

The netherlands: more than wooden clogs and cheese

[Science](#), [Geography](#)



Bike riding, tulip fields, countryside, architecture, canals, history, and some of the best cheese you have ever tasted! If any (or all) of this sounds enticing, you need to make your way to the Netherlands as soon as possible. On top of that, it is usually one of the cheapest European airports to fly into. The Netherlands is a beautiful country that will pleasantly surprise you. It is part of the European Union (EU), but I did not know what to expect as I ended up there on a whim. By the end of the trip, I didn't want to leave. It has become one of my all-time favorite travel destinations.

Amsterdam

If you are going to the Netherlands, you need to spend at least 48 hours in Amsterdam. With the Red Light District and legal use of cannabis, you may not think that the city will be up your alley. I promise, you will not regret your trip to Amsterdam because there is so much to do!

Where to Stay

Stayokay Amsterdam Oost (Zeeburg): This hostel has everything you need, including free wi-fi, air conditioning, a large cafeteria with free hot breakfast and other snacks and meals for purchase, and a lobby bar that is open in the evening. It is not in the heart of downtown, but it is across the street from a tram that can get you anywhere in the city. Most of the guests are in their 20s and 30s. I was in a room for six with three bunk beds and a bathroom/shower in the room. If you are traveling with a group of friends, it is a great room for you. There are also individual options as well. I felt very safe staying here, and I would stay here again.

Things to Do

- I AMSTERDAM sign: It is cliché and touristy, but you have to do it! There are a couple of signs in the city, including one in New Amsterdam. The areas are very lively and everyone is taking group pictures and selfies. Don't be afraid to ask a random person for a photo because everyone wants the same thing! This will be a quick stop, and you are guaranteed some quality people watching.

- Anne Frank House: I was speechless after my time at the museum. I had read the book when I was in middle school, but it was unbelievable to see it live. You get to go behind the bookcase into the annex where Anne was in hiding with her family for over two years. This is not a "fun" thing to do, but it is something that you should do. The museum does a great job preserving not only her memory, but also others who were impacted by the Holocaust. I recommend getting your tickets online before your arrival. The line can be anywhere from 10 minutes to 3 hours since it is one of the most popular attractions in the city, but if you go at off times (opening or closing time), you may get a shorter line.

- The Fault in our Stars Bench: Okay? Okay. If you love the book or the movie, it's worth a quick stop. It is on the Leidsegracht Canal, which is a gorgeous area.

- Red Light District: This area is unique to the culture of the city, and it is one of the prettiest areas as well. The area is lined with canals and bridges, restaurants, and bars. It is not uncommon to see families during the day; there is even an elementary school in the area. At night, it turns into party

central! The alleys between the buildings off the main canals are where you will see the women in the windows. It is VERY IMPORTANT that you do not take pictures of the women. While I didn't see it myself, it is not unheard of to have a bucket of water or urine poured on you for doing this. This area is a huge tourist destination, so beware of pickpockets!

- Dam Square: This square is in the heart of Amsterdam, and there are bike riders, street performers, and other demonstrations. The tram literally goes through it, and it is very accessible! There is a monument that people like to congregate around in the back, and there are restaurants with outdoor seating on the sides that you should check out in spring or summer!

- Rembrandplein: You might not be a Rembrandt, but you can go to the neighborhood in his honor! The tram drops you off in the center of the square, and there are restaurants and bars in the area. There are also several coffee shops down the streets leading into the square. At night, it is a lively area, and it is cheaper than going out in the Red Light District or near Dam Square. This area is a great way to experience Amsterdam in a not-so-touristy way.

- Bike Tour: Walk on any street or go on TripAdvisor or Viator to find a bike tour that fits your style. I went with Mike's Bike Tours, and it was by far the best part of the trip. You will see everything that you think of when you think of "Holland." I went on the countryside tour that rode through the more urban area of New Amsterdam, and then we went through some parks and small neighborhoods and ended up in the countryside. You will see tulip

fields, farms, windmills, and older churches. The tour took about 5 hours, but it was well worth it!

- Coffee shop vs. Cafe: It is important to know the difference in this city. If you would like cannabis, go to the coffee shop. If you would like a coffee, go to a cafe.

- Ice Bar: These bars are very popular in Europe, and there is one in Amsterdam. Everything is made of ice, so dress accordingly. I would recommend pants and closed-toe shoes.

Food & Drinks

- Amsterdam Cheese Museum: Amsterdam is known for its cheese! I debated going in because it didn't seem like anything special, but once I found out it was FREE and that there were free samples, I was sold. A kind tour guide explained the cheese making process for several different cheeses that we sampled. It is small and quick, but worth it for the free food.

- Heineken Experience: Heineken is the domestic beer of the Netherlands. This is a fun morning or afternoon activity because you can learn about how the beer is made, and there is ample opportunity to drink the beer as well. The staff is willing to answer any questions you have too. If you don't drink beer, that's perfectly fine! You will still have fun.

- Burgermeester: As an American, I am very particular with my burgers. Burgermeester didn't disappoint! I also have Celiac and need to be gluten-free/wheat free, and the staff was very accommodating.

- Street Fries: One of the best things I have ever tasted! There are small fry restaurants all over the city, and they are all fantastic! Get them with mayo for a true European fry experience.

Helpful Apps & Websites

- Trafari: Trafari is a travel app that is geared towards travellers in their 20s and 30s. With that being said, it is helpful for any traveler! You can find information and reviews about accommodations, food, nightlife, and things to do.

- TripAdvisor: This is both a website and an app! You can find information and reviews on different accommodations, restaurants, and attractions.

- Viator Tours: If you are interested in doing more organized tours of the city, or if you are interested in particular attractions, like bike tours, you should check out the Viator website or app.

Other cities

I was in Rotterdam very briefly for a quick meal when we were on our way to our next destination. While Amsterdam is more well-known, Rotterdam is also a gorgeous city with stunning architecture. You can even ride through the canals in a Hot Tug! If you have more time and want to explore more of the Netherlands, check out TripAdvisor. This list also gives the 10 best places. Anyone, regardless of interests, can find something they love about the Netherlands. I am so excited to go back one day!