



NETHERLANDS



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1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

Location: Northwest Europe.

Toerisme Recreatie Nederland (Netherlands Board of Tourism)
PO Box 458, 2260 MG Leidschendam, The Netherlands
Tel: (70) 370 5705. Fax: (70) 320 1654. E-mail: info@nbt.nl
Web site: <http://www.holland.com> or www.vvv.nl

Royal Netherlands Embassy
38 Hyde Park Gate, London SW7 5DP
Tel: (020) 7590 3200. Fax: (020) 7581 3458 or 7225 0947.
E-mail: consular@netherlands-embassy.org.uk
Web site: <http://www.netherlands-embassy.org.uk>
Opening hours: Monday to Friday 0900-1700 and 0930-1130 (visa section).

Netherlands Board of Tourism
18 Buckingham Gate, London SW1E 6LB
Tel: (020) 7931 0661 or (0891) 717 777 (recorded information; calls cost 60p per minute). Fax: 020 7828 7941. E-mail: information@nbt.org.uk
Web site: <http://www.holland.com/uk>

British Embassy
Lange Voorhout 10, 2514 ED The Hague, The Netherlands
Tel: (70) 427 0427. Fax: (70) 427 0345.
Web site: <http://www.britain.nl>
For visas and passports, contact the Consulate General.

British Consulate

2 GENERAL

Koningslaan 44, 1075 AE Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Tel: (20) 676 4343. Fax: (20) 676 1069 or 675 8381 (consular section).
E-mail: visaenquiries@amsterdam.mail.fco.gov.uk
Consulate in: Philipsburg.

Royal Netherlands Embassy
4200 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008
Tel: (202) 244 5300. Fax: (202) 362 3430.
E-mail: nlgovwas@netherlands-embassy.org
Web site: <http://www.netherlands-embassy.org/>

Consulate General of The Netherlands
1 Rockefeller Plaza, 11th Floor, New York, NY 10020-2094
Tel: (212) 246 1429. Fax: (212) 333 3603 or 586 7222 (consular section).
E-mail: nlgovnyc@spacelab.net
Consulates also in: Chicago, Houston and Los Angeles.

Netherlands Board of Tourism
355 Lexington Avenue, 19th Floor, New York, NY 10017
Tel: (212) 370 7360. Fax: (212) 370 9507.

E-mail: info@goholland.com
Web site: http://www.goholland.com

Embassy of the United States of America
Lange Voorhout 102, 2514 EJ The Hague, The Netherlands
Tel: (70) 310 9209. Fax: (70) 361 4688.
Web site: http://www.usemb.nl

Consulate General of the United States of America
Museumplein 19, 1071 DJ Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Tel: (20) 575 5309. Fax: (20) 575 5310 (visa section).
Web site: http://www.usemb.nl

Royal Netherlands Embassy
350 Albert Street, Suite 2020, Constitution Square Building, Ottawa, Ontario K1R 1A4
Tel: (613) 237 5030. Fax: (613) 237 6471. E-mail: nlgovott@netcom.ca
Web site: http://www.netherlandsembassy-ottawa.org/f_explorer
Consulates in: Calgary, Edmonton, Halifax, Kingston, London, Québec, Regina, Saint John, St John's and Winnipeg. Consulates general in: Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver.

Netherlands Board of Tourism
25 Adelaide Street East, Suite 710, Toronto, Ontario M5C 1Y2
Tel: (416) 363 1577 or (1 888) 464 6552 (toll free). Fax: (416) 363 1470. E-mail: info@goholland.com
Web site: http://www.holland.com

Canadian Embassy
PO Box 30820, 2500 GV The Hague, The Netherlands
Tel: (70) 311 1600. Fax: (70) 311 1620. E-mail: hague@dfait-maeci.gc.ca
Web site: http://www.ocanada.nl/
Opening hours: Monday to Friday 0900-1730 (chancery); 1000-1200 and 1430-1600 (consular).

Country dialling code: 31.

General

Area: 33,939 sq km (13,104 sq miles).

Population: 15,760,200 (1999).

Population Density: 465.1 per sq km.

Capital: Amsterdam. Population: 727,053 (1999).

Seat of Government: The Hague. Population: 440,743 (1999).

Geography: The Netherlands shares borders to the south with Belgium and to the east with Germany, while the North Sea lies to the north and west. Large areas of The Netherlands have been reclaimed from the sea and consequently one-fifth of the country lies below sea level. The country is flat and level and is criss-crossed by rivers and canals. Areas reclaimed from the sea, known as polders, are extremely fertile. The landscape is broken by the forest of Arnhem, the bulb fields in the west, the lakes of the central and northern areas, and coastal dunes that are among the most impressive in Europe.

Government: Constitutional monarchy since 1848. Head of State: Queen Beatrix Wilhelmina Armgard since 1980. Head of Government: Prime Minister Wim Kok since 1994.

Language: Dutch is the official language. English, German and French are widely spoken foreign languages.

Religion: 38% Roman Catholic, 30% Protestant; 26% do not profess any religion.

Time: GMT + 1 (GMT from last Sunday in March to Saturday before last Sunday in October).

Electricity: 220 volts AC, 50Hz. 2-pin European-style plugs are in use.

Communications:

Telephone: Full IDD is available. Country code: 31 (followed by 20 for Amsterdam, 10 for Rotterdam and 70 for The Hague). Outgoing international code: 00. Telephone information is given in French, English and German. The cheap rate is from 2000-0800 Monday to Friday. Calls can be made from public booths or post offices. Most booths only accept cards, which can be bought at post offices, VVV offices, and shops displaying the PTT-telephone card poster; and sometimes coins (25 cent, G1 and G2.5).

Mobile telephone: GSM 900 and 1800 networks across the Netherlands. Operators include KPN Telecom (web site: <http://www.mobiel.net>).

Fax: Services are widely available and are also provided by some hotels.

Internet/E-mail: There are many cybercafés and some Internet access centres. Business centres also provide public access. Using the internet is very straightforward in Amsterdam, where PCs are available free of charge in libraries and public buildings.

Telegram: Facilities are available at all main post offices; telegrams can also be sent directly from telephone kiosks.

Post: Stamps are available from all post offices as well as from tobacconists and kiosks selling postcards and souvenirs. Mail within Europe takes approximately five days. Post offices are open 0900-1730 Monday to Friday. Some post offices in major towns are also open on late shopping nights (Thursday or Friday night) and 1000-1300 Saturday. There are all-night post offices in Amsterdam (Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal, behind the Royal Palace) and Rotterdam (Coolingsingel).

Press: The main newspapers are De Telegraaf, De Volkskrant, Het Algemeen Dagblad and NRC Handelsblad (an evening paper). Foreign newspapers are widely available.

BBC World Service and Voice of America frequencies: From time to time these change.

BBC:

MHz12.109.4106.1950.648

Voice of America:

MHz15.259.7607.1701.197

3 PASSPORT

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
British	Yes	No	No
Australian	Yes	No	2
Canadian	Yes	No	2
USA	Yes	No	2
OtherEU	1	No	No
Japanese	Yes	No	2

Note: The Netherlands is a signatory to the 1995 Schengen Agreement. For further details about passport/visa regulations within the Schengen area see the introductory section in How to Use this Guide.

PASSPORTS: Passport valid for at least 3 months after the last day of the intended visit required by all except (a) 1. nationals of EU countries, Andorra, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco, San Marino and Switzerland holding a valid national ID card. (b) holders of Certificate of Identity issued by the Government of Cyprus to nationals of Cyprus. (c) holders of a Hong Kong Certificate of Identity.

Note: 2. It is advisable to have a return ticket, but not obligatory. Proof of sufficient funds for the duration of stay may be required.

VISAS: Required by all except the following for stays of up to 3 months:

- (a) nationals referred to in the chart and under passport exemptions above;
- (b) nationals of Andorra, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Brunei, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus (except holders of Certificate of Identity issued by the Government of Cyprus, who do require a visa), Czech Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Korea (Rep. of), Latvia, Lithuania, Monaco, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Poland, San Marino, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Uruguay, Vatican City and Venezuela;
- (c) transit passengers continuing their journey by the same or first connecting aircraft, provided holding onward or return documentation and not leaving the airport.

Note: Some nationals passing through The Netherlands always require a transit visa, even when not leaving the airport. Transit passengers are advised to check transit regulations with the relevant Embassy or Consulate before travelling.

Types of visa and cost: A uniform type of visa, the Schengen visa, is issued for tourist, business and private visits. Short-Stay: £16. Multiple Entry: £21 (up to 3 months). Transit: £6. The Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy) can be contacted for further details.

Note: Spouses and children of EU nationals (providing spouse's passport and the original marriage certificate are produced), and nationals of some other countries, receive their visas free of charge (enquire at Embassy or Consulate for details). Nationals of the Dominican Republic, Ghana, India, Nigeria and Pakistan should have their marriage and birth certificates verified and legalised by the relevant Netherlands Embassy or a visa fee will be charged.

Validity: Short-stay visas are valid for 6 months from date of issue for single- or multiple entries of maximum 90 days per entry. Transit visas are valid for single- or multiple entries of maximum 5 days per entry, including the day of arrival. Visas cannot be extended; a new application must be made each time.

Application to: Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy); see address section. Travellers visiting just one Schengen country should apply to the Consulate of that country; travellers visiting more than one Schengen country should apply to the Consulate of the country chosen as the main destination or the country they will enter first (if they have no main destination).

