

THE NETHERLANDS



In the year that marks 75 years of freedom since the end of WWII, the Netherlands is ready to celebrate with events across the country. Vibrant Amsterdam is always ready to party, but by making use of the excellent train network you can explore a host of celebrations in stunning cities and get more bang for your euros. April and May are the months to visit, as you can take in Kingsday, Liberation Day and the Eurovision Song Contest, which will be hosted in the country this year. Set out on the ever-growing network of over 35,000km of cycling paths to explore attractions beyond the cities, such as Unesco World Heritage Site the Wadden Sea, and discover the wealth of nature that this tiny country has to offer.

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Historic ships
line the Hoger
der A canal of
Groningen





Cube Houses
(Kubuswoningen) by
architect Piet Blom, in
Rotterdam

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Population: 17 million

Capital: Amsterdam

Languages: Dutch

Unit of currency: Euro

How to get there: Schiphol Airport is the biggest airport in the Netherlands, but there are smaller ones in Groningen, Rotterdam, Eindhoven and Maastricht. In addition, the Netherlands is easily reached by train from many European destinations, now including the UK, thanks to the new direct Eurostar line connecting Amsterdam and London.

TELL ME MORE...

A visit to the Netherlands isn't complete without a stop in Amsterdam. Taking a stroll alongside the canal houses is more serene than ever, as boating heads to an all-electric future. The crowds remain ever-present, though – hop aboard a train to leave them behind and visit less-explored cities such as Groningen, Maastricht or Eindhoven. Join the friendly locals for a cold beer in a pub and visit top-notch restaurants (increasingly catering

to vegetarians and vegans), craft breweries, and museums filled with masterpieces. Wherever you decide to go, it's never hard to take a break from city life. Explore the Unesco-listed Wadden Sea, spot highland cows on a hike across the Veluwe or take a sailing trip on one of the many Frisian lakes. The best way to discover it all? By doing as the locals do and jumping on a bike of course.

UNMISSABLE EXPERIENCES

- In the 'Green Heart' (the natural area surrounded by Den Haag, Rotterdam, Utrecht and Amsterdam), adventure company Hihahut provides four unique cabins connected by hiking, bike and boating routes. Create your own Hihahut-adventure by linking visits to these sustainable places to stay; you could sleep in a tent in a greenhouse or a cabin in an orchard with a see-through roof made for stargazing.
- The Wadden Sea boasts five Dutch islands all worth a visit. For the full experience, embark on a guided 'mud walk' across the bottom of



The Kinderdijk Cycle Route
passes historic windmills

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'Living here means being and believing what you want. The Dutch are open-minded and multilingual, making it easy to feel at home. In my home town, Groningen, visit Pernikkel for a late breakfast!'

-Fareeda van der Marel, head chef at restaurant Achterwerk

the sea at low tide and experience the power of its ebb and flow while hiking to Ameland or Schiermonnikoog from the mainland.

TIME YOUR VISIT

April 2020 has been declared the Month of Freedom, with the national Liberation Day on 5 May as a cumulative highlight. On this day, fourteen Freedom Festivals will be held throughout the country. Visiting in April brings the added bonus of being able to celebrate Kingsday with the locals on the 27th.

• By Linda Ismaili



ITINERARY

One week in the Netherlands

- Starting off in **Amsterdam**, hop aboard a ferry to the lesser-known north of the city. Spend the day hunting for vintage treasures, and then find a spot by the riverside at PLeek to sample some local beers. Then leave the crowds behind and explore the country by train – the furthest stop is less than 2½ hours away.
- Take a walking tour in **Rotterdam** to discover its innovative architecture and harrowing war history.
- Take a day-trip from historical **Arnhem** and cycle across **Hoge Veluwe National Park** to admire Van Goghs at the Kröller-Müller Museum.
- Explore **Groningen's** cosy and car-free city centre, where bars don't have a closing time and the countryside is just a bike ride away.

