28 63; www.bremakker.nl; Tempelierweg 40; camp site €26.50, chalets from €130; ☒ Apr-Oct) This leafy campground is situated between Den Burg and De Koog at the forest's edge, about 1km from the beach. There's a laundry and snack bar, plus sports facilities and almost always an abundance of calm. Its chalets are in excellent condition and sleep up to four persons.

Eating

With over 27,000 sheep roaming the island, lamb naturally gets top billing, but seafood comes a close second.

Vispaleis-Rokerij De Ster (☎ 31 24 41; Heemskerckstraat 13, Oudeschild; snacks €3-6, mains €5-8; ☒ lunch & dinner) There are plenty of fish takeaway joints,

but this is arguably the island's top pick – it cures its own catch behind the harbour dam. Plonk down at a plastic table for an eel or herring sandwich, or its trademark fish soup.

Freya (☎ 32 16 86; Gravenstraat 4, Den Burg; set menu €23.50; ☒ dinner Tue-Sat) This petite restaurant has a reputation for outstanding French and Dutch cuisine, so it's no surprise that reservations are highly recommended. The hosts are warm and welcoming, and while the place bubbles with energy, it has a decidedly romantic air.

Taveerne De Twaalf Balken (☎ 31 26 81; Weverstraat 20, Den Burg; mains €12-20; ☒ lunch & dinner) The 'Tavern of the 12 Beams' is a locals' haunt that specialises in lamb dishes and cosy ambience. The front section is dark and subdued, perfect for sipping away on one of the many Trappist beers on offer, while the back conservatory is bright and warm, and topped off with a kids' corner.

Rôtisserie Kerckplein (☎ 31 89 50; Oesterstraat 6, Oosterend; mains €25-35; ☒ dinner Wed-Sun) This cosy Texel-French restaurant has definitely got lamb down to a fine art, with seven choices in this category alone. You can sit in the loft and wash it all down with a dark *Texels Speciaalbier*. In high season it also opens at lunchtime.

Also recommended:

De Worstelent (☎ 32 26 81; www.14sterren.nl; Smitsweg 4, Den Burg; mains €15-20, ☒ lunch & dinner) The barnhouse restaurant attached to the Hotel de 14 Sterren is a top option for lunch and/or dinner, with an extensive wine list alongside steak, fish and vegetarian dishes.

Bij Jef (☎ 31 96 23; www.bijjef.nl; Herenstraat 34, Den Hoorn; mains around €20; ☒ lunch & dinner) Sumptuous French-influenced cuisine.

Getting There & Away

Trains from Amsterdam to Den Helder (€12, one hour, twice hourly) are met by a bus that whisks you to the awaiting car ferry.

Teso (☎ 36 96 00; www.teso.nl; adult/child/car return €3/1.50/35) runs a ferry service from Den Helder to 't Horntje. The crossing takes 20 minutes and leaves at 30 minutes past the hour from 6.30am to 9.30pm; returning boats leave on the hour between 6am to 9pm. On some summer days there's a service every half-hour – check the timetable to be sure. If you're driving in high season, show up at the docks 15 to 30 minutes before departure as there'll be a queue. Fares for motorcycles and cars are 30% cheaper from Tuesday to Thursday.

Ferry **De Vriendschap** (☎ 31 64 51; www.waddenveer.nl; De Cocksdorp; adult/child return €20/13.50) makes the half-hour crossing from De Cocksdorp to car-free Vlieland (p239), the nearest of the Wadden Islands, at 10.45am on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday May to September. In July and August it departs daily, and an extra ferry sails at 9.30am. It returns from Vlieland at 5.15pm, and also 4pm July to August.

