

Did You Know?

- On average, the Dutch are some of the tallest people in Europe. Dutch men are, on average, six feet (184 cm) tall, while the average Dutch woman is 5 feet 6 inches (170 cm) tall.
- There used to be close to 10,000 windmills in the Netherlands. Now there are only about 1,000 left.
- Many world famous artists are Dutch, including Rembrandt, Vermeer, van Gogh, and Jan Steen.
- The Dutch invented the thimble, the microscope, and the compact disc.
- The national government is located at The Hague rather than at the capital, Amsterdam.
- Dutch explorers were the first Europeans to discover Australia and New Zealand in the 17th century.
- The Dutch are famous for their *klompen* (wooden shoes). *Klompen* are not usually worn for everyday life except by people who work outside. *Klompen* help keep a person's feet dry.
- KLM is the national airline of the Netherlands. Originally founded in 1919, it is also the longest-running airline in the world.
- In some parts of the Netherlands, there are as many cows as people.
- Orange carrots like the ones we eat today first appeared in the Netherlands in the 16th century. Before that carrots were usually white, yellow, black, or red. Orange is the official color of the Netherlands.
- Almost every Dutch person has a bicycle. The country has twice as many bikes as cars.
- Two-thirds of Dutch people live below sea level.
- Amsterdam is home to more than 1,280 bridges.

Flag

Originally, the red stripe in the Dutch flag was orange, in honor of Prince William of Orange. But the orange was eventually changed to red because the orange and blue were difficult to see in battle. The current colors were adopted officially in 1937.



National Image

The tulip is the national flower of the Netherlands. Thousands of people each year visit in the spring to see the tulips in bloom.



People and Places

Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 16,040

Area (sq. km.): 41,543



Netherlands means “low lands,” which is appropriate since more than a quarter of the country is below sea level. The land in the west was once covered by water. Windmills were used to pump the water from the land, and *dikes*, or barriers, were built to hold back the ocean. Today, modern machines do the pumping. The Netherlands is about the same size as Switzerland or the states of Massachusetts and Connecticut put together. It borders the North Sea. The land is mainly flat, but there are hills in the east and south.

The climate tends to be mild and damp. Average summer temperatures are around 72°F (22°C), and average winter temperatures are close to freezing. Rain is common throughout the year.

Population

Population: 16,877,351

The Netherlands is not a big country, so there are a lot of people packed into a very small place! More than 40 percent of the population lives in the two western *provinces* (similar to states) of North and South Holland. The majority of the population is ethnic Dutch. There are also large numbers of Moroccans, Turks, Surinamese, and Indonesians. North Holland and South Holland contain the three largest cities: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague. With Utrecht, these cities form an area called Randstad.

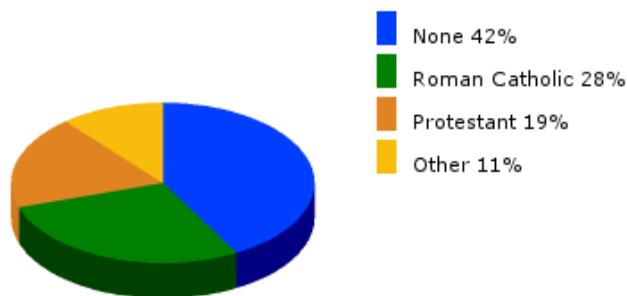
Language

The official language is Dutch, or *Nederlands*, which is related to German. Dutch is also spoken in Antilles and Aruba. About 500,000 people speak Frisian, the official language of the northeastern *province* (similar to a state) of Friesland. English, German, and French are commonly spoken and are taught in *secondary* (high) schools. A form of Dutch known as Flemish is spoken in a region of Belgium called Flanders.

Can You Say It in Dutch?

Hello	<i>Hallo</i>	(HAH-loh)
Good-bye	<i>Tot ziens</i>	(TOTE ZEENS)
Please	<i>Alstublieft</i>	(ALS-too-bleeft)
Thank You	<i>Dank u</i>	(DONK ooh)
Yes	<i>Ja</i>	(yah)
No	<i>Nee</i>	(nay)

Religion



Source: *The World Factbook 2014*. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2014.

