



Netherlands

Canals, windmills, tulip fields and bicycles, in a small, flat country that has spent centuries holding back the sea.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Amsterdam

SEAT OF GOVERNMENT

The Hague, where the parliament, the government and the Supreme Court sit

POPULATION

About 18.2 million (Statistics Netherlands, CBS, July 2026)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Dutch. West Frisian is also official in the province of Friesland, and English and Papiamentu on the Caribbean islands

CURRENCY

Euro, since 1999 (notes and coins since 2002); before that, the Dutch guilder. The Caribbean islands use the US dollar

AREA

About 41,850 km² including lakes and coastal waters, of which about 33,500 km² is land

GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary constitutional monarchy. King Willem-Alexander (since 2013) is head of state, and the prime minister leads the government

HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

Mount Scenery, about 870 m, a dormant volcano on the Caribbean island of Saba. In the European part: the Vaalserberg, about 322 m

MAIN RIVERS

The Rhine and the Meuse (Maas), which reach the North Sea through a great delta shared with the Scheldt

NEIGHBOURS

Germany and Belgium on land. The United Kingdom lies across the North Sea. In the Caribbean, Venezuela lies south of Bonaire, and Saint Kitts and Nevis and Saint Barthélemy are near Saba and Sint Eustatius. The wider Kingdom also borders France on the island of Saint Martin

DRIVES ON THE

Right

CALLING CODE

+31 (+599 on the Caribbean islands)

A 45-minute trip to Netherlands

Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find Netherlands together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story: AD 50: Romans build a fort at Utrecht; 1848: A new constitution; 1957: A founding member of the EEC. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Stroopwafel and Raw herring (Hollandse Nieuwe). Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Hallo" (Hello), "Goedemorgen" (Good morning), "Goedemiddag" (Good afternoon). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://preview.worldstroll.com/countries/netherlands/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

Netherlands and its cities



- Amsterdam (North Holland): The canal ring and its bridges, The Rijksmuseum and the Van Gogh Museum, The Anne Frank House, Bicycles everywhere
- Rotterdam (South Holland): Europe's largest port, The Erasmus Bridge, Modern architecture, The Van Nelle Factory
- The Hague (South Holland): The Binnenhof, the historic home of parliament, The Mauritshuis and 'Girl with a Pearl Earring', International courts, The beach at Scheveningen
- Utrecht (Utrecht): The Dom Tower, Canals with wharves at water level, The Union of Utrecht of 1579, The Rietveld Schröder House
- Groningen (Groningen): A big student population, Nickname 'capital of the north', Its Hanseatic history
- Maastricht (Limburg): The Maastricht Treaty of 1992, The Vrijthof square, Its Roman

beginnings

- Leiden (South Holland): The oldest university in the Netherlands, The birthplace of Rembrandt, The 3 October festival, Close to the Keukenhof gardens
- Haarlem (North Holland): Nickname 'flower city' (Bloemenstad), The tulip bulb district, The coastal dunes nearby
- Delft (South Holland): Delft blue pottery, The painter Vermeer, The House of Orange, Its university of technology
- Gouda (South Holland): Gouda cheese, Stroopwafels, The 15th-century city hall, Clay smoking pipes
- Middelburg (Zeeland): Early telescopes and microscopes, The Delta Works nearby, The medieval abbey, seat of the provincial government

A short history of Netherlands

The story of the Netherlands is a story of water and trade. Romans guarded the Rhine, medieval farmers drained the marshes, and a rebellion against Spain gave birth to a proud trading republic. Later came a kingdom, a hard occupation in the Second World War, and great works to keep the sea out for good.

AD 50 **Romans build a fort at Utrecht**

Around AD 50 the Romans built a small fort at a crossing of the Rhine, which then marked the northern edge of their empire. It grew into the city of Utrecht. The remains of the Roman frontier along the Rhine are now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

1568 **The Eighty Years' War begins**

Provinces of the Low Countries rose against their ruler, King Philip II of Spain, over taxes, religion and their old rights. Led by William of Orange, known as William the Silent, the Dutch Revolt became a long war, usually dated from 1568.