Getting Around

Connexion/AOT (☎ 09009292; ☒ 7am-10pm) operates two bus routes on the island throughout the year, and supplements this with another over the summer months; day passes cost €4.50 from the bus driver. Bus 28 links 't Horntje with Den Burg (seven minutes) and De Koog (another 15 minutes) before returning via the Ecomare museum, while bus 29 starts at the ferry jetty and goes to Den Hoorn and Den Burg before snaking its way along the eastern shore to De Cocksdorp via Oudeschild and Oosterend. The summer-only bus 230 zigzags all over the island, taking in Oudeschild, Den Burg, Ecomare and De Koog before finishing up in De Cocksdorp.

The welter of bicycle shops include **Zegel** (☎ 31 21 50; Parkstraat 14, Den Burg), which charges €4/16 for touring bikes per day/week and €6/22.50 for three-speeds. Near the ferry terminal, **Verhuur Heijne** (☎ 31 95 88; Pontweg 2, 't Horntje) charges similar rates.

The **Telekom Taxi** (☎ 32 22 11) takes you between the ferry terminal and any destination on the island for €5 per person. Book at least an hour in advance, or buy a ticket at the Teso counter in Den Helder ferry terminal; taxis wait by the ferry jetty in 't Horntje.

AALSMEER

☎ 0297

A few kilometres southwest of the capital – and not far from the world's largest tulip garden (p195) – in the town of Aalsmeer is the world's biggest **flower auction** (☎ 39 21 85; www.aalsmeer.com; Legmeerdijk 313; adult/child €4.50/2.50; ☒ 7-11am Mon-Fri). On average, 21 million flowers and plants, worth around €6 million, change hands in the period of a day; the romantic rose is the biggest seller by far, surprisingly outselling its nearest competitor, the tulip, almost three to one. The action itself takes place in a staggering arena; at one million square metres in size, it's the largest commercial building in the world.

Bidding usually takes place between 7am and 9.30am, so get there early to catch the spectacle from the viewing gallery. Selling is conducted – surprise! – by Dutch auction, with a huge clock showing the starting price, dropping until someone takes up the offer. There's a self-guided tour of the site with audio boxes at strategic points. Pick your days carefully: Mondays are quiet and Thursdays very, very busy.

Take Connexion bus 172 from Amsterdam Centraal Station to the Aalsmeer VBA stop (50 minutes, five times hourly).

MUIDEN

☎ 0294 / pop 3400

Only an hour's bike ride southeast of Amsterdam, Muiden is an unhurried historical town renowned for its red-brick castle, the Muiderslot. Life otherwise focuses on the central lock that funnels scores of pleasure boats out into the vast IJsselmeer.

Sights

The town's dominating feature is the **Muiderslot** (Muiden Castle; ☎ 26 13 25; www.muiderslot.nl; Herengracht 1; adult/child €7/5; ☒ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, noon-6pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), a fortress built in 1280 by the ambitious count Floris V, son of Willem II. The castle was one of the first in Holland to be equipped with round towers, a French innovation. The popular Floris was also a champion of the poor and French sympathiser, two factors which were bound to spell trouble; the count was imprisoned in 1296 and murdered while trying to flee.

In the 17th century, historian PC Hooft entertained some of the century's greatest writers, artists and scientists here, a group famously known as the Muiderkring (Muiden Circle). Today it's the most visited castle in the country, with precious furnishings, weapons, and Gobelin hangings designed to re-create Hooft's era. The interior can be seen only on guided tours; tours may be partly improvised in English. Reserve ahead if you want an English-only tour.

Off the coast lies a derelict fort on the island of **Pampus** (☎ 26 23 26; www.pampus.nl; adult/child ferry & guided tour €12/8; ☒ Apr-Oct). This massive 19th-century bunker was a key member of a ring of 42 fortresses built to defend Amsterdam. Rescued from disrepair by Unesco, the facility now receives preservation funds as a World

Heritage site. Ferries to Pampus depart from Muiderslot port at 10.30am, 12.30pm and 2.30pm.

