

ACCESS

Guide

Cycling In The Netherlands

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Introduction

In the Netherlands everyone bicycles: Adults, children, teenagers, the elderly, students, and professionals. Bicycling is popular because there is a continuous network of cycle paths that are maintained, which makes cycling a convenient and easy way to get around town. The government also encourages cycling. The Ministry of Transport, Public Work and Water Management is stimulating cycling because research has shown that employees who cycle to work are healthier than those who do not. But before joining the Dutch on the bike paths there are some practical things that you should know which this booklet will help you with.

Types of Bicycles

The most common type of bicycle is the *Oma Fiets*, (Grandma Bike). However, you will see a lot of other types of bikes, including the following: *Stadsfiets* (City bike), *ATB*, *Sportfiets* (Sport bike), *Elektrische fiets* (Electric bike), *bakfiets* (cargo bike), and mopeds.

Stadsfietsen (city bikes) and *omafietsen* (grandma bikes) are most often used for every day trips, including going to school and/or work, and running errands around town.

A *sportfiets* (exercise bike) is a more convenient bicycle for longer trips.

An ATB is most convenient for those who bike on difficult terrain. A special type of ATB is the mountain bike, which is not often used in the Netherlands, because of its flat terrain, but it is convenient for cycling in the mountains.

An electric bike (*elektrische fiets*) offers the possibility to get electric support while cycling. It is especially useful when it is very windy because it does not require as much strength. In Dutch this is called "*trapondersteuning*," which means that you have to bike yourself, but the electric motor will support you. Depending on the type of electric bike you can choose between no support, little support, average support or a lot of support.

A moped is a bicycle with an auxiliary engine. In the Netherlands there are two types of mopeds. A *snorfiets* has an engine capacity of 50 cc or less and can reach a maximum speed of 25 km/h. Helmets are not required and it has a light blue license plate. *Bromfietsen* ride in principle on the roadway and can reach a maximum speed of 45 km/h. They have a yellow license plate. By law, children younger than 8 years old can only be passengers on a moped if they are provided with a proper, safe seat that gives them adequate support for their back, hands and feet. It is not permitted to hold a mobile phone while operating a moped.

Bakfietsen (cargo bikes) are transport bikes with three wheels and a large front bucket. It is common to see parents transporting children around in *bakfietsen* because the box is low to the ground making it is easier to transport more weight.

There are also four-wheeled vehicles, but they are not allowed on bike paths and have to follow the same rules as *bromfietsen*. They look like small automobiles and must have an overall weight of less than 350 kg (excluding the weight of battery in electric vehicles). They can reach a maximum of 45 km/h and can be distinguished by their small size and a 45 km/h sticker that is displayed on the back of the car.

Bicycle traffic rules and laws

Road signs

It is a good idea to learn a few Dutch bicycle terms since living in the Netherlands means that the road signs are in Dutch. Here are the most common words on bike signs:

Fiets = Bicycle

Fietspaden = Bicycle Lanes

Fietsenstalling = Parking for bikes

Geen fietsen stallen = Bicycle parking is not permitted (often seen in front of businesses)

Fietsers uitgezonderd = This rule does not apply to bicyclists

Fietsen toegestaan = Cycling Allowed

Fortunately, most signs also have illustrations. Here are some of the most common signs.



This sign shows that you are entering a pedestrian zone, but the sign with 'Fietsen Toegestaan' underneath means that cycling is allowed.

Yellow signs mean detour. Follow the arrows.





Bicyclists are allowed to ride in both directions. When there are no arrows, cycling is only allowed in one direction.



This indicates a bicycle lane.



Bicycles are not permitted.



The yield sign means that you must yield to oncoming traffic, including other bicyclists.

Bike laws

The large number of cyclists is taken into account in urban planning. "Strict Liability" is supported by Dutch law, and means that the driver's insurance is deemed responsible in a collision between a car and a cyclist. This makes car drivers wary of bicycles, but bicyclists should always be careful and alert.

In the Dutch traffic law bicycles form a separate category, and therefore some special regulations apply, which may be different from those for motorised traffic or those in other countries. In short, the traffic law distinguishes between 'slow traffic' (bicycles, mopeds) and 'fast traffic' (motorcycles and cars).

The following laws are specifically for bicyclists:

- Cycling is not allowed on sidewalks or pedestrian-only areas.
- Use hand signals when preparing to make a left or right turn. Simply put your arm out in the direction you want to turn.
- It is allowed to ride alongside another bicyclist, but cycling with three people in a row is not permitted.
- Bicyclists share the bike paths with mopeds. Be prepared for them by cycling on the right-side of the bike path so that they can pass you.
- Cycling is not allowed on highways.
- Tunnels may or may not be accessible for cycling. If they are, there is usually a separate bike path.
- *Brommers* (mopeds) must use the main road rather than the bike roads. They are allowed on

the bike roads only if explicitly indicated, by the blue traffic sign displaying a bicycle and a moped symbol.