Application requirements: (a) Completed application form(s). (b) Passport (valid for at least 3 months longer than the validity of the visa) containing a blank page to affix the visa. (c) Fee, where applicable (payable in cash or by postal order). (d) Passport-size photo(s). (e) In certain cases, a letter indicating purpose of the visit or an accommodation booking. (f) Evidence of sufficient funds for period of stay. (g) For business visas, a recent letter from the applicant's employer, solicitor, bank manager or local Chamber of Commerce. (h) For students, a letter from the applicant's school or university.

Note: The number of forms and photos required is dependent on the nationality of the applicant.

Working days required: Normally within 24 hours, but can take up to 3 months for certain nationals.

Temporary residence: Work permit and residence permit required for non EU nationals. Enquire at Consulate (or Consular section at the Embassy) for further information.

4 MONEY

Currency: Guilder (Dfl or Fl) = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of Dfl1000, 250, 100, 50, 25 and 10. Coins are in denominations of Dfl5, 2.5 and 1, and 25, 10 and 5 cents.

Single European currency (Euro): The Euro is now the official currency of 12 EU member states (including the Netherlands), although it is currently only used as 'written money' (cheques, bank transactions, credit cards, etc). The first Euro coins and notes will be introduced in January 2002; the Dutch Guilder will still be in circulation until July 1 2002, when it will be completely replaced by the Euro. 1 Euro = Dfl2.20371.

Currency exchange: Exchange offices are indicated by the letters GWK. GWK is a national organisation with currency exchange offices at major railway stations, at Schiphol airport and at the border crossings with Germany and Belgium. Hotels tend to charge high commissions. Verkoopt means sell, while Koopt means buy.

Credit cards: MasterCard, American Express, Diners Club and Visa are accepted. Check with your credit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

Travellers cheques: Widely accepted. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take travellers cheques in Dutch Guilders.

Exchange rate indicators

The following figures are included as a guide to the movements of the Guilder against Sterling and the US Dollar:

Date Nov '99 May '00 Nov '00 Feb '01 £1.00 = 3.463.663.723.50 \$1.00 = 2.102.472.572.40

The following figures are included as a guide to the movements of the Euro against Sterling and the US Dollar:

Date May '00 Aug '00 Nov '00 Feb '01 1 Euro = £0.60 £0.62 £0.59 £0.62 1 Euro = \$0.89 \$0.93 \$0.86 \$0.92

Currency restrictions: There are no restrictions on the import and export of either local or foreign currency.

Banking hours: 0900-1600/1700 Monday to Friday.

5 DUTY FREE

The following goods may be imported into The Netherlands without incurring customs duty:

(a) Travellers from non-EU European countries with goods purchased in non-EU countries: 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 100 cigarillos or 250g of tobacco; 1 litre of alcoholic beverages stronger than 22° proof or 2 litres less than 22% or 2 litres of fortified wine; 2 litres of wine; 8 litres of non-sparkling Luxembourg wine; 60g of perfume and 250ml of eau de toilette; other goods to the value of Dfl125 if bought duty free.

(b) Travellers originating from outside Europe:

400 cigarettes or 100 cigars or 500g of tobacco; wine, spirits and perfume as for non-EU European countries; other goods to the value of Dfl125.

Note: (a) These allowances are only for travellers aged 17 years and above. (b) Enquiries concerning current import regulations should be made to the Royal Netherlands Embassy in the country of departure, or to the national Chamber of Commerce. (c) The import of firearms and ammunition requires a licence.

Abolition of duty-free goods within the EU: On June 30 1999, the sale of duty-free alcohol and tobacco at airports and at sea was abolished in all 15 EU member states. Although there are now no limits imposed on importing tobacco and alcohol products from one EU country to another, (with the exceptions of Denmark, Finland and Sweden, where limits are imposed), travellers should note that they may be required to prove at customs that the goods purchased are for personal use only.

6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Jan 1 2001 New Year's Day. Apr 13 Good Friday. Apr 16 Easter Monday. Apr 30 Queen's Day. May 5 National Liberation Day. May 24 Ascension Day. Jun 4 Whit Monday. Dec 25-26 Christmas.
Jan 1 2002 New Year's Day. Mar 29 Good Friday. Apr 1 Easter Monday. Apr 30 Queen's Day. May 5 National Liberation Day. May 9 Ascension Day. May 20 Whit Monday. Dec 25-26 Christmas.

7 HEALTH

Special Precautions Certificate Required

Yellow Fever	No	No
Cholera	No	No
Typhoid and Polio	No	-
Malaria	No	-
Food and Drink	No	-

Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For more information, consult the Health appendix.

Health care: The standard of health care (and other social services) is very high, with an unusually high proportion of the national income devoted to public health. In 1993, there were 6969 General Practitioners and 152 hospitals with 4.1 hospital beds per 1000 inhabitants. There is a reciprocal health agreement with all other EU countries. On presentation of form E111 by UK residents (available from post offices or the Department of Health), medical treatment, including hospital treatment, is free; prescribed medicines and dental treatment must, however, be paid for. Further information can be obtained from The Netherlands General Sickness Insurance Fund (Algemeen Nederlands Onderling Ziekenfonds - ANOZ), at Kaap Hoordreef 24-28, Utrecht, or the local sickness insurance office. Certain strong medicines can be taken to The Netherlands if they are accompanied by a doctor's prescription. Outside of the EU, The Netherlands has reciprocal health agreements with Cape Verde, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey and Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). All other travellers are advised to take out full medical insurance. For police, fire or ambulance emergencies, dial 112 anywhere in the country.

Travel - International

AIR: The Netherlands' national airline is KLM-Royal Dutch Airlines (KL). KLM flies direct to all major European, North American and Asia-Pacific cities. KLM uk flies to London Stansted and City Airports and several regional airports in the UK.

Approximate flight times: From Amsterdam to Belfast is 1 hour 5 minutes; to London is 1 hour; to Manchester is 1 hour 5 minutes and to New York is 9 hours 45 minutes (including stopover in London).

International airports: Amsterdam (AMS) (Schiphol) (web site: <http://www.schiphol.nl>) is 15km (9 miles) southwest of the city (travel time by train - 20 minutes). KLM buses provide a daily service from 0600-0000 departing every 30 minutes, stopping at the a selection of major hotels and returning to Schiphol. There is a direct rail link between the airport and Amsterdam Centraal Station, with trains every 15 minutes from 0600-0000 and every hour through the night. Trains to Zuid station (Amsterdam South) run every 15 minutes from 0525-0015; return is from Zuid station, Parnassusweg/Minervalaan (via tram no. 5 from the city centre) from 0545-0040. There is also a service to the RAI Congress Centre every 15 minutes from 0525-0012. Return is from RAI station (via tram no. 4 from the city centre) from 0545-0040. Plentiful taxis are available to the city.

Airport facilities include restaurants, duty-free shops, currency exchange machines (able to convert 17 different currencies), banks, an art gallery, baby rooms (free of charge and open 24 hours), showers, a business centre (with fax, personal computer and telephone facilities), conference rooms and car hire.

Rotterdam (RTM) (Zestienhoven) (web site: <http://www.rotterdam-airport.nl>) is 8km (5 miles) northwest of the city (travel time - 15 minutes). 24-hour flight information: (10) 446 0813. Bus no. 33 departs every 10 minutes. Return is from Central Station, Knisplein, from 0630-1830.

Taxis to the city are also available. Airport facilities include restaurant, bank, outgoing duty-free shop and car hire.

Eindhoven (EIN) (Welschap) (web site: <http://www.eindhovenairport.nl>) is 8km (5 miles) from the city. Coaches run every 15 minutes and taxis to the city are also available. Airport facilities include car hire and outgoing duty-free shop. Flight information: (40) 251 6142.

Maastricht (MST) (Aachen) (web site: <http://www.maa.nl>) is 8km (5 miles) from the city. Airport facilities include outgoing duty-free shop.

Groningen (GRQ) (Eelde) (web site: <http://www.groningenairporteelde.nl>) is 9km (6 miles) from the city.

Enschede (ENS) (Twente) (web site: <http://www.enschede-airport.nl>) is 8km (5 miles) from the city.

SEA: The major ferry ports are Vlissingen, Rotterdam and Hook of Holland (Hoek van Holland). Regular car and passenger ferries are operated from the UK to The Netherlands via the following routes and shipping lines:

Stena Line (tel: (0990) 707 070; **web site:** <http://www.stenaline.co.uk>): Harwich to Hook of Holland; journey time - 3 hours 45 minutes (day), 4 hours 30 minutes (night); 2 sailings daily.

P&O North Sea Ferries (tel: (01482) 377 177; **web site:** <http://www.ponsf.com>): Hull to Rotterdam (Europoort); journey time - 12 hours 30 minutes; 1 sailing nightly.

DFDS Seaways (tel: (01255) 240 240; **web site:** <http://www.dfdsseaways.co.uk>): Newcastle to Amsterdam (summer only); journey time - 16 hours.

Note: P&O European Ferries and Hoverspeed UK run services to The Netherlands via Belgium. French ports also provide connections.

RAIL: There are regular Eurostar trains from London to Brussels where a direct connection to a number of destinations throughout the Netherlands can be caught after a 30-minute wait. The entire journey takes a little over 7 hours (journey time from London to Brussels is 3 hours 40 minutes; from Brussels to Amsterdam is 3 hours. The national rail network (see Travel - Internal section) provides links to other major European cities, including Paris, Zürich, Frankfurt/M, Copenhagen and Luxembourg. For further information and reservations contact Eurostar (tel: (01233) 617 599 (travel agents) or (0990) 186 186 (public; within the UK) or (01233) 617 575 (public; outside the UK only); **web site:** <http://www.eurostar.com>); or Rail Europe (tel: (08705) 848 848). Travel agents can obtain refunds for unused tickets from Eurostar Trade Refunds, 2nd Floor, Kent House, 81 Station Road, Ashford, Kent TN23 1PD. Complaints and comments may be sent to Eurostar Customer Relations, Eurostar House, Waterloo Station, London SE1 8SE. General enquiries and information requests must be made by telephone. Rail travellers not using the Channel Tunnel link need to make some form of sea crossing, usually by ferry or hovercraft; for details on sea crossings see also under Sea above The cost of the crossing is usually included in the price of the rail ticket. For information and reservations contact Rail Europe (tel: (0990) 848 848).