Activities

You won't find a better area on the IJsselmeer for boating and windsurfing. Boat firms at Muiden harbour rent large, often luxurious motor and sailing boats from about €300 to €1300 per week. For smaller craft, the **Water-sportcentrum Muiderberg** (☎ 06-223 75489; www.wscmuiderberg.com; ☹ Apr–mid-Oct) rents small sail-boats for two to four persons (from €35 per day) as well as windsurf boards and canoes (€5 to €10 per hour) in Muiderberg, 3½km from Muiden. The shop isn't signposted, but seek out the green beach hut and ask for Ben or Jeroen.

Eating & Drinking

Brasserie Muiden (☎ 26 45 07; Herengracht 75; mains €15-20; ☹ lunch & dinner) This centrally located eatery is a step up from most, with a polished interior and outdoor canal-side seating. The menu heavily features seafood, but the likes of ribs and steaks are never very far away.

Café Ome Ko (☎ 0294-261 330; cnr Herengracht & Naardenstraat; ☹ 8am-2am) In warm weather the clientele of this little bar turns the street outside into one big party. When's there's no party on, the café is a perfect spot to watch the comings and goings through the busy lock right outside.

Getting There & Away

Connexxion bus 157 links Muiden with Amsterdam's Amstelstation (20 minutes, twice hourly). Bus 110 links the town with Weesp (15 minutes), Muiderberg (five minutes) and Naarden (15 minutes).

HET GOOI

Along the slow-moving Vecht River southeast of Amsterdam lies Het Gooi, a shady woodland speckled with lakes and heath. In the 17th century, this 'Garden of Amsterdam' was a popular retreat for wealthy merchants, and nature-hungry urbanites still flock to its leafy trails to hike and cycle today. The area's main centre is Hilversum, a one-time commuter town given a fresh start by the Dutch broadcasting industry, which has its headquarters here. The area is roughly bordered by Laren, a well-heeled town a few kilometres to the northeast with a good art museum, Huizen

on the Gooimeer to the north, and Loosdrecht, on the artificial lakes known as the Loosdrechtse Plassen to the east. Huizen and Loosdrecht are popular water-sports centres, while Naarden, on the Gooimeer to the north, has an intriguing fortress.

Naarden

☎ 035 / pop 17,000

Naarden would be just another satellite town to the capital if it wasn't for the magical fortress on its northwest border. This work of art is best seen from the air: a 12-pointed star, with arrowheads at each tip. This defence system, one of the best preserved in the country, was unfortunately built only after the Spanish massacred the inhabitants in the 16th century. The bastions were still staffed by the Dutch army throughout the 1920s, although its strategic importance had already paled before WWI.

INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 694 28 36; www.vvwnaarden.nl; Adriaan Dortsmanplein 1B; ☹ 10am-2pm Sat, also 11am-3pm Tue-Fri May–early Jun, 11am-3pm Mon-Fri early Jun–early Sep) In the old barracks; has an English-language leaflet with a self-guided walking tour of the town and accommodation information.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Most of Naarden's quaint little houses date from 1572, the year the Spaniards razed the place during their colonisation of North Holland. The bloodbath led by Don Frederick of Toledo is commemorated by a stone tablet on the building at Turfpoortstraat 7.

The **Vestingmuseum** (Fortress Museum; ☎ 694 54 59; Westwalstraat 6; adult/child €5/3; ☹ 10.30am-5pm Tue-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun Mar-Oct, noon-5pm Sun Nov-Feb) is a star-shaped fortress thought to be the only one in Europe featuring a buffer of two walls and two moats. You can stroll around on the rolling battlements before descending into the casements for glimpses of a cramped soldier's life.

It's easy to spot the tall tower of the fort's central **Grote Kerk** (☎ 694 98 73; www.grotekerknaarden.nl; Marktstraat 13; admission free; ☹ 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sat, 2.30-4.30pm Sun-Mon), a Gothic basilica with stunning 16th-century vault paintings of biblical scenes. You can climb the tower (265 steps) for a good view of the leafy Gooi and the Vecht River. Organ concerts (admission €5) are held throughout the year.