Around a quarter of the population is Roman Catholic. Most Catholics live in the southern *provinces* (similar to states) of Brabant and Limburg. Close to 20 percent is Protestant (mostly Dutch Reformed). The nation is home to smaller percentages of Muslims and members of other churches. Not very many Dutch attend church services on a regular basis, and about 42 percent do not belong to any organized religion. The royal family belongs to the Dutch Reformed Church. As in other European countries, the role of religion in the Netherlands is decreasing. There is a strong tradition of maintaining the separation of church and state.

History

Time Line

100 BC	
58 BC	The Romans conquer what is now the Netherlands
AD 400	
AD 406	Germanic tribes overthrow the Romans
834–1007	Vikings raid what is now the Netherlands
1200	
1200s	Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague are first built

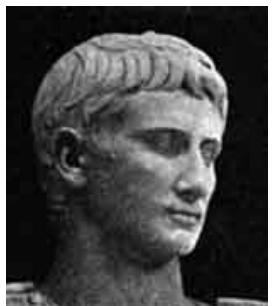
1568	Prince William of Orange begins the Eighty Years' War for independence from Spain	
1600		
1600s	The Golden Age is a time of great exploration, artistic creation, and scientific invention	
1648	The Netherlands finally wins independence	
1700		
1795	France takes control of the Netherlands	
1815	The United Kingdom of the Netherlands is created, which includes the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg	
1830	Belgium declares independence from the Netherlands	
1900		
1914–18	The Netherlands is neutral during World War I; Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany goes into exile in the Netherlands at the end of the war	
1922	Dutch women get the right to vote	
1939	The Netherlands declares its neutrality at the outbreak of World War II	
1940–45	Germany invades and occupies the Netherlands in World War II; the nation is the site of extensive fighting and destruction	
1945	The Netherlands is freed from German control and becomes a charter member of the United Nations	

1949	Indonesia, which was occupied by Japan during World War II, gains independence from the Netherlands
1953	A massive flood breaches the dykes, killing nearly 2,000 people and destroying 50,000 homes
1958	The Delta Project is begun to help control flooding
1975	The Dutch colony of Surinam gains its independence
1980	Queen Beatrix comes to the throne
2000	
2000	The Netherlands legalizes <i>euthanasia</i> (assisted suicide for the terminally ill), setting strict conditions for doctors
2002	The <i>euro</i> replaces the <i>guilder</i> as the country's currency
2004	Controversial filmmaker Theo Van Gogh is murdered after making a film that is critical of the treatment of women in Islamic culture
2009	A failed attack on the royal family results in seven deaths
2013	Queen Beatrix <i>abdicates</i> (gives up) the throne, and her son Willem-Alexander becomes the first king in over a hundred years
2014	A Malaysia Airlines plane departing from Amsterdam is shot down over rebel-held territory in eastern Ukraine; the majority of passengers were Dutch
PRESENT	



Roman Rule

For thousands of years, Germanic, Celtic, and Frisian tribes inhabited the area now known as the Netherlands. Led by Julius Caesar, the Romans invaded in 58 BC. They brought increased trading to the region, built roads and *dikes* (barriers), and established farms. Roman rule lasted for more than four hundred years. Around the time of the fall of Rome (AD 476), Franks and Saxons settled there. The people remained part of the Frankish Kingdom until AD 800. In medieval times, the entire area consisted of independent areas ruled by dukes and counts. In the 1500s, these areas, along with Belgium and Luxembourg, were known as the Low Countries and were ruled by Spain.



Prince William of Orange

Prince William of Orange is considered the founder of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Prince William led the fight for Dutch independence against King Phillip II of Spain. King Phillip made the Dutch people pay high taxes and wanted to force every one of his subjects to become Catholics. William, a Protestant, built up an army and attacked Spanish troops in 1568. This was the beginning of the Eighty Years' War, which led to the division of the northern and southern Netherlands as well as the creation of the United Provinces of the Netherlands. The Netherlands eventually won its independence from Spain, but William never lived to see that happen. He was assassinated in 1584.



