

FUN ABC GUIDE

As the Dutch do

SOMI LYNDA



Hey, thanks for picking up my book! Before we dive into the super fascinating life of Dutchies, let me introduce myself.

My name is Somi Lynda. When I first set foot in the Netherlands from Nigeria, I had no idea that this small yet mighty country would leave such a lasting impression on me. Growing up, it was impossible not to hear about legendary Dutch artists like Rembrandt and Van Gogh when learning about art or to attend a Lagos wedding without spotting a bottle of Heineken proudly displayed. How could a country smaller than my home state be so globally influential, whether through art, design, or its numerous international food and beverage exports? It was a question that both fascinated and excited me, and one I couldn't wait to explore.

My journey began in Amsterdam, where I arrived as an eager international business student, ready to immerse myself in one of Europe's most dynamic cultural and economic hubs. What initially attracted me to the Netherlands was its intriguing blend of small size and global popularity.

But the Dutch quirks quickly began to reveal themselves. Like any newcomer, I encountered my fair share of cultural shocks: the endless directness that's as refreshing as it is startling, the meticulous dedication to splitting bills with Tikies, and the art of cycling in all weather conditions: rain, hail, or shine. These initial surprises eventually evolved into a deep appreciation for the Dutch way of life, peculiarity and all.



As I adapted to life here, I realized something: living in the Netherlands as a foreigner is like being handed a fascinating, intricate puzzle. You have most of the pieces, but some, those tiny cultural nuances, feel like they might forever elude you. This book is my attempt to bridge that gap.

In these pages, you'll find a mix of cultural commentary, practical advice, and laugh-out-loud anecdotes. Whether you're considering a move, planning a visit, or simply curious about life here, this book is your guide to navigating it all: the good, the puzzling, and the downright hilarious.

Let's dive in together. Or as the Dutch would say, 'Laten we beginnen!'

Somi Lynda

A



Amsterdam

What better way to kick off this journey than with the city that lives rent free in almost everybody's minds when they think about the Netherlands, Amsterdam.

To be honest, most Dutchies seem to dislike Amsterdam and prefer to live in an alternative city. This could be due to how overpriced the city has become or saturated with tourists. And don't even get them started on how tourists act like Amsterdam is the entire country and there is nothing else! Yes,

it's a fantastic city, but it's not the only gem in the Dutch crown! There's Utrecht, Rotterdam, The Hague, and so much more. It's like thinking

you've seen the whole Van Gogh painting collection when you've only seen the sunflowers!

But Amsterdam has caught international attention as the city of canals, bicycles, and more quirky characters than you can imagine. It's like the Netherlands put all its charm, history, and craziness into a blender and voilà, out popped Amsterdam!

As you wander through the city, you'll find yourself in a real-life maze of picturesque canals that seem to have a mind of their own. It's like they're playing a never-ending game of 'follow the leader,' and you're just along for the ride. Be careful not to get carried away and fill up your

camera roll with hundreds of pictures of these beautiful canal views. Also watch out so you don't accidentally bump into a short-tempered cyclist.

6 But don't worry, Amsterdam is not just about canal hopping and bicycle dodging. It's also a cultural hotpot that just keeps giving! From world-class museums such as the Rijksmuseum to unusual art galleries such as the STRAAT street art and graffiti museum, located in what was once the largest shipyard in the world. This unique location in Amsterdam has sparked so much debate as people wonder if street art in a museum should still be considered 'street' art. But if there's something I've come

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to expect from this city, it's that Amsterdam is that cool kid who doesn't play by the rules and creates lots of the latest trends.

And when it comes to the nightlife, Amsterdam boasts a diverse club scene, offering something for every music lover and partygoer. Popular spots include:

Paradiso:

a legendary venue set in a former church, known for hosting live performances and club nights featuring everything from electronic to indie music. Fun Fact: Did you know that Paradiso started as a hippie hub? In 1967, free spirits squatted in an empty church, transforming it into a space for creative expression. By March 1968, it officially reopened as Paradiso.

Melkweg:

another iconic space that serves as a cultural hub, featuring club nights, concerts, and art exhibitions. Melkweg is that venue where you get to experience new artists performing in what feels like a cosy and intimate setting before they shoot off to the world stage.

Shelter:

famous for its underground techno vibe, this club is located beneath the A'DAM Tower and offers a high-energy experience. The club's proximity to Amsterdam Centraal Station scores high points for accessibility, however locals complain that has also made it a tourist magnet. The music is still good though...

Radion:

here's another great option if you're looking for more underground techno vibes. Plus, on most nights you have the option of switching between the different rooms at the venue. There are 3 rooms in total so you will surely find your vibe in one of them.

