The Netherlands

Location

The Netherlands is located on the West Coast of the European continent, bordered by the North Sea, Belgium and Germany. It covers an area of 41,526 sq km, which is a little over 100,000 acres. Its geographic coordinates are between 53°52’ and 50°45’ north latitude and 3°21’ and 7°13’ east longitude. Its border with Germany along the northeast measures 577 km; the border with Belgium in the southeast measures 477 km, and in the western border along the North Sea measures 451 km.

Geography

The highest point in the Netherlands is Vaaslerberg Hill in the southeast, which is 321 m above sea level. The lowest point is Prins Alexanderpolder (near Rotterdam), which is 7 m below sea level. The most interesting part about the elevation of most of the land in the country is that more than half actually lies below sea level. This is due to a series of dykes and dams that have been constructed to push out and hold back the waters of the North Sea. The Netherlands is the only country to have major growths in land area without taking over land from other countries.

The mouths of three of Europe’s major rivers are located in the Netherlands. They are the Rhine, Maas, and Schelde. Most of the terrain is classified as coastal lowlands and reclaimed land, though there a few rolling hills in the southeast. This makes the Netherlands relatively low and flat compared to most countries, especially since it has no major mountain ranges.

The Netherlands has no real areas of wilderness, because it is Europe’s most densely populated country. There are a few natural areas, but most are wetlands. The country is literally
one large bog, as it was once covered by the sea and is the area where the water from the
mountains of Switzerland and Germany drain.

Climate

The Netherlands has a very mild climate classified as the Maritime type. It has cool
winters and warm summers. It is very rainy for the entire autumn and spring. The weather can
change quickly because winds can quickly blow clouds across the flat land.

The average temperature in January ranges from 34° to 41° F and in July ranges from 57°
to 69° F. The average rainfall is 28 inches and there are very few cloudless days.

Flooding is the main natural disaster. This can be caused by large rainfalls, storms in the
ocean breaking dykes, or runoff from melting snow in the mountains of Germany and
Switzerland.

History

The constitution was officially adopted and its first king crowned in 1814. The Kingdom
of the Netherlands was formed in 1815, which included Belgium and Luxemburg. In 1830,
Belgium seceded and formed a separate country and Luxemburg soon after. The Netherlands
was invaded and occupied by Germany in the Second World War.

Prior to it being a country, the Netherlands was occupied by many different powers and
conquered many times. These included the Romans, German Tribes, Franks (German tribes),
Vikings, British, French, and Spaniards, before fighting for its independence. This independence
was established by expelling the Spaniards in 1648.

The Netherlands became one of the most important ports in Europe until the French and
British became great sea powers. It had colonies in Indonesia, New Guinea, and Suriname,
which all later gained their independence.
The Netherlands today is one of the more industrialized nations. It has a constitutional monarchy for a government with Queen Beatrix serving as Head of State.

**Important Dates**

Important dates on Netherlands’s calendar for 2002 and 2003 are:

**Population**

The population of The Netherlands in 2001 was approximately 16 million people. Ninety-one percent of the population is Dutch and Moroccans, Turk, and others make up the other nine percent. The population density is 449 persons per square kilometer, which makes it one of the most densely populated countries in Europe.

The average population growth is 1.3%. Dutch people have a high life expectancy of 78 years. The death rate is 8.69 deaths per 1,000 population, birth rate is 11.85 births per 1,000 population. The overall population growth rate is 0.55%, which is due mostly to immigration.

**Currency**

The official currency of the Netherlands is now the Euro, but it was formerly the Netherlands guilder. The exchange rate for people to change their guilders to Euros was 2.20371 guilders per Euro. They were one of the leading countries in forming the European Union. One Euro equals 1.0064 U.S. dollars (2002). Euros come in notes and coins with coin denomination of cents and 100 cents equaling a Euro. Euro notes are in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, and 500 Euros. Coins are in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, and 50 cents; and 1 and 2 Euros.

**Education**
The education system in the Netherlands is much more complex than in the United States. They have four levels of education: primary (ages 4-12), secondary (ages 12-18), adult education and tertiary. The primary is divided into primary education and special primary education. The secondary is divided into pre-vocational education and secondary vocational education. Adult education is divided into general secondary education, Dutch as a second language, courses which give broad basic information, and courses which aim at fostering self-reliance. The tertiary is divided into higher professional education and university education.

They have both free public and tuition-based private schools. The difference here is that over 65% of all students are enrolled in private schools.