ROAD: The Netherlands are connected to the rest of Europe by a superb network of motorways. All roads are well signposted with green 'E' symbols indicating international highways, red 'A's indicating national highways, and smaller routes indicated by yellow 'N's. The national speed limit is 120 kph (75mph). Although frontier formalities between The Netherlands, Germany and Belgium have now all but vanished, motorists - particularly on smaller roads - should be prepared to stop when asked to do so by a customs official. The yellow cars of the ANWB/Wegenwacht (Royal Dutch Touring Club) (tel: (70) 314 1420) patrol major roads 24 hours a day with qualified mechanics equipped to handle routine repairs. For emergencies, dial: 60888 (within The Netherlands only).

Travelling from the UK, all road vehicles can be carried through the channel tunnel in Le Shuttle trains running between Folkestone in Kent (with direct access from the M20) and Calais (with

links to the A16/A26 motorway; exit 13). All vehicles from motorcycles to campers can be accommodated. Passengers generally travel with their vehicles. Heavy goods vehicles are carried on special wagons with a separate passenger coach for the drivers. Terminals and shuttles are well-equipped for disabled passengers. Passenger Terminal buildings contain duty-free shops, restaurants, bureaux de change and other amenities. The journey takes approximately 35 minutes from platform to platform and about one hour from motorway to motorway. Shuttles run every 75 minutes, 24 hours per day and three to four trains run each hour at peak times. Services run every day of the year. By contacting Eurotunnel Customer Information in Coquelle (**tel:** (3) 21 00 61 00; **fax:** (3) 21 00 60 01) as they approach the French terminal, motorists can find out when the next shuttle leaves and how busy the service is. Motorists pass through customs and immigration before they board, with no further checks on arrival. Fares are charged according to length of stay and time of year. The price remains constant throughout the day and applies to the car, regardless of the number of passengers or size of the car. Off-peak fares are: Day Return: if booked one day in advance, £45 Mon to Sat, £20 Sunday; 5-Day Return: £159 (not available to travel agents); Standard Return: £239. Lower rates apply to motorcycles. There are also many promotional deals available, especially outside the peak holiday seasons. Tickets may be purchased in advance from travel agents, or from Eurotunnel Customer Services in France or the UK with a credit card. For further information, contact Eurotunnel Customer Services in the UK on (0990) 353 535 (brochures and reservations). Coach: Eurolines run coach services from the UK to The Netherlands and from The Netherlands to various destinations throughout Europe. They have an office in Amsterdam at Rokin 10, 1012 KR (**tel:** (20) 627 5151; **fax:** (20) 627 5176; **web site:** <http://www.eurolines.nl>). Further information can also be obtained by calling Eurolines in the UK (**tel:** (020) 7730 8235 (reservations) or (0990) 143 219 (public reservations); **web site:** <http://www.eurolines.co.uk>). Car hire: Major companies can be found in the main cities, among them Avis, Hertz, Budget and Europcar.

Travel - Internal

AIR: KLM Cityhopper (WA) operates between Amsterdam and Eindhoven. Transavia Airlines (HV) (80% of which is owned by KLM) also runs scheduled flights. Martinair Holland (MP) operates passenger and cargo charter services. Enquire at KLM offices or at the Netherlands Board of Tourism for further information.

SEA: Ferry service to the Wadden Islands across the IJsselmeer (former Zuyder Sea) and Schelde Estuary. There is also a service to the Frisian Islands across the Waddenzee. Boat Tours runs excursions from Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Arnhem, Groningen, Giethoorn, Delft and Maastricht. Stena Line operates a daily service for private cars, freight and trailers.

RAIL: The highly developed rail network, of which about 70% is electrified, is efficient and cheap, and connects all towns. Both Intercity and local trains run at least half-hourly on all principal routes. Rail and bus timetables are integrated, and there is a common fare structure throughout the country. NV Nederlandse Spoorwegen (**web site:** <http://www.ns.nl>) is the state-owned rail company and operates all lines within the country.

Cheap fares: Rail Rovers are valid for one day. Public Transport Link Rovers are issued in conjunction with Rail Rovers. These cover unlimited travel on all public transport buses and trams in town and country, and on the underground system in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Euro Domino tickets are available for travel in The Netherlands, or The Netherlands and Belgium. 3-, 5- and 10-day passes are available. The Benelux Tourrail Card allows unlimited travel for any five days within a 1 month period, covering The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Other deals include Multi-Rovers, Summer Tour Rovers and Teenage Rovers. Children under 4 years of age travel free on all journeys within The Netherlands. Child's Railrunner tickets are available for children aged 4-11 years travelling with a fare-paying adult (19 years or older), and include up to

three children travelling with any one adult. Contact the Railway Authority of any of the participating countries for prices and further information.

Inter-Rail passes are also valid in The Netherlands.

Any UK enquiries about rail travel, the purchase of Rail Rover tickets and prices should be **addressed to:** Holland Rail, Gilbert Street, Ropley, Hampshire SO2 40BY (tel: (01962) 773 646; fax: (01962) 773 625; e-mail: hollandrail@ukconsultants.com).

ROAD: There is an excellent road system. Visitors to The Netherlands may use credit cards when obtaining petrol. The motoring association in The Netherlands is the ANWB (Royal Dutch Touring Club), Postbus 93200, 2509 XB The Hague (tel: (70) 314 1420). Bus: Extensive regional bus networks exist. Long-distance coaches also operate between the cities, but costs are generally on a par with trains. Taxi: Taxis have an illuminated 'taxi' sign on the roof and there are taxi ranks at railway stations and at various other points in the cities. Rather than hailing taxis in the street, it is more usual in The Netherlands to order a taxi by phone. Taxis should have meters inside to indicate the fare, including the tip. Car hire: Available from airports and main hotels. All European car-hire companies are represented. Bicycle hire: Bicycles can be hired from all main railway stations, but must be returned to the station from which they are hired. A refundable deposit is required. Driving regulations: Driving is on the right. Drivers should be particularly aware of cyclists; often there are special cycle lanes. There is a chronic shortage of parking space in central Amsterdam, and the rush hours (0700-0900 and 1700-1900) should be avoided throughout the whole country. Parking fines are severe. Headlights should be dipped in built-up areas, but it is prohibited to use sidelights only. Children under 12 should not travel in the front seat. Seat belts are compulsory. Speed limits are 80kph (50mph) on major roads, 120kph (75mph) on motorways and 50kph (30mph) in towns. Documentation: An International Driving Permit is not required, as long as a driving licence from the country of origin is held. EU pink format licences are accepted. Trailers and caravans are allowed in without documents. A Green Card is advisable, but not compulsory. Without it, drivers with motor insurance policies in their home country are granted only the minimum legal cover in The Netherlands; the Green Card tops this up to the level of cover provided by the driver's own policy.

URBAN: Public transport is very well developed in the cities and large towns. A strippenkaart national fares system exists - strips of 15 tickets each are widely available at railway stations, post offices and some tourist offices. These are accepted anywhere in payment of standard zonal fares. There are also individual and multi-day tickets for the cities. For more detailed information on travel within Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague, see below.

Amsterdam: Amsterdam has an extensive network of buses, trams and underground (GVB), with frequent services from early morning to about midnight. There are less frequent services throughout the night at a higher fare. Full information on services (including a map), day tickets and strippenkaart (strip-tickets) can be obtained from the GVB office in front of the Central Station (0700-2230 daily) or the GVB Central Office at Prins Hendrikkade 108-114. Tram: Amsterdam's 17 tram lines provide a fast, frequent and reliable service, making the tram the best way to travel around the capital. Trams operate from 0600-2400 Monday to Friday (from 0630 Saturday and 0730 Sunday). The tram system (as well as the buses and the underground) enables reasonably quick travel even during the busiest periods of the day. Trams leave from Central Station: 1 and 2 traverse the main canals, 19 takes a route to Museumplein and Concertgebouw and 9 and 14 to the Muziektheater and Waterlooplein market. A new Circle Tram service has begun operating through central Amsterdam, taking in major attractions and hotels. Underground: Amsterdam's underground lines all originate at the Central Station and serve the southeastern business district and the suburbs. Trains run from 0600-0015 Monday to Friday, from 0630 Saturday and from 0730 Sunday. The GVB is easy to use. Taxi: These are fairly expensive. Booking is usually made by a phone call (tel: (20) 677 7777), but taxis can also be picked up at taxi ranks (Central Station, Rembrandtplein and Leidseplein). Fares are indicated by

the meter; a small tip will be appreciated. Car hire: The major European firms, including Hertz and Avis, are represented. Cars can also be hired through most hotels. Parking regulations are quite strict and failure to park in prescribed areas or to pay the parking fee can result in a fine and the prospect of the car being clamped or towed away. Water travel: Canal Buses (every 25-45 minutes between Central Station and Rijksmuseum; children under the age of 5 travel free); Watertaxis (0900-0100 Monday to Sunday, carrying 8 to 25 passengers); Museum Boats (departing from Prins Hendrikkade every 30 minutes in summer and every 45 minutes in winter) and Waterbikes (for 2-4 people, with a route map provided) are all available. Boat hire: Visitors can hire pedalos (also known as canal bikes) and boats to explore the canals. Bicycle hire: This is an excellent way to travel around Amsterdam, and it seems nearly everyone is doing it. Cycle lanes are clearly marked by white lines - but visitors are advised to watch out for trams, cars and pedestrians. There are numerous companies hiring out bikes (at a cost of approximately Dfl10-Dfl12.50 per day).