- Bicycles have bells for a reason! Use the bell to warn other bicyclists that you are approaching them and need to pass them, use it to warn pedestrians who are blocking the bike path, or to warn anyone else who might be in your way!
- Do not park your bike in places that have signs posted saying, '*Geen fietsen plaatsen.*' (No bike parking.)

These are the bike laws pertaining to lighting:

- Always have front and rear lights on at night. When visibility is poor due to mist, lights are mandatory even during the daytime.
- Your bike must be equipped with lights and reflectors when riding in the dark. This includes a white front and red tail light, a red rear reflector, reflective pedals, and some sort of side reflector on both wheels or tires. This side reflector should be circular, either a reflective strip on the tire, or one separately attached to the spokes.
- Although single spoke reflectors are legally not sufficient, you're not likely to have problems having them, provided you carry front and tail lights. This is for your own safety and that of fellow bicyclists.
- Bicycle lights must be attached to the bicycle. The lights cannot flash on and off and may not be blinding.
- The front light on your bicycle must be white or yellow, and the rear light must be red.

For the exact rules please refer to Articles 35 and 35a of the Traffic Rules and Traffic Signals Regulations (RVV). For more information visit

http://www.verkeerenwaterstaat.nl/english/topics/means_of_transportation/bicycles/

- Bicyclists can wear bicycle lights on their back and chest. The front light must be white or yellow, and the rear light must be red. For the exact rules please refer to Articles 35 and 35a of the Traffic Rules and Traffic Signals Regulations (RVV).

Even with laws stating that bicyclists must have proper lighting and reflectors on their bicycles, many bicyclists do not abide by the laws. Disregarding the law is dangerous and can result in a fine.

Carrying children on bikes

Beginners might be in awe when they see the many things that Dutch carry on their bicycles. Not only do they transport groceries and pets, but they also carry their children. The Dutch are big on transporting children by bicycle as seen by the number of parents transporting their young ones around town - at times more than one child! But there are laws and safety requirements for cycling with children. Since 1990 it has been law that only children younger than eight years old can be carried on a bicycle and they must have an effective seat with support for their hands, feet and back.

There are several ways of transporting your children: in front of you, at the back, in a *bakfiets* or in a so-called *fietskar*.

Bike thefts

Although the Netherlands is a safe country, bike theft is a big problem: Amsterdam is said to be the bike theft capital of the world. In 2009 50,000 bikes were reported stolen, which accounts for about ten percent of the stolen bicycles in the Netherlands. If you come across people on the street asking you if you are interested in purchasing a bicycle, know that these are possibly stolen bicycles.

To help prevent your bike from being stolen, follow these tips:

- **Park at a guarded bicycle parking lot.** Some cities have free parking lots where you are presented with a ticket when parking your bike, which must be presented to take your bike out of the parking lot. Train stations often offer parking spaces for bikes that cost a few Euros a day.
- **Buy a lock for your bike.** Most Dutch bikes are equipped with a built-in lock, which locks the back wheel and requires a key to unlock it. But it is advised that you purchase an additional lock to secure your bike onto something.
- **Lock your bike to something.** If there aren't any bike stands, chain your bike to a post. But do not chain your tire to something because a would-be thief will just take your tire off and walk off with the rest of your bike!
- **Make your bike stand out.** Those outrageously decorated bikes that you come across are that way for a reason. They are painted in bright colours so that they stand out and might discourage potential thieves from stealing them.

Bikes on the metro, tram, bus, train, ferry, and more!

There are rules regarding bicycles on public transportation.

Metro. Travellers on the metro can take their bike along for free, outside of rush hour. A maximum of two bikes can be parked on each metro exit. You are allowed to take your bike on the subway in Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

Trains. Bicycles are allowed on the train outside of peak hours, which are 6:30-9:30 a.m. and 16:30-18:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, except in July and August. In many trains it is prohibited to carry normal size bikes during peak hours. Reservations are not required. A *Dagkaart Fiets* (Bike Day Ticket) costs €6, but taking a folded bicycle on the train is free. Bicycles must be placed in a special bike area on the train, which can be recognized by a sticker of a bicycle on the outside of the train.

Buses and Trams. Bicycles are not allowed on buses or trams in the Netherlands.

Ferries. To take a bicycle on a ferry usually requires a ticket, but the ferries across the IJ in Amsterdam are free. River ferries that carry motorised traffic always allow bicycles, and normally have a continuous service during most of the day. Most times you pay a small fee, upon boarding. The smaller (foot) passenger ferries also take bicycles.

