

Traveling in The Netherlands

There are numerous ways in which one can travel in The Netherlands, that is namely by bicycle, metro, tram, bus, and train. It is a known fact that the cost of traveling in the country is extremely expensive to both internationals and locals alike. Hence, it is of great concern to know how to get the best deals available.

Bicycles

The main method of transport when traveling in the city between convenient distances is by riding the bicycle. The Dutch are quite conscious of sustainability and environmental protection, thus, traveling by bicycle has become the most environmentally-friendly way of getting around. Bicycle paths have been constructed solely for this purpose, and the land structure is more than suitable for this type of traveling. The only factor against using a bicycle would be the weather. Snow and rain make biking extremely difficult for foreigners who aren't accustomed to the 'Dutch' way of riding a bicycle. One other factor worth mentioning is the tram track, which are hazardous to those who get their wheels stuck in them. Nevertheless, bicycles are a necessity as it saves a significant amount of money one would spend on other transportation. International students usually purchase second hand bikes from one of the following options: bike stores, online (<http://www.marktplaats.nl/>), stolen bike dealers. Lastly, bicycle theft is a serious problem in The Netherlands. So, if you don't have a strong lock or a parking bar attached firmly to the ground, don't be surprised if you can't find your bike after your shopping chores!



Metro, Tram and Bus

The Netherlands has a good transportation infrastructure which makes traveling within the cities very convenient and easy. Metros, Trams and Buses are perfect options for those who do not own a bicycle or are traveling distances unreachable by bicycles. These usually operate from 06:00 to 24:00; timetables also vary during the weekends. The best way to pay for these public transports is by using the 'OV-Chipkaart'. Equivalent to the 'Yo-Yo Card' in Taiwan, this card allows for discounts when traveling on public transportation. The cost of travel is calculated by the distance traveled, which can range from €0.75 to more than €2.00. An empty OV-Chipkaart costs a non-refundable €7.50. Credit can be obtained through charging the card at ticket machines located at all metro stations. These machines only accept coins and cards (debit, pin, and credit cards); paying by paper money can only occur at ticket offices where personnel are present. However, there is a rule to using this card that everyone should be aware of. Entering and exiting the vehicle requires you to check-in and check-out respectively by holding the card against the OV-Chipkaart gate screen. Checking into the transport will deduct €4.00 from the card; the actual travel costs minus the boarding rate will then be deducted from or added to the card once you check-out at the end of the journey. Many people forget to check-out of the vehicle resulting in a great amount of money being lost. Although there is this disadvantage, the OV Chipkaart is still far better an option than purchasing single-trip tickets that cost €2.50 regardless of the distance travelled. Hence, just remember to check-out after using the public transport!



Train

The most favorable way to travel between cities, such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam, is by train. The Dutch railway system and trains (<http://www.ns.nl/>) are quite reliable, except only when there is snow of course. There are four Dutch train services that serve locations within The Netherlands. These go by the names of 'Intercity (IC)', 'Snelrein', 'Stoptrein' and 'Sprinter'. The names describe what one should expect from that particular train service. For example, the Intercity (IC) trains are the fastest trains and make limited stops only at major railway stations. Snelrein is a semi-fast service; although it does not stop at every train station, it stops at most. Stoptrein trains stop at all or most stations along the route. Sprinter is an urban rapid transit-like railway service and its trains stop at most stations. Train tickets can be purchased from ticket machines located at the train stations. Like the OV-Chipkaart, these machines only take coins and cards as methods of payment. Train transport in The Netherlands, like any other European countries, is quite expensive. For example, a single day return ticket between Rotterdam and Amsterdam costs close to €30.00. To get a discount on train tickets there is another special discount card known as 'Voordeelurenkaart'. It costs €55.00 and allows you to travel with 40% reduction on the actual price of a train ticket. In addition, it also allows the card holder to cover for up to three more other individuals traveling along. Purchasing the card requires an ID and passport photograph. Trains are indeed the quickest way to get between cities, but delays occur often, especially if it's not an Intercity (IC) train. Also, traveling by train is not recommended when it snows too much during the winter. You wouldn't want to be stranded in another city because of train cancellations and breakdowns!