Rotterdam: The city has excellent bus and tram services and a 2-line underground network, which work on a zonal system. Information is available from the Central Station. Car hire: The major European firms, including Avis and Hertz, are represented.

The Hague: The Hague has bus and tram services. Information is available from the Central Station, Koningin Julianaplein. Car hire: Avis and Hertz are represented.

JOURNEY TIMES: The following chart gives approximate journey times (in hours and minutes) from Amsterdam to other major cities in The Netherlands.

Air	Road	Rail
		The Hague-0.4
		Rotterdam-1.0
		Utrecht-0.25
		Groningen-2.0
		Arnhem-1.1
		Maastricht0.4
		Vlissingen-2.0
		Eindhoven0.3
		Breda-1.3

8 ACCOMMODATION

HOTELS: The Netherlands has a wide range of accommodation, from luxury hotels in big towns to modern motels along motorways. The Netherlands Reservation Centre (NRC) (Netherlands Reserverings Centrum) can make reservations throughout the country: Postbus 404, 2260 AK Leidschendam (tel: (70) 419 5500; fax: (70) 419 5519; e-mail: info@hotelres.nl; web site: <http://www.hotelres.nl>).

Grading: The Netherlands Board of Tourism issues a shield to all approved hotels by which they can be recognised. This must be affixed to the front of the hotel in a conspicuous position. Hotels which display this sign conform to the official standards set by Dutch law on hotels, which protects the tourist and guarantees certain standards of quality. Hotels are also graded according to the Benelux system, in which the standard is indicated by a row of 3-pointed stars from the highest (5-star) to the minimum (1-star). However, membership of this scheme is voluntary, and there may be first-class hotels that are not classified in this way. Benelux star ratings adhere to the following criteria:

5-star (H5): This is a new category signifying a luxury hotel. Amenities include private bath and/or shower, toilet, radio and TV in every room. 24 hour room service. Fax facilities in reception.

4-star (H4): First-class hotels. 80% of rooms have a private bath. Other amenities include night reception and room service.

3-star (H3): Half of the rooms have a private bath or shower. Other amenities include day reception and the sale of tobacco products.

2-star (H2): A quarter of rooms have a private bath. Other amenities include a bar.

1-star (H1): Simple hotel. No private baths, but hot and cold water in rooms. Breakfast available.

Cat H: Hotel with minimal comfort.

Cat O: Simple accommodation.

For further information contact the Netherlands Board of Tourism.

GUEST-HOUSES: These are called pensions and rates vary. Book through local tourist offices.

BED & BREAKFAST: Not as common a form of accommodation as it is in the UK but reservations can be made through Bed and Breakfast Holland, T. de Bockstraat 3, 1058 TV Amsterdam (tel: (20) 615 7527; fax: (20) 669 1573; e-mail: bbrholland@hetnet.nl).

SELF-CATERING: Farmhouses for groups can be booked months in advance via the local tourist offices. Holiday chalets, especially in the relatively unknown parts of Zeeland, can be booked through the local tourist office. Bungalow parks throughout the country can be booked through the Netherlands Reserverings Centrum (NRC). Most bungalow resorts offer a full range of recreational facilities including swimming pools, golf and tennis. Prices depend on size, quality of amenities and the time of year. To order a self catering brochure call the Netherlands Board of Tourism (see address section).

CAMPING/CARAVANNING: There are some 2500 registered campsites in Holland. Only 500 offer advanced booking, the others operate on a first-come, first-served basis. Off-site camping is not permitted. Prices are fairly high and it is often far better value to stay more than one night. A list is available from the Netherlands Board of Tourism (see address section) and reservations can be made through the Stichting Vrije Recreatie, Broekseweg 75-77, 4231 VD Meerkerk (tel: (183) 352 741/2/3; fax: (183) 351 234).

Youth Hostels: There are 34 hostels in various surroundings, from castles to modern buildings. People with a Hostelling International card pay approximately Dfl20-30 for an overnight stay including breakfast (non-members pay Dfl5 more). Information is obtainable from the Dutch Youth Hostel Association (Stichting Nederlandse Jeugdherberg Centrale), Prof Tulpstraat 2, 1018 HA Amsterdam; tel: (20) 551 3155; fax: (20) 639 0199; web site: <http://www.njhc.org>).

Amsterdam

For the purpose of this survey, the country has been divided into seven regions: Amsterdam (including the province of Noord-Holland); The Hague (including the province of Zuid-Holland); Rotterdam; Utrecht; The North (the provinces of Friesland, Groningen and

Drenthe); The East (the provinces of Flevoland, Overijssel and Gelderland) and The South (the provinces of Noord-Brabant, Zeeland and Limburg). There is also a brief section devoted to coastal resorts. For information and contact details on regional tourist offices, contact The Netherlands Board of Tourism (see address section).

Amsterdam, the capital of The Netherlands (though not the seat of government) is built around a concentric network of canals spanned by over 1000 bridges. As Amsterdam is inextricably linked to water, one of the most attractive ways of viewing the city is on a canal tour. Many of the houses date back to The Netherlands' golden age in the 17th century. These narrow-fronted merchants' houses are characterised by the traditionally Dutch ornamented gables. The oldest part of the city is Nieuwmarkt, located near the first canals - Herengracht, Prinsengracht and Keizersgracht - built to protect the city against invasion. In the 17th century, Amsterdam gained a reputation for religious tolerance, which attracted thousands of Flemish, Walloon and French Protestants as well as Jewish merchants from Spain, Portugal and Central Europe. Today, Amsterdam's famous liberalism has survived in the city's 'coffee shops' (many which are allowed to sell soft drugs) and thriving sex industry (prostitutes pay taxes and generate trade worth Dfl1 billion per year). The city has also long been a centre of diamond cutting and it is still possible to see diamond cutters at work. Boasting 53 museums, 61 art galleries, 12 concert halls and 20 theatres, Amsterdam has a booming cultural life. A special canal boat (the 'museum boat') links 16 of the major museums. (A special Museum Pass valid for one year that entitles holders to free entry to over 400 museums is available from participating museums and local tourist offices; for details, contact the Netherlands Board of Tourism.) In the local countryside it is still possible to see working windmills. There are annual events such as the Amsterdam Art Weeks and the Holland Festival.

The Amsterdam Tourist Office is located at Stationsplein 15, opposite Central Station (tel: (20) 551 2512; fax: (20) 625 2869) and is open 0800-2000 Monday to Saturday and 0830-1630 Sunday. It is possible to book a VVV-approved guide/hostess in Amsterdam by contacting Guidor, c/o the Netherlands Reserverings Centrum (for address details, see Accommodation section). For information on how to get around the city, see Urban in the Travel - Internal section.

SIGHTSEEING: SIGHTSEEING: The following is a selection of some of the most popular sights:

Rijksmuseum: National museum with Dutch paintings dating from the 16th-19th century, including The Nightwatch by Rembrandt. It is situated at Stadhouderskade 42. Opening hours: 1000-1700 daily.

Anne Frank's House: Historic home of the young diarist and her family who hid from German occupation during World War II. Prinsengracht 263. Opening hours: 0900-1700 Monday to Saturday and 1000-1700 Sunday (winter); 0900-1900 Monday to Saturday and 1000-1900 Sunday (summer). Closed December 25, New Year's Day and Yom Kippur.

Van Gogh Museum: Permanent exhibition including 200 paintings and 500 drawings by Van Gogh and his contemporaries. Paulus Potterstraat 7. The museum has recently been extensively renovated. Opening hours: 1000-1700 daily, closed New Year's Day.

Museum Het Rembrandthuis (The Rembrandt House Museum): Comprehensive collection of etchings by Rembrandt. Jodenbreestraat 4-6. Opening hours: 1000-1700 Monday to Saturday, 1300-1700 Sunday and holidays, closed New Year's Day.

Stedelijk Museum of Modern Art: Collection of Dutch and international art from 1850 onwards, including works by Picasso, Cézanne, Chagall and Monet, as well as photography, video and film, and industrial design. Paulus Potterstraat 13. Opening hours: 1100-1700 Monday to Sunday, closed New Year's Day.

Heineken Browerij (Heineken Brewery): Heineken, the Dutch national beer, is the world's second largest brewing empire. This brewery, which operated from 1932-1988, is now a museum, with daily guided tours (only available to those aged 18 and over). Opening hours: conducted tours from 0930-1100.

Other interesting places to visit include the Koninklijk Paleis (Royal Palace); the Nieuwe Kerk (New Church); the Martelwerktuigenmuseum (the Torture Museum); the Munt Tower, which looms over the floating flower market on the Singel canal; the open-air market at Waterlooplein; the Begijnhof (14th-century almshouses around a quiet courtyard); Amsterdams Historisch Museum (Historical Museum) and Schuttersgallerij (Civic Guards Gallery), which has interesting exhibits testifying to the Amsterdam's history and customs; book shops in the Oudemanhuispoort; and the Sexmuseum Venustempel, Europe's only sex museum, open from 1000-2330.