Airplanes. It is possible to take bicycles by air, but it is important to follow the packing procedure, which might require you to dismantle the bike. The bike will probably count as luggage and there may be an extra charge. Travelling with a foldable bike is easier.

Other important information

Protection from the rain

The weather poses a big disadvantage to bicyclists in the Netherlands. The weather is often wet, and as a result of the flat terrain, there are strong headwinds. The best cycle season is from May through September. From October to April you can expect rain, snow and wind and it is not pleasant for cycling. But the Dutch bicycle day and night, and in rain, sleet or snow. Of course they use rain gear, which is worn over clothing and helps to keep them dry from head to toe. Rain gear can be purchased at bicycle stores, and other stores including HEMA, Blokker, etc.

Although you will see Dutch bicycling while carrying an umbrella, there are alternatives. *Regenpakken* (rain suits) and ponchos will protect your clothing from the rain.

There are several different types of rain suits, including Goretex, which is guaranteed waterproof though it is bulkier than other types of suits. It is also an option to purchase a Goretex jacket and pair it with cheap rain pants.

There is a large selection of waterproof and breathable fabrics that are on the market: micro-porous coatings (Mpc , Helly Tech, and Texapore), microporous membranes (Gore-Tex), hydrophilic coating (Triple Point), and hydrophilic membranes (Sympatex and Mpc Extreme).

Micro-porous layers have a large number of holes that are too small for a water droplet, but big enough for water vapour to pass through. Hydrophilic materials have a layer that is breathable and waterproof breathable, where the water molecules move through the layer to the outside of the fabric. The less expensive rain suits are made of PVC or PU/PUR (Polyurethane), and although they are waterproof they do not breathe.

Gore-Tex is the best and most expensive option for rain suits.

Things to consider when purchasing rain gear:

- Proper ventilation is important. Go for rain jackets that have holes on the back and zippers under the armpits.
- It is important that the rain gear closes properly at its openings, i.e. the hood, sleeves and bottom.
- The fewer seams the suit has reduces the risks for leaks.

Ponchos are an alternative to a rain suit. A poncho is fully ventilated and can be put on quickly in the case of a sudden downpour. Of course there are different types of ponchos. There are those that close completely, such as Cordes or Anuy, which have openings for the hands that close with Velcro. Cheaper versions are completely open on the sides, but will not protect you from the rain. In light rain, a windbreaker jacket will suffice. A windbreaker is water repellent but not waterproof.

Learning to ride a bike

There are several places that offer lessons on how to ride a bicycle.

Fietsersbond has a bicycle school in Amsterdam and The Hague.

Telephone: 030-2918171

fietsschool@fietsersbond.nl

Het Fiets College has locations in Amsterdam and The Hague.

Amsterdam: 070-3979850

The Hague: 020-6271147

info@hetfietscollege.nl

www.hetfietscollege.nl

Renting bikes

Bikes are available for rent by the day, week or month, at most major train stations in the Netherlands. In the most visited spots, such as Amsterdam and Gouda, private companies offer rentals as well as bicycle sightseeing tours.

Repairing bikes

Rijwielhandels (bike shops) are readily available and it is easy to obtain spare parts and/or have your bike repaired.

Cycle routes

Maps are widely available and come in two forms: Route Maps and National Maps. A Route Map is a national map that shows route information rather than general topography. Only the routes are marked and related information is shown. They are often used for holidays and sold at most tourist shops. National Maps cover the entire country, with markings and symbols about the cycle ways of the Netherlands. They are very useful not only for cycling in unfamiliar towns and cities but also for cross-country use. These are sometimes expensive but are larger and are widely available at tourist shops. Suggestion: go to the tourist office (VVV) for information and advice about cycle routes, whether it is in your own town or in another area of the Netherlands.

There are plenty of routes where you can bicycle. Landscape-wise the most interesting areas are the coastline, including the Wadden Islands, the national parks “De Hoge Veluwe” and “De Veluwezoom”, and the hills in Limburg.

Additional routes can be found at:

- For cycle routes: www.fietsen.123.nl/cycle%20routes%20netherlands.htm
- The North Sea Cycle Route: www.northsea-cycle.com
- Katherine Widing (2005) "Bicycle Touring Holland." Published by Cycle Publishing San Francisco. This book can be bought in some travel bookshops in the Netherlands or ordered at www.fietsgidsen.nl.
- Lenore Kennedy (1999) "Full Circle in the Low Countries." Online book, available on www.geocities.com/Yosemite/9732/nl98/index.htm.