The 17th-century Czech educational reformer, Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius), is buried here in the Waalse Kapel. His life and work are related next door at the **Comenius Museum** (☎ 694 30 45; Kloosterstraat 33; adult/child €2.50/1.50; ☹ noon-5pm Wed-Sun).

The tourist office also organises one-hour **boat tours** (€2) around the moat.

SLEEPING & EATING

Poorters (☎ 694 48 68; www.poorters.nl; Marktstraat 66; s/d €60/70) The sole hotel within the old town walls is splendidly renovated with four simple but atmospheric rooms (only one has private shower and toilet). There's a cosy bar, a restaurant (mains €8 to €18) with canal-side dining and regular art exhibitions.

Jachthaven (☎ 695 60 50; Onderwal 4; hut €32) There's no camp site or hostel close to Naarden, but you can book one of the basic *trekkershutten* (hikers' huts) for up to four people at this yacht harbour. They're in a corner of the marina near a leafy recreation area, with hundreds of boats to view and a restaurant on-site. Take bus 110 to Jachthaven (five minutes).

Naarden has a surprising number of top eateries for its size. Some of the better ones:

Beter Broodje (Marktstraat 25; snacks €2-5; ☹ lunch & dinner) Small, basic fast-food establishment favoured by locals and tourists alike for its quick service and satisfying seafood snacks.

Eetcafé 't Hert (☎ 694 80 55; Cattenhagestraat 12; mains €11-20; ☹ lunch & dinner) Pleasant pub-café with sunny garden tucked away in one of Naarden's backstreets. Sandwiches, salads and regional specialities served.

Het Arsenaal (☎ 694 91 48; Kooltjesbuurt 1; mains €22-30; ☹ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily) One of the region's strongholds of swank, specialising in French cuisine. The separate brasserie offers more pedestrian fare at lunchtime.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are two direct trains hourly between Amsterdam Centraal Station and Naarden-Bussum (€4.10, 20 minutes, twice hourly), and more if you change at Weesp. From the station, bus 110 (five minutes, twice hourly) runs to the fortress, otherwise it's a 20-minute walk. Bus 110 continues on to Muiden (15 minutes) and finally Weesp (30 minutes).

Hilversum

☎ 035 / pop 83,100

Hilversum, a quiet commuter town with a handful of quality museums, is a good launch-

ing pad for excursions into the leafy region of Het Gooi. However it's best known to the Dutch as the national broadcasting centre. Commentary from abroad is beamed back here rather than to Den Haag, the seat of the Dutch parliament, or to the nation's capital in Amsterdam – a quirk of Dutch history as the first radio station was founded in Hilversum

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The few attractions are in or near the pedestrianised centre, which is immediately west of the train station. Ringed by a street network defined by the old city walls, the centre of Hilversum measures about 1.5km across and is easy to navigate.

Library (☎ 621 29 42; 's Gravelandse Weg 55; ☹ 1-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat) A dozen internet terminals that you can use for free.

Tourist office (☎ 629 28 10; www.vvhilversum.nl; Kerkbrink 6; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Signposted from the train station; in the heart of town.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The centre of Hilversum may be marred by modern town planning, but the legacy of Willem Dudok, the architect who shaped the city in the early 20th century, is still plain for everyone to see. Nearly 100 buildings in Hilversum bear Dudok's stamp; the tourist office sells a walking guide to Dudok's buildings in the town.

The beautiful, modernist **Raadhuis** (Town Hall; Dudokpark 1), 700m west of the train station, is the epitome of Dudok's work. The fabulous interior, with its simple, elegant lines that recall Frank Lloyd Wright or the Bauhaus movement, is a must for any architecture fan. The tower, restored in 1996, is stunning in its symmetry and inventive arrangement of horizontal and vertical brick. Inside is the **Dudok Centrum** (☎ 629 2262; adult/child €2/free; ☹ noon-4.30pm Wed & Fri), which holds regular architecture exhibitions. Tours of both the Raadhuis and Dudok Centrum (adult/child €5/3) take place at 2pm on Sunday.