NIGHTLIFE: NIGHTLIFE: Many of the nightclubs are concentrated in the Rembrantsplein-Leidseplein area. There is a weekly magazine, Amsterdam This Week, which will give visitors a good idea of the week's events and clubs worth visiting. There are a number of bars and clubs, many with live music, from cabaret to modern jazz. Clubs are usually open 2200-0400. Concert halls/theatres: Stadsschouwburg (opera) and Concertgebouw (classical music, opera, ballet). Enquiries can be made through the VVV Theatre Booking Office situated on Stationsplein 10, Amsterdam; open 1000-1600 Monday to Saturday. Walletpjes (Red Light District): Amsterdam's red light district, located in one of the oldest parts of Amsterdam, is famous worldwide mainly because its prostitutes are legal and regulated (they work six-hour shifts, pay tax on their earnings and undergo frequent medical examinations). Just like any other red light district, however, Walletpjes, which attracts around 100,000 people a night, is sleazy and seedy and should perhaps best be avoided.

NOORD-HOLLAND: NOORD-HOLLAND: The Amsterdam VVV publishes a booklet outlining over 15 excursions which highlight the Dutch image abroad (ie clogs, tulips, cheese and windmills). Day trips are available to Alkmaar, where there is a famous cheese market at Waagplein, open 1000-1200 from mid-April to mid-September every Friday; a frequent train service runs from Central Station. There is also a good bus service from Central Station to Volendam and Marken, both old fishing villages, largely built of wood. The former is predominantly Catholic, the latter Protestant.

Haarlem: Haarlem (20km/12 miles west of Amsterdam) is a centre of Dutch tulip-growing and the surrounding countryside affords a fine view of the bulb fields from the end of March to mid-May. The town itself has a beautiful 16th and 17th-century town centre and two fine museums. The Teyler Museum, Spaarne 16, was first established in 1784 from its world-famous Oval Room by merchant banker, Pieter Teyler van der Hulst. The museum has a very diverse collection which includes drawings by Rembrandt, scientific instruments, fossils and coins. The ultramodern new wing opened in 1996 and offers a striking contrast with the oak-panelled rooms of the original building. The Frans Hals Museum, Heiligland 62, houses paintings by the artist. Also worth visiting is St Bavokerk Cathedral, containing a 5000-pipe organ which Mozart is reported to have played. Nearby, the casino at Zandvoort (5km/3 miles west of Haarlem) is also the site of the Dutch Grand Prix. There is a famous Flower Auction in Aalsmeer, Legmeerdijk 313; open 0730-1130 Monday to Friday. Near Lisse, 8km (5 miles) south of Haarlem, are the Keukenhof Gardens, which have a lily show in the last week; open March 24-May 25, 0800-1930 Monday to Sunday. The Frans Roozen Nurseries & Tulip Show and the bulb fields can be visited at Vogelenzangweg 49, open 0800-1800 Monday to Sunday (March 25-May 27) and 0900-1700 Monday to Sunday (July to September). Broek op Langedijk has Europe's oldest vegetable auction hall with a large and interesting exhibition of the land reclamation of the surrounding area; open April 4-October 1, 1200-1700 Monday to Friday, 1200-1600 Sunday by appointment only. Hoorn and Enkhuizen are well known watersports centres. The latter town features the National Zuyder Zee Museum, Wierdijk 18, Enkhuizen, an outdoor museum with ships and reconstructed houses, open from early April to late October, 1000-1700 Monday to Sunday (closed January 1 and December 25-26).

The Hague

The Hague (Den Haag, officially known as 's-Gravenhage) is a cosmopolitan city which has over 60 foreign embassies and is the seat of the International Court of Justice, as well as being the capital of the province of Zuid-Holland. Although The Hague is the seat of government of The Netherlands, it is not the country's capital. The central part of the Old Town is the Binnenhof, an irregular group of buildings surrounding an open space. The seaside resort of Scheveningen (which has the country's only pier) is a nearby suburb.

SIGHTSEEING: SIGHTSEEING: The following is a selection of some of the most popular sights:
Madurodam Miniature Town: Haringkade 175. Opening hours: 0900-2300 Monday to Sunday (March to May); 0900-2300 (June to August); 0900-2130 (September); 0900-1800 (October to January) (illuminated after dark).

Panorama Mesdag: Zeestraat 65B. Largest panoramic circular painting in the world, created by the artist Mesdag and others, famous for its perfect optical illusion. Opening hours: 1000-1700 Monday to Saturday, 1200-1700 Sunday and holidays (closed December 25).

Antique Walk: VVV route including most of the 150 antique shops in The Hague - the detailed description and map are printed on the back of a reproduction 1614 print and are available from VVV information offices.

Parliament Buildings and Knight's Hall: 13th-century buildings with regular tours and slide shows explaining the history of the Binnenhof. Opening hours: 1000-1600 Monday to Saturday (last guided tour 1545).

Royal Cabinet of Paintings: In the Mauritshuis at Korte Vijverberg 8. Collection includes the Anatomical Lesson of Dr Tulp by Rembrandt, and other 17th-century Dutch works. Opening hours: 1000-1700 Tuesday to Saturday, 1100-1700 Sunday and holidays (closed on Mondays, January 1 and December 25; closed one hour earlier at 1600 on December 5 and December 31). Other interesting places to visit include the Gemeentemuseum (recently renovated municipal museum housing an interesting collection of modern art as well as interactive displays illustrating a wide range of subjects), the Puppet Museum, the antique market at the Lange Voorhout, the Duinoord district built in the style of old Dutch architecture, the Haagse Bos wooded park, the 17th-century Nieuwe Kerk and the Royal Library.

ZUID-HOLLAND: ZUID-HOLLAND: 22km (14 miles) southeast of Rotterdam and about 45km (28 miles) southeast of The Hague is Kinderdijk, near Alblasterdam, a good place to see windmills. They can be visited during the week. Delft, centre of the Dutch pottery industry and world famous for its blue hand-painted ceramics, is roughly midway between Rotterdam and The Hague. Gouda, 20km (12 miles) southeast of Rotterdam, is famous for its cheese market and the Candlelight Festival in December. The town centre is dominated by the massive late-Gothic Town Hall. Nearby is the pretty old town of Oudewater, noted for its beautiful 17th-century, gabled houses. 12km (7 miles) northwest of Gouda is the town of Boskoop, renowned for its fruit trees; a visit during the blossom season is a delightful experience. Dordrecht, 15km (9 miles) southeast of Rotterdam and about 37km (23 miles) southeast of The Hague, was an important port until a flood in 1421 reduced the economic importance of the town. The museum in the city has a good collection of paintings from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, while the most striking building is probably the Grote Kerk, begun in about 1305. Leiden (20km/12 miles northeast of The Hague, 40km/25 miles north of Rotterdam), the birthplace of Rembrandt, was a famous weaving town during the Middle Ages, and played a large part in the wars of independence against Spain in the 16th century. The university was founded by William the Silent in 1575 in return for the city's loyalty. The Pilgrim Fathers lived here for ten years (1610-1620) and The Pilgrim Fathers' Documentation Centre in Boisoetkade (Vliet 45) has many artefacts, records and paintings dating from the period of their stay in the city.

There are many beach resorts in this region of the country. Some of the major ones include Scheveningen, Katwijk aan Zee, Noordwijk aan Zee, Monster, 's-Gravenzande, Wassenaar and Ter Heijde.

Rotterdam

Rotterdam is the world's largest port and is the hub of the Dutch economy. Much of the city was obliterated during the Second World War, and only small parts of the old city remain. Historically, the city has been an important manufacturing centre since the 14th century, but its pre-eminence as a port dates only from the early 19th century.

SIGHTSEEING: SIGHTSEEING: The following is a selection of some of the most popular sights: **Euromast & Space Tower:** Parkhaven 20. The Observation Tower at 185m (605ft) is the highest point in Holland.

Maritiem Museum Prins Hendrik: Leuvehaven. Outdoor and indoor exhibits including ships, barges, harbour cranes and marine archaeological artefacts.

Museum Boymans van Beuningen: Museumpark 18-20. A unique collection of paintings, sculptures and objets d'art dating from the 14th century to the present day. Open Sunday and holidays (closed Mondays and December 25, January 1 and May 1).

The municipal museums are open 1000-1700 Monday to Saturday, 1100-1700 Sunday and holidays. They are closed on January 1 and April 30.

Dierenpark Blijdorp (Zoo): An open-plan zoo, beautifully laid out, with a restaurant. Exotic wildlife including bats, wolves, elephants and rhinos amongst tropical forest vegetation. Van Aerssenlaan 49. Opening hours: 0900-1800 Monday to Sunday.

Harbour tours: Willemsplein. Boat tours (Spido) through the harbour of Rotterdam are available throughout the year. In the summer there are excursions to Europoort, the Delta Project and evening tours. There are also luxury motor cruisers for hire. A drive through the harbour of Rotterdam is also possible. The 100-150km (60-90-mile) journey takes in almost every aspect of this massive harbour. The route passes wharves and warehouses, futuristic grain silos and unloading equipment, cranes and bridges, oil refineries, power stations and lighthouses, all of which create a skyline of awesome beauty, particularly at sunset. The docks, waterways, canals and ports-within-ports are interspersed with some surprising and apparently incongruous features; at one point the route passes a garden city built for shipyard workers, while further on there is a village and, at the harbour's westernmost point, a beach. A visit to Rotterdam harbour is recommended.

Other interesting places to visit include the 17th-century houses in the Delfshaven quarter of the city; the Pilgrimskerk; collections of maps and seacharts at the Delfshaven Old Town Hall; many traditional workshops for pottery, watchmaking and woodturning.

NIGHTLIFE: NIGHTLIFE: The major concert venue is the De Doelen Concert Hall (classical music, plays), which has 2000 seats. Rotterdam has many bars, clubs and restaurants that cater for all age groups and tastes.