Summary of useful websites

- The Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management has an information brochure available in English. For more information on Road Traffic Signs and Regulations in the Netherlands visit:
http://www.verkeerenwaterstaat.nl/english/Images/RVV-brochure_Eng_tcm249-272701.pdf
- Contains information about routes, campsites, maps, trains and much more:
www.cycletourer.co.uk/cycletouring/holland.shtml
- A web page for independent cyclists in the Netherlands:
<http://holland.cyclingaroundtheworld.nl>
- Marten Gerritsen's page contains useful information: www.m-gineering.nl/touringg.htm
- Useful information: www.aero.lr.tudelft.nl/~bvo/fiets/nlbybike.htm
- World Cyclist Association (Vereniging "De Wereldfietser"): www.wereldfietser.nl
- The website for the ANWB: <http://www.anwb.nl/fietsen>
- The website of the Dutch bicyclist union: www.fietsersbond.nl (Dutch only)
- Centre of expertise on bicycle policy in the Netherlands, with masses of information and even a virtual visit to the Netherlands: www.bicyclecouncil.org
- For news and assistance related to cycling in Amsterdam:
www.amsterdam.nl/verkeer_vervoer/fiets or www.fiets.amsterdam.nl
- To retrieve stolen/lost/abandoned bikes in Amsterdam:
http://www.amsterdam.nl/verkeer_vervoer/fiets/fietsdepot/english_information
- All about transportation, including cycling in Amsterdam: www.toamsterdam.nl
- Information about taking your bicycle on the Dutch trains: www.nsfiets.nl
- National tourist information office, with plenty of advice on cycling routes, including those through the tulip fields and dunes: www.vvv.nl (Dutch only)
- National knowledge platform for infrastructure, traffic, transportation and public spaces – 'making knowledge applicable in practice.': www.crow.nl (Dutch only)

- Organisation for traffic safety research: www.swov.nl/index_uk.htm
- National motoring/touring organization with plenty of cycling – and walking – information, including routes and maps, and even a cyclists’ weather forecast: www.anwb.nl/fietsen (Dutch only)
- Velorama National Bicycle Museum, in Nijmegen, with an impressive collection of 250 vintage bicycles, including one from 1817 with no pedals: <http://www.velorama.nl/engels/menu.html>
- Information on fast access, public transport bikes at some 200 user destinations: www.ov-fiets.nl (Dutch only)
- Hundreds of biking routes: www.fietspad.nl (Dutch only)
- European Cyclists’ Federation: www.ecf.com
- A vast network of 12 European cycling routes: www.eurovelo.org
- A good history of the Dutch bicycle and various models: www.oudefiets.nl (Dutch only)
- Activities during May, which is bicycle month in Holland: www.meimaandfietsmaand.nl (Dutch only)
- Popular site for bicycle enthusiasts, with routes, news, agendas, tips and much more, including more than 100 bicycle shops listed for towns throughout Holland: www.fietsen.123.nl (Dutch only)
- Dutch magazine about cycling in Holland: www.fietsactief.nl (Dutch only)
- Everything you need to know about cycling services and news for Amsterdam: www.fiets.amsterdam.nl
- Great selection of utility bicycles, and more, run by American entrepreneur, Henry Cutler (see also his blog: www.bakfiets-en-meer.nl): www.workcycles.com
- League of American Bicyclists focused on ‘advocacy and education for a bicycle-friendly America’: www.bikeleague.org
- Netherlands Board of Tourism site (see ‘Discover Holland/Active/Cycling’): www.holland.com/us

- A list of inexpensive B&Bs catering to cyclists, check out the 'Friends on the Bike' website: www.vriendenopdefiets.nl
- The quintessential guide to travel and life in Holland – for all 12 provinces; great for planning all cycling holidays: www.hereholland.com
- General information about Holland: www.xpat.nl or www.hollandhandbook.nl
- The next generation public bike system: www.1-2bike.eu

Courtesy of www.bicyclemania.nl

ACCESS guides available for downloading, free of charge, from the ACCESS website:

- Banking
- Childcare and playgroups
- Food from home
- Health care
- Housing and accommodation
- Inheritance and wills
- International primary and secondary education
- Learning the Dutch language
- Marriage , registered partnership, cohabitation and ending a relationship
- Obtaining a driving license in the Netherlands
- Post Office
- Public Transport
- Social Security
- Starting your own business
- Studying in the Netherlands
- Telephone, internet and television
- What to do when leaving the Netherlands
- Working in the Netherlands

All information correct at time of going to print

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This ACCESS guide is intended to provide comprehensive and general information. ACCESS did everything possible to ensure correct and up-to-date information. We cannot accept any responsibility for the information that might have changed. If you need more information about this subject, please contact the organisations listed or look at the websites mentioned.