1579 **The Union of Utrecht**

On 23 January 1579, northern provinces and cities signed an alliance in Utrecht to stand together against Philip II. It is often seen as the first step towards the Dutch Republic and even as an early kind of constitution.

1602 **The Dutch East India Company is founded**

On 20 March 1602 the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was founded, one of the first companies whose shares anyone could buy. It built a trading empire across Asia, with forts, colonies and its own soldiers, and it also traded in enslaved people and used great violence.

1637 **Tulip mania collapses**

Tulips spread in the Netherlands from the 1590s, after the botanist Carolus Clusius planted them in Leiden. In the 1630s prices for rare bulbs soared, some selling for more than ten times a skilled craftsman's yearly income, until the market suddenly collapsed in February 1637. It is often called the first recorded speculative bubble.

1648

The Peace of Münster

On 30 January 1648 Spain signed the Peace of Münster, formally recognising the Dutch Republic as independent and ending the Eighty Years' War. This was the heart of the Dutch Golden Age, the century of Rembrandt, Vermeer and worldwide trade.

1815

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is founded

After years of French rule under Napoleon, William of Orange-Nassau declared himself King William I on 16 March 1815. His new kingdom also included most of today's Belgium, and his family, the House of Orange-Nassau, still reigns.

1830

Belgium breaks away

In August 1830 riots in Brussels grew into a revolution, and the southern provinces broke away to form the Kingdom of Belgium. The Netherlands only accepted Belgian independence in 1839.

1848

A new constitution

As revolutions swept across Europe in 1848, King William II agreed to a new constitution drafted by a commission led by Johan Rudolph Thorbecke. Ministers became answerable to parliament, and the Netherlands has been a parliamentary constitutional monarchy ever since.

1863

Slavery is abolished

On 1 July 1863 the Netherlands abolished slavery in Suriname and its Caribbean islands, where about 45,000 people were still enslaved. In Suriname they had to keep working on plantations for another ten years. The day is remembered as Ketikoti, 'the chain is cut'.

1932

The Afsluitdijk closes the Zuiderzee

On 28 May 1932 workers closed the last gap in the Afsluitdijk, a 32 km dam that cut off the Zuiderzee, an arm of the North Sea. The salty inland sea slowly became a freshwater lake, the IJsselmeer, and large new polders were later drained from it.

1940

Germany invades

On 10 May 1940 Germany invaded the neutral Netherlands. On 14 May German bombers destroyed the historic centre of Rotterdam, and the main Dutch forces surrendered the same day. Queen Wilhelmina and the government carried on from exile in Britain.

1942

Anne Frank goes into hiding

On 6 July 1942 Anne Frank, a 13-year-old Jewish girl, went into hiding with her family in a secret annex behind her father's business on the Prinsengracht in Amsterdam. They were discovered and arrested in August 1944, and Anne died in the Bergen-Belsen camp in early 1945. About three quarters of the Jews of the Netherlands were murdered in the Holocaust.

1945

Liberation

On 5 May 1945, at Wageningen, the German commander agreed to surrender all German forces in the Netherlands. Every year the Dutch remember the war dead on 4 May and celebrate Liberation Day on 5 May.

1953

The great flood

On the night of 31 January to 1 February 1953 a storm surge broke through the dikes in Zeeland and South Holland, and 1,836 people died in the Netherlands. The disaster led to the Delta Works, dams and storm barriers built between 1954 and 1997.

1957

A founding member of the EEC

On 25 March 1957 the Netherlands signed the Treaty of Rome with Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg and West Germany, creating the European Economic Community, which grew into today's European Union.