Utrecht

The city of Utrecht - the fourth largest in The Netherlands - is set on a slightly elevated tract of land (the Geest), a fact which, in a country vulnerable to flooding, has greatly aided the city's commercial development. It is one of the oldest cities in the country, the site first having been settled by the Romans. During the Middle Ages, Utrecht was often an imperial residence, and the city's bishops regularly played an important role in the secular affairs of Europe. The city's prosperity allowed the construction of several beautiful churches, particularly the Cathedral of St Michael (13th century), St Pieterskerk and St Janskerk (both 11th century) and St Jacobkerk (12th century). Other buildings of note include the House of the Teutonic Order, the 14th-century

Huys Oudaen, the Hospice of St Bartholomew and the Neudeflat, a more modern construction (built in the 1960s), but one which affords a superb view across the city from its 15th-floor restaurant. The city also has several museums, including the Central Museum (which has an excellent Department of Modern Art), the Archiepiscopal Museum, the Railway Museum, the Archaeological Collection and the Municipal Museum.

The province of Utrecht, in the very heart of The Netherlands, contains numerous country houses, estates and castles set in landscaped parks and beautiful woods. The countryside around Utrecht is very fertile and seems like one large garden. The town makes a convenient base for excursions into the Veluwe region in the province of Gelderland (see The East section).

25km (16 miles) to the northeast of Utrecht is the town of Amersfoort, set in a region of heathland and forest. The old town is well preserved, one of the most attractive buildings being the Church of St George. 8km (5 miles) away is the town of Soestdijk, containing the Royal Palace and the beautiful parklands of the Queen Mother. Between Soestdijk and Hilversum is Baarn, a favourite summer resort among the Dutch.

The North

FRIESLAND: FRIESLAND: The province of Friesland in the northwest of the country has its own language and its own distinct culture. A large part of the marshlands along the North Sea coast have been reclaimed from the sea. Friesian cattle are among the most famous inhabitants of the area. The Friesian lake district in the southern part of the state centres on the town of Sneek. It is a good place for watersports, particularly yachting. Near Sneek is the small town of Bolsward, which has a magnificent Renaissance Town Hall. Leeuwarden, the capital of Friesland, has several old buildings and the Friesian Museum, probably the most important provincial museum in the country. 6km (4 miles) to the west is the village of Marssum, which has a 16th-century manor house. There are daily ferry connections with four of the Friesian Islands and a chain of museums on the Aldfaer's Erf Route. The Hollandse and Friesian Islands (Texel, Vlieland, Terschelling, Ameland and Schiermonnikoog), on which there are bird sanctuaries and areas of outstanding natural beauty, lie north of the mainland. Accommodation and campsites are available.

GRONINGEN: GRONINGEN: The agricultural province of Groningen is known for its fortified country houses dating back to the 14th century. The provincial capital, Groningen is commercially the most important town in the north of The Netherlands, as well as being a major cultural centre. The city suffered considerable damage during the Second World War, but many of the 16th-18th century buildings have now been restored.

DRENTHE: DRENTHE: This is a province of extensive cycle paths, prehistoric monuments (particularly in the area of the village of Havelte) and Saxon villages. The region is almost entirely agricultural, much of the land being drained by the system of vennis and weiks. The main town, Assen, set in an area of woodlands, was an insignificant village until the middle of the last century, and has no historical monuments. The Provincial Museum is, however, worth a visit. There are also several Megalithic tombs to be found south and southwest of the town.

The East

The wooded east consists of the provinces of Overijssel, Gelderland and Flevoland.

OVERIJSSEL: OVERIJSSEL: The province of Overijssel is a region of great variety. In the little town of Giethoorn, small canals take the place of streets, and all transport is by boat. At Wanneperven there is a well-equipped watersports centre. The old Hanseatic towns of Zwolle and Kampen have splendid quays and historic buildings. There are bird sanctuaries along the IJsselmeer.

GELDERLAND: GELDERLAND: This is The Netherlands' most extensive province, stretching from the rivers of the south to the sand dunes of the north. Gelderland is often referred to as 'the back garden of the west'. Arnhem is the major city. It was heavily damaged in the Second World War; indeed, its important position on the Rhine has led to it being captured, stormed and occupied on many occasions during its long history. The old part of the town has, however, been artfully rebuilt. There is a large open-air museum near Arnhem showing a collection of old farms, mills, houses and workshops, all of which have been brought together to form a splendid park. Not far from the town centre there is a zoo and a safari park.

Nearby is the Hoge Veluwe National Park, an extensive sandy region and a popular tourist area, which contains a game reserve (in the south), and the Kroller-Muller Art Gallery and Museum, with many modern sculptures and paintings (including a Van Gogh collection). One ticket enables the visitor to see all of this, and there are free bicycles available to cycle round the park. **Gallery and museum opening hours:** 1000-1700 Tuesday to Saturday, 1100-1700 Sunday and holidays (April to October); 1300-1700 daily (November to March). Sculpture park opening hours: 1000-1630 Tuesday to Saturday, 1100-1630 Sunday and holidays (April to October).

Almost all the old traditional villages have been converted into holiday resorts. There are no towns of any size in the Veluwe region.

FLEVOLAND: FLEVOLAND: Much of Flevoland was drained for the first time in the 1950s and 1960s, and is in many ways a museum of geography; the southern part of the province is not yet completely ready for cultivation, and visitors can witness the various stages of agricultural preparation. Lelystad is the main town of the region, built to a controversial design in the 1960s. Part of the province has also been designated as an overspill area for Randstad Holland. Flevoland's 1100 sq km (425 sq miles) of land include many large bungalow parks.

The South

NORTH BRABANT: NORTH BRABANT: This province consists mainly of a plain, rarely more than 30m (100ft) above sea level, and is mostly agricultural. The region is known for its carnival days in February and the Jazz in Duketown jazz festival. The capital of the province is the city of 's-Hertogenbosch (non-Dutch speaking visitors will welcome the use of 'Den Bosch' as a widely accepted abbreviation) situated at the centre of a region of flat pasture land which floods each winter. St Jan's Cathedral is the largest in the country; the provincial museum is also interesting. Other major cities in this large and comparatively densely populated province include Eindhoven, an industrial centre which has grown in the last 100 years; Breda, an old city with many medieval buildings - it was here that the declaration was signed in 1566 which marked the start of the Dutch War of Independence; and Tilburg, an industrial centre which also has a large amusement and recreation park (to the north of the city) whose attractions include a haunted castle.

At Europaweg, Kaatsheuvel, is the De Efteling Recreation and Adventure Park, with approximately 50 attractions, including a large fairytale wood and a big dipper; open 1000-1800 Monday to Saturday from the end of March to mid-October.

At Museumpark 1, Overloon, is the Dutch National War & Recreation Museum, which includes displays of heavy armament in a park setting and other exhibits devoted to the history of the Second World War. Open 1000-1700 Monday to Sunday (early April to September); 1000-1800 Monday to Sunday (June to August); closed January 1, December 24-26 and December 31.

At Beekse Bergen 1, Hilvarenbeek, is the De Beekse Bergen Safari Park. Safari buses are **available (continuous journey). Opening hours:** 1000-1800 April to September; 1000-1630 October.

LIMBURG: LIMBURG: The province of Limburg, the most southerly in the country, is bordered by both Belgium and Germany. The rolling hills covered with footpaths make this a good place for walking holidays. It is also famous for its cuisine. In the extreme south of the province is the city

of Maastricht, and its position at the crossroads of three countries makes it ideal for excursions to such nearby cities as Aachen over the border in the Federal Republic of Germany. Maastricht itself is one of the oldest towns in the country, and its Church of St Servatius is the oldest in The Netherlands. The church treasury is particularly interesting. Further north is the town of Roermond, an important cultural and artistic centre dominated by the superb Munsterkerk.

ZEELAND: ZEELAND: The province of Zeeland has several medieval harbour towns where some of the best seafood in Europe can be found. Most of the province lies below sea level and has been reclaimed from the sea. The region also includes several islands and peninsulas in the southwest Netherlands (Walcheren, Goeree-Overflakkee, Schouwen-Duiveland, Tholen, St Philipsland and North and South Beveland). The province has become renowned for a massive engineering project of flood barriers designed to protect the mainland and the results of reclamation from the devastating floods which periodically sweep the coastline. The countryside is intensively farmed. The capital of the province is Middelburg, a town which has been important since medieval times. The Town Hall is widely regarded as being one of the most attractive non-religious Gothic buildings in Europe. 8km (5 miles) to the north is the small town of Veere which retains many buildings from its golden age in the early 16th century. The North Sea port of Flushing (Vlissingen) is, for many British travellers arriving by boat, their first sight of The Netherlands. It is also the country's first town in another sense; in 1572 it became the first place to fly the free Dutch flag during the War of Independence.

The Coast

There are 280km (175 miles) of beaches and over 50 resorts in The Netherlands, almost all of which are easily accessible from Rotterdam, Amsterdam and The Hague. Large areas have been specially allocated for naturists and the beaches themselves are broad, sandy and gently sloping. There is surf along the coast, and those who wish to swim must be strong enough to withstand the hidden currents. Swimmers should obtain and follow local advice. In the high season, life guards are on duty along the more dangerous stretches of the coast.

