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Presentation of The Netherlands

by Annet Geerling and ULrike Thiel

The Netherlands is a flatter than flat country most commonly associated with tulips, windmills, clogs and cheese. While such clichéd images of the Netherlands still hold true, Holland offers much more than the stereotypical national quirks. It's a small, vibrant nation that can be traversed in a few hours - but it begs a longer stay than that.

The Netherlands (/iˈn.ðr.l.ndz/; Dutch: Nederland, pronounced [ˈne.d.rl.nt] West Frisian: Nederlân; Papiamentu: Hulanda) is a constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, located mainly in North-West Europe and with several islands in the Caribbean.

Mainland Netherlands borders the North Sea to the north and west, Belgium to the south, and Germany to the east, and shares maritime borders with Belgium, Germany, and the United Kingdom. It is a parliamentary democracy organised as a unitary state.

The country capital is Amsterdam and the seat of government is The Hague. The Netherlands in its entirety is often referred to as Holland, although North and South Holland are actually only two of its twelve provinces.

Safety aspects

In general the Netherlands is a very safe country, and with the usual precautions you won't experience any problems while travelling. You are advised not to wander around certain neighbourhoods alone late at night. Although nothing worse will probably happen to you than being the victim of a pick pocket, this is never something you would like on your holiday so be sure to keep your belongings somewhere close to your body.

Violent robberies and other crimes are rare and you are unlikely to be confronted with these forms of crime. If you are, you can always call 112 for immediate help.

Trafficwise, the Netherlands is one of the safest countries in the world. The country is known for its network of bicycle lanes, which greatly improves the safety for cyclists.

The country does not experience many natural disasters other than occasional floods. Hurricanes and earthquakes are almost non-existent and few people die because of any other natural disaster like heavy rains, thunder, hail, heat or cold.

The historical Motto Of the NL is: Je maintiendrai (I will maintain)

The Netherlands was one of the first countries to have an elected parliament. Among other affiliations the country is a founding member of the EU, NATO, OECD and WTO. With Belgium and Luxembourg it forms the Benelux economic union. The country is host to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and five international courts: the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, the International Criminal Court and the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. The first four are situated in The Hague as is the EU's criminal intelligence agency Europol and judicial co-operation agency Eurojust. This has led to the city being dubbed "the world's legal capital". The Netherlands has a capitalist market-based economy, ranking 13th of 157 countries according to the Index of Economic Freedom. In May 2011, the Netherlands was ranked as the 'happiest' country according to results published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The History of NL

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- French domination 1795–1814
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The southern part of the country was part of the Holy Roman Empire until it was acquired piece by piece by the Burgundians. At the end of the Middle Ages, it became a Spanish possession

(together with what is now Belgium). Little survives from this period, except a few historic city centers, and a few castles.

Following the Dutch Revolt, led by national hero William of Orange (Willem van Oranje), the Netherlands became a de facto independent republic in 1572. The (first) split with Belgium came when the northern provinces (including Flanders) signed the Union of Utrecht in 1579. It grew to become one of the major economic and seafaring powers in the world during the 17th century, which is known as the Dutch Golden Age (Gouden Eeuw). During this period, many colonies were founded or conquered, including the Netherlands East Indies (currently Indonesia) and New Amsterdam (currently New York City), which was later traded with the British for Suriname.

In 1805, the country became a kingdom when Emperor Napoleon appointed his brother 'King of Holland'. In 1815, it became the 'United Kingdom of the Netherlands (Verenigd Koninkrijk der Nederlanden) together with Belgium and Luxembourg under King William I (Willem I). In 1830 Belgium seceded and formed a separate kingdom. Luxembourg received independence from the Netherlands in 1890, as the Salic Law prohibited a female ruler.

Avoiding the liberal revolutions of 1848 and new adopted Treaty, The Netherlands quietly became a constitutional monarchy and remained neutral in World War I but suffered a brutal invasion and occupation by Germany in World War II. A modern, industrialized nation, the Netherlands is also a large exporter of agricultural products. In 1944, the Low Countries formed the union of the Benelux in which they economically (and sometimes politically) work together. The country was a founding member of NATO in 1949 and the European Community (EC) in 1957, and participated in the introduction of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) in 1999.

Early History

The Low Countries (current-day Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg) have been inhabited by Germanic tribes since 600 BC when the Romans conquered it around 10 BC. The cities of Utrecht, Nijmegen and Maastricht were the Netherlands' first major cities. built during the Roman occupation.

The Middel Ages

The Low Countries passed in and out of foreign hands during the Middle Ages, going through a Burgundian period and a spell under the Austrian Habsburgs, before Phillip II of Spain took control in the middle of the 16th century.

Early Middle Ages.

As the Roman state got weaker, barbaric Germanic tribes started to invade the land. Most powerful of them, the Franks invaded the territory in the 5th century and brought the Christianity with them. By 800 today's Netherlands was a part of the powerful Franks Empire of Charlemagne. It is in Nijmegen that Charlemagne built one of his palaces. Tradition says that Nijmegen was his favorite residence, while Aachen (today in Germany) was the empire's capital.

