



Holland



The Dutch aren't bogged in their clichés, even though bikes, dykes, windmills and blazing flower fields are pretty much the norm outside the major cities. Do as the locals do - grab a bike and explore. It's a very big small country, and full of salutary surprises. In this chapter you will find all the information about the Netherlands and how to find your way around.

Special Dutch Food

Although food from all over the world is available in restaurants and supermarkets, traditional Dutch cooking shows no sign of dying out. Its origins lie in Holland's agricultural past and it features local products such as bread, potatoes, root vegetables, greens, pork and beef products plus a variety of dairy product including the famous Dutch cheeses. Dairy products loom large in the Dutch diet. A lot of milk and buttermilk is drunk by all ages and yoghurt is sold by the litre in supermarkets.

A traditional Dutch main meal would include mashed potatoes sometimes mixed with green vegetables ("stamppot"), pork in the form of smoked sausage or bacon cubes and a rich gravy. Meat balls are also popular served with gravy and potatoes. Lamb and mutton are rarely eaten and hard to find, horse meat is popular, however. Some of the more unusual vegetables often eaten are sauerkraut, chicory and kale. Thick soups form another popular meal, the most famous being "erwtensoep", a substantial pea and ham soup containing the ubiquitous smoked sausage and brown bean soup ("bruinebonensoep") with brown beans replacing the peas.

Holland has a colonial past in the far east and the Dutch have acquired a taste for Indonesian dishes. Indonesian ingredients are available in supermarkets and some have found their way into mainstream cooking.

Traditional favourites

If you visit the Netherlands you have to have tasted the following typical Dutch food:

Vla

A thick sweet milk pudding which is similar to English custard, made mainly from milk and offered in a variety of tastes ranging from vanilla and chocolate to strawberry. If you get the chance, you must try hopjes-vla and bitterkoekjes-vla which have a very typical and also unexplainable tastes.

Cheese



A lot of cheese is consumed and whole cheeses can still be found on display in shops. Pieces are cut and sliced while you wait. The most popular variety is Gouda, not the red-coated Edam often seen in the rest of Europe



Karnemelk

Literally 'churned milk' (buttermilk). It has a thin substance and is rather sour. It is supposed to be quite healthy, but admittedly you must acquire a taste for it.

Poffertjes



These resemble very small pancakes and are traditionally served warm with lots of powdered sugar sprinkled on top. You can make them at home if you have a special pan, but it might be easier to go to a poffertjeskraam (kraam is literally a market stall, but also indicates larger eating-houses) and get them ready made.

Hagelslag

Traditionally lots of chocolate-snippers that the Dutch sprinkle on their bread. Nowadays it comes in quite a number of (chocolate-) varieties.



Muisjes

Literally meaning 'mice', it falls in the same category as hagelslag and is also used as bread-spread. Of course the ingredients do not consist of an actual mouse, although the blue & white muisjes do resemble very small mice crawling around on your slice of bread. Traditionally the blue & white muisjes are served on beschuit (rusk) to celebrate the birth of a child. Although now available in different varieties (like gestampde muisjes or 'crushed mice') it is essentially made from anise with a sugar coating.

Haagse hopjes

A typical Dutch coffee candy. You have to taste them.

Drop

A sweet (liquorice) that comes in a very large number of different forms and tastes, from salt and hard to soft and sweet. It is very popular among the entire Dutch population and is claimed to have something of an addictive-effect if eaten regularly in very large quantities.



Dropjes



Stroopwafels



Haagse hopjes

Stroopwafel



An unique type of cookie that has been around for centuries. They are made with two thin waffle-type wafers that have a very special caramel filling. The waffle is cooked at a very high temperature on a waffle iron then sliced in half. The syrup then spread on and the two halves come together again.

Vlaai

A pastry or a sweet pie typical of the southern regions of the Netherlands (Limburg and Brabant) but available all through the country. It comes in many different varieties and usually contains some kind of fruit filling.

Pepernoten , taai taai, speculaas en marsepein

Cakes and pastries containing marzipan and almonds are popular at Sinterklaas



Speculaas

Kruidnoten

Oliebollen

Oliebollen

"Oliebollen" are a type of doughnut traditionally eaten on New Year's Eve. Mobile shops making and selling them appear in late autumn.

Stamppot:

A very down-to-earth meal consisting of mashed potatoes with varying ingredients like carrot (hutspot), kale (boerenkool stampot) or endive (andijvie stampot) and usually served with rookworst, a delicious, smoked, juicy, mild sausage. You will find some nice recipes of typical Dutch food at our facebook page: SmilingFaces AuPairs



Pea Soup

Another famous Dutch delight. Dutch pea soup is a meal in itself and is full of fresh winter vegetables and chunks of bacon and sausage. You should be able to stand a spoon upright in a good pea soup.

Patat

Patat or 'French fries' may not be an exclusively Dutch food, but the thickness of the French fry itself and the fact that it is very often eaten with mayonnaise ('patat met ('patat with') is French fries with mayonnaise) does make some foreigners stare. Even more extreme is a 'patatje oorlog' - literally meaning "french fries war" - indicating French fries with mayonnaise and saté-sauce. 'patat speciaal' is French fries, mayonnaise, ketchup and raw onions. Patat in all its varieties can be obtained in any snackbar.