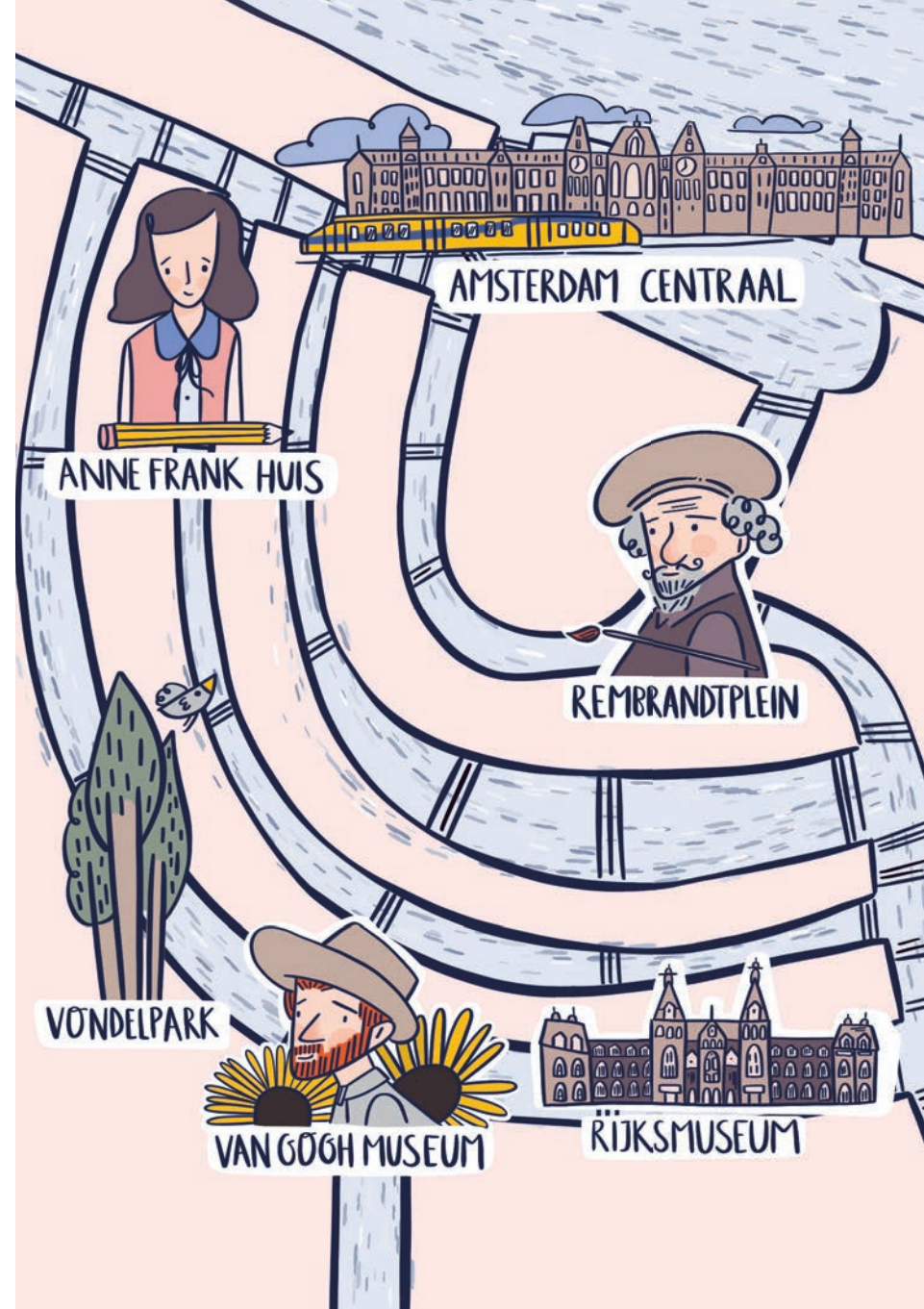
Chin Chin Club:

a mix of dining, karaoke, and dance in a vibrant setting,

perfect for those seeking a more unconventional night out. By day it's a restaurant/bar, and after 11pm the dancefloor comes alive with an extensive mix of genres such as hip-hop, R&B, afro, and house classics.

Club NYX: a multi-floor club celebrating inclusivity and fun, known for its eclectic music and welcoming atmosphere. Club NYX is an open-minded queer club where you find partygoers that are queer, straight, dressed up in drag, alone or in a group, all having a good time.