Economical growth in the Middle Ages.

After the fall of the Charlemagne Empire (he died in 814) the Low Countries territory has been divided into several smaller states – ruled by dukes and counts. At the same time, already in the Middle Ages, a strong economical development made the Netherlands one of the richest areas in Europe. Agriculture along with crafts and commerce, rich towns and important trading links reaching as far as Asia and North Africa, transformed the Netherlands into the area where the feudal power has been limited, safety of movement and economical activity established, sustained growth possible..

Habsburg Netherland

Under Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain, the Netherlands region was part of the Seventeen Provinces, which also included most of present-day Belgium, Luxembourg, and some land in France and Germany. Under Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain, the Netherlands region was part of the Seventeen Provinces, which also included most of present-day Belgium, Luxembourg, and some land in France and Germany.

The Eighty Years' War between the provinces and Spain began in 1568. In 1579, the northern half of the Seventeen Provinces formed the Union of Utrecht, a treaty in which they promised to support each other in their defense against the Spanish army. The Union of Utrecht is seen as the foundation of the modern Netherlands. In 1581 the northern provinces adopted the Act of Abjuration, the declaration of independence in which the provinces officially deposed Philip II of Spain as reigning monarch in the northern provinces.

Queen Elizabeth I of England sympathised with the Dutch struggle against the Spanish,

and in 1585 she concluded a treaty with the Dutch whereby she promised to send an English army to the Netherlands to aid the Dutch in their war with the Spanish. In December 1585, 7,600 soldiers were sent to the Netherlands from England under the command of Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester. However, the English army was of no real benefit to the Dutch rebellion. Although Robert Dudley returned to the Netherlands in November 1586 with another army, the army still had little effect in the rebellion. Philip II, the son of Charles V, was not prepared to let them go easily, and war continued until 1648, when Spain under King Philip IV finally recognised the independence of the seven northwestern provinces in the Peace of Münster. Parts of the southern provinces became de facto colonies of the new republican-mercantile empire.

Dutch Republic 1581–1795

After independence, the provinces of Holland, Zeeland, Groningen, Friesland, Utrecht, Overijssel, and Gelre formed a confederation known as the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands. All these provinces were autonomous and had their own government, the "States of the Province". The States-General, the confederal government, were seated in The Hague and consisted of representatives from each of the seven provinces. After independence, the provinces of Holland, Zeeland, Groningen, Friesland, Utrecht, Overijssel, and Gelre formed a confederation known as the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands. All these provinces were autonomous and had their own government, the "States of the Province". The States-General, the confederal government, were seated in The Hague and consisted of representatives from each of the seven provinces. The sparsely populated region of Drenthe, mainly consisting of poor peatland, was part of the republic too, although Drenthe was not considered one of the provinces; it had its own States, but the landdrost of Drenthe was appointed by the States-General. Moreover, the Republic had come to occupy during the Eighty Years' War a number of so-called Generality Lands (Generaliteitslanden in Dutch). These territories were governed directly by the States-General. They did not have a government of their own and did not have representatives in the States-General. Their population was mainly Roman Catholic, and these areas were used as a buffer zone between the Republic and the Southern Netherlands.

The Dutch Empire grew to become one of the major seafaring and economic powers of the 17th century. In the Dutch Golden Age ("Gouden Eeuw"), colonies and trading posts were established all over the world. Dutch settlement in North America began with the founding of New Amsterdam, on the southern tip of Manhattan in 1614. In South Africa, the Dutch settled the Cape Colony in 1652. By 1650, the Dutch owned 16,000 merchant ships. During the 17th century, the Dutch population increased from an estimated 1.5 million to almost 2 million.

Many economic historians regard the Netherlands as the first thoroughly capitalist country in the world. In early modern Europe it featured the wealthiest trading city (Amsterdam) and the first full-time stock exchange. The inventiveness of the traders led to insurance and retirement funds as well as phenomena such as the boom-bust cycle, the world's first asset-inflation bubble, the tulip mania of 1636–1637, and, according to Murray Sayle, the world's first bear raider, Isaac le Maire, who forced prices down by dumping stock and then buying it back at a discount.[22] The republic went into a state of general decline in the later 18th century, with economic competition from England and long standing rivalries between the two main factions in Dutch society, the Staatsgezinden (Republicans) and the Prinsgezinden (Royalists or Orangists) as main factors

Disputes arose between the Dutch and the English. In 1667, the Dutch decided to keep the nascent plantation colony of Suriname conquered from the English, resulting from the Treaty of Breda. The English were left with New Amsterdam, a small trading post in North America, which is now known as New York City

French domination 1795–1814

On 19 January 1795, one day after stadtholder William V of Orange fled to England, the Bataafse Republiek (Batavian Republic) was proclaimed, rendering the Netherlands a unitary state. From 1795 to 1806, the Batavian Republic designated the Netherlands as a republic modelled after the French Republic.