Kroket and frikandel

Both are fried, roll-formed snacks containing (some kind of) meat. Available at any snackbar and not advisable for vegetarians. An interesting way to get takeaway in Holland is from the wall. There are snack bars that have rows of little windows where you slot in a coin and choose what snack you would like.



Patat



Kroket



Haring with onions

Haring & paling

Holland borders the North Sea so a lot of fish is eaten both smoked and fresh. The most notable fish dish is the "zoute haring" which consists of an uncooked herring, filleted while you wait and eaten with chopped onions as a snack. Very much an acquired taste for the foreigner but extremely popular with the Dutch. You pick the fish up by the tail and let it slide into your mouth gradually. Of course the head is removed and the fish has been cleaned. The first catch of the season is called Hollandse nieuwe ('Dutch new') and is considered a special treat. Smoked eels are also considered a great delicacy. Stalls selling seafood, including ready-to-eat fried fish, are common in all Dutch towns. Mussels are popular in season with restaurants doing "all you can eat" deals.

Bread : boterham

Wholemeal bread and other dark varieties outsell white bread. The "boterham" is eaten at breakfast and lunch. We put on meat, sweet or cheese.



Boterham with cheese



Boterham with hagelslag



Beer

Dutch Beer Heineken is world famous. It is cheap and plentiful in supermarkets where crates containing 24 bottles can be bought.

Special Dutch Days

Carnival in Maastricht!

Carnival is the equivalent of the Mardi Gras held elsewhere in the world and is celebrated with gusto in the South of Holland. In the streets, in the pubs and everywhere. Three days and nights of party with dancing, singing and jumping. This event takes place in February.

Kingsday / Koningsdag

The King's official birthday is a national holiday, celebrated by street parties and other events. At the 26 or 27th of April. The King and other members of the royal family visit the festivities in one or perhaps two different places each year. The royal visits are always broadcast live on television.



Sinterklaas

One of the most particular special days is Sinterklaas celebrated on the fifth of December. The period of activities starts when he arrives in the Netherlands in the Middle of November till he leaves the 6th of December. Here we describe the tradition:



All Dutch children know that Sinterklaas lives in Spain. Whatever the case may be, in Spain he spends most of the year recording the behaviour of all children in a big red book, while his helper Black Peter stocks up on presents for next December 5th. In the first weeks of November, Sinterklaas gets on his white horse, Peter ("Piet") swings a huge sack full of gifts over his shoulder, and the three of them board a steamship headed for the Netherlands. Around mid-November they arrive in a harbour town - a different one every year - where they are formally greeted by the Mayor and a delegation of citizens. Their parade through town is watched live on television by the whole country and marks the beginning of the "Sinterklaas season".

Sinterklaas and his helpmate (zwarte pieten) are suddenly everywhere at once.

At night they ride across Holland's rooftops and Sinterklaas listens through the chimneys to check on the children's behaviour. Piet jumps down the chimney flues and makes sure that the carrot or hay the children have left for the horse in their shoes by the fireplace

is exchanged for a small gift or some candy. During the day, Sinterklaas and Piet are even busier, visiting schools, hospitals, department stores, restaurants, offices and many private homes. Piet rings doorbells, scatters sweets through the slightly opened doors and leaves basketfuls of presents by the front door. How do they manage to be all over the Netherlands at once?



The Dutch are busy too - shopping for, and more importantly, making presents. Tradition demands that all packages be camouflaged in some imaginative way, and that every gift be accompanied by a fitting poem. This is the essence of Sinterklaas: lots of fun on a day when people are not only



allowed, but expected, to make fun of each other in a friendly way. The original poem accompanying each present is another old custom and a particularly challenging one. Here the author has a field day with his subject (the recipient of the gift). Foibles, love interests, embarrassing incidents, funny habits and well-kept secrets are all fair game. The recipient, who is the butt of the joke, has to open his/her package in public and read the poem aloud amid general hilarity. The real giver is supposed to remain anonymous because all presents technically come from Sinterklaas, and recipients say out loud "Thank you, Sinterklaas!", even if they no longer believe in him.

During the Sinterklaas period one eats spicy ginger 'speculaas' or 'pepernoten', mild anise 'taai-taai' in fancy doll shapes, sugar candy, fancy fruit slices or rich almond marzipan, and chocolate letters (mostly you get only the first letter of your first name).

Christmas 25th-26th of December

In the Netherlands, Christmas was mostly a family celebration for with no presents, since the children had received those on the 5th from Sinterklaas. It was purely a family holiday. With a tree, first with real candles, later with coloured lights and beautiful shaped ornaments. In present day Netherlands the Sinterklaas tradition is (still) stronger than the Christmas traditions, but many people now give presents on Christmas Day too. When the Dutch decorate their tree, there is not much difference from Christmas trees all over the world. Special themes or a colourful mix of decorations make up for individual and personal Christmas trees. There are no set rules as regards the Christmas dinner, but game, roast pork or meat fondue are popular main dishes.

New Year's Eve

This is a family occasion. Everyone gathers after dinner and the whole evening is spent playing family games or watching television. There are lots of drinks and snacks, but no Dutch New Year's Eve celebration would be complete without "oliebollen" sprinkled with powdered sugar. All over the country fireworks are let off at midnight and toasts are drunk with champagne or wine.