Amsterdam also hosts dance festivals and themed events throughout the year. One that has built quite the reputation for itself is the Amsterdam Dance Event (ADE). ADE is the world's largest festival and conference for electronic music, held every year in Amsterdam. During this period the city turns into one big party scene. There's suddenly a DJ in so many unconventional places, from small bakeries to clothing stores. My personal favorite, which I always capture on my social media page, is the AH toGo rave. The biggest Dutch supermarket chain Albert Heijn hosts a rave at the Albert Heijn toGo store located at Stationsplein (Amsterdam Centraal station). Imagine going to buy some snacks and, just as you are



lamenting the inflated price of sandwiches, the DJ starts playing a sick beat that makes you forget your sorrows for a while. Even if you can't afford ADE tickets, you're most likely to catch a free rave in the city.

This beautiful city knows how to party. Clubs, bars, and coffee shops that serve more than just a hot cuppa joe (wink, wink) line the streets at the city center, and the fun-loving locals are always up for a good time.

Which brings us to the infamous Red Light District, or as its known in Dutch, 'De Wallen.' As you wander through the neon-lit streets, you'll feel like you stumbled into a real-life adult-themed amusement park. The bright lights beckon you like a moth to a flame, and before you know it, you're surrounded

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by a mesmerizing array of 'shop windows.' But we're not talking about regular shops selling shoes and socks, oh no! These windows display a very different kind of merchandise – let's call it the 'human window shopping experience.'

Yes, in the oldest part of Amsterdam these 'ladies of the night' still practice the world's oldest profession. They

strut their stuff in their glowing chambers like glamorous disco queens, ready to charm passersby with a wink, a smile, and an offer you can't refuse. It's like a game of cat and mouse where everyone knows the rules, and nobody's judging.

But wait, there's more! In the midst of all the cheeky debauchery, you'll also find art galleries, bars, and restaurants. It's like they thought, 'Hey, why not have a little culture and cuisine between the adult-themed activities?' This mix makes the Red Light District a popular location for stag and hen dos. Amongst the tons of tourists that flock the street, you can easily spot these groups dressed in funny costumes or bridal party gear, seeking some fun.

Sometimes the nuisance from tourists gets out of hand. The

residents in the area have voiced their complaints, leading to the 'We Live Here' campaign. In 2018, this campaign was created by local residents to make visitors aware that regular people also live in the Red Light District and would appreciate it if visitors act responsibly. Just by taking a stroll around the neighborhood, you will notice some doors are covered with pictures of locals as well as the 'we live here' wording to serve as a reminder.

Amsterdam is the place where fun, freedom, and a whole lot of naughtiness come together for a party that lasts all night long. Whether you're a wide-eyed tourist or a curious local, this place will leave you with stories you'll never forget and maybe a couple you won't tell anyone about!



BIKE RAGE

B is for bike rage. You arrive in the Netherlands all excited to experience Dutch life, 'Tulips, windmills, and bicycles, woo-hoo!' But little did you know that beneath those calm and composed Dutch exteriors lies a hidden secret: bicycle rage!

It's like the streets turn into a racetrack for Tour de France wannabes. You're strolling along, enjoying your day, and suddenly, you're in the middle of a high-speed Tour de 'Please Don't Hit Me!' Cyclists fly past you like they're on a mission to break the sound barrier. You're left standing there like a deer caught in the headlights, thinking, 'Whoa, I didn't sign up for this adrenaline-packed bike rodeo!' What's even more puzzling is that almost no cyclist is wearing a helmet!

I still remember my first taste of the Dutch bicycle rage. I was navigating my way around the city with Google Maps while trying to keep up with my environment in the bike lane. As I noticed other cyclists racing past me, I tried to increase my pace, too.

Just as I got to the intersection where I needed to turn right after the traffic light, I realised I wasn't where I needed to be in order to safely make that turn. I was supposed to wait at the rightmost part of the road so as not to hinder traffic.

Unfortunately, I was not in the right lane, and I reduced my speed to change lanes. The bike behind me almost collided into me! I looked back to see the cutest Dutch granny with

fluffy white hair. Granny didn't waste any time to tell me off. She just yelled her expletive as she sped off and continued her journey. To be fair, I almost gave her a mini heart attack, but her face scrunched as she yelled 'k****,' which definitely stuck with me for the rest of the journey.

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14 Adding to all this rage is the bike bells! Instead of a gentle ding-ding, it's more like a war cry. You'll be minding your own business, and then suddenly, RRRRIIIINNNGG! It's like you've stumbled into a medieval jousting match, and you're the unsuspecting knight about to be unhorsed.

But hey, once you get the hang of it, you'll embrace the 'Dutch velodrome experience.' You'll join the ranks of the fearless cyclists, zigzagging through traffic with the skill

of a squirrel avoiding cars. You'll even have your own epic bicycle battles, fiercely defending your right-of-way.

Another thing you'll quickly notice is the Dutch determination to cycle regardless of the weather. Rain, wind, or hail, Dutchies bike through it all! They'll say, 'Je bent niet van suiker gemaakt' (You're not made of sugar) as they

pedal through sideways rain or strong winds.