From 1806 to 1810, the Koninkrijk Holland (Kingdom of Holland) was set up by Napoleon Bonaparte as a puppet kingdom governed by his brother Louis Bonaparte in order to control the Netherlands more effectively. The name of the leading province, Holland, was used for the whole country. The Kingdom of Holland covered the area of the present day Netherlands, with the exception of Limburg and parts of Zeeland, which were French territory. In 1807, Prussian East Frisia and Jever were added to the kingdom. In 1809, however, after a failed British invasion, Holland had to give over all territories south of the Rhine to France.

King Louis Bonaparte did not meet Napoleon's expectations – he tried to serve Dutch interests instead of his brother's, allowed trade with the British in spite of the Continental System and even

tried to learn Dutch – and he was forced to abdicate on 1 July 1810. He was succeeded by his five-year-old son Napoleon Louis Bonaparte. Napoleon Louis reigned as Louis II for just ten days as Napoleon ignored his young nephew's accession to the throne. The Emperor sent in an army to invade the country and dissolved the Kingdom of Holland. The Netherlands then became part of the French Empire. The Netherlands remained part of the French Empire until the autumn of 1813, when Napoleon was defeated in the Battle of Leipzig and forced to withdraw his troops from the country.

In 1795 France again invaded the Netherlands, this time under command of Napoleon. After his defeat in 1813, a new Dutch Kingdom was declared by William VI of Orange. During the French occupation the Netherlands gave its colonies in 'safekeeping' to the United Kingdom but most of them were never returned. Only the colonies of the West-Indies (now Indonesia) were returned to the Netherlands in 1824.

Kingdom of the Netherlands 1815–1940

William I of the Netherlands, son of the last stadtholder William V van Oranje, returned to the Netherlands in 1813 and became Sovereign Prince of the Netherlands. On 16 March 1815, the Sovereign Prince became King of the Netherlands.

In 1815, the Congress of Vienna formed the United Kingdom of the Netherlands by expanding the Netherlands with Belgium in order to create a strong country on the northern border of France. In addition, William became hereditary Grand Duke of Luxembourg.

The largest Dutch settlement abroad was the Cape Colony. It was established by Jan van Riebeeck on behalf of the Dutch East India Company at Cape Town (Dutch: Kaapstad) in 1652. The Prince of Orange acquiesced to British occupation and control of the Cape Colony in 1788. The Netherlands also possessed several other colonies, but Dutch settlement in these lands was limited. Most notable were the vast Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) and Dutch Guiana (now Suriname). These 'colonies' were first administered by the Dutch East India Company and the Dutch West India Company, both collective private enterprises. Three centuries later these companies got into financial trouble, and the territories in which they operated were taken over by the Dutch government (in 1815 and 1791 respectively). Only then did they become official colonies.

During its colonial period the Netherlands was heavily involved in the slave trade. The Dutch planters relied heavily on African slaves to cultivate the coffee, cocoa, sugar cane and cotton plantations along the rivers. Treatment of the slaves by their owners was notoriously bad, and many slaves escaped the plantations. Slavery was abolished by the Netherlands in Dutch Guiana in 1863, but the slaves were not fully released until 1873.

During the 19th century, the Netherlands was slow to industrialize compared to neighbouring countries, mainly because of the great complexity involved in modernizing the infrastructure, consisting largely of waterways, and the great reliance its industry had on windpower.

Although the Netherlands remained neutral during World War I, it was heavily involved in the war. Later during the war Dutch neutrality proved essential to German survival until the blockade by Great Britain in 1916, when the import of goods through the Netherlands was no longer possible. However, the Dutch were able to continue to remain neutral during the war using their diplomacy and their ability to trade.

Second World War 1940–1945

The Netherlands intended to remain neutral during the Second World War, although contingency plans involving the armies of Belgium, France and the United Kingdom were drawn up in case of German aggression. Despite this neutrality, Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands on 10 May 1940 as part of their campaign against the Allied forces. The country was overrun in five days.

Only after the bombing of Rotterdam, the main element of the Dutch army surrendered on 14 May 1940. The Kingdom as such, continued the war from the colonial empire; the government in exile resided in London.

On 8 December 1941, the Netherlands declared war on Japan. The government-in-exile then lost control of its major colonial stronghold, the Netherlands East Indies (Indonesia), to Japanese forces in March 1942.

Princess Juliana of the Netherlands, the only child of Queen Wilhelmina and heir to the throne, sought refuge in Ottawa, Canada, with her two daughters, Beatrix and Irene, during the war. In 1944–45, the First Canadian Army was responsible for liberating much of the Netherlands from German occupation.

Recent history 1945–present

After the war, the Dutch economy prospered by leaving behind an era of neutrality and gaining closer ties with neighbouring states. The Netherlands was one of the founding members of the Benelux (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) grouping, was among the twelve founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and was among the six founding members of the European Coal and Steel Community, which would later evolve, via the EEC (Common Market), into the European Union.

The 1960s and 1970s were a time of great social and cultural change, such as rapid *ontzuiling* (literally: depillarisation), a term that describes the decay of the old divisions along class and religious lines. Youths, and students in particular, rejected traditional mores and pushed for change in matters like women's rights, sexuality, disarmament and environmental issues.

