The Netherlands, informally Holland, is a country located in Northwestern Europe with overseas territories in the Caribbean. It is the largest of the four constituent countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The Netherlands consists of twelve provinces; it borders Germany to the east and Belgium to the south, with a North Sea coastline to the north and west. It shares maritime borders with the United Kingdom, Germany, and Belgium. The official language is Dutch, with West Frisian as a secondary official language in the province of Friesland. Dutch, English, and Papiamento are official in the Caribbean territories.

Netherlands literally means "lower countries" in reference to its low elevation and flat topography, with 26% situated below sea level. Most of the areas below sea level, known as polders, are the result of land reclamation that began in the 14th century.In the Republican period, which began in 1588, the Netherlands entered a unique era of political, economic, and cultural greatness, ranked among the most powerful and influential in Europe and the world; this period is known as the Dutch Golden Age. During this time, its trading companies, the Dutch East India Company and the Dutch West India Company, established colonies and trading posts all over the world.

With a population of over 17.9 million people, all living within a total area of 41,850 km2 (16,160 sq mi)—of which the land area is 33,500 km2 (12,900 sq mi)—the Netherlands is the 33rd most densely populated country, with a density of 535 people per square kilometre (1,390 people/sq mi). Nevertheless, it is the world's second-largest exporter of food and agricultural products by value, owing to its fertile soil, mild climate, intensive agriculture, and inventiveness. The four largest cities in the Netherlands are Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht. Amsterdam is the country's most populous city and the nominal capital, though the primary national political institutions are located in the Hague.

History

The history of the Netherlands extends back long before the founding of the modern Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815 after the defeat of Napoleon. For thousands of years, people have been living together around the river deltas of this section of the North Sea coast. Records begin with the four centuries during which the region formed a militarized border zone of the Roman Empire. As the Western Roman Empire collapsed and the Middle Ages began, three dominant Germanic peoples coalesced in the area – Frisians in the north and coastal areas, Low Saxons in the northeast, in addition to the Franks in the south. By 800, the Frankish Carolingian dynasty had once again integrated the area into an empire covering a large part of Western Europe. The region was part of the duchy of Lower Lotharingia within the Holy Roman Empire, but neither the empire nor the duchy were governed in a centralized manner. For several centuries, medieval lordships such as Brabant, Holland, Zeeland, Friesland, Guelders and others held a changing patchwork of territories.

By 1433, the Duke of Burgundy had assumed control over most of Lower Lotharingia, creating the Burgundian Netherlands. This included what is now the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and a part of France. When their heirs the Catholic kings of Spain took strong measures against Protestantism, the subsequent Dutch revolt led to the splitting in 1581 of the Netherlands into southern and northern parts. The southern "Spanish Netherlands" corresponds approximately to modern Belgium and Luxembourg, and the northern "United Provinces" (or "Dutch Republic)", which spoke Dutch and was predominantly Protestant, was the predecessor of the modern Netherlands.

In the Dutch Golden Age, which had its zenith around 1667, there was a flowering of trade, industry, and the sciences. The Dutch Republic practiced religious toleration and Amsterdam attracted Portuguese Jews, many of whom were merchants, that practiced their religion and engaged in economic activity. A rich worldwide Dutch empire developed in Asia and the Americas. The Dutch East India Company became one of the earliest and most important of national mercantile companies of the time, based on invasion, colonialism, and extraction of outside resources, but not religious evangelization. During the eighteenth century, the power, wealth and influence of the Netherlands declined. A series of wars with the more powerful British and French neighbours weakened it. The English seized the North American colony of New Amsterdam, and renamed it "New York". There was growing unrest and conflict between the Orangists and the Patriots. The French Revolution spilled over after 1789, and a pro-French Batavian Republic was established in 1795–1806. Napoleon made it a satellite state, the Kingdom of Holland (1806–1810), and later simply a French imperial province.

After the defeat of Napoleon in 1813–1815, an expanded "United Kingdom of the Netherlands" was created with the House of Orange as monarchs, also ruling Belgium and Luxembourg. After the King imposed unpopular Protestant reforms on Belgium, it left the kingdom in 1830 and new borders were agreed in 1839. After an initially conservative period, following the introduction of the 1848 constitution, the country became a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarch. Modern-day Luxembourg became officially independent of the Netherlands in 1839, but a personal union remained until 1890. Since 1890, it is ruled by another branch of the same dynasty.

The Netherlands was neutral during the First World War, but during the Second World War, it was invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany. The Nazis, including many collaborators, rounded up and killed almost all of the country's Jewish population. When the Dutch resistance increased, the Nazis cut off food supplies to much of the country, causing severe starvation in 1944–1945. In 1942, the Dutch East Indies were conquered by Japan, but prior to this the Dutch destroyed the oil wells for which Japan was desperate. Indonesia proclaimed its independence from the Netherlands in 1945, followed by Suriname in 1975. The post-war years saw rapid economic recovery (helped by the American Marshall Plan), followed by the introduction of a welfare state during an era of peace and prosperity. The Netherlands formed a new economic alliance with Belgium and Luxembourg, the Benelux, and all three became founding members of the European Union and NATO. In recent decades, the Dutch economy has been closely linked to that of Germany and is highly prosperous. The four countries adopted the euro on 1 January 2002, along with eight other EU member states. There are few communities more laidback or down-to-earth than the Dutch. Arrogance and pretention rarely go down well in the Netherlands, whereas high spirits, friendship and family are things to be proud of. The Dutch also have a reputation of being economically saavy and prefer to save money rather than indulge on unnecessary consumerism. Despite the country’s lavish buildings and architecture, extravagance is not always celebrated, often seen as being wasteful and inconsiderate. Instead, the people of the Netherlands are more interested in art, music and international affairs, which is evident by their daily discussions of global issues.

Culturfe

The Netherlands is known as one of the most secular countries in Europe and it’s believed that around 40 percent of Dutch people have no religion. About 30 percent of the population are Roman Catholic and below five percent are practicing Muslims. Despite it once being the dominant faith in the Netherlands, now only an estimated 20 percent of the people are Protestant, and the number of churches has considerably dwindled over the past two centuries.

Kukenhof Garden

The history of Keukenhof dates back to the 15th century. Countess Jacoba van Beieren [Jacqueline of Bavaria] (1401-1436) used 'Keukenduyn' [kitchen dunes] as hunting ground for the kitchen of Teylingen Castle. Keukenhof Castle was built in 1641 and the estate grew to encompass an area of over 200 hectares.

Landscape architects Jan David Zocher and his son Louis Paul Zocher, who also designed Amsterdam's Vondelpark, redesigned the castle gardens in 1857. That park, in the English landscape style, still constitutes the basis of Keukenhof.

In 1949 a group of 20 leading flower bulb growers and exporters came up with the plan to use the estate to exhibit spring-flowering bulbs, signaling the birth of Keukenhof as a spring park. The park opened its gates to the public in 1950 and was an instant success, with 236,000 visitors in the first year alone. 2024 will be the 75th edition of Keukenhof. During the past 74 years Keukenhof developed into a world-famous attraction.