



The Netherlands 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Cyber; Winter weather; Riots/Civil Unrest; Nationalist; Right-wing; Drug Trafficking

Europe > Netherlands; Europe > Netherlands > Amsterdam; Europe > Netherlands > The Hague

5/10/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Medium

Crime Threats

The Dutch National Police reported that registered crimes dropped during the first half of 2015 by 8.8 percent compared to the same period in 2014. The Hague recorded the highest number of reports with 258 per 10,000 inhabitants, followed by Rotterdam at 222 per 10,000 inhabitants and Amsterdam rounding out the top three with 204 per 10,000 inhabitants. Furthermore, the police recorded 465,050 crimes in the first six months of 2015 compared to 509,917 crimes in the first six months of 2014. The number of street robberies demonstrated the greatest decrease at 19.1 percent, with a considerable decrease in burglaries at 14.5 percent. However; some groups admit that certain crimes (health care/insurance fraud and cyber crimes) were likely underreported and are not accurately reflected in these statistics.

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Tourists and visitors are most commonly victimized in petty, non-violent street crimes of opportunity (pickpocketing, break-ins to unattended vehicles (especially targeting air bags), cell phone theft). Travelers are often targets of pickpockets and thieves who typically operate individually or in small groups. The theft of laptop computers, other electronic devices, and valuables occurs most commonly at Schiphol airport, on trams/trains, and in transit stations in/around Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague, particularly at night. In Amsterdam, thieves are very active in/around Centraal Station; Amsterdam Zuid station; tram stops near the red light district, restaurants, and hotels; and on trams between Centraal Station and the museum district. A common tactic involves pickpockets timing thefts to coincide with train/tram stops so they can exit the scene quickly. Parked vehicles have also been targeted, especially when valuables are left in plain view.

Burglaries remained a concern, especially during the winter months in affluent areas such as Wassenaar. Police report that many of these crimes involved surveillance of a targeted residence with entry when the residence was unoccupied, sometimes through second floor windows/balconies. Small, easy-to-carry valuables were the primary target.

Although rare, violent crime does happen, mainly in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. The U.S. Embassy is unaware of U.S. citizens or U.S. commercial entities being specifically targeted for violent criminal activity by criminals operating individually, in small groups, or larger organized elements. In 2015, limited violent crime was reported in the Amsterdam/Amstelveen Region, mostly involving rival drug gangs.

Cybersecurity Issues

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The Netherlands is home to the Amsterdam Internet Exchange (AMS-IX), the second busiest Internet exchange in the world, where the networks of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia meet to exchange Internet traffic. International customers/organizations utilize the reliable, high bandwidth services of web hosting providers in the Netherlands. As a result, malicious cyber actors use the critical cyber infrastructure in the Netherlands for criminal activities.

In an effort to help combat the cyber threat, the European Commission designated the European Police Office (EUROPOL) as the European Cyber Crime Center (EC3), which commenced activities in 2013. The EC3 serves as the European information hub on cyber crime, developing digital forensic capabilities to support investigations in the EU and building capacity to combat cyber crime through training, raising awareness, and delivering best practices for investigations. In addition, the EC3 has built a community of experts from all sectors of society to combat and prevent cyber crime and online child sexual abuse.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Travel in, around, and between cities is possible via a highly-developed, national public transportation system, an extensive system of bike paths, and a modern highway system. Intercity travel by road is relatively safe in comparison to some other European countries, and travel between countries is comparable to the rest of Western Europe and the U.S.

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A valid U.S. driver's license is valid for use in the Netherlands for up to 180 days while in tourist/visitor status. The driver and all passengers must use seat belts or child seats. Driving is on the right side of the road. Drivers must yield the right-of-way to drivers and bicyclists coming from the right at intersections/traffic circles, unless otherwise posted. Motorists should be especially mindful that bicyclists have the right-of-way. The maximum allowable blood-alcohol content is 0.05 percent. Use of cellular telephones without the use of a hands-free device while driving is prohibited and is punishable by steep fines.

Speed limits are strictly enforced via radar and through a countrywide network of traffic cameras/radar units. Traffic cameras are pervasive, and speeding tickets for traveling even 2-5 km/hour over the limit are common. The maximum speed limit on highways is 130km/hour, with a highway speed limit of 100km/hour posted in most urban areas. Secondary roads and some urban-area highways have a speed limit of 80km/hour. The speed limit in towns/cities is either 70km/hour or 50km/hour, with 30km/hour zones in smaller residential areas. The government has reduced speed limits on certain roads near cities to reduce air pollution. Speed limit signs are electronic; therefore, speed limits may be changed remotely by authorities depending on traffic conditions.

Bicyclists are strongly encouraged to wear helmets. Helmets are mandatory for motorcyclists and individuals operating scooters larger than 50cc.

Public Transportation Conditions

Public transportation is modern, safe, and convenient. Lanes in the center of many urban two-way streets are reserved for buses, trams, and taxis. Pedestrians should be mindful of

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trams. Serious, and sometimes fatal, accidents involving pedestrians or bicyclists colliding with trams occur each year.