Today, the Netherlands is regarded as a liberal country, considering its drugs policy and its legalisation of euthanasia. On 1 April 2001, the Netherlands became the first nation to allow same-sex marriage.

Below Sealevel

The Netherlands is a geographically low-lying country, with about 25% of its area and 21% of its population located below sea level, and 50% of its land lying less than one metre above sea level. This distinct feature contributes to the country's name in many other European languages (e.g. German: *Niederlande*, French: *Les Pays-Bas* and Spanish: *Países Bajos*, literally mean "(The) Low Countries"). Significant land area has been gained through land reclamation and preserved through an elaborate system of polders and dikes. Much of the Netherlands is formed by the estuary of three important European rivers, which together with their distributaries form the Rhine-Meuse-Scheldt delta.

Most of the country is very flat, with the exception of foothills in the far southeast and several low-hill ranges in the central parts.

The Netherlands' surface, as its name indicates ("nether" means low), is mostly below sea level and protected by dikes. Where it rises above sea level, the land is still rather flat and generally only rises several meters above sea level. Only a very small portion of this already small country is hilly. This is in the southeast, in the province of Limburg, where the *Vaalseberg* on the border with Belgium and Germany ("berg" means mountain) is the Netherlands' highest point at about 320 metres above sea level. Much of the land in the Netherlands has been reclaimed from the sea - like the entirety of Flevoland, the 12th province. Flevoland is now in the *IJsselmeer* ("meer" means lake), but used to be submerged in the *Zuiderzee* ("zee" sea).

Winning land out of water

Over the centuries, the Dutch coastline has changed considerably as a result of human intervention and natural disasters. Most notable in terms of land loss is the 1134 storm, which created the archipelago of Zeeland in the southwest.

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On 14 December 1287, *St. Lucia's flood* affected the Netherlands and Germany killing more than 50,000 people in one of the most destructive floods in recorded history. The *St. Elizabeth flood* of 1421 and the mismanagement in its aftermath destroyed a newly reclaimed polder, replacing it with the 72-square-kilometre (28 sq mi) *Biesbosch* tidal floodplains in the south-centre.

The last major flood in the Netherlands took place in early February 1953, when a huge storm caused the collapse of several dikes in the southwest of the Netherlands. More than 1,800 people drowned in the ensuing inundations.

The Dutch government subsequently decided on a large-scale program of public works (the "*Delta Works*") to protect the country against future flooding. The project took more than thirty years to complete.

Water plays a big role

After the 1953 disaster, the *Delta Works* were constructed, a comprehensive set of civil works throughout the Dutch coast. The project started in 1958 and was largely completed in 1997 with the completion of the *Maeslantkering*. A main goal of the *Delta* project was to reduce the risk of flooding in South Holland and Zeeland to once per 10,000 years

To guard against floods, a series of defences against the water were contrived. In the first millennium AD, villages and farmhouses were built on man-made hills called *terps*. Later, these *terps* were connected by dikes. In the 12th century, local government agencies called "*waterschappen*" (English "water bodies") or "*hoogheemraadschappen*" ("high home councils") started

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to appear, whose job it was to maintain the water level and to protect a region from floods. (These agencies exist to this day, performing the same function.) As the ground level dropped, the dikes by necessity grew and merged into an integrated system. By the 13th century, windmills had come into use in order to pump water out of areas below sea level. The windmills were later used to drain lakes, creating the famous polders.

In 1932, the Afsluitdijk (English "Closure Dike") was completed, blocking the former Zuiderzee (Southern Sea) from the North Sea and thus creating the IJsselmeer (IJssel Lake). It became part of the larger Zuiderzee Works in which four polders totalling 2,500 square kilometres (965 sq mi) were reclaimed from the sea.

Additionally, the Netherlands is one of the countries that may suffer most from climate change. Not only is the rising sea a problem, but also erratic weather patterns may cause the rivers to overflow.

The delta works

After the 1953 disaster, the Delta Works were constructed, a comprehensive set of civil works throughout the Dutch coast. The project started in 1958 and was largely completed in 1997 with the completion of the Maeslantkering. A main goal of the Delta project was to reduce the risk of flooding in South Holland and Zeeland to once per 10,000 years (compared to 1 per 4000 years for the rest of the country). This was achieved by raising 3,000 kilometers (1,864 mi) of outer sea-dykes and 10,000 kilometers (6,214 mi) of inner, canal, and river dikes, and by closing off the sea estuaries of the Zeeland province. New risk assessments occasionally show problems requiring additional Delta project dyke reinforcements. The Delta project is one of the largest construction efforts in human history[citation needed] and is considered by the American Society of Civil Engineers as one of the seven wonders of the modern world.[citation needed]

Politics

Every year on the 30th of April, Koninginnedag (Queensday) is celebrated in the Netherlands. Although it is actually the birthday of the Queen's mother, the date has been kept, partly because the weather is much nicer in April than it is in January, when the current Queen has her birthday. On Koninginnedag the streets of almost every sizable town in the country come alive with activity. The centre of the action is in Amsterdam, but, if you prefer things a little less crowded, Utrecht is also a popular destination. Both cities have canals and it's just perfect to watch a boat parade with music while you are drinking a beer along the canal side terrace. There are also large outdoor concerts throughout the country, though the one in Amsterdam is the most popular. Several cities have night-markets which actually start the night prior to Koninginnedag and last for about 24 hours.

