

# Noord Brabant & Limburg



The Dutch southeast belies most clichés about the Netherlands: tulips, windmills and dykes are scarce. Noord Brabant is primarily a land of agriculture and industry peppered with a few pleasant towns, including Den Bosch. It's also home to the Netherlands' most popular tourist draw, De Efteling theme park, and the biggest street fair in Benelux, the Tilburgse Kermis.

Meanwhile, Limburg is home to beautiful Maastricht, contender for the title of Finest Dutch City, as well as – drum roll – hills. It also hosts Europe's biggest art sale, the European Fine Art Foundation show.

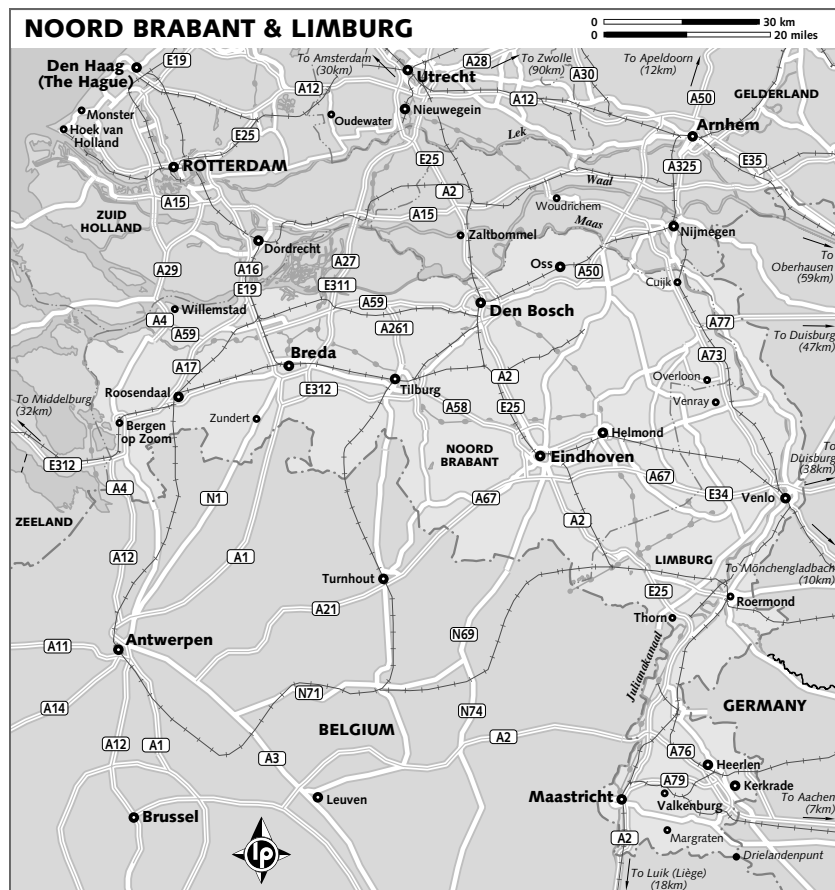
Neither province has its roots in the asceticism of the north, a fact made obvious during *carnaval*, when the streets fill with fireworks, bands and impromptu parties. And both provinces' proximity to Belgium and all those indulgent Catholic monasteries – most of which doubled as excellent microbreweries – mean there are many chances to imbibe.

In fact, the Dutch call the southeastern lifestyle *bourgeois*: like the epicurean inhabitants of Burgundy in France, people in these parts love to eat and drink heartily.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Thrill to the rarefied vibe in **Maastricht** (p278), a world apart from the north.
- Scare yourself silly in the tunnels at **Sint Pietersberg** (p280).
- Take it easy in laid-back **Den Bosch** (p272).
- Admire European modern art at Eindhoven's **Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum** (p274).
- Do the day-trip thing in lovely **Breda** (p275).





## NOORD BRABANT

The Netherlands' largest province spans the bottom of the country from the waterlogged west to the elevated east. The towns here have mostly transformed from wealthy medieval fiefdoms to laid-back shopping, student and tourism precincts. Den Bosch is the main city and, along with Breda, is an interesting place to spend the day.

Despite its size, Noord Brabant won't hold you up. It's primarily a land of agriculture and industry, peppered with a few towns pleasant and engaging enough to use as way stations on your pilgrimage to Limburg or beyond.

### DEN BOSCH ('S-HERTOGENBOSCH)

☎ 073 / pop 134,000

This sweet old town has a top-notch church, a good museum, outstanding cafés and restaurants, and atmospheric streets that make for plenty of enjoyable strolling. The official name of the town is 's-Hertogenbosch (Duke's Forest), but locals call it Den Bosch (*den boss*). It's the birthplace of the well-known 15th-century painter Hieronymus Bosch, who took his surname from the town.

#### Orientation

The town's pedestrianised centre is based around the Markt, 600m east of the train station.

### Information

**Bosch Medicentrum** (☎ 699 20 00; Nieuwstraat 34) Regional hospital.

**Library** (☎ 612 30 33; Hinthamerstraat 72; internet per hr €3; ☎ noon-4pm Mon, Tue-Sat 11am-8pm)

**Post office** (Kerkstraat 67; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

**Tourist office** (☎ 09001122334; www.regio-vvv.nl; Markt 77; ☎ 1-6pm Mon, 9.30am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat)

### Sights & Activities

The main attraction is **Sint Janskathedraal** (☎ 613 03 14; www.sint-jan.nl; Choorstraat 1; admission free; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-4.30pm Sun), one of the finest churches in the Netherlands. It took from 1336 to 1550 to complete, and there's an interesting contrast between the red-brick tower and the ornate stone buttresses. The interior is also of interest, with late-Gothic stained-glass windows, an impressive statue of the Madonna, and an amazing organ case from the 17th century.

Unfortunately, Protestants destroyed the cathedral's paintings in 1566. Thankfully, two by Bosch remain.

Take the opportunity to climb the 73m **tower** (admission €3.50), with its carillon and great views.

The **Stadhuis** (town hall) was given its classical baroque appearance in 1670. There's a statue of Hieronymus Bosch at the front of the building.

The **Noordbrabants Museum** (☎ 687 78 77; www.noordbrabantsmuseum.nl; Verwersstraat 41; adult/child €6.50/3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, noon-5pm Sat), in the 18th-century former governor's residence, features a sculpture garden and exhibits about Brabant life and art, including drawings and other work by Bosch.

**Boat tours** leave from the canal by Sint Janssingel. Check the tourist office for times.

### Sleeping

**Hotel Terminus** (☎ 613 06 66; fax 613 07 26; Boschveldweg 15; s/d €31/60) As its name suggests, it's close to the station. The simple, brightly coloured rooms are decent enough, plus there's an appealing bar (well, the owners call it a 'folk pub') and regular live folk music.

**Hotel Euro** (☎ 613 77 77; www.eurohotel-denbosch.com; Kerkstraat 56; s/d from €65/85) This business hotel