Directly above the tourist office is the **Museum Hilversum** (☎ 629 28 26; www.museumhilversum.nl; Kerkbrink 6; adult/child €4/2; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun), which is worth checking out if you plan to explore Het Gooi – 'Amsterdam's Back Garden'. Displays include archaeological finds from early Gooi-dwellers and the history of the region, including the town itself.

The **Nederlands Omroepmuseum** (Dutch Broadcast Museum; ☎ 677 34 34; Media Park, Sumatralaan 45) tells

the history of Dutch TV and radio going back to 1919. The first broadcasting licence was granted to a Hilversum station, and the Dutch broadcasting industry grew up around it. An interesting aspect is the background about the various political and religious groups now represented on the media landscape, a product of the social 'pillarisation' that moulded 20th-century Dutch life. At the time of research the museum was closed due to substantial renovations; check with the tourist office for up-to-date information.

The tourist office sells a huge range of cycling and hiking maps to the area, including the Wandelroutes and Fietsroutes in 't Gooien Omstreek (Hiking Routes and Biking Routes in 't Gooi and Surrounds). If you don't read Dutch, it's no problem as the routes are clearly marked. The cycling series covers 12 paths in the vicinity, all of which are well sign-posted, with distances of 35km to 70km.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel de Waag (☎ 624 65 17; www.dewaag.nl; Groest 17; s/d from €45/65) You probably won't spend the night in Hilversum, but if you do this is your best bet. It's a jolly café with an unusually good location in the centre and rooms in fairly good nick. The sidewalk often hums with activity in the early evenings.

Benk (☎ 623 33 61; Kerkrink 2; mains €14-19; ☎ lunch & dinner) Occupying a sunny corner of the main square is this modern bar-restaurant. Benk's simple lunch offerings (ie, sandwiches around €5) are a winner with office workers, and its more established dinner menu, heavily laden with meat and seafood, is a fine appetizer for the bar's cocktails.

Not far east of the centre is a conglomeration of three top restaurants, all with outdoor seating:

Zilt & Zo (☎ 628 14 93; Laanstraat 35a; set menu €30; ☎ dinner) International cuisine of the highest quality, complemented by a worldwide wine list.

De Jonghe Graef van Buuren (☎ 624 54 02; Laanstraat 37; mains around €14; ☎ dinner) Pub-eatery serving solid fare like deep-fried plaice with chips, but with plenty of care and attention.

Proeverij de Open Keuken (☎ 623 07 77; Laanstraat 31; mains around €15, tapas €4-8) Best visited for its generous choice of tapas and friendly service.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Direct train services to/from Hilversum include the following:

| Destination | Price (€) | Duration (min) | Frequency (per hr) |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|--------------------|
| Amsterdam | 4.90 | 26 | 1 |
| Naarden-Bussum | 1.70 | 5-8 | 6 |
| Utrecht | 3.40 | 20 | 4 |

Bus 107 goes from the train station to the Raadhuis and Dudok Centrum (five minutes).

Around Hilversum

In Laren, which is 5km northeast of Hilversum, the **Singer Museum** (☎ 539 39 39; www.singerlaren.nl; Oude Drift 1; adult/child €10/free; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun) houses a splendid collection of Dutch and foreign paintings, mostly modernist and impressionist works from 1880 to 1950. Not all works are displayed at once, with exhibitions changing several times a year. Take bus 109 from Hilversum train station to Laren Kermisterrein (20 minutes, four hourly).

