

Squiz the World goes to... The Netherlands

"Each week, we give the world globe a spin, and see where we land. Then we take the kids of Australia on an audio excursion to visit that country and its people.

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I'm Amanda Bower, and today on Squiz the World we're visiting the Netherlands... which you might know as Holland... and where people speak Dutch. Confused? Don't worry, we'll get into it.

With all the flooding happening in Australia, we thought we'd travel to Europe this week to learn about "The Lowlands" - which is what "The Netherlands" means - and find out how they deal with having more than 1/3 of their country below sea level. The Dutch are serious experts when it comes to dealing with unwanted water.

So strap yourselves into the Squiz Kids Super Fast Supersonic Jetliner as we take off and take a squiz at The Netherlands.

Just the Facts

The Netherlands is a country of 17 million people on the west coast of Europe. Its biggest city, Amsterdam, is also its official capital... although the seat of government - which means the place where the country's politicians meet and make decisions about how to run the country - is in a city called The Hague.

The Hague, Amsterdam, and another big city, Rotterdam, are in provinces called South Holland and North Holland. A province is what we here in Australia would call a state. Centuries ago, Holland was its own country, but now North and South Holland make up just two of the Netherlands' 12 provinces. The country's government is trying really hard to get people to stop saying "Holland" for the whole country... so if you're planning a trip, make sure you say you're going to the Netherlands!

Maybe some of you have already been there, or seen pictures or videos of the Netherlands. What do you think some of the most famous landmarks are? (pause)

I'll bet you all of Bryce's money that someone said tulips... And you'd be right! The Netherlands is referred to as 'the flower shop of the world' for good reason. They produce 80% of the world's flower bulbs, including 4.3 billion tulip bulbs each year. A tulip has a single bell-shaped flower that can come in all kinds of colours, and the Netherlands has the largest flower garden in the world, Keukenhof Park, where you can see 800 varieties of tulips!

I've popped a link to a short video in your episode notes to see it in springtime for yourselves. Seeing it in person is definitely on my travel bucket list!

Whenever you travel, it's important to learn a few words in that country's language. It's a great way to show respect. So, let's....

Learn the Lingo

"In the Netherlands, the official language is Dutch. Although, if I were speaking Dutch, I'd say that the official language is called Nederlands. Which makes sense, given the name of the country.

So why do English speakers call it Dutch? Well, it's a language that's close to German, which is called Deutsch, and ... basically the English got a bit confused. Anyhoo, let's learn how to speak a little Nederlands.

Squiz Kid Bloem is 12. Her Mum is Dutch, and she's is going to teach us how to say good morning.

Goede morgen

Those ""g"" sounds are tough, aren't they? Go on, you give it a try! Goede morgen

People are always really grateful when you just try to speak their language. They may even thank you for it. Hey, Bloem, how do we say thanks a lot?

Dank je wel

And dank je wel to you, too, Bloem"

Now that we can communicate a little bit, it's....

Time for School

In the Netherlands, kids can start school on the first school day after their 4th birthday - and they **MUST** start school after they turn 5. So for the first two years, new kids are showing up at school throughout the year!

Those first two years at school are all about play and learning to work with others. The real academics work gets started in the third year, when you turn 6.

Last week, we talked about how kids in South Korean schools get tested a LOT. In Dutch schools, students throughout the country are tested twice a year, but there's no pass or fail, and apparently no competition between kids - or parents - about marks. The tests are used to see if any students need extra help, and also identify whether schools and teachers are doing a good job.

The final year of primary school in the Netherlands is in year 8. Each year, those 11-year-olds give a special present to their parents and the rest of the school - a musical, that they put on themselves, doing everything from costumes to set design. Ask any Dutch adult, and they'll probably still remember their school musical as a highlight of their childhood.

When people visit Australia, there are things they find AMAZING that we might take for granted. Like our unique wildlife, the food we eat, the games we play. And the way the Netherlands deals with water is pretty astonishing...

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

The recent floods in south-east Queensland and north-east New South Wales were devastating. But did you know that in the Netherlands, 2/3 of the entire country is in regular danger of flooding? (pause for FX)

Two thousand years ago, all of the Netherlands was a swamp. To build their homes, the first permanent inhabitants first built artificial hills, so that their houses wouldn't float away with the tides.

Then, the Dutch started to build something called dikes. These were basically ridges of earth built along a river, or around a field, to stop the flow of water. There are now 22,000 km of dikes in the Netherlands, even though it only has 800km of coastline! I've popped a link in your episode notes to show how they criss-cross the entire country.

Nowadays, dikes are made with a core of sand, covered by a thick layer of clay to provide waterproofing and resistance to erosion. It may then be covered with rocks or tarmac, before putting grass on top, and leaving sheep to graze there. (pause, sheep baa)

The sheep are part of the fight against flooding... they keep the grass dense and compact the soil, which makes the dike less likely to erode. Smart, huh?

The Dutch also dug drainage ditches, to bring water away from flood prone areas. After a special type of windmill was invented in the 15th century, they were used to pump water out, too. There are about 1000 of these old windmills all over the country! (pause FX)

Nowadays, the Netherlands have massive sea and storm surge barriers to protect against flooding, they test their dikes often, and, because of climate change, they are also relocating some people away from vulnerable areas ... and yes, that means they are moving people from their old homes to new ones... something lots of countries are considering as sea levels rise.

Phew! I've learned a ton about the Netherlands, and now I'm starving! I think it might be...

Dinner Time

I wonder if it's their diet that makes Dutch men the tallest in the world, measuring on average 183cm, or six feet? The women aren't far behind, reaching on average 171cm. No one is exactly sure why, but think it's a combination of their genetics; their health care system; and their diet rich in milk, cheese, and... licorice?

Okay, it's unlikely to be licorice, but the Dutch do consume 2 KILOS of licorice per person every year, with 80 different kinds to choose from.

Still, we can't start dinner with dessert... can we?

We'd better not. Let's tuck into the Dutch national dish of Stampot. It features one of my favourite foods in the whole world... mashed potatoes. There are lots of different kinds of Stampot, but they all have mash mixed with veggies, and served with a smoked pork sausage called rookworst on top. Rookworst might be a little tricky to find, but I'm told that kielbasa makes a great substitute. There's a recipe in your episode notes... don't forget the licorice for dessert!

The S'Quiz

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening.

Question 1 What kind of flower is the Netherlands famous for?

Question 2 How much licorice does the average Dutch person eat each year?

Question 3 What kind of animal helps protect the Netherlands' dike system?

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for staying curious about the world, and joining me on this incredible trip to the Netherlands.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day. Over and out.