9 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

Cycling: Cycling: The Netherlands is rightly known as 'the land of bicycles': around 15 million Dutch people regularly travel by bicycle and there are an estimated 12 million cycles in use. The popularity of cycling is perhaps mainly due to the country's geography: distances between the cities are short and the countryside is almost totally flat, except for a few rolling hills in the east and south (the highest of which is a mere 321m/1053ft). Not surprisingly, cycling facilities are outstanding and there are approximately 17,000km (10,625 miles) of special cycling lanes and paths available. Detailed cycling maps (recommended) can be obtained for every province from local tourist information offices; as well as indicating cycling routes and tracks, the maps provide route descriptions and guides. Cycling lanes are recognisable by a round blue sign with a white bicycle in the middle. Most itineraries are circular routes, starting and ending at the same place. The province of Gelderland has the highest number of marked cycling routes. Landscapes vary from spectacular dunes (on the Duinroute in the north of the country) to wilderness and forests (on the route across the Hoge Veluwe nature reserve in the Gelderland Valley). Long-distance routes (such as the 270-km/169-mile North Sea route LF1 between the Belgian border and the northern Dutch town of Den Helder) are also available. Bicycles can be hired virtually everywhere and a list of local hire companies is available from the Netherlands Tourist Board (see address section). Prices are approximately Dfl8 per day or Dfl35 per week. The Netherlands Railways also offer bike-rental vouchers, which can be bought at railway ticket offices (Dfl8 for one-day bike rental and G6 on presentation of a valid train ticket). Vouchers can be used at bicycle depots at

over 100 train stations throughout the country. Over 300 stations offer the facility to take bicycles onto the train. The classic Dutch upright single-speed hub-brake bicycle is the most frequent, but other types of bicycles (including mountain bikes, children's bicycles and tandems) are also available.

Walking: Walking: Walking holidays are also very popular in The Netherlands, whose 300-km/188-mile long coast has a number of scenic walks through sand dunes and nature reserves. Visitors can obtain maps with walking routes from the Foundation for Long-Distance Walks (Stitching Lange-Afstand-Wandelpadsen), PO Box 846, 3800 AV Amersfoort (tel: (33) 465 3660; fax: (33) 465 4377). Visitors can also join the annual six-day walking event (beginning of August), where participants walk from Hook of Holland to Den Helder. At Wadden Sea National Park (Europe's largest continuous national park), there is also the opportunity to take part in various types of mud walking trips on the bottom of the Wadden sea, whose shallows fall dry at low tide.

Watersports: Watersports: The Dutch coast on the western shore is well-suited and well-equipped for all types of watersports, including swimming and windsurfing. Sailing is popular on Loosdrechtse Plassen (south of Amsterdam), Friesland Lakes, Veerse Meer and the IJsselmeer. Boats can be hired without difficulty in most places. Touring Holland's canals and rivers is popular. Catamaran sailing and parachuting is possible on the islands of Texel and Ameland. Water-skiing is not permitted on inland lakes. Fishing is popular throughout the country, but while no licence is needed for sea fishing, inland fishing licences are required and are available at local post offices. whose western shore in particular has long sandy beaches backed by miles of sand dunes.

Markets: Markets: A visit to one of the famous Dutch flower markets is recommended. The best ones are in Delft, Utrecht and Amsterdam (where the famous Bloemenmarkt along the Singel canal is a major tourist attraction). Dutch flower bulbs are available for sale but it is essential to make sure the vendor sells them with an official export certificate. The most popular Dutch flowers are tulips and daffodils. There are also various colourful flower parades (corso), notably the Bollenstreek flower parade (the country's biggest). Many parades display spectacular flower 'floats' made of hyacinths, daffodils and daliahs. The Floriade, held every ten years in The Netherlands, is one of the world's most famous flower exhibitions. Due next in the year 2002 (from mid-April to mid-October), the city of Haarlemmermeer will host this prestigious horticultural event. Visitors may also visit one of the country's unique flower auctions, such as the ones in Aalsmeer (easy to reach from Amsterdam) and the 'Flower Auction Holland' near The Hague and Rotterdam in the Westland. The country's traditional cheese market is held in Alkmaar, every Friday from 1000-1200, from mid-April to mid-September.

10 SOCIAL PROFILE

Food & Drink: There are few dishes that can be described as quintessentially Dutch, and those that do fall into this category are a far cry from the elaborate creations of French or Italian cuisine. Almost every large town, however, has a wide range of restaurants specialising in their own brands of international dishes including Chinese, Italian, French, Balkan, Spanish, German, American and British. Indonesian cuisine, a result of the Dutch colonisation of the East Indies, with its use of spices and exotic ingredients, is particularly delicious. A typical Dutch breakfast usually consists of several varieties of bread, thin slices of Dutch cheese, prepared meats and sausage, butter and jam or honey and often a boiled egg. A working lunch would be koffietafel, once again with breads, various cold cuts, cheese and preserves. There will often be a side dish of omelette, cottage pie or salad.

The most common daytime snack are broodjes (sandwiches) and are served in the ubiquitous sandwich bars - broodjeswinkels. Filled pancakes are also popular. Lightly salted 'green' herring can be bought from street stalls (they are held by the tail and slipped down into the throat).

More substantial dishes are generally reserved by the Dutch themselves for the evening meal: erwtensoep (thick pea soup served with smoked sausage, cubes of bacon, pig's knuckle and brown or white bread), groentensoep (clear consommé with vegetables, vermicelli and meatballs), hutspot (potatoes, carrots and onions), klapstuk (an accompaniment of stewed lean beef) and boerenkool met rookworst (frost-cripsed kale and potatoes served with smoked sausage). Seafood dishes are often excellent, particularly in Amsterdam or Rotterdam, and include gebakken zeetong (fried sole), lekkerbekjes (fried whiting), royal imperial oysters, shrimps, mussels, lobster and eel (smoked, filleted and served on toast or stewed or fried). Favourite Dutch desserts include flensjes or pannenkoeken (25 varieties of Dutch pancake), wafels met slagroom (waffles with whipped cream), poffertje (small dough balls fried and dusted with sugar) and spekkoek (alternate layers of heavy buttered sponge and spices from Indonesia), which translated means 'bacon cake'. Coffee, tea, chocolate and fruit juice are drunk at breakfast. Restaurants usually have table service. Bars and cafés generally have the same, though some are self-service. Drink: The local spirit is jenever (Dutch gin), normally taken straight and chilled as a chaser with a glass of beer, but it is sometimes drunk with cola or vermouth; it comes in many varieties depending on the spices used. Favoured brands are Bols, Bokma, De Kuyper and Claeryn. Dutch beer is excellent. It is a light, gassy pils type beer, always served chilled, generally in small (slightly under half-pint) glasses. The most popular brand in Amsterdam is Amstel. Imported beers are also available, as are many other alcoholic beverages. Dutch liqueurs are excellent and include Curaçao, Triple Sec (similar to Cointreau), Parfait d'Amour and Dutch-made versions of crème de menthe, apricot brandy and anisette. There are no licensing laws and drink can be bought all day. Bars open later and stay open until the early hours of the morning at weekends.

Nightlife: Large cities have sophisticated nightclubs and discos, but late opening bars and cafés are just as popular in provincial towns. There are theatres and cinemas in all major towns. Amsterdam is a cosmopolitan city, with some of the liveliest nightlife in Europe. There are legal casinos in Amsterdam, Breda, Eindhoven, Den Haag, Groningen, Nymegen, Rotterdam, Zandvoort, Valkenburg and Scheveningen (which claims to have the largest in Europe); all have an age limit of 'over 18' (passports must be shown).

Shopping: Special purchases include Delft (between The Hague and Rotterdam) blue pottery and pottery from Makkum and Workum, costume dolls, silverware from Schoonhoven, glass and crystal from Leerdam and diamonds from Amsterdam. Shopping hours: 1100-1730 Monday, 0900-1700 Monday-Saturday. In Amsterdam, Rotterdam and other big cities, supermarkets are open from 0800-2000/21000. In large city centres, shops are open Sunday 1200-1700. Shopping malls are also open on Sunday.

Note: Bulbs and plants may not be exported except by commercial growers, or by individuals with a health certificate from the Plant Disease Service.

Special Events: For a complete list of events and festivals held in The Netherlands in 2001, contact the Press and Public Relations Officer at the Royal Netherlands Embassy or The Netherlands Board of Tourism (see address section). The following list gives a selection of the major festivals and special events in 2001:

Jan 24-Feb 4 2001 Rotterdam International Film Festival. Feb 24-27 Carnival, Maastricht. Mar 10-18 The European Fine Art Fair (most important fair in the world for 17th century paintings by Dutch and Flemish artists), Maastricht. Mar 22-May 24 Keukenhof Spring Gardens (The Netherlands' largest bulb garden), Keukenhof. Apr 6-Sep 7 Alkmaar Cheese Market (open-air cheese market every Friday from 1000-1200). Apr 21-22 National Museum Weekend (approximately 450 museums are open free of charge or at reduced admission), countrywide. Apr 21 Bulb Region Flower Parade (with special floats and lit displays throughout the weekend), from Noordwijk to Haarlem. Apr 30 Queen's Day, countrywide celebrations. May 12 National Windmill Day (open day). May 26-Jul 21 World Circus 2001 (Circus Festival), Rotterdam. Jun 9-30 Holland Festival, Amsterdam. Jun 24 Parkpop (free pop festival), The Hague. Jul 13-15 North Sea Jazz Festival, The Hague. Aug 23-26 Preuvenemint (food festival), Maastricht. Sep World Harbour Days, Rotterdam; Flower Festival Aalsmeer (flower auction and flower parade), from Aalsmeer to Amsterdam; Open Monument Day, countrywide. Sep 19-28 Netherlands Film Festival. Oct Blues Jamm Utrecht (Europe's largest blues festival), Utrecht. Nov 1-11 World Authors Festival, Rotterdam. Nov 29-Dec 3 Pan Pictura Antique Fair (art and antique fair), Amsterdam. Nov-Dec St Nicholas (festivities celebrating the Dutch equivalent of Father Christmas). Dec Gouda by Candlelight (Christmas festivities), Gouda.

