



The Little Orange Handbook 2.0

The Netherlands
for Newcomers

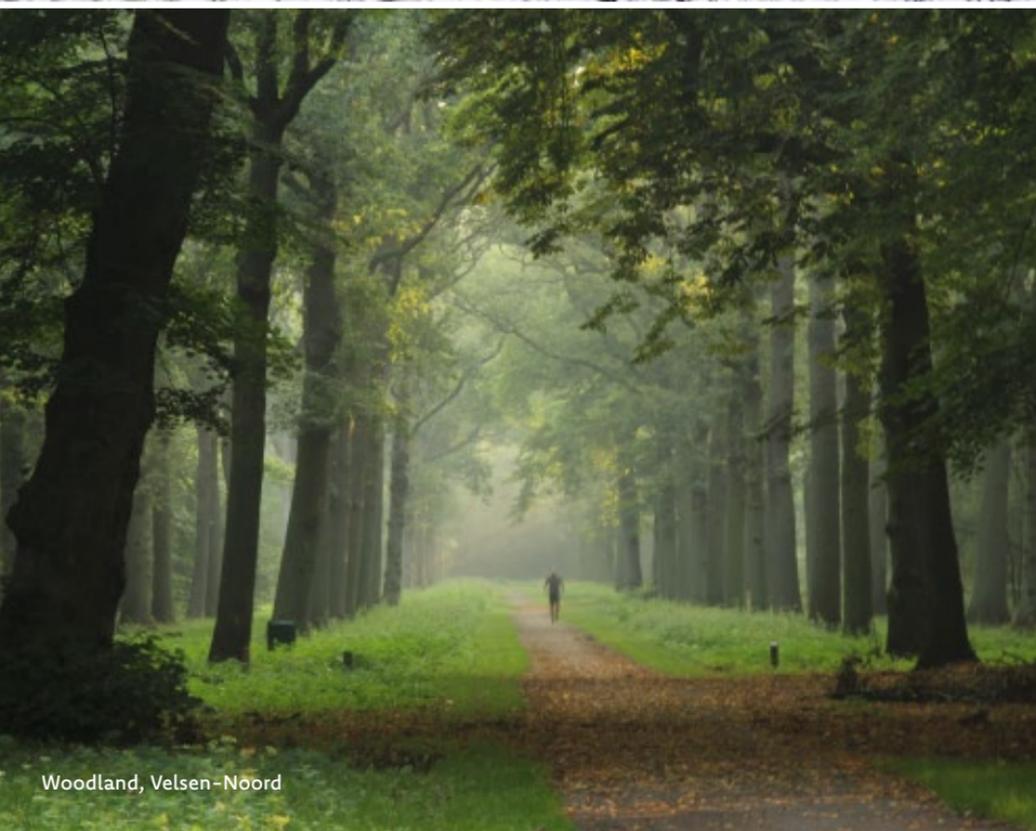


Tulip Fields near Noordwijk





Kralingse Bos, Rotterdam



Woodland, Velsen-Noord

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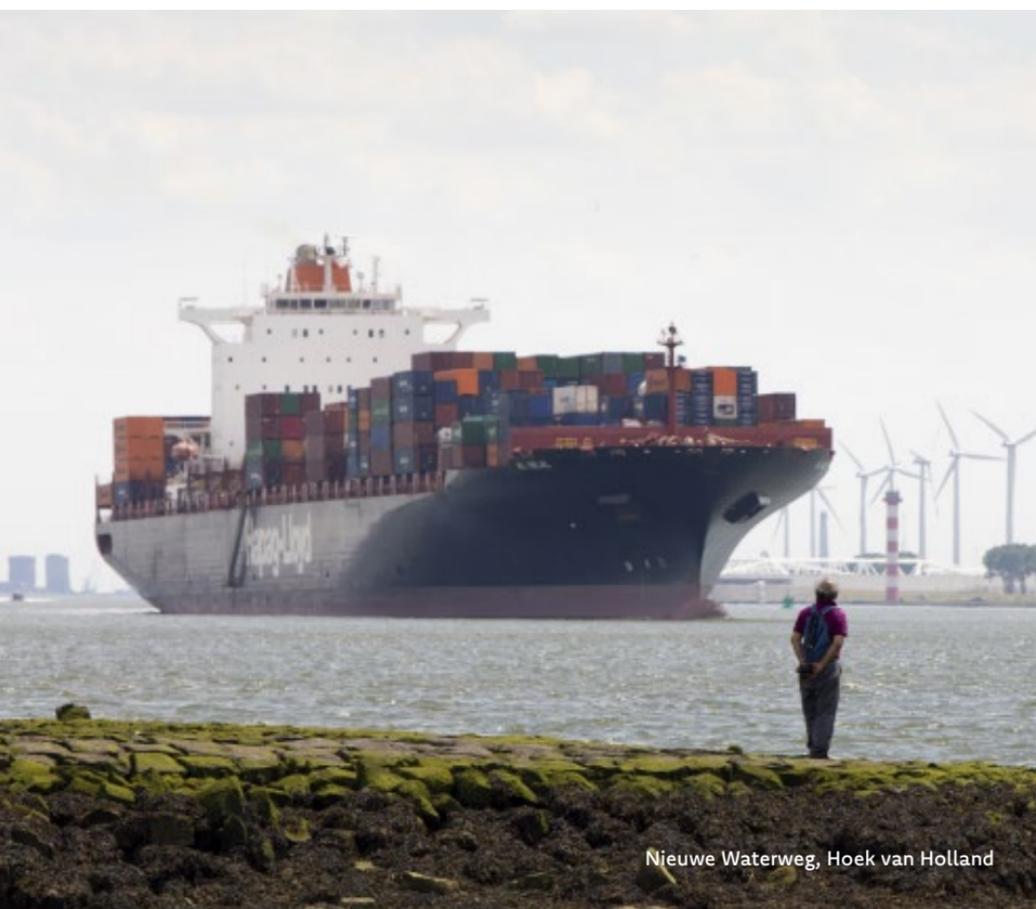
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Introduction

Dear reader,

Welcome to the second edition of *The Little Orange Handbook*! This handy guide to life in the Netherlands provides you with practical tips and hints for living here as well as a compact cultural, historical and economic background on Dutch society and its people's mentality. Just take a quick peek at the table of contents for a first impression of the highly useful stuff waiting for you to explore.

