

# Dutch

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## Where we came from

The Dutch are from a small densely populated, west European country called the Netherlands. Protected by dikes, 20 per cent of the Dutch land area and 21 per cent of the country's population are located below sea level. The capital city is Amsterdam and the government resides in The Hague. Currently the Netherlands consists of 12 provinces, two of which are called 'Noord Holland' (North-Holland) and 'Zuid Holland' (South-Holland). Those areas played a dominant role during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but when referring to the country as a whole, it is now incorrect to use the term Holland – a common error also made by many Dutch people. It would be comparable to using the name of one of Australia's states when meaning the nation at large. The Netherlands is about half the size of Tasmania, with a current estimated population of 16,750,000. The Dutch flag consists of red, white and blue stripes and is the oldest horizontal tricolour flag. On royal occasions an orange streamer is added to symbolise the House of Orange, from which the Dutch royal family originates. In recent years the colour orange is also used for international sporting events. Dutch serves as the national language with Frisian being an official regional language. The Dutch are some of the keenest language learners of European languages. Over 70 per cent have a good conversational knowledge of English, more than 55 per cent can communicate in German and 20 per cent in French.

## Historical notes

In 1606 the ship the *Duyfken*, under Captain Willem Janszoon, landed on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, near Weipa. This was the first documented landing of Europeans on the Australian mainland and marks the beginning of four centuries of contact and exchanges between the Netherlands and the Indigenous peoples of Australia and later European and other arrivals. About 10 years after the landing in North Queensland - more than 150 years before the British discovered Australia's East Coast – another Dutch captain, Dirk Hartog, landed at Shark Bay in Western Australia. That journey was part of the trading activities of the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie* or VOC).

The VOC established bases in Java and the Moluccas in the seventeenth century, in order to facilitate the spice trade between East Asia and Europe. Under the auspices of the VOC, Dutch mariners were the first to chart the coastline of the Australian continent, initially known as New Holland, and later given the name Australia. Between 1606 and 1770, more than 40 Dutch vessels made voyages to the continent 'down under'. Abel Tasman circumnavigated Tasmania and he established in 1644 that it was an island which he named Van Diemen's Land. Dutch sea-voyagers were more interested in trade than in settlement, yet they claimed sovereignty over New Holland by right of discovery. The Dutch charted the entire Australian coastline except for the eastern parts. English navigator Captain James Cook did so in 1770 and British settlement subsequently started in 1788.

In the nineteenth century the Dutch also started to settle in Australia. Some sugar growers and refiners came to Queensland via the Dutch East Indies. During World War II the Dutch fought alongside the Anglo Australian forces against the Japanese invasion and in 1942 the Dutch colonial Civil Administration, a kind of government in exile, was established at Camp Columbia in the outskirts of Brisbane (Wacol). There were then around 4 000 Dutch people in Brisbane, most of them civilian refugees. After Indonesia gained independence, Dutch refugees were repatriated to the Netherlands, but many eventually settled in Australia. Others were welcomed here under the Ex Servicemen Scheme. As a result of the 1940–1945 war, the Netherlands, like many countries in Europe, was totally depleted and experienced severe economic difficulties. To minimise the housing shortage and high unemployment, the Dutch Government encouraged emigration to countries such as the United States, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, whilst Australia simultaneously tried to increase its population. The Netherlands Australian Migration Agreement (NAMA) was signed in 1951: 'skilled and unskilled young adults or family units with breadwinners under 45 years' were selected for assisted passage. The Australian and Netherlands governments shared the costs. However, more than sixty per cent of Dutch migrants did not receive any financial support. In Queensland subsidised accommodation was provided at the Wacol Migrant Centre. Some people stayed there for a few weeks

only, but others for several years. A small number of single self-paying females were temporary housed at the migrant depot Yungaba, at Kangaroo Point. Between 1947 and 1970 more than one million people had chosen to leave the Netherlands and around 160,000 of them settled in Australia.

## Settlement and participation

The majority of Dutch migrants, including a considerable proportion born in the Netherlands' East Indies (now Indonesia), came to Queensland during the 1950s and 1960s. They were valued as migrants as they arrived with skills, qualifications and high work ethics and were able to participate immediately in the work force. Most of them had minimal English language skills but they generally made a rapid cross-over to English and integrated well overall. Compared with the 'first wave', the contemporary generation of Dutch migrants tends to have a higher level of education and an excellent command of the English language; features shared with recent migrants from other European source countries. Attracted to the relaxed life-style and pleasant Queensland climate, they often had already spent some time in Australia as tourists, backpackers or students. Settlers from the Netherlands still observe traditions such as cross-stitch embroidery and Delft-blue pottery they proudly display in many homes, in particular by the older generation. Popular Dutch food items, such as 'poffertjes', smoked eel and salted herrings, are often served on special occasions.