FLEVOLAND

Flevoland, the Netherlands' 12th and youngest province, is a masterpiece of Dutch hydro-engineering. In the early 1920s, an ambitious scheme went ahead to reclaim more than 1400 sq km of land – an idea mooted as far back as the 17th century. The completion of the Afsluitdijk (opposite) paved the way for the creation of Flevoland. Ringed dykes were erected, allowing water to be pumped out at a snail-like pace. Once part of Overijssel province, the Noordoostpolder was inaugurated in 1942, followed by the Eastern Flevoland (1957) and Southern Flevoland (1968). First residential rights were granted to workers who'd helped in reclamation and to farmers, especially from Zeeland, who lost everything in the great flood of 1953.

The cities that sprang up bring to mind anything but the Golden Age. The main hubs – Almere, Lelystad and Emmeloord – are grindingly dull places, laid out in grid patterns for affordable housing. The star attractions are the Bataviawerf museum at Lelystad, old fishing villages such as Urk and Schokland, and the bird-filled nature reserve of Oostvaardersplassen.

LELYSTAD

☎ 0320 / pop 67,000

With unattractive modern architecture dominating its disjointed sprawl, Lelystad, the capital of Flevoland Province, is a good example

of urban planning gone awry. The main reason for visiting this expanse of steel and concrete is its three museums, which will keep parents and their hangers-on entertained for hours.

Orientation

Most shops and restaurants are in the pedestrianised knot of streets opposite the station; the key museums are a short bus ride west on the IJsselmeer shore. A smattering of tourist leaflets is available at the train station.

Sights

Lelystad's two big sights, the Batavia Museum and Nieuwland Poldermuseum, are next to Bataviastad, a mock fort containing an outlet shopping centre 3km west of the train station. A combined ticket to both costs €12/5.50 for adults/children, and bus F (10 minutes, four hourly) connects the museums with the train station.

Your first port of call should be the **Bataviawerf Museum** (☎ 26 14 09; Oostvaardersdijk 1-9; adult/child €9/4.50; ☎ 10am-5pm) and its star attraction: a replica of a 17th-century Dutch merchant

frigate, the *Batavia*, which took 10 years to reconstruct. The original was a 17th-century *Titanic* – big, expensive and supposedly unsinkable. True to comparison, the *Batavia*, filled to the brim with cannon and goods for the colonies, went down in 1629 on its maiden voyage off the west coast of Australia. The replica however redeemed its predecessor in 2000 by sailing around the Pacific.

There's ample evidence of the era's wealth on the upper decks, where you'll see carved wooden likenesses of merchant seamen and a gold-leaf lantern above the captain's quarters. Little imagination is required, however, to grasp how punishing a sailor's life could be, especially for those who broke the rules: stealing a loaf of bread might merit a month's confinement in a cramped hole so constructed that it was impossible to either sit or stand upright.

The wooden skeleton alongside belongs to the *Seven Provinces*, a replica of Admiral Michiel de Ruijter's massive flagship that's scheduled for completion in 2015. In a separate building on the northern perimeter, the

KEEPING THE RELENTLESS SEA AT BAY

The Netherlands' coastline originally extended as far as the sandy beaches of Texel (p167) and its Frisian Island companions (p238). The relentless sea, however, never seemed to be in agreement with such borders, and by the end of the 13th century storms had washed seawater over flimsy land barriers and pushed it far inland. The end result was the creation of the Zuiderzee (literally South Sea).

The ruling Dutch had for centuries dreamed of draining the Zuiderzee to reclaim the huge tracts of valuable farmland. The seafaring folk of the villages lining the sea were of a different opinion, even though the shallow Zuiderzee constantly flooded their homes and businesses, and often took lives with it. A solution needed to be found, and the only way to tame the waves, it seems, was to block them off.

A huge dyke was proposed as early as the mid-17th century, but it wasn't until the late 19th century, when new engineering techniques were developed, that such a dyke could become reality. Engineer Cornelis Lely, who lent his name to Lelystad, was the first to sketch out a retaining barrier; a major flood in 1916 set the plan in motion, and construction began in 1927. Fishermen worried about their livelihood, and fears that the Wadden Islands would vanish in the rising seas were voiced, and while the former concerns were legitimate, the latter proved unfounded.