Provincies (departments)

Groningen

Located in the north with the capital Groningen. It also includes some of the Wadden Islands, like Rottumeroog.

Friesland

West of Groningen, this province has its own language (Frisian) but Dutch is understood as well. Several Wadden Islands belong to Friesland, like Terschelling and Ameland.

Drenthe

South of Groningen this province is mostly famous because of its hunebedden, or dolmen..

Flevoland

This is the youngest province of the country and it is totally reclaimed from the sea.

Overijssel

South of Friesland and Drenthe, this province is less known but has some nice quiet nature to enjoy and a few old hanze cities as well, like the capital Zwolle and Kampen.

Gelderland

Here you can find one of the major nature reserves in the Netherlands, called the Veluwe. Als the oldest Dutch city, Nijmegen and Arnhem are located in this province.

Utrecht

This province is in the centre of the country, with the city of Utrecht as its capital.

North Holland

In the northwest of the country, Amsterdam is located here but the capital is Haarlem.

South Holland

Although the north of this province is part of the green heart of the Netherlands, the south is mostly urban, with The Hague and Rotterdam being the biggest cities.

Zeeland

In the southwest, this province is less densely populated and has always been struggling with the sea.

North Brabant

Being one of the biggest provinces and having one of the largest populations, this province has much to offer, both for nature and culture lovers. Cities to enjoy are Breda and 's Hertogenbosch and several nature parks like the Biesbosch are a nice way of getting away from the Dutch crowds.

Limburg

In the southeast, Maastricht is located here and the south is the only part of the country which is not totally flat.

You can see why the Netherlands is nicknamed Holland by the names of both North Holland and South Holland, where the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague are based. In addition to the provinces, another important region is Randstad, which is roughly the triangle between Amsterdam, Utrecht and Rotterdam. With half of the Dutch population living in this area, it is of considerable economic and cultural significance

Constitution and Divisions

The Netherlands has been a constitutional monarchy since 1815 and a parliamentary democracy since 1848. The Netherlands is described as a consociational state. Dutch politics and governance are characterised by an effort to achieve broad consensus on important issues, within both the political community and society as a whole. In 2010, The Economist ranked The Netherlands as the tenth most democratic country in the world.

The monarch is the head of state, at present Queen Beatrix. Constitutionally, the position is equipped with limited powers. The monarch can exert some influence during the formation of a new cabinet, where they serve as neutral arbiter between the political parties. Additionally, the king (the title queen has no constitutional significance) has the right to be informed and consulted. Depending on the personality and qualities of the king and the ministers, the king might have influence beyond the power granted by the constitution.

In practice, the executive power is formed by the ministerraad, the deliberative council of the Dutch cabinet. The cabinet consists usually of thirteen to sixteen ministers and a varying number of state secretaries. One to three ministers are ministers without portfolio. The head of government is the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, who often is the leader of the largest party of the coalition. In fact, this has been continuously the case since 1973. The Prime Minister is a primus inter pares, meaning he has no explicit powers beyond those of the other ministers. Currently, the Prime Minister is Mark Rutte.

Caribbean Islands

These Caribbean islands have the status of openbare lichamen (public bodies) and are generally referred to as special municipalities. They are not part of a province.

The cabinet is responsible to the bicameral parliament, the States-General, which also has legislative powers. The 150 members of the House of Representatives, the Lower House, are elected in direct elections, which are held every four years or after the fall of the cabinet (by example: when one of the chambers carries a motion of no-confidence, the cabinet offers its resignation to the monarch). The States-Provincial are directly elected every four years as well. The members of the provincial assemblies elect the 75 members of the Senate, the upper house, which has less legislative powers, as it can merely reject laws, not propose or amend them.

The Caribbean islands Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba are "special municipalities" fully integrated in the Netherlands proper. Beside the Netherlands proper, Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten are constituent countries within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

On 10 October 2010 the Netherlands Antilles—a former country of the Kingdom of the

Netherlands in the Caribbean—was dissolved. Referendums were held on each island of the Netherlands Antilles between June 2000 and April 2005 to determine their future status. As a result the islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba (the BES islands) were to obtain closer ties with the Netherlands. This led to the incorporation of these three islands into the country of the Netherlands as special municipalities upon the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles. The special municipalities are collectively known as the Caribbean Netherlands

Economy

Amsterdam is the financial and business capital of the Netherlands. The Amsterdam Stock Exchange (AEX), part of Euronext, is the world's oldest stock exchange and is one of Europe's largest bourses. It is situated near Dam Square in the city's centre. As a founding member of the euro, the Netherlands replaced (for accounting purposes) its former currency, the "Gulden" (guilder), on 1 January 1999, along with 15 other adopters of the Euro. Actual euro coins and banknotes followed on 1 January 2002. One euro was equivalent to 2.20371 Dutch guilders. The Netherlands has a very strong economy and has been playing a special role in the European economy for many centuries. Since the 16th century, shipping, fishing, trade, and banking have been leading sectors of the Dutch economy. The Netherlands is one of the world's 10 leading exporting countries. Foodstuffs form the largest industrial sector. Other major industries include chemicals, metallurgy, machinery, electrical, goods and tourism. Examples include Unilever, Heineken, financial services (ING), chemicals (DSM), petroleum refining (Shell), electronical machinery (Philips, ASML) and car navigation TomTom.