Rail is often a convenient alternative to driving, particularly in the areas around Amsterdam, The Hague, and Rotterdam (see: <http://www.ns.nl/en>).

Other Travel Conditions

Pedestrians should not walk along bicycle paths, which are often adjacent to the sidewalk and usually designated by red pavement. Bicyclists and pedestrians should be particularly cautious during the winter when paths, roads, and especially bridges can be icy and extremely slippery. Accidents involving bicyclists and vehicles, or bicycles alone, are common and can result in serious injury.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

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The Netherlands continued to respond effectively in 2015 to the evolving threat of global terrorism from groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), al-Qai'da, and returning foreign terrorist fighters, focusing on transportation security, terrorist financing, countering violent extremism, prosecution of terrorist-related offenses, and bilateral counterterrorism cooperation. Cooperation with U.S. law enforcement remained excellent. Resilience by the citizen population to terrorism continues to be high.

As seen during the January 7 and November 13, 2015, terrorist attacks in Paris, and other attacks attributed to ISIL and other groups throughout Western Europe in 2015, terrorism remains a significant concern. As evidenced during these attacks, ISIL focused on soft targets (synagogues, offices, stadiums, theaters, restaurants, other locations where large crowds gather). In response, the U.S. Department of State published an updated Worldwide Caution: <http://www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings/worldwide-caution.html>.

In February 2013, the Dutch National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV) increased the national threat level from "limited," meaning a chance of an attack in the Netherlands or against Dutch interests was relatively small but could not be ruled out entirely, to "substantial," which indicates a realistic possibility that an attack could occur. There were no recorded terrorist attacks or significant raids in the Netherlands in 2015, and the level remained at "substantial." The NCTV has reported more than 200 individuals have traveled from the Netherlands to conflict zones in the Middle East and North Africa, most notably Syria, to join terrorist organizations. The NCTV believes there is a possibility/risk that some will return highly radicalized, traumatized, or eager to commit violent acts. Police and security services have observed this among small numbers of young people in the Netherlands and have taken a number of proactive measures in response.

Domestic "lone wolves," also called homegrown violent extremists, continue to be a concern,

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as they often do not travel to conflict zones and are off the radar of Dutch security services.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

Civil demonstrations, which range from small groups to thousands of participants, are common and are primarily directed at the government and often focused on foreign relations, domestic policy, or economic developments. This is particularly true in The Hague, the political center of the Netherlands. Although demonstrations may occur anywhere, in The Hague most protests are held at the Malieveld, a field adjacent to Centraal Station, and less than a kilometer from the U.S. Embassy. Typical demonstration points include: embassies (including the U.S. Embassy) in the city center, the Parliament, the Foreign Ministry, and the Peace Palace. Protests in Amsterdam are common at the Museumplein – where the U.S. Consulate General is located – and Dam Square. By law, prior notification is required for public demonstrations. A police presence is provided to communicate with the participants, ensuring adequate security for them and the general public. In 2015, protests were generally peaceful and concluded without incident. Reports of violence are rare.

Situations may develop that could pose a threat to public safety. U.S. citizens should be mindful that protests intended to be peaceful can become confrontational and violent quickly

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or without notice. U.S. citizens are urged to avoid areas of demonstrations if possible and to exercise caution.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

In 2015, the Netherlands received 59,100 refugees, the highest number on record, predominantly from the Middle East. By comparison, the country received 29,890 refugees in 2014. As a result, an undercurrent of anti-Muslim sentiment has been created that has been led by far right-wing political activists and adopted by a small, but growing, percentage of the populace. This was illustrated by the defacing and vandalizing of a number of mosques in the Netherlands. In some towns, local populations have protested outside of refugee centers, which in one instance led to a mob storming the center while throwing fireworks. None of these activities have targeted or have affected U.S. government personnel or facilities.

Post-specific Concerns

Drug-related Crimes

U.S. citizens have died or been injured while using marijuana, hashish, and other “soft drugs.” Marijuana is a controlled substance, and possession is a misdemeanor that can result in a fine. The use of illegal “soft drugs” has been tolerated when bought in small quantities for personal consumption at licensed “coffee shops.” “Coffee shops” are a haven for petty criminals who prey on tourists and other individuals under the influence of drugs. Persons who visit “coffee shops” have become victims of pickpocketing, identity theft, sexual assault, and

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other crimes. Visitors are warned that marijuana may contain higher levels of THC than what is common in the U.S., often exacerbating the drug's effects and a user's impairment. Additionally, "coffee shops" and other locations are known to sell other illegal, hard drugs (psychotropic mushrooms). Visitors are cautioned against using drugs and should pay particular attention to the use of GHB and Rohypnol (so-called "date-rape" drugs), which can be added to or mixed with beverages, rendering the victim vulnerable.