What people eat in Netherlands

Dutch cooking is simple, filling and built on dairy, potatoes, vegetables and fish from the North Sea. Breakfast and lunch are usually bread, often with cheese or sweet toppings, and the warm meal comes in the evening: traditionally potatoes, vegetables and a little meat with gravy. Coffee time with a cake or a biscuit is a daily ritual, and centuries of trade, especially with Indonesia and Suriname, brought spices and dishes that the Dutch now think of as their own.

Stroopwafel

Gouda, South Holland

Two thin, crisp waffles pressed together with a warm, sticky filling of syrup, brown sugar, butter and cinnamon. They are sold hot and fresh at markets and in packets in every supermarket.

Raw herring (Hollandse Nieuwe) (Hollandse Nieuwe haring)

The North Sea coast

Young herring, lightly salted and ripened, eaten raw from a fish stall, often with chopped raw onion and pickles or in a soft bread roll. The new season's herring, 'Hollandse Nieuwe', arrives in early summer. By law, herring for eating raw is frozen first to kill parasites. Like other raw fish, it is best avoided by pregnant women, and older people or anyone with a weakened immune system may prefer to skip it too.

Bitterballen

All of the Netherlands

Small crunchy balls of thick beef ragout, rolled in breadcrumbs and deep-fried, served piping hot with mustard for dipping. They are part of the classic plate of snacks served with drinks in a Dutch café.

Poffertjes

All of the Netherlands

Tiny, fluffy pancakes made with yeast and cooked in a special pan with many shallow hollows, then served with a knob of butter and a snowfall of powdered sugar.

Pea soup (Erwtensoep or snert)

All of the Netherlands

A very thick winter soup of green split peas with pork, celeriac, leeks, carrots, onions and often potato, finished with slices of smoked sausage. It is almost a stew, served with dark rye bread and bacon.

Kale stamppot (Boerenkoolstamppot)

All of the Netherlands

Potatoes mashed together with curly kale, butter and warm milk, served with a smoked sausage and gravy or mustard. Stamppot, 'mash pot', is the classic cold-weather dinner, also made with sauerkraut, endive or carrots and onions.

Hutspot

Leiden, South Holland

Potatoes, carrots and onions boiled and mashed together, traditionally with slow-cooked beef. It is sweet, orange and comforting.

Gouda cheese (Goudse kaas)

Gouda, South Holland

A yellow cow's milk cheese, from young, soft and mild to old, hard and full of flavour. It is eaten on bread at breakfast and lunch, and in cubes with a drink.

Edam cheese (Edammer)

Edam, North Holland

A mild, semi-hard cheese shaped like a ball with flat ends, often sold with a coat of red wax. It is lower in fat than many cheeses.

Liquorice (Drop)

All of the Netherlands

Black liquorice sweets in every shape, from soft and sweet to hard and very salty (zoute drop). Dutch liquorice is often flavoured with ammonium chloride, which gives it its salty taste.

Chocolate sprinkles (Hagelslag)

All of the Netherlands

Little chocolate sprinkles scattered thickly on a slice of buttered bread, eaten at breakfast or lunch by children and adults alike. There are also fruit-flavoured and aniseed versions.

Dutch apple pie (Appeltaart)

All of the Netherlands

A deep apple pie in a buttery, crumbly crust, filled with apple pieces, cinnamon and lemon, often with raisins, and topped with a lattice or crumble. It is served with a spoonful of whipped cream, 'met slagroom'.

Oliebollen

All of the Netherlands

Round balls of yeast dough, often with raisins or apple, deep-fried and dusted with powdered sugar. They are the traditional treat for New Year's Eve, sold from stalls all through December.

Kibbeling

The North Sea coast

Bite-sized chunks of white fish, traditionally cod, in a spiced batter, fried and served hot from a market fish stall with a mayonnaise-based sauce such as remoulade.

Jenever (Jenever (also genever))

The Netherlands and Belgium

A juniper-flavoured spirit, the traditional liquor of the Netherlands and Belgium. There are two kinds, 'jonge' (young) and 'oude' (old). It is strong alcohol, to be sipped slowly.