The Netherlands has the 16th largest economy in the world, and ranks 7th in GDP (nominal) per capita. Between 1997 and 2000 annual economic growth (GDP) averaged nearly 4%, well above the European average.

Growth slowed considerably from 2001 to 2005 with the global economic slowdown, but accelerated to 4.1% in the third quarter of 2007. Inflation is 1.3%, and unemployment is at 4.0% of the labour force. By Eurostat standards, unemployment in the Netherlands is at 4.1% (April 2010) – the lowest rate of all European Union member states. The Netherlands also has a relatively low GINI coefficient of 0.326. Despite ranking only 7th in GDP per capita, UNICEF ranked the Netherlands 1st in child well-being. On the Index of Economic Freedom Netherlands is the 13th most free market capitalist economy out of 157 surveyed countries.

Agriculture

. A significant portion of Dutch agricultural exports are derived from fresh-cut plants, flowers, and bulbs, with the Netherlands exporting two-thirds of the world's total. The Netherlands also exports a quarter of all world tomatoes, and trade of one-third of the world's exports of chilis, tomatoes and cucumbers goes through the country. The Netherlands also exports one-fifteenth of the world's apples.

Population

The Netherlands has an estimated population of 16,491,852. It is the 11th most populous country in Europe and the 61st most populous country in the world. Between 1900 and 1950, the country's population almost doubled from 5.1 to 10.0 million people. From 1950 to 2000, the population further increased from 10.0 to 15.9 million people, but the population growth decreased compared to the previous fifty years.

The estimated growth rate is currently 0.436% (as of 2008). The fertility rate in the Netherlands is 1.66 children per woman (as of 2008) which is high compared to many other European countries, but below the 2.1-rate required for natural population replacement. Life expectancy is high in the Netherlands: 79 years for newborn girls and 78 for boys (2007). The country has a migration rate of 2.55 migrants per 1,000

The majority of the population of the Netherlands are ethnically Dutch. A 2005 estimate counted: 80.9% Dutch, 2.4% Indonesian, 2.4% German, 2.2% Turkish, 2.0% Surinamese, 2.0% Moroccan, 0.8% Antillean and Aruban, and 6.0% others.

The Dutch are the tallest people in the world, with an average height of 1.81 metres (5 ft 11 in) for adult males and 1.67 metres (5 ft 6 in) for adult females. People in the south are on average about 2 cm shorter than those in the north.

Religion

The Netherlands is one of the most secular countries in Western Europe, with only 39% being religiously affiliated (31% for those aged under 35), and fewer than 20% visiting church regularly. According to the most recent Eurobarometer poll 2005, 34% of the Dutch citizens responded that "they believe there is a God", whereas 37% answered that "they believe

there is some sort of spirit or life force", and 27% that "they do not believe there is any sort of spirit, god, or life force".

The Netherlands is one of the most secular countries in Western Europe, with only 39% being religiously affiliated (31% for those aged under 35), and fewer than 20% visiting church regularly. According to the most recent Eurobarometer poll 2005, 34% of the Dutch citizens responded that "they believe there is a God", whereas 37% answered that "they believe there is some sort of spirit or life force", and 27% that "they do not believe there is any sort of spirit, god, or life force".

Currently, Roman Catholicism is the single largest religion of the Netherlands, forming the religious home of some 28% of the Dutch population in 2011. The Protestant Church of the Netherlands follows with 16% of the population. It was formed in 2004 as a merger of the two major strands of Calvinism: the Dutch Reformed Church (which represented roughly 8.5% of the population), the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (3.7% of the population), and a smaller Lutheran Church. Other Protestant churches, mostly orthodox Calvinist splits, represent 6% of the population. In 1947, 44.3% belonged to Protestant denominations, 38.7% belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, and 17.1% were unaffiliated.

In 2006, there were 850,000 Muslims (5% of the total Dutch population). [81] The Netherlands has an estimated 250,000 Buddhists or people who feel strongly attracted by this religion, largely ethnic Dutch people. There are approximately 200,000 Hindus, most of them are of Surinamese origin. Sikhs are another religious minority numbering around 12,000, mainly located in or around Amsterdam. There are five gurudwaras in the Netherlands.

Although the Holocaust deeply affected the Jewish community (killing about 75% of its 140,000 members at the time), it has managed to rebuild a vibrant and lively Jewish life for its approximately 45,000 current members.

Freedom of education has been guaranteed by the Dutch constitution since 1917, and schools run by religious groups (especially Christian and Muslim) are funded by the government. All schools must meet strict quality criteria.

