



The Netherlands

Welcome

Greet your Dutch guests by saying *Welkom* (vel-khom), meaning “welcome”. You can also say *meneer* (muh-near) or *mevrouw* (muh-frow), meaning “Sir” or “Madam” respectively. In a business situation, introduce yourself by giving the other person a firm handshake and saying your first name and surname. When speaking to those you are less familiar with or with older Dutch people, this formal style of greeting is appreciated.

“Welcome!”
(Vel-khom)
Welkom!

The Dutch greet family and close friends with three kisses on the cheek. Making eye contact is very polite when you are having a conversation – this shows that you are listening to what they are saying and is a sign of trust and respect.

The Language

Hello
(Ha-llo)
Hallo

Goodbye
(Tot seehns)
Tot ziens

Please
(Al-stew-bleeft)
Alstublieft

Thank you
(Budd-dankt)
Bedankt

The official language of the Netherlands is Dutch. In Friesland, a region in the north of the Netherlands, Frisian is also spoken. English is taught at school from the age of ten and, for some subjects, English is the main teaching language at university. You can therefore expect many of your Dutch guests to speak English well.



Bear in mind that older guests may not have a wide English vocabulary and that many Dutch people find it difficult to understand accents and slang.

Did you know?

A large part of the Netherlands is below sea level. Without dykes, much of the Netherlands would be flooded, including the main cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht.



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The Culture

The Dutch see themselves as a thrifty, hard-working and well-organised people. They prefer things to be clear and structured, for example prices and charges on the menu or hotel tariffs.

Punctuality is important, and they are likely to get frustrated if, for example, the tour guide or the bus is ten minutes late. The Dutch at home also have a standard dinner time – 6 o'clock – although they are likely to eat later when going to a restaurant or travelling for business or holidays.

Although they generally have small families, with one or two children, family life is very important to the Dutch. Birthdays tend to be celebrated with the whole family. They like to spend their free time taking part in sports, such as skating, football and swimming. Bike ownership is extremely popular in the Netherlands.

Customer Service Advice

Dutch people are very independent. They will find their own way and search for information by themselves, but they do still appreciate good customer service that to their mind is 'friendly and open'.

Dutch eating habits may seem unusual. For example, they tend to eat their sandwich with cutlery. If they ask for "black" coffee, they mean they want coffee, but not with milk or sugar in it. Here are a few other hints and tips:



- **Do** be punctual. Dutch people will expect you to be on time. Especially businessmen, because time is money.
- **Do** be prepared to receive a direct answer when you ask a question. Dutch people are very direct and to the point. A direct translation from Dutch may seem abrupt but it will not be the intention of your Dutch guest to cause offence.
- **Do** inform your customers of the closing time of pubs. In the Netherlands pubs close very late (about 2-3 a.m.).
- **Do** steer clear of personal topics in conversation – the Dutch don't generally talk about personal issues with strangers.
- **Do** talk about the weather. In the Netherlands it is a popular topic for small talk.



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General Background

The Netherlands is bordered by Germany and Belgium and consists of 12 provinces. The mouths of three major rivers in Europe are situated in the Netherlands. These rivers are the Rhine, Maas (Meuse) and Schelde.

The country is a major exporter of agricultural products. The Netherlands economy depends strongly on foreign trade and has a high level of industrial activity in food processing, petroleum refining, chemicals and electrical machinery.

Key Facts

- **Population** – 16,716,000
- **Capital City** – Amsterdam
- **Language** – Dutch (majority), Frisian (official)
- **Religions** – Roman Catholic 30%, Dutch Reformed 11%, Calvinist 6%, other Protestant 3%, Muslim 5.8%, other 2.2%, none 42%.
- **Currency** – Euro
- **Exchange Rate** – €1.11 = £1.00
- **Dialling Code** – +31

Did you know?

Hup, Holland, Hup! are Dutch words of encouragement to their national sports teams.



Where to go next

For more information about languages, culture and welcoming international visitors, go to:
www.talkingtotheworld.co.uk/welcoming.

Remember!

These are general guidelines on how people from different cultures *might* act and the customer service they *might* expect. These guidelines can't predict every individual's behaviour in every situation.

'Welcoming the World' is an initiative which aims to help people in frontline roles to give great customer service to international visitors. We have endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of the information contained within this country profile, which is one of a wider series. However, views or opinions presented by the contributing author do not necessarily represent those of the programme co-ordinator.