Rice table (Rijsttafel)

Indonesian dishes, Dutch colonial custom

A feast of rice with many small Indonesian dishes: satay, sambal, curries, vegetables, eggs, fish and crunchy extras. The dishes are Indonesian, but the idea of serving dozens at once was a Dutch colonial custom, made to impress visitors.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- Before eating, people wish each other 'eet smakelijk' (ayt SMAH-kuh-luk), 'enjoy your meal'.
- When raising a glass, say 'proost' (PROHST), 'cheers'.
- Coffee time is a real tradition: guests are offered coffee or tea with a biscuit or a slice of cake, and the old saying goes that you take just one biscuit from the tin.
- Service is included in restaurant prices by law. Tipping is not required, but rounding up or leaving 5 to 10 percent for good service is common.

Poffertjes

Tiny, fluffy pancakes made with yeast and cooked in a special pan with many shallow hollows, then served with a knob of butter and a snowfall of powdered sugar.

Ingredients

- 125 g plain flour
- 125 g buckwheat flour (or use all plain flour)
- 7 g dried yeast (1 sachet)
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- A pinch of salt
- 1 egg
- About 300 ml lukewarm milk
- Butter for the pan and for serving
- Powdered sugar for serving

Method

1. Mix the flours, yeast, sugar and salt in a bowl.
2. Whisk in the egg and the milk little by little to make a smooth, thick batter that drops slowly from a spoon.
3. Cover the bowl and leave it in a warm place for about 45 minutes, until the batter is bubbly.
4. Heat a poffertjes pan over a medium heat and brush the hollows with melted butter. Without a special pan, use a heavy frying pan and drop in small teaspoons of batter.
5. Fill each hollow about three quarters full. When the tops start to set and bubble, turn them with a fork or skewer and cook the other side until golden, about 1 to 2 minutes in total.
6. Serve at once with a knob of butter and plenty of powdered sugar.

Pea soup

A very thick winter soup of green split peas with pork, celeriac, leeks, carrots, onions and often potato, finished with slices of smoked sausage. It is almost a stew, served with dark rye bread and bacon.

Ingredients

- 500 g green split peas, rinsed
- 2 litres water
- 500 g pork ribs or a piece of pork belly
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 leeks, sliced
- 2 carrots, diced
- Half a small celeriac, peeled and diced
- 2 potatoes, peeled and diced
- 1 smoked sausage (rookworst), about 275 g
- A handful of chopped celery leaves
- Salt and black pepper
- Dark rye bread, to serve

Method

1. Put the split peas, water and pork in a large pot, bring to the boil and skim off the foam.
2. Cover and simmer gently for about 1 hour, stirring now and then so the peas do not stick.
3. Take out the pork. Add the onion, leeks, carrots, celeriac and potatoes and simmer for another 45 minutes to 1 hour, until the peas have fallen apart and the soup is very thick.
4. Meanwhile cut the meat from the bones into small pieces. Heat the smoked sausage in hot water as the packet says, then slice it.
5. Return the meat to the pot with the sausage and the celery leaves, season with salt and pepper and heat through, stirring well.

6. Serve hot with rye bread. The soup is even better the next day, thinned with a little water.

Kale stamppot

Potatoes mashed together with curly kale, butter and warm milk, served with a smoked sausage and gravy or mustard. Stamppot, 'mash pot', is the classic cold-weather dinner, also made with sauerkraut, endive or carrots and onions.

Ingredients

- 1 kg floury potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
- 500 g curly kale, washed and finely chopped
- 1 smoked sausage (rookworst), about 275 g
- About 150 ml warm milk
- 40 g butter
- Salt, black pepper and a little nutmeg
- Mustard or gravy, to serve

Method

1. Put the potatoes in a large pan, just cover with salted water and bring to the boil.
2. Put the chopped kale on top of the potatoes, cover and cook for about 20 minutes, until the potatoes are soft.
3. Meanwhile heat the smoked sausage in hot water as the packet says.
4. Drain the potatoes and kale well, add the butter and mash everything together, adding warm milk until it is smooth but firm.
5. Season with salt, pepper and a little nutmeg.
6. Serve with slices of sausage and mustard, or with gravy.