Note: Rotterdam, together with Oporto, has been declared a European City of Culture 2001 and a wide range of events are taking place in the city throughout the year. For further information, contact Rotterdam 2001, Mauritsweg 5, PO Box 1320, 3000 BH Rotterdam, The Netherlands (tel: (10) 402 2001; e-mail: info@rotterdam01.nl; web site: <http://www.rotterdam01.nl>).

Social Conventions: It is customary to shake hands. English is spoken as a second language by many and is willingly used; many Dutch people will also speak German and French. Hospitality is very much the same as for the rest of Europe and America. It is customary to take a small gift if invited for a meal. Casual wear is widely acceptable. Men are expected to wear a suit for business and social functions. Formal wear may be required for smart restaurants, bars and clubs. Evening dress (black tie for men) is generally specified on invitation. Tipping: All hotels and restaurants include 15% service and VAT. It is customary to leave small change when paying a bill. G1-2 is usual for porters, doormen and taxi drivers. Hairdressers and barbers have inclusive service prices.

11 BUSINESS PROFILE

Economy: The Netherlands has a typically developed European economy. It is also one of the world's largest exporters of farm produce (accounting for 16% of total export earnings). Dairy products, meat, vegetables and flowers are the main products. Industry is well developed with all kinds of heavy engineering, and the production of petrochemicals, plastics, pharmaceuticals, synthetic fibres and steel. There is also a wide range of light industries, including the manufacturing of electronic goods, although the traditionally strong textiles sector is in decline. In the last twenty years, The Netherlands has developed a strong base in advanced technological industries including computing, telecommunications and biotechnology. Deposits of natural gas

(the only mineral resource of any size) meet much of the country's energy needs. Service industries are also important, notably transportation through the container port at Rotterdam, which is the world's busiest (measured by volume of freight handled). The Netherlands has derived substantial benefits from its membership of the EU, with whose members the bulk of its trade takes place. It has generally been a strong proponent of further economic integration within Europe. To that end, cuts in government spending were introduced in the mid-1990s in order to reduce the budget deficit and satisfy the conditions for joining the European Monetary Union (EMU) in January 1999. A period of high unemployment around the same time was the only negative aspect of an otherwise strong economic performance throughout the decade. The unemployment level has now been cut to 2.5%, slightly below the country's annual GDP growth rate of 3%. Germany is the largest single trading partner, accounting for about 25% of The Netherlands' imports and exports. Belgium/Luxembourg, France and the UK follow. The Netherlands is a founder member of the Benelux Economic Union and of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

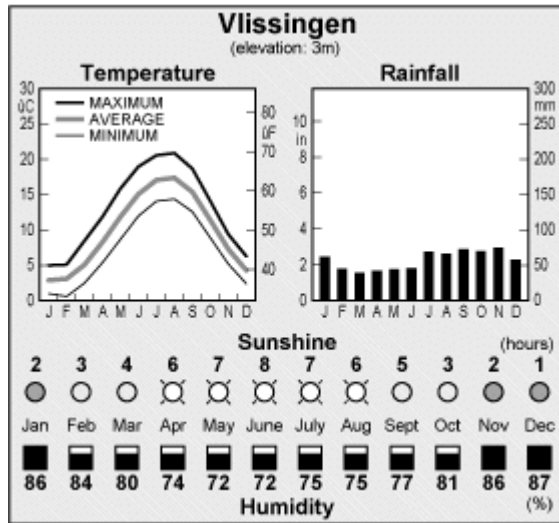
Business: Appointments are necessary and visiting cards are exchanged. The Dutch expect a certain standard of dress for business occasions. Best months for business visits are March to May and September to November. Practical information can be obtained from the Economic Information Service in The Hague (tel: (70) 379 8933; fax: (70) 379 7878; e-mail: evd@evd.nl; web site: <http://www.evd.nl>). The majority of Dutch business people speak extremely good English, and promotional literature can be disseminated in English. However, interpreters can be booked through Conference Interpreters, at Prinsegracht 993 in Amsterdam (tel: (20) 625 2535; fax: (20) 626 5642; e-mail: interpreters@conferenceinterpreters.com; web site: <http://www.conferenceinterpreters.com>). Translators can be booked through the United Dutch Translation Office, Keizersgracht 560-2, 1017 EM Amsterdam (tel: (20) 626 5889; fax: (20) 622 2371). Alternatively, they can be booked through The Netherlands Chamber of Commerce in the country of departure. (There are Netherlands-British Chambers of Commerce in London, Manchester and The Hague, and Netherlands-US Chambers of Commerce in New York and Chicago.) There are also many secretarial agencies in The Netherlands, such as International Secretaries, who will be able to supply short-term help to visiting business travellers. The principal venue for trade fairs is the RAI Exhibition Centre in Amsterdam. Office hours: 0830-1700 Monday to Friday.

Commercial Information: The following organisations can offer advice: The Hague Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Konigskade 30, 2596 AA The Hague (tel: (70) 328 7100; fax: (70) 324 0684; e-mail: info@denhaag.kvk.nl; web site: <http://www.denhaag.kvk.nl>); or

Amsterdam Chamber of Commerce and Industry, PO Box 2852, 1000 CW Amsterdam (tel: (20) 531 4000; fax: (20) 531 4699; e-mail: post@amsterdam.kvk.nl; web site: <http://www.amsterdam.kvk.nl>); or The Netherlands Chamber of Commerce, 307-308 High Holborn, London WC1V 7LS (tel: (020) 7405 1358; fax: (020) 7405 1689; e-mail: nbcc@btinternet.com; web site: <http://www.nbcc.demon.co.uk>).

Conferences/Conventions: The largest conference and exhibition centres are RAI in Amsterdam and the Jaarbeurs in Utrecht. There are smaller centres in The Hague, Rotterdam and Maastricht, as well as many hotels with facilities. The fourth-largest conference centre in The Netherlands is Noordwijk, where the largest hotel has a helipad; this small seaside town has won prizes for its clean beaches. Amsterdam and The Hague both have business centres. For further information, contact the Netherlands Board of Tourism in London (see address section) or The Netherlands Convention Bureau, Amsteldijk 166, 1079 LH Amsterdam (tel: (20) 646 2580; fax: (20) 644 5935; e-mail: ncb@xs4all.nl; web site: <http://www.nlcongress.nl>).

12 CLIMATE



Mild, maritime climate. Summers are generally warm with changeable periods, but excessively hot weather is rare. Winters can be fairly cold with the possibility of some snow. Rainfall is prevalent all year.

Required clothing: European according to season, with light- to medium-weights worn in warmer months and medium- to heavy-weights in winter. Rainwear is advisable all year.

13 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

History: Since the early Middle Ages, the region of the Low Countries had established itself as one of the most prosperous parts of Europe but - paradoxically - also one of the most politically unstable. At various times the ambitions of both the kings of France and the Holy Roman Emperors threatened to annexe the region, although neither were powerful enough to subdue the proud municipalities permanently which, largely as a result of the wool trade, had grown up during the medieval period. By the early 16th century, imperial influence had gained the upper hand, and the Low Countries had, partly through dynastic ties, become annexed to the far-flung empire of the Habsburgs. It was against their rule that the largely Protestant northern provinces of the Low Countries, led by William of Orange and Nassau, rebelled in 1568. The struggle for independence, which lasted until 1648, also saw a remarkable growth in Dutch sea power (a phenomenon never satisfactorily explained by historians) as many Spanish and Portuguese possessions in the New World and the Far East were seized. The 17th century, the so-called 'Golden Age', also witnessed a flowering of art and culture which placed the tiny but rich country at the forefront of European culture. In 1689, William III of Orange also became King of England, but the association was severed on his death in 1702. During the 18th century, the power of The Netherlands was on the wane, and in 1810 it was absorbed into Napoleon's empire. Subsequently, the whole area of the Low Countries was briefly reunited (1814-30). In 1848 the constitution was amended, giving the monarch only limited powers. The Netherlands took no part in the World War I, but suffered badly as a result of the Nazi invasion of 1940. Post-war Dutch diplomacy has concentrated on increasing European unity, and these efforts culminated in 1957 when The Netherlands became one of the six founder-members of the EC. In the second half of 1991, the Dutch held the Presidency of the EC and were responsible for organising the crucial

summit at Maastricht in December 1991 which was set up to decide the future of EU integration in economic and monetary policy and other areas. Domestic politics have been dominated by the customary Western European blend of conservative and social democratic governments. In the June 1989 election for the First Chamber, the Christian Democrat CDA and the centrist VVD (People's Freedom and Democracy) formed a coalition with, by the smallest possible margin, a combined total of 76 of 150 seats. In the Second Chamber, the CDA-VVD alliance held a small majority following the poll of May 1991. After being excluded for all but five years since the 1960s, the centre-left PvdA (Labour Party) finally entered office after the First Chamber election of May 1994 brought about the collapse of the CDA vote. PvdA leader Wim Kok heads a 3-party 'purple coalition' with the VVD and the centrist Demokraten 66. Following initial tensions (mainly over welfare spending) a PvdA-VVD-D66 alliance was agreed in August. Wim Kok became Prime Minister, excluding the CDA from the Cabinet for the first time since 1917. The coalition has presided over a period of strong economic growth while managing to introduce far-reaching labour and welfare reforms. At the 1998 general election, the coalition was comfortably returned to power, with the PvdA and VVD recording increases in their vote at the expense of D66 (once again keeping the CDA out in the cold). There are tensions within the coalition, however, over public expenditure, which has been cut once again in order to meet conditions for the Netherlands to join and remain within the Euro currency zone but so far it has proved reasonably durable.

Government: The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral multi-party legislature: the First (Lower) Chamber has 150 members elected for a 4-year term; the Second (Upper) Chamber has 75 members indirectly elected by provincial councils for the same length of term.

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