In 1932 the Zuiderzee was ceremoniously sealed off by the Afsluitdijk (Barrier Dyke), an impressive dam (30km long and 90m wide) that links the provinces of Noord Holland and Friesland. The water level remained relatively steady, but the fishing industry was effectively killed as the basin gradually filled with fresh water from the river IJssel – the IJsselmeer was born. Vast tracts of land were however created, which were soon turned into arable *polders* (p48). A second barrier between Enkhuizen and Lelystad was completed in 1976 – creating the Markermeer – with the idea of ushering in the next phase of land reclamation, but the plan was shelved to protect the environment.

For more information on this vast human endeavour, spend some time at the Nieuwland Poldermuseum (p176) in Lelystad, which covers in detail the land reclamation.

Netherlands Institute for Maritime Archaeology displays the remains of a 2000-year-old Roman ship found near Utrecht.

Nearly half of the Netherlands was created by massive land reclamation, and **Nieuwland Poldermuseum** (☎ 26 07 99; Oostvaardersdijk 1-13; adult/child €7/3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 11.30am-5pm Sat & Sun, also 10am-5pm Mon Jul & Aug) is the definitive museum on the topic. It's a sure-fire winner with kids, who can build model bridges or dams, and navigate ships through their locks.

No expense has been spared for **Luchtvaart Themapark Aviodrome** (☎ 289 98 40; www.aviodrome.nl; Dakotaweg 11a; adult/child €13.50/11.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). This huge museum has 70 historic aircraft on display, including a replica of the Wright Brother's 1902 Flyer, Baron von Richthofen's WWI triplane, a Spitfire and a Dakota. You can also play air-traffic controller in a re-created flight tower or watch aviation films in the mega-cinema. It's at Lelystad Airport 4km east of town (bus 148 from the train station).

Sleeping & Eating

Lelystad is neither blessed with good hotels or great restaurants; you're better off visiting the town on a day trip. For a bite to eat while visiting the museums, pop next door to Bataviastad, which has a handful of so-so eateries.

Getting There & Away

Lelystad station is the terminus of trains coming from the south; services include Amsterdam (€8.30, 40 minutes, two hourly) and Utrecht (€10.90, 70 minutes, two hourly).

Flevoland has poor regional bus services. Bus 150 goes from Lelystad station to Enkhuisen via the IJsselmeer dyke road N302 (35 minutes, every two hours). Bus 143 goes east to Kampen in Overijssel (one hour, every half-hour). The Qliner bus 315 goes to Groningen (2¼ hours, hourly).

OOSTVAARDERSPLASSEN NATURE RESERVE

Between Lelystad and Almere lies the marshy realm of Oostvaardersplassen, a 6000-hectare reserve of mostly swampy lake that developed virtually by accident. When Flevoland province opened in 1968 this area was earmarked for an industrial estate, but the planners dawdled and nature stepped in. A virgin landscape of reeds, willows and rough grasslands emerged.

Today it's a bird sanctuary of international repute with a formidable variety of species. Great white egrets, cormorants and spoon-bills can be seen nesting, and lucky visitors may also catch a glimpse of endangered species such as the white-tailed eagle. Illustrated boards around the park help to identify what appears in your sights.

You'll also see quirky mammals such as the conic (a docile pony), the horned heck cattle as well as red deer, all of which serve as lawn mowers on the meadows around the perimeter.

Entry into the marsh itself isn't allowed, but the next best thing is a visit to De Kluut observation hut on the northeastern edge of the reserve. The various hiking and bicycle paths begin here, including a 35km route around the entire lake. The Schollevaar observation post near a cormorant colony can only be visited with a park ranger.