The Golden Age

The 1600s are called the Golden Age in the history of the Netherlands. Although small, the Netherlands became very powerful. Dutch traders traveled to Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. They brought back great wealth. The Netherlands built a vast overseas empire, becoming one of the world's leading maritime and commercial powers. The Dutch also explored and settled new lands, from India and the Americas to South Africa and the Caribbean. Famous painters such as Rembrandt, Rubens, Vermeer, and Hals lived during the Golden Age. The Dutch artists became known for their portraits and scenes of everyday life.



World Wars

In World War I, the Dutch were *neutral*, which means that they didn't take sides. But they had no choice in World War II because Germany invaded the Netherlands in 1940. The city of Rotterdam was destroyed by bombs. Many people were forced to work for the Germans. Dutch Jews were sent to death camps. In all, more than 200,000 Dutch people were killed during the war. It wasn't until 1945 that the Germans were defeated and the Netherlands became free again. Shortly after the war ended, the nation joined the United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Instead of remaining *neutral* they have worked to develop and maintain good relations with their neighboring countries.



Flood Control

The Dutch have a saying: "God made the earth, but the Dutch made the Netherlands." Through hard work and skill, the Dutch have taken much of their land from the sea. They built dikes to hold the ocean back and then pumped the water out to create dry land. The use of *dikes* (barriers) goes back to before Roman times. Since the Netherlands is one of the most densely populated countries on earth, it is very important to keep the waters at bay. After major flooding in 1953, which killed nearly two thousand people, the Dutch began the Delta Project. They built a huge system of dams, *dikes*, and barriers to keep flooding from happening again.



Lifestyle

Games and Sports

The Dutch often participate in sports through clubs. The most popular sport is soccer, which they call *football*. Tennis, field hockey, cycling, swimming, sailing, ice-skating, windsurfing, basketball, and badminton are also common. Nearly every person old enough to ride a bicycle has one. *Fietspaden* (bike paths) run throughout the country. Some people play *korfbal*, a sport played on a grass field (or indoors) that combines elements of soccer and basketball. In the *province* (similar to a state) of Friesland, some residents play *kaatsen*, a team sport similar to baseball in which players hit a small, soft ball with the hand. *Fiereljeppen* (pole vaulting) is also popular. The Dutch traditionally used poles for jumping over ditches. When the ice is hard enough, a day-long ice-skating race takes place on a route that encompasses Friesland's 11 main towns, many lakes, and parts of the sea. As many as 80,000 people participate.



Holidays

The Dutch usually do not exchange gifts on Christmas Day. That is a day for families and feasts. Gift giving traditionally is associated with St. Nicholas Eve (5 Dec.). *Sinterklaas* (St. Nicholas) arrives on a white horse and leaves gifts in kid's shoes. Children sing special songs (*Sinterklaasliedjes*) to encourage *Sinterklaas* to leave his gifts. Kids also place hay or a carrot in their shoes for the horse. These treats are then replaced with candy or a small present. In the days leading up to St. Nicholas Day, *Sinterklaas* also rides in parades and visits children wherever they may be. His assistant, *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete), throws pieces of *pepernoten* (gingerbread) for children to gather and eat. Family members and friends who exchange gifts on the evening of 5 December must disguise or hide the presents. They are all anonymous (said to have come from *Sinterklaas*) and are accompanied by an amusing poem about the receiver and good-natured teasing.



Vlaggetjesdag (Little Flag Day) is celebrated in the coastal areas. Held in May, it marks the beginning of the herring season. Ships leave the harbor, decorated with little flags.

