



# Netherlands

SERENITY CAPTURED ON CANVAS BY DUTCH MASTERS STILL DEFINE THIS COUNTRY OF CANALS, WINDMILLS AND TULIPS

## About Netherlands

A small country with a population of 16 million, about 83% of whom are Dutch; most of the rest are Indonesian, Surinamese, Moroccan, Turkish or Antillian. The country shares a border with Belgium and Germany.



## When To Visit

Spring and summer are when the country is at its picture postcard best; the winter is good for ice skating on the canals.

## Visa Requirements

Tourists from Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, USA and most of Europe only need a valid passport for a stay of up to three months. EU nationals can enter with just their national ID card.

## Getting There

Amsterdam's Schiphol is the main air link, but many travellers in the region prefer the cheaper flights to Brussels, Belgium, and taking the bus or train from there. Eurolines buses also connect Amsterdam to most European cities.

## Bahrain Connection

The Hague, location of the World Court, has a place in the heart of all Bahrainis after the court ruled in Bahrain's favour in a long-running dispute with neighbouring Qatar over ownership of Hawar Island.



Colourful miniature Dutch houses on sale at a tourist shop in Amsterdam.

**O**KAY, LET'S GET ONE THING OUT OF THE WAY first. Many people use the terms Holland and the Netherlands interchangeably, but in reality (as we were gently reminded more than once), Holland refers to just two of the Netherlands' 12 provinces.

The Netherlands may not be quite as small as Bahrain, but it is a small country nevertheless. For once, we felt our choice of vehicle was not exactly ideal. Getting around the capital Amsterdam is best done by bicycle, the transport of choice in a country where driving and parking a car can be very expensive.

It's hard to find someone who *doesn't* own a bicycle here. There are bicycles everywhere. Most of Amsterdam's streets have cycling lanes, and you can even rent bicycles at train stations!

Amsterdam is a beautiful city that still retains some of the serenity captured by so many Dutch painters



**PAGE OPPOSITE:**  
The Netherlands is a country of canals.

Windmills aren't just a tourist attraction in the Netherlands, they are a major generator of energy.



with its colourful tulip fields, ancient windmills and endless stretches of canals.

In more recent times, though, it has become just as famous for its reputation for tolerance laced with sin. There is no stigma to purchasing drugs here (and it's all legal, by the way), and window shopping gets a whole new meaning in the city's red light district which is a major tourist attraction. A word of advice: Don't take pictures here – the women have been known to throw photographers into canals, camera and all.

As you can expect from a country that produced Vincent van Gogh and Rembrandt, the Netherlands is nourished by a wealth of museums and cultural attractions like concert halls, and avant-garde theatre and dance venues. Its relaxed and tolerant attitudes draw those looking for a creative, anything-goes atmosphere.

While in Amsterdam, we met Yemen's ambassador to the Netherlands Abdul Malik Al Aryani, who Ali has known for many years. Al Aryani invited us to lunch and went out of his way to help with



Say cheese! The Netherlands is justly famous for its cheese, one of the most popular items on visitors' shopping lists.



putting out the Friendship Tour message.

Many restaurants here offer a tourist menu, which usually means modest prices. And if you can't read the Dutch menu, ask for an English version – most restaurants will have one. (In fact, most Dutch people speak English).

At Dutch restaurants, you'll find excellent seafood and fish dishes (especially oysters and herring, which is a popular street food), marvellous cheeses and delicious pea soup.

In many places, french fries are sold on street corners. The best are called *vlaamse frites* (Flemish fries), made from cut potatoes rather than potato pulp pressed into the shape of a french fry.

Shopping in the Netherlands must be done in the day; few stores stay open beyond 5 or 6 in the evening. Cheese, chocolate, tulip bulbs, decorative tiles and wooden shoes are all popular with tourists, while for those with deeper pockets, diamonds or Delft porcelain are highly prized.