



A modern city in touch with its past, Holland's centre of government offers more than meets the eye.

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# THE HAGUE

**L**ess than 20km from Rotterdam is Holland's third-largest city. Hidden behind the North Sea's beaches and dunes, the city was founded in 1248 by Willem II, Count of Holland, and in later years the counts of Leiden, Delft and Dordrecht used it as their administrative centre. Its original name 'Des Graven Hage' literally means 'the count's hedge' or 'the count's private enclosure', and today The Hague remains Holland's centre of government, but not its official capital.

Modern city life revolves around the Binnenhof, where the national parliament sits next to a small lake called the Hofvijver. Known as 'the city of peace', The Hague is home to many international and European organisations including the United Nations Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, the International Court of Justice and Europe's central law enforcement body, Europol. The number and variety of foreign residents (especially expatriates) makes the city culturally diverse, with many foreign pubs and shops.

A few minutes' walk from the commercial shopping centre along the Kneuterdijk is one of the first treasures that the area has to offer. The Lange Voorhout is a broad L-shaped boulevard lined with rows of tall, shady trees.

Bracketing this oasis are stately mansions and national monuments such as the Klooster Kerk, which was originally built in the 14th-century as a convent and is now used for classical concerts and official galas. A little further along the avenue are the buildings that house the British and American embassies, the Pulchri Studio art gallery and the magnificent royal Lange Voorhout Palace and its Escher Art Museum, filled with the accomplishments of the Dutch graphic artist MC Escher.

The area outside the museum between the American embassy and the chic Saur brasserie is transformed every Thursday and Sunday into a bustling antiques market. The rows of stalls are filled to bursting with antiquated treasures and assorted tat, and picking through it can provide an entire afternoon's pleasure. One row is dominated by collectable books, such as auction catalogues from Sotheby's and historical reference works. Further over are antique golf clubs, silver and gold jewellery, porcelain and crystal.

A local artist called Cornelius can often be found nearby selling his exquisite hand-painted miniature canvasses of seascapes and classic Dutch sailing ships, while on another row of stalls, browsers may find such macabre prizes



One of Denneweg's many designer cafés



Hotel Des Indes



At fresco dining, Denneweg



Part of Hotel Des Indes' four-course high tea

as assorted glass eyes or a chair made from rabbit skins and the antlers of an African kudu. After the end of September, the antique market relocates to the nearby Het Plein, where it runs every Thursday from 10am to 6pm.

Those in need of a break after their shopping spree should drop in at Hotel Des Indes at the end of Lange Voorhout. The hotel was originally the country residence of King Willem III, and he used it for entertaining guests and holding parties before it became a luxury hotel in 1881. Famous guests such as President Roosevelt, Bing Crosby and Sting have all spent the night and experienced its grandeur and luxury, which has recently been updated by the renowned French interior designer Jacques Garcia.

The five-star hotel's much venerated high teas are certain to provide relief for anyone who has worked up a hunger, and the service runs daily from 2pm to 5pm. Visitors are advised to book up to two weeks in advance to avoid disappointment, particularly on weekends. The extensive four-course high tea includes such delights as duck breast in truffle dressing, baked bass with carrot and cardamom purée, scones and six varieties of desserts. A snip at €32 (£22) per person.

**PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT, BING CROSBY AND STING HAVE ALL SPENT THE NIGHT IN THE HAGUE'S FIVE-STAR HOTEL DES INDES, WHICH HAS RECENTLY BEEN UPDATED BY THE RENOWNED FRENCH INTERIOR DESIGNER JACQUES GARCIA.**

If you'd rather eat somewhere less formal, the more low-key Denneweg is just around the corner. A shopping street with a huge array of quality cafés and restaurants, this is where The Hague's beautiful people come to relax over coffee or buy a fine bottle of wine from one of the many boutique stores.

Before reaching Denneweg you may be distracted by the secluded charm of Maliestraat, a miniature street that bustles with shoppers visiting its bakeries and delicatessens. At the end, a bridge over the canal leads to Café Hathor, a typical Dutch brown café with outdoor seating out over the water.



Maliestraat

Gouden Ton



Artotheek



Panisse



Press on to the Denneweg, however, and you'll be rewarded with light, spacious cafés, their outdoor terraces spilling out onto the road. Long Island club sandwiches and ciabattas with east coast salmon are typical of the menus here. Once again Dutch antiques, jewellery and classical art can be found in abundance. Kunstkring and Artotheek are the street's two main galleries and both offer modern works for sale, while Artotheek has works that can be rented for as little as €6 (£4) per month.

Those interested in unique wines and spirits should head to the Gouden Ton, with its huge range of rare beverages. The exclusive wines to be found here are not sold by other retailers and include organic selections from the revolutionary Martin Schedtzel family of Alsace Lorraine. Also available are rare calvados, cognacs and schnapps or, for something a little different, there is the Nonino family grappa, a spirit different from normal grappa because it is made using the entire intact grape rather than the grape's leftovers. Aside from the readily available alcohol, the street is also home to a charming vintage chemist, and shops offering the latest in organic remedies and food.

As you reach the end of Denneweg, cross over into the more business-like Frederikstraat. The pace here is a little less bustling, although there is still

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plenty of window-shopping to be done outside the interior design stores or by way of inspecting the menus of some of The Hague's finest restaurants. A real find here is Panisse, a bakery specialising in a delicious array of home-baked breads, quiches and sweet tartlets made from chocolate, apple and orange.

There are so many wonderful secrets waiting to be discovered on the city's charming streets that The Hague's nickname seems thoroughly deserved. It may have earned its city-of-peace credentials from its role on the global stage, but a local's eye view of day-to-day life proves that The Hague is indeed a picture of tranquility.