Dutch apple pie

A deep apple pie in a buttery, crumbly crust, filled with apple pieces, cinnamon and lemon, often with raisins, and topped with a lattice or crumble. It is served with a spoonful of whipped cream, 'met slagroom'.

Ingredients

- 300 g self-raising flour, plus a little for rolling
- 200 g cold butter, cubed
- 150 g light brown sugar
- 1 egg, beaten (keep a little for brushing)
- A pinch of salt
- 1 kg tart apples, such as Elstar, Goudreinnet or Bramley
- 75 g sugar
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- Juice of half a lemon
- 50 g raisins (optional)
- Whipped cream, to serve

Method

1. Heat the oven to 175 °C and butter a 24 cm springform tin.
2. Rub the butter into the flour, brown sugar and salt, add most of the egg and knead briefly to a smooth dough. Chill for 20 minutes.
3. Peel and core the apples, cut them into small chunks and mix with the sugar, cinnamon, lemon juice and raisins.
4. Press about two thirds of the dough over the base and up the sides of the tin. Fill with the apples.
5. Roll out the rest of the dough, cut it into strips and lay them in a lattice over the top. Brush with the remaining egg.
6. Bake for about 60 to 70 minutes, until golden brown and the apples are soft. Let it cool in the tin before serving with whipped cream.

Useful phrases

Hallo

HAH-loh · Hello

Goedemorgen

KHOO-duh-MOR-khuh · Good morning

Goedemiddag

KHOO-duh-MID-dahkh · Good afternoon

Goedenavond

KHOO-duh-NAH-vont · Good evening

Hoe gaat het?

hoo KHAHT hut · How are you?

Dank u wel

DAHNK uu vel · Thank you very much (polite)

Dank je wel

DAHNK yuh vel · Thank you very much (friendly)

Alstublieft

AHL-stuu-BLEEF · Please, or here you are

Pardon

par-DON · Excuse me

Sorry

SOR-ee · I'm sorry

Spreekt u Engels?

SPRAYKT uu ENG-uls · Do you speak English?

Ik begrijp het niet

ik buh-KHRAYP hut NEET · I don't understand

Hoeveel kost dit?

hoo-VAYL KOST dit · How much does this cost?

Waar is het toilet?

VAHR is hut twah-LET · Where is the toilet?

De rekening, alstublieft

duh RAY-kuh-ning AHL-stuu-BLEEF · The bill, please

Eet smakelijk

ayt SMAH-kuh-luk · Enjoy your meal

Proost

PROHST · Cheers

Het was heel lekker

hut vahs HAYL LEK-ur · It was delicious

Tot ziens

tot ZEENS · Goodbye

Things you might not know

1. About 26 percent of the Netherlands lies below sea level, and about 21 percent of the people live there, protected by dikes, dunes and pumps.
2. Holland is not the whole country: it is a region made up of two of the twelve provinces, North Holland and South Holland. In 2019 the Dutch government decided to use 'the Netherlands' rather than 'Holland' in its international communication.
3. Amsterdam is the capital named in the constitution, and the king is sworn in there, but the parliament, the government and the Supreme Court sit in The Hague.
4. The Dutch own at least 18 million bicycles, about one for every person, and about 27 percent of all trips are made by bike.
5. Flevoland, the twelfth and newest province, was formed in 1986 on land drained from the former Zuiderzee. Its land was reclaimed between 1942 and 1968, and its largest city, Almere, is now the seventh-largest city in the country.
6. The highest point of the Netherlands is not in Europe: it is Mount Scenery, a dormant volcano on the Caribbean island of Saba, which became part of the Netherlands in 2010.
7. New York began as the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam, at the tip of Manhattan. The English took it in 1664 and renamed it New York.
8. Dutch water boards, which look after dikes and water levels, go back to the 12th century, and people still elect their members every four years.
9. In the 1800s the Dutch were known for being short. By 2012 young Dutch men averaged about 183 cm, among the tallest in the world.
10. On King's Day, 27 April (26 April if the 27th is a Sunday), the country turns orange, the colour of the royal House of Orange, and people all over the country sell their old things at a huge street 'free market'.
11. Some 1,200 historic windmills still stand in the Netherlands, and many of them still work.
12. Dutch children get their main presents on 5 December from Sinterklaas, who traditionally arrives by steamboat from Spain in mid-November and