Willem Andreae, the Dutch Ambassador in Canberra, was quoted in 2012 as saying that 'the seventeenth century Dutch seafarers may have found minimal trade opportunities in Australia, but the Dutch certainly have done so now'. The Netherlands rates fourth place on the list of foreign investors in Australia and it is the second largest source country from the Eurozone. More than 70 Dutch businesses are presently established in Australia, including Shell, Unilever, Philips, KLM, KPM, ABN-AMRO, Rabobank, and ING, providing employment for many people. The Amsterdam Schiphol Airport is part of the consortium that tendered successfully to purchase Brisbane's International Airport. Dutch migrants to Queensland have contributed substantially towards small business in areas as diverse as tourism, fashion, catering, finance, antiques, building industry, house painting, floral industry, farming and agriculture. A considerable number of first and second generation Dutch migrants have become professionals in

medicine, healthcare, teaching, music, accounting and manufacturing. Many commenced their own successful businesses. Various Australian industries, such as AMP, Boral, Mayne Nickless and Qantas, are now operating successfully in the Netherlands. They are attracted by the efficiency of the transport and communication infrastructure and by the strategic geographic location of the Netherlands as a key distribution point for goods intended for the European Union. Dutch backpackers, as well as family-members of Dutch settlers, tend to be keen travellers to Australia, which is of course positive for the local tourist industry.

## Community associations

The social needs of Dutch migrants were historically met by their involvement with Dutch oriented clubs and organisations, some of which were highly compartmentalised into religion-affiliated groups, consequently leading to minimal community cohesion and consensus. The number of new arrivals from the Netherlands is now rather small, hence the Dutch Australian population is ageing faster than Australia's population at large. The second generation tends to show minimal interest in the original social groups. No longer viable, organisations such as the Australian Netherlands Chamber of Commerce (ANCOC) and the Netherlands Ex-Servicemen and Women Association (NESWA) ceased to exist during the last few years. An example of an association still going strong is the Netherlands Association of Queensland; the only organisation with its own club-house, located at Richlands. Other groups still active are: the Borrelclub Brisbane (a businessmen's social club), the carnival club The Stirrers, the Dutch language group of Radio 4EB FM and the Dutch Alumni group. A small group of newly arrived people of Dutch background with young children meet regularly on the last Sunday of the month in one of Brisbane's parks. Lessons in Dutch language and culture are given at the Duyfken School for children of primary school age (after normal school hours). The younger generation communicates solely via e-mail and some of them are keen to organise at monthly get-togethers for informal socialising.

When realising the need for a Dutch-specific retirement village, the Dutch community came together and established the Netherlands Retirement Village Association of Queensland for the purpose of building a retirement village. It was opened in Birkdale in 1978 and given the name Prins Willem Alexander Village

(after the Dutch Crown Prince). Originally the village consisted of independent living units only, but a hostel, serviced apartments and nursing home sections have been added over the years, and the complex is still expanding. Most staff-members are bi-lingual in English and Dutch, a boon for the benefit of aged people who through language regression have reverted to their first language. Typical Dutch food is often served and traditional festivities such as 'Sinterklaas' (St Nicholas) are celebrated yearly. Residents as well as many people living outside the village regard the annual 'April Fest' to be a highlight on the calendar of Dutch events.

The Dutch Australian Community Action Federation – Queensland Inc. ([www.cybadex.com/daca](http://www.cybadex.com/daca)) is an umbrella organisation to which 10 member-groups are presently affiliated (compared with 16 groups when initiated in 1996). Current activities include the following: Friendly Visiting Network, Dutch Helpline (a community telephone-service) and the Resource Centre (the 'archive' for Dutch Australian historical material). In 2001 the Federation published the book, *Our Story – Experiences of the Dutch in Queensland*, for the benefit of present and future generations.

The former Dutch Reformed Church, which originated in the Netherlands, has changed its name to Christian Reformed Church of Australia and become predominantly Australian. Up to a few years ago, the Uniting Church provided services in Dutch. Catholics attended mainstream local churches from the start and some few religious services in the Dutch language were held around Christmas time.

Long-term Honorary Consul for The Kingdom of The Netherlands in Queensland, Sir Kasper Kuiper, appointed by Queen Beatrix in 1993, a successful Australian businessman and former Captain in the Royal Dutch Navy, also demonstrates considerable personal commitment to Australian and Dutch relations and to the Dutch community in Brisbane.

On the 4th of May of each year the Netherlands and the Dutch in Queensland celebrate the end of World War II. A monument was erected in George Street, Brisbane, close to Parliament House to honour the memory of both Dutch and Dutch Indonesian service personnel, as well as all civilians who have suffered

and died as a consequence of war. The 15th of August is also commemorated as it marks the end, in 1945, of Japanese rule in the former Netherlands East Indies, now the Republic of Indonesia.

## Cultural links

There are strong cultural connections: Dutch and Australian orchestras and dance companies perform regularly in each other's country. For instance, distinguished Dutch conductor Eduard de Waard conducted the Sydney Symphony Orchestra from 1995 to 2004 and notable Australian film-maker of Dutch origin, Paul Cox, exhibited his films at the International Film Festival in Rotterdam in 2002. A number of exhibitions featuring works by Dutch painters were held in Brisbane, such as Dutch Art of the Golden Age at the Queensland Art Gallery, with valuable paintings from Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum. Dutch migrants played an important role in the development of football (known in Australia as soccer). The two countries regularly compete against each other in hockey and swimming.

The ties between Australia and the Netherlands have existed for more than four centuries. As one of the largest ethnic groups, the Dutch have contributed significantly, both at economic and cultural levels, to their country of choice, Australia, and to the state of Queensland. Whilst Dutch migrants' cultural heritage remains important to most, they have generally integrated well and fully participate in the activities of the mainstream Australian population. They may have retained some of the characteristics and language of their former fellow citizens still living in their former home country but they have certainly become Australians and an integral part of Queensland's multicultural population.

### Bibliography

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