Education

Education in the Netherlands is compulsory between the ages of 4 and 16, and partially compulsory between the ages of 16 and 18. All children in the Netherlands attend elementary school from (on average) ages 4 to 12. It comprises eight grades, the first of which is facultative. Based on an aptitude test, the 8th grade teacher's recommendation and the opinion of the pupil's parents or caretakers, a choice is made for one of the three main streams of secondary education (after completing a particular stream, a pupil may still continue in the penultimate year of the next stream):

The vmbo has 4 grades and is subdivided over several levels. Successfully completing the vmbo results in a low-level vocational degree that grants access to the mbo ("middlelevel applied education"). With the mbo diploma, a student can apply for the hbo.

The havo has 5 grades and allows for admission to the hbo ("higher professional education"), which are universities of professional education (or applied sciences) that award professional bachelor degrees that gives access to the university system.

The vwo (including atheneum and gymnasium) has 6 grades and prepares for studying at a research university. The university consists of a three year bachelor's degree, followed by a one, two or three year master's degree, and finally a four year doctoral degree. Doctoral candidates in the Netherlands are temporary employees of a university.

The Dutch higher education system distinguishes between hogescholen (lit. 'high schools') and universities. The former only award Bachelor's degrees, usually in applied sciences, and have lesser entry requirements. Traditionally, they are considered a lesser form of education than universities, even though their programmes generally are of high quality.

Culture

The Netherlands has had many well-known painters. The 17th century, when the Dutch republic was prosperous, was the age of the "Dutch Masters", such as Rembrandt van Rijn, Johannes Vermeer, Jan Steen, Jacob van Ruysdael and many others. Famous Dutch painters of the 19th and 20th century were Vincent van Gogh and Piet Mondriaan. M. C. Escher is a wellknown graphics artist.

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Presentation of The Netherlands

19th and 20th century were Vincent van Gogh and Piet Mondriaan. M. C. Escher is a well-known graphics artist. Willem de Kooning was born and trained in Rotterdam, although he is considered to have reached acclaim as an American artist. The Netherlands is the country of philosophers Erasmus of Rotterdam and Spinoza. All of Descartes' major work was done in the Netherlands. The Dutch scientist Christiaan Huygens (1629–1695) discovered Saturn's moon Titan and invented the pendulum clock. Antonie van Leeuwenhoek was the first to observe and describe single-celled organisms with a microscope. In the Dutch Golden Age, literature flourished as well, with Joost van den Vondel and P.C. Hooft as the two most famous writers. In the 19th century, Multatuli wrote about the poor treatment of the natives in Dutch colonies. Important 20th century authors include Harry Mulisch, Jan Wolkers, Simon Vestdijk, Cees Nooteboom, Gerard (van het) Reve and Willem Frederik Hermans. Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* was published after she died in the Holocaust and translated from Dutch to all major languages.

Weather and Climate

The predominant wind direction in the Netherlands is southwest, which causes a moderate maritime climate, cool summers and mild winters. This is especially the case with places within direct proximity of the Dutch coastline, which sometimes are over 10 °C (18 °F) warmer (in winter) or cooler (in summer) than places in the (south) east of the country.

Although Dutch people complain a lot about the weather in their country, it is actually not that bad. There are no real extremes, like excessive heat or cold, hurricanes or extreme snow- or rainfall. That said, summers are relatively cool with average daytime temperatures around 20-23 °C. Winters, on the other hand, are mild, and temperatures below 0 °C during the day do not occur that often. A snow carpet lasting for more than a few days is relatively rare. The best months to travel around the Netherlands are probably May to July, when days are long and apart from occasional showers, rainfall is lowest.

Although it is a small country, summer temperatures can vary from one place to another enormously. The coast is always nice with a breeze, but the east can be hot at certain times when a heatwave strikes the country and temperatures can be 35 °C. Usually, this kind of heat is ended with sometimes severe thunderstorms and rainfall. Most of the annual precipitation in the Netherlands falls during the warmer 6 months of the year, though autumn and winter have more days with some precipitation, usually less mm.

But most of the time, weather in the Netherlands is nothing special, so complaining about it like the Dutch really is not necessary.

The Language: Double Dutch

Dutch is the national language of the Netherlands. The standard variety originates from a dialect formerly spoken around the city of Leiden; this variety, officially known as Standard Dutch, is also one of the official languages of Belgium and Luxembourg. The second official language of the Netherlands is Frisian, exclusively spoken in the northern province of Friesland. All Frisians nowadays also speak Standard Dutch, although not all of them are equally willing to as regional pride is high.

Besides Standard Dutch, the Netherlands boast a remarkable number of local dialects for such a small territory, possibly due to the many bodies of water that made frequent interaction between the various settlements rather difficult. Furthermore, a number of regional dialects can be distinguished, of which Flemish, spoken in the northern Belgian provinces, and Twents, spoken in the eastern parts of the Netherlands, are examples you are likely to encounter.

For tourists, a special note about the Amsterdam dialect, occasionally referred to as Jordanees, is in order. Because of strong Jewish presence, Jordanees features a variety of Yiddish words and expressions which, combined with the odd sense of humour that many Amsterdamians have, tend to make it a rather difficult tongue to understand.