rides a white horse.

TALK ABOUT IT

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to the Netherlands, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Stroopwafel or Raw herring (Hollandse Nieuwe)? What is a dish you remember from a trip?
- The great flood (1953). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- A founding member of the EEC (1957). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen Rijksmuseum, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of the Netherlands, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know Netherlands?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. Which city is famous for blue and white pottery and was home to the painter Vermeer?

- A) Groningen
- B) Delft
- C) Gouda
- D) Maastricht

2. The rijsttafel, or 'rice table', brings together many small dishes from which country's cuisine?

- A) Indonesia
- B) Japan
- C) India
- D) Morocco

3. In Dutch restaurants, a 20 percent service charge is added to the bill by law.

- A) True
- B) False

4. What currency did the Netherlands use before the euro?

- A) The guilder
- B) The krone
- C) The mark
- D) The franc

5. Which colour do the Dutch wear on King's Day?

- A) Orange
- B) Blue
- C) Green
- D) Red

6. As of 2026, you can pay for Dutch trains, trams and buses by tapping a contactless bank card at the start and end of each journey.

- A) True
- B) False

7. On which evening are oliebollen traditionally eaten?

- A) New Year's Eve
- B) Easter Sunday
- C) Midsummer's Eve
- D) King's Day

8. 'Lekker' is the Dutch word for cheese.

- A) True
- B) False

9. In which city do the Dutch parliament and government sit?

- A) Rotterdam
- B) Amsterdam
- C) The Hague
- D) Utrecht

10. According to legend, the starving people of which city found a pot of hutspot left behind by Spanish soldiers in 1574?

- A) Leiden
- B) Gouda
- C) Groningen
- D) Delft

11. Gouda cheese is traditionally made from sheep's milk.

- A) True
- B) False

12. When do Dutch people say 'Eet smakelijk'?

- A) When leaving a shop
- B) When saying sorry
- C) When raising a glass
- D) Just before eating

Quiz answers

1. B) Delft

Delft is known for Delft blue pottery and was the home of Johannes Vermeer.

2. A) Indonesia

The dishes of a rijsttafel are Indonesian. Serving dozens at once was a Dutch colonial custom.

3. False

False. By law, service is included in the prices. Tipping is optional: rounding up or 5 to 10 percent for good service is common.

4. A) The guilder

The guilder was the Dutch currency for centuries until the euro replaced it. Euro notes and coins arrived in 2002.

5. A) Orange

Orange is the colour of the royal House of Orange, and on King's Day the whole country turns orange.

6. True

True. Since 2023 all public transport accepts contactless bank cards and phones. Remember to tap out when you leave.

7. A) New Year's Eve

Oliebollen, deep-fried dough balls often with raisins, are the traditional treat for New Year's Eve.

8. False

False. 'Lekker' means tasty or nice. The word for cheese is 'kaas'.

9. C) The Hague

The Hague is the seat of the parliament, the government and the Supreme Court, although Amsterdam is the capital.

10. A) Leiden

When the siege of Leiden ended in 1574, legend says the people found hutspot in the Spanish camp. Leiden still eats it every 3 October.

11. False

False. Gouda is a cow's milk cheese, named after the town of Gouda where it was sold.

12. D) Just before eating

Just before eating, everyone says 'eet smakelijk', meaning 'enjoy your meal'. For a toast, say 'proost'.

Netherlands visa page

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