The government has very few regulations for schools. There is no official dress code and boys and girls are educated the same way. They have the freedom to organize teaching which means that schools are free to determine what is taught and how. There are statutory standards as to the quality of education. These prescribe the subjects to be studied, the attainment targets and the content of national examinations. There are also rules about the number of teaching periods per year, teacher training and teaching qualifications, the rights of parents and pupils to have a say in school matters, and the planning and reporting obligations of schools.

As result of their education policies, they have a literacy rate of 99%.

Language

The official language of the Netherlands is Dutch. The term Dutch is derived from the word Deutsch, which means German. The Dutch language is a German dialect all its own, but shares many characteristics with its mother language. It is the 30th most spoken language and is spoken by more than 21 million Dutch and Flemish people.

Religion
The Netherlands is predominately Christian, having both Protestants and Catholics, but also a mix of other religions like Muslim and Judaism. As with many European countries, religious differences have shaped the country and caused many disputes. The constitution of the Netherlands guarantees freedom of religion. Currently (2002), the population is 31% Roman Catholic, 21% Protestant, 4.4% Muslim, 3.6% other, and 40% unaffiliated.

Agriculture

Although the Netherlands is one of the smaller countries of the World, it ranks among the top three in exporters of agricultural products. This is even more remarkable when you consider it is the most densely populated area in Europe. It employs 5% of the population and accounts for 3.5% of the GDP.

Dairy farming and market gardening are the two largest segments of the Dutch agriculture. They are known all over the world for their beautiful flowers and wonderful bulbs. They have become very efficient in their production, which has been through a lot of education, research, and dissemination sponsored by the government. They are no longer focusing on increasing production, but to animal welfare, the environment, and the quality of produce.

There has been more development of organic farms and already 30% of the population regularly buys organic produce. They have incorporated a dairy quota system, which limits the amount of milk to be produced. This caused them to select highly efficient and productive cows for grazing operations. Many also raise swine and poultry intensively in indoor pens, which makes pork, poultry, and eggs one of their largest exports. Other major exports are potatoes, grains, sugar beets, fruits, and vegetables. There is also a growing fisheries industry that is replacing the commercial fishing as a result of pressure from environmentalists.

Trade
More than half of the Dutch GDP is generated from trade with other countries. It exports $210.3 billion worth of materials and only imports $201.2 billion worth of goods.

Seventy-eight percent of its exports are to the European Union, but other exports are Central and Eastern Europe and the U.S. Fifty-six percent of its imports are also within the European Union, and 9% from the U.S.

They export a lot of commercial services like trade and transportation; other exported services include construction, dredging, technical, and financial services. Exported products include machinery and transport equipment, chemicals, food, manufactured goods, and raw materials.

**Food**

The Dutch are truly the meat and potato eaters of the world. The traditional dishes have a main ingredient of potatoes accompanied by meat and boiled vegetables. They eat a lot of bread. Their dishes do not include a lot of spices, but instead have everything covered with gravy. Their dishes seem to be the foundation of the American home-style meal.

The day starts with bread with coffee or tea for breakfast. Lunch is bread with cheese in the afternoon. The day is completed with a hot meal in the evening.

Today, it is not uncommon to find dishes from many parts of the world included on menus. Dutch people are very internationally oriented and their food tastes show this. Items from Italy, Asia, and even Africa are often found on the menus.

**Landmarks**

What does a person go to see when they go to the Netherlands? Dykes, windmills and flowers are the most obvious. You will find these everywhere. There is a reason there are so many stories and pictures of these when describing the Netherlands. When looking for
information on trips to the Netherlands, you will find their travel bureau refers to the country as Holland as it has a more romantic appeal.

The capital of the Netherlands is Amsterdam, the seat of government is The Hague, where international treaty agreements have been discussed. Amsterdam is also home to the Vincent Van Gogh Museum a tribute to the Netherlands’ most famous painter.

The dykes and windmills along the coast are what make the Netherlands able to exist. They pump and keep the water out and supply electric at the same time. While checking out the traditional sites, make sure to pick up your souvenir pair of wooden shoes.

Another must-see is the Floriade. This is the largest floriculture show in the world. It is located just outside of Amsterdam. There are also many memorials and museums of WWII and the Holocaust. This was the home of Anne Franke, so you can see the areas she described in her diary.

The Netherlands is also home to many zoos and theme parks, which can be fun for the entire family. Burger’s Bush and Safari is a zoo that offers more of an adventure and is located in Heerenberg. The Six Flags of Holland are designed as to what vacations are like in the U.S. and it may not seem like you have even left the U.S.

It is really interesting to find out how much there is to see in such a small country.

Brian Williams