Food

Bread or toast with jelly, cheese or meats, boiled eggs, and coffee or tea are common breakfast foods. Children often eat hot cereal for breakfast. For breakfast or lunch, many people like to put *hagelslag* (chocolate sprinkles) or chocolate spread on their bread. A typical Dutch meal might be vegetable soup, boiled potatoes, pork chops, cauliflower, and yogurt pudding. The Dutch also like seafood, especially raw herring or smoked eel. *Stroopwafels* (syrup-filled wafers) and many varieties of Dutch licorice are popular snacks, as are french fries, which the Dutch eat with mayonnaise, not ketchup. A parent often indicates when to eat by saying *Eet smakelijk* (pronounced "ATE smahk-ay-lick"), which literally means "Eat deliciously" but is used in the same way as *Bon appétit* (Enjoy the meal).



Schools

Adult Literacy: 99%

Education is very important in the Netherlands. Most children go to school between the ages of five and eighteen. Students may attend a Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, or “nonreligious” school, but they all study the same subjects. *Primary* (elementary) education ends at age 12. During the final two years of *primary* school, students learn English. After two years of *secondary* education (high school), Dutch students can choose between different types of high schools to help prepare them for jobs or for higher education.

Life as a Kid

The Dutch have small but close families. Most have only one or two children. Because so many people live in such a small country, most Dutch live in apartments or small houses. When they are not busy in school, kids like to play outside on the sidewalk or in nearby parks. They enjoy soccer, marbles, and hide-and-seek. They also like listening to music or spending time on their computers. A favorite snack for many Dutch kids is black licorice. Dutch licorice is salty, not sweet.



Although many Dutch kids enjoy sports and being physically active, there are a growing number who are overweight. The government has started campaigns to get children to be more careful about what they eat.

Society

Government

Capital: Amsterdam

Head of State: King Willem-Alexander

Head of Government: PM Mark Rutte

The Netherlands is a *constitutional monarchy*, which means that there is a king or queen and an elected government. But the prime minister is actually the one who leads the government. As in other countries, there is a *parliament* (lawmaking body), called the States General, that passes laws. The States General includes a 75-seat upper house (First Chamber) and a 150-seat lower house (Second Chamber). The voting age is 18. The Netherlands is divided up into 12 *provinces* (similar to states), each with its own government. Amsterdam is the capital, but the government has its headquarters at The Hague, the capital city of the *province* of South Holland.

Money and Economy

Currency: Euro



The Netherlands has a strong economy. Selling flowers—tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, and others—is a big business. The Netherlands grows more than half of the world's flower exports, and Dutch flowers are known all over the world. The Netherlands also produces meats, cheeses, and other dairy foods. Leading industries include machinery, chemicals, and construction. Trading and tourism are also important to the economy. Until recently, the currency was the *guilder*, but like many other European countries, the Netherlands now uses the euro.

Getting Around

Most people own cars. But the country's six million cars mean traffic is a serious problem. Bikes are also a common way to get around. The public transportation system in the Netherlands is one of Europe's best. Trains connect most cities. Buses and streetcars are common. The country is divided into zones for public transportation. A universal ticket called a *Strippenkaart* can be purchased at stations or from drivers or machines. Amsterdam and Rotterdam have subways. In the city of Arnhem, the buses run on electricity. Rotterdam is one of Europe's most important ports. It is also the world's largest port.



Culture Facts & Contacts

Anne Frank

After the Germans invaded in 1940, many Dutch Jews were afraid of being sent to Nazi concentration camps. One of these was Anne Frank, a young girl who went into hiding with her family to avoid being captured. For more than two years, Anne and her family hid out in an office building in Amsterdam. But the Franks were finally caught and sent to concentration camps. Anne, her mother, and her sister died there. But the diary Anne kept while in hiding was published after the war. Millions have read her story.



Learn More

Contact the Royal Netherlands Embassy, 4200 Linnean Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 244-5300; web site dc.the-netherlands.org. Or contact the Netherlands Board of Tourism, phone (212) 370-7360; web site www.holland.com.

© 2015 ProQuest LLC and Brigham Young University. It is against the law to copy, reprint, store, or transmit any part of this publication in any form by any means without strict written permission from ProQuest.

CultureGramsTM

ProQuest
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106 USA
Toll Free: 1.800.521.3042
Fax: 1.800.864.0019
www.culturegrams.com

Netherlands



The Kingdom of the Netherlands also includes the Caribbean islands of Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles.