Street drug sales of cocaine and MDMA (ecstasy) are common in Amsterdam, and dealers will approach tourists. Heroin is also available but less common. Many street dealers also sell counterfeit drugs that can be harmful when ingested. For example, Amsterdam police have reported an increase in white heroin being sold as cocaine. This has resulted in an alarming death rate and reports of medical emergencies among unsuspecting tourists who were lead to believe they had purchased cocaine instead of heroin.

Police Response

Police response and capabilities are comparable to other Western European countries. Professionalism and competence are high, and corruption and tolerance of corruption are low.

Smaller police stations are closed during evening hours. The goal for the police is to arrive on the scene of the emergency within 15 minutes for 90 percent of the calls. In the first half of 2015, they succeeded in 86 percent of cases, the same response rate as in the first half of 2014. Generally, police will not respond to traffic accidents unless injuries or a crime has been reported.

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Crime Victim Assistance

The emergency telephone number is 112 and can be used for all emergencies. Operators answer in Dutch but speak English. The telephone number for non-emergencies or police assistance is 0900-8844.

Police forces offer special assistance and support to victims of crime. A police report can be filed at any police station, including those at airports, and will be written in Dutch. In most cases, police request that reports be filed on-line.

American citizens who are arrested or detained by the police, or who are victims of crime, may seek assistance from the American Citizens Services (ACS) unit of the U.S. Consulate General in Amsterdam, which provides all consular services throughout the Netherlands. If you need to contact the Consulate about any emergency involving a U.S. citizen, call: +31(0)20 575 5309 between 8AM-4:30PM. Outside of business hours, please call the Embassy Duty Officer at: +31 (0)70-310 2209.

Medical Emergencies

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Modern medical services and facilities are widely available. The national emergency number is 112. If the situation warrants, seek assistance from a hospital. These institutions are staffed and equipped to deal with emergency situations.

The National Poison line is +31 (0)30-274-8888.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

The U.S. Consulate General in Amsterdam maintains a “family” doctor and a list of medical professionals who can assist U.S. citizens in finding a doctor or hospital at: http://amsterdam.usconsulate.gov/health_and_medical.html. The Netherlands Association of Hospitals has compiled a list of all Dutch hospitals at www.ziekenhuis.nl.

For non-emergency medical assistance, visitors are obliged to consult a general practitioner (huisarts) before attempting to obtain non-emergency medical treatment from a specialist. The medical care sectors are based on a referral system, which requires patients to see a huisarts first. Medical specialists will generally only see patients who have been referred to them by a huisarts. If staying in a hotel, contact the reception desk, and they will direct you to the doctor assigned to that hotel. If staying with a friends/family, contact their huisarts. The huisarts phone numbers for Amsterdam is +31 (0)88-003-0600, and for Rotterdam is +31 (0)90-513-8039. They are equivalent to SMASH for after-hour urgent care.

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The Hague area has its own after-hours medical service (SMASH) that is available for non-emergency medical situations that is offered at various hospitals. A SMASH medical appointment can be made at: +31 (0)70-346-9669.

The Amsterdam Airport Schiphol has its own 24-hour medical services office at: +31 (0)20-649-2566. This service center is located on the upper floor near check-in counter 16 of Terminal 2.

Recommended Insurance Posture

U.S. citizens are strongly urged to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and whether it will cover emergency expenses. U.S. citizens who have purchased overseas medical insurance have found it to be essential when a medical emergency occurs. Emergency services (including transportation by ambulance) are not free, and patients will be billed for any services rendered.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/netherlands>.

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OSAC Country Council Information

The Netherlands has an extremely active OSAC Country Council and holds the distinction as the oldest continuously-active OSAC chapter in the world, celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2015. For more information, please contact OSAC Coordinator Arie van Veelen or Regional Security Officer (RSO) Dean Simpkins at the U.S. Embassy in The Hague or RSO Stephen J. Kazyak at the U.S. Consulate General in Amsterdam, all of whom can be reached at TheHagueOSAC@state.gov. To reach OSAC's Europe team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy

Lange Voorhout 102, The Hague

Hours of Operation: Mon-Fri 8AM-4:30PM, excluding U.S. and Dutch national holidays.

Embassy Contact Numbers

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If calling from outside of the Netherlands, please omit the "0" after the +31 country code. The Hague and Amsterdam are +6 hours EST.

Switchboard: +31 (0)70-310-2209

Website: <http://thehague.usembassy.gov/>

Nearby Posts

U.S. Consulate General Amsterdam: <http://amsterdam.usconsulate.gov/>

Embassy Guidance

All citizenship, American Citizen Services, and visa services for the Netherlands are handled by the U.S. Consulate General in Amsterdam.

The Department of State encourages U.S. citizens living overseas or planning to travel abroad to enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), which can help provide you with important safety and security information. Enrolling will also make it easier for the Embassy to contact you in the event of an emergency. You can enroll in STEP at <https://step.state.gov/step/>.

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