The Netherlands is home to an unusual and exhilarating event: The Dutch Headwind Cycling Championships (NK Tegenwindfietsen). Held annually, this competition challenges cyclists to ride against the Dutch coastal winds, particularly on the Oosterscheldekering, one of the Delta Works storm surge barriers. The event only takes place when the wind reaches at least 7 Beaufort (a strong gale of 50-61 km/h or higher) and competitors ride a grueling 8.5 km stretch. It's a reminder that no weather is bad enough to stop a true Dutchie from hopping on their bike.

Since cycling is a way of life in the Netherlands, it's important that I share a small guide

TIPS FOR BUYING YOUR BIKE:

- **Try Before You Buy:** renting different types of bikes is common. Test them out!
- **Consider Second-Hand:** Dutch second-hand markets and shops offer great deals.
- **Accessorize:** add panniers, baskets, or funky bells to customize your ride.
- **Locks are Key:** invest in a solid lock (or two!) to keep your bike safe.
- **Weather-Proofing:** mudguards and good lights are essential for the rainy Dutch weather.

15 on what type of bikes are common here and which one might work best for you:

1. Classic Omafiets or Opafiets (Grandma/Grandpa Bike)

What it is: sturdy, upright, with a vintage charm. Think of the bikes with step-through frames you see everywhere. Perfect for: daily commuting, leisurely rides, and looking effortlessly Dutch.

Fun Fact: these bikes are so iconic that they're a symbol of Dutch culture!

2. Cargo Bike (Bakfiets)

What it is: a bike, mostly electric, with a large box or platform in front. Great for carrying kids, groceries, or even your dog.

Perfect for: families, eco-shoppers, and multi-tasking pros.

Cool factor: easiest way to become a member of the cool suburban parents club, also easier for hauling stuff or short moves!

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3. E-Bike (Electric Bike)

What it is: a regular bike with a battery-powered boost.

Perfect for: longer commutes, areas with lots of bridges to ascend, or those who want to arrive without breaking a sweat.

Pro tip: most E-bikes are heavy so make sure you have enough charge to avoid being halfway through your journey with an empty battery and a bike that is so hard to cycle with.

4. Racing or Road Bikes

What it is: lightweight bikes with thin tires designed for speed.

Perfect for: fitness enthusiasts and weekend cyclists exploring the countryside.

Heads up: not ideal for cobblestone streets or bad weather.

5. City Bike (Stadsfiets)

What it is: a versatile bike made for short rides and urban terrain.

Perfect for: students, commuters, and navigating the narrow streets of Amsterdam.

Feature alert: look for a built-in lock and a chain guard for hassle-free riding!

6. Mountain or Trekking Bike

What it is: bikes with rugged frames and multiple gears.

Perfect for: off-road adventures, exploring national

parks, or tackling rougher paths.

Surprise: though the Netherlands is flat, these are great for nature trails!

7. Fatbikes

What it is: the new craze of electric bikes amongst the youths, these bikes come equipped with thick, wide tires and a very broad seat.

Perfect for: cycling with almost no effort and comfortably carrying a cycle partner.

Heads up: prepare to receive dirty looks from Dutchies because Fatbikers are considered a menace to the road.



BIKE SAFETY TIPS IN THE NETHERLANDS: DOS AND DON'TS

DOS

- Ride on the Red Bike Lanes: these are designated for cyclists only. Stick to them to avoid accidents.
- Use Bells for Warnings: bells are not just required by law but are also vital for communication on crowded bike lanes.
- Cross Tram Tracks at an Angle: tram tracks are slippery and can catch your tires. Always approach them diagonally.
- Budget Extra Time: Dutch cities, with their constant construction and detours, often make cycling take longer than expected.
- Follow Traffic Rules: respect crosswalk signals and look carefully before crossing streets.
- Use Hand Signals: always signal your intentions when turning to ensure safety and communication with other road users.



DON'TS

- Don't Use Your Phone: using a phone while cycling is illegal and can lead to fines. Stay focused.
- Don't Forget the Proper Equipment: ensure your bike has functioning lights, a bell, and reflectors. Cycling fines range from €55 for phone use to €30 for no lights.
- Don't Park Anywhere You Want: bikes parked in unauthorized places may be confiscated, and retrieving them isn't fun. Use official bike racks or the free underground fietsenstalling (bike parking).

The Netherlands boasts more bikes than people; we are talking about 20 million bikes to 18 million people! So navigating safely is critical for everyone's enjoyment. Whether you're commuting, exploring, or just enjoying the ride, these tips will ensure you blend in with the seasoned Dutch cyclists. Happy cycling!