Dutch things everybody knows

These are some interesting destinations outside of the major cities.

- Efteling — renowned theme park with fairytale elements like elves and dwarves
- Hoge Veluwe National Park — largest national park with heathlands, sand dunes and woodlands
- Keukenhof — more than 800,000 visitors see these enormous flower fields each spring
- Kinderdijk — these windmills show the typical Dutch landscape in all its glory

- Schokland — old island evacuated in 1859, a well-preserved ghost village remains
- South Limburg — hilly green landscapes, picturesque villages, castles and orchards
- Texel — largest island suited for cycling, walking, swimming and horse riding
- Waterland and Zaan Region — typical Dutch villages with clogs, wooden houses, windmills and the Zaanse Schans
- Zaanse Schans — open air museum with Dutch windmills and Zaan houses

Do you know him too? Sinterklaas

He arrives in the Netherlands in November each year on a steamboat from Spain and is then paraded through the streets, much to the excitement of Dutch children. Sinterklaas is the original Santa Claus. He arrives in the Netherlands in November each year on a steamboat from Spain and is then paraded through the streets, much to the excitement of Dutch children. The event is shown live on TV. On the 5th of December, the eve of Sinterklaas Day, people sit around the fireplace (or the modern equivalent) and sing songs before a bag of gifts is delivered by Sinterklaas or one of his helpers, the Zwarte Pieten. Traditionally, the holiday celebrates the name day of Saint Nicholas, patron saint of, among other things, children.

Dutch horses

A Dutch Warmblood is a warmblood type of horse registered with the Koninklijk Warmbloed Paardenstamboek Nederland (Royal Warmblood Studbook of the Netherlands (KWPN)),¹ which governs the breeding of competitive dressage and show jumping horses, as well as the show harness horse and Geldlander, and a hunter studbook in North America.

Developed through a breeding program that began in the 1960s, the Dutch are some of the most successful horses developed in postwar Europe. Prior to World War II, there were two types of utility horse in the Netherlands: Geldlanders bred in the south under the Geldlander Horse Studbook (1925) and the Groningen bred in the north under the NWP (1943).² The Groningen was, and still is, a heavy weight warmblood horse very similar in type to the Alt-Oldenburger and East Friesian. The Geldlander, by the same token, was a more elegant variation on the same theme, being often a high-quality carriage horse in addition to a useful agricultural horse. And, while the Groningen were almost unwaveringly solid black, brown, or dark bay, the Geldlanders were more often chestnut with flashy white markings. These two registries merged to form the Royal Warmblood Horse Studbook of the Netherlands (KWPN).

After the Second World War, the Geldlander and Groninger were replaced by tractors and cars, and horses began to become a luxury rather than a necessity. As early as the 1950s, stallions like the French-bred L'Invasion and Holsteiner Normann were imported to encourage a change in the type of Dutch horses, followed soon after by the Holsteiner Amor and Hanoverian Eclatant. The carriage-pulling foundation stock contributed their active, powerful front ends and gentle dispositions to the Dutch Warmblood.²

Today the KWPN comprises four sections: the Geldlander, the Tuigpaard or Dutch Harness Horse, and riding horses bred for either dressage or show jumping. Indeed, the KWPN was the first studbook to regulate such specialization amongst its sport horses.

The Dutch therapy horse (SHP)

Since 11 years there exists a new type of horse with special vocational training in The Netherlands. The Therapy horse SHP have are protected by SHP according to their own code of ethics

- SHP-E(NL) equitherapists must take responsibility for the therapy horse entrusted in their care. Until the end of the horse's entire life.
- SHP-E(NL) equitherapists must show each horse equal respect regardless of race, age or gender.
- SHP-E(NL) equitherapists must insist that their clients treat the horse with equal respect.
- The horse must be fed and cared for appropriately in accordance with the needs of the breed.
- The following minimum requirements apply: Freedom to roam together in paddocks every day and
- overnight stabling in stables that comply with FN standards at the very least.
- The mental and physical health of the horse is paramount, irrespective of its use.
- The use of the horse in therapy must be appropriate to its disposition, ability and willingness to work.
- This must not be influenced by the use of medication or action that may be harmful to the horse.

- When equitherapists work with a horse which is not their own, they must find out how much schooling it has had, work with it and develop a strong relationship with it before using it as a therapy horse.
- The horse should be schooled according to classical principles based on the horse's nature. The schooling must encourage the horse's natural disposition both physically and mentally and respect it as a partner in a two-way relationship. Harsh methods are not permitted (e.g. extreme use of auxiliary reins to shorten the neck unphysiologically, or which act from below on the horse's mouth or neck, hyperflexion or the use of methods which force the horse into an unnatural position, cause him pain, create tension, unbalance him, restrict their movement and/or unsettle him).

We wish you a very pleasant time in the Netherlands!!!

**DEAR PARTNERS
OF THE EU-LDV PROJECT ON AMAT**

The Dutch foundation promoting science-based equitherapy (equine assisted therapy) and therapeutic riding, SHP-E(NL) is happy to have you here