Whether they be expats or foreign students, migrants usually concentrate on the cities – and most Dutch cities are quite attractive and offer plenty of things to do. In their historical centers, a rich cultural life flourishes and there are attractions for all tastes and wallets. Many Dutch urbanites are cosmopolitan people with liberal worldviews and sometimes rather unconventional lifestyles, who find themselves rubbing shoulders with others who have more limited views on modern society. And often just 40 kilometers separate these cities from insular villages with strict religious traditions and other forms of conservatism.

Speaking of the countryside; away from cities and high-



ways, the Netherlands has quite a lot to offer in the field of charming scenery and natural beauty, with quiet country roads and wide panoramas in which water is the dominant factor.

Staying in the Netherlands longer than the average tourist would will make you aware of the pros and cons of living here. On the plus-side, most visitors experience society as being relaxed and open; transparent, and welcoming to new ideas and new people. There is great political and personal autonomy in the Netherlands, with freedom of press, religion and opinion. The Dutch make ample use of this freedom, as you will certainly find after learning the language (though their ability to express their opinions in English is just fine, too). Or just by turning on the news – witness the protests organized by the Dutch farmers in 2022 regarding the environmental measures the Dutch government wanted to introduce, leading the farmers to take to the highways in their tractors, dump hay and put up barricades. Keeping Dutch directness in mind, you will inevitably also hear less pleasant ideas and some extreme opinions, but it is up to you whether you want to go into debate over them or not. Still, whatever your personal lifestyle or your preferences regarding religion, sexuality, politics, etcetera, are; in the Netherlands you can live in accordance with them – provided you respect other people's choices as well...



Other plusses when it comes to life here, are the excellent quality of health care and education, both of which rank very high in world statistics. This book will inform you of some of the particularities when it comes to how it all works, just to help you on your way. Likewise, the country is seen as child-friendly: children are both loved and taken seriously and there are numerous venues in which tomorrow's adult citizens can enjoy themselves and develop their skills. Think of museums and theaters, but also of fun parks and child-friendly restaurants.

For children and adults alike, the Dutch sports scene is also very diverse. There are thousands of sports clubs, most of which have excellent facilities. These facilities, both indoors and outdoors, are to be found everywhere, and in this country known for its plentiful water, all kinds of water sports are popular and well-facilitated. Sports clubs usually also welcome people from 'outside' – even those who do not yet speak the local language – so membership may be a good way to make new friends.

Moreover, life here leaves you time to enjoy it all. The Dutch are a hardworking lot, but they also highly value leisure time. Official workweeks for employees are less than 40 hours, but of course the self-employed and people in leading positions make longer hours. Even so, they enjoy several weeks of holidays and succeed in spending most evenings and weekends with their loved ones. 'Quality time' is not a hot topic here, but Dutch society is certainly not '24/7', and people from more hectic economies can initially be annoyed by this – though most of them find themselves adjusting 'surprisingly' well to a life less stressful.

Less favorable comments on life in the Netherlands usually remark on the many rules and regulations – written but also unwritten ones. Other complaints concern the individualism of the Dutch: the downside of personal freedom is that people may leave you to your own devices. True friendship is a long-term thing in Dutch culture, involving a slow approach with increasingly personal conversation. The Dutch prefer their friends to share certain basic ideas on life and lifestyle, so people from outside need to 'work their way in'. Speaking Dutch will obviously help, but the good news and the bad news is that just about all

Dutch people speak English and they almost automatically switch to it as soon as they hear you slowly stumble your way through Dutch. This may be good for fast understanding but not for improving your language skills!

Two other issues that have incurred negative commentary have been how the government dealt with COVID-19 – including inconsistent advice on masks, poor anticipation of the need for subsequent lockdowns, a slow start of the vaccination program, combined of course with the Dutch attitude that no one should tell them what to do – and how the government dealt with the influx of Ukrainian refugees after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Due to a lack of beds for these refugees, up to 250 of them found themselves sleeping outside in the late summer, while the hygiene in the centers was sub-par. These events, plus a few others, have led to a drop in confidence in Dutch politics, however, as political pundits say; this has happened before, it has always recovered, and all things are relative – causing them to see no reason for concern.

Quite a few visitors comment on old-fashioned attitudes regarding male-female role patterns: most Dutch women are strong, independent and quite successful, but certain economic and cultural factors may hold them down, obviously a matter under debate.

A final criticism is that the Dutch tend to be rather money-oriented. Even though they may be less thrifty than before, price and ‘usefulness’ are still important factors in any decision, while more romantic notions such as esthetics, style or fashionability come second.

Overall, the Netherlands is a good place to be, and this book will help you settle in, whether you are an expat, an international student, a love immigrant or any other kind of long-term visitor. Let me conclude by saying: welcome to the Netherlands!

Jacob Vossestein

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