The **visitors centre** (☎ 0320-25 45 85; Kitsweg 1; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), which is currently enjoying a major facelift, has good wildlife exhibits, free hiking maps and vending machines for coffee and cold drinks. If you're looking to stay near the park, **Campground het Oppertje** (☎ 0320-25 36 93; Uilenweg 11, Lelystad; per adult/child/tent €4/2/3.50; ☎ Apr-Sep) is about as close as you're going to get. It's a calm, green waterside site blessed with a constant sea breeze, which is good for windsurfing (you can take lessons here) but not always great for pitching a tent. There is no public transport to the campground.

Getting There & Away

Public transport to the park is nonexistent. To get to the visitors centre by car from Amsterdam, drive the A6 north and take exit No 10 towards Lelystad on the N302 and take a left after 5km onto Buizardweg (also signposted 'Oostvaardersplassen').

URK

☎ 0527 / pop 16,500

This pious village was once a proud little island, home to a sizeable fishing fleet and an important signal post for ships passing into the North Sea. In the 1940s Urk reluctantly joined the mainland when the surrounding Noordoostpolder was pumped dry, and even today some locals pine for the isolation of island life, as tough as it obviously was.

Although now cut off from the North Sea, the town is still a centre of the seafood indus-

try, a holdover from the days when its fleet sailed into the open Zuiderzee. That sweet smell on the air comes from the several fish factories located here.

You'll see dozens of historic fishing boats moored around the harbour, including the brown-sailed *botters* with gleaming wooden hulls and oversized leeboards. At the western end of town, take the coastal walk around the lighthouse for a pinch of local folklore. Just 70m off the shore lies the **Ommelebommelestien**, a slippery rock said to be the birthplace of all native Urkers. Legend also has it that, far from receiving the delivery by stork, dad had to take a rowboat to pick up his newborn.

The supports of the village church, **Kerkje aan de Zee** (Peter Salebieplein), are made entirely out of masts of VOC (Dutch East India Company) ships that brought back exotic goods from the East Indies. Nearby you'll find the **Fishermen's Monument**, a lonely statue of a woman in a billowing dress gazing seaward where her loved ones were lost. Marble tablets around the perimeter list the Urk seafarers who never returned – name, age and ship's ID number – and room has been left for further casualties.

Just below the town's lighthouse is **Restaurant De Kaap** (☎ 68 15 09; www.restaurantdekaap.nl; Wijk 5; mains €10-15), the place to sample Urk specialties, such as smoked gurnard, while taking in gorgeous views of the harbour and IJsselmeer. The interior is richly decorated with maritime ornaments; the hotel rooms (singles/doubles €35/60) are comfy and quiet.

Bus 141 runs between Urk and Zwolle several times an hour (1¼ hours). On Sunday there's only a handful of buses, starting in the late afternoon.

SCHOKLAND

☎ 0527

A bleak variation on the island theme, the community of Schokland eked out an existence for hundreds of years on a long, narrow strip of land in the Zuiderzee. By the mid-19th century the clock had run out: fish prices plummeted and vicious storms were literally eroding the island away. The plucky locals hung on, despite the appalling living conditions, prompting Willem III to order their removal in 1859. Schokland was eventually swallowed up by the Noordoostpolder in the 20th century, just like Urk.

Now a Unesco World Heritage site, the **Schokland Museum** (☎ 25 13 96; www.schokland.nl; Middeldbuurt 3; adult/child €3.50/2.75; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, daily Jul & Aug, Fri-Sun Nov-Mar) affords glimpses into this tortured past. The island's heritage is described in detail with a good historical slide presentation in English. Views from the lower path hint just how big the waves were here, at the prow-shaped barrier constructed from tall wooden pilings. Ironically, since the area was drained the foundations have begun to dry out. Schokland is sinking but, luckily, no longer into the sea.

Be sure to stop by the church, the **Waterstaatkerk**, built to replace the one virtually washed away in the storm of 1825. Here, as in so many Dutch fishing towns, a model ship hangs high above the congregation – the symbol of a union between sea and religious belief.

There's no public transportation to the museum; you can ride a bike the 14km north from Kampen. Turn west off the N50 on the road at Ens and go another 2.5km.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'