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AREA GUIDE




THE COMPLETE EXPAT GUIDE TO

# Leiden

*The city of discoveries, between the dunes and the bulb fields*

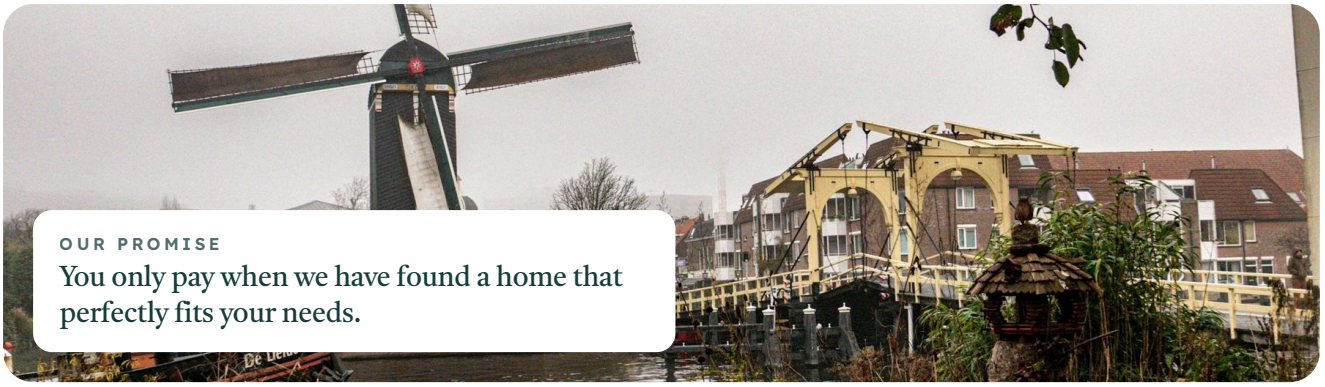
Edition 2026 / 2027 · Neighbourhoods, food, schools, healthcare, sports, cycling and Dutch life

www.dutchexpatshousing.nl

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

# Welcome to Leiden

This guide is written by the team of Dutch Expats Housing. We help internationals find a home in the Netherlands every week, and we put everything we tell our own clients about Leiden in one place: where to live, where to eat, where your children can go to school, which sports club to join and how to feel at home the Dutch way.



OUR PROMISE
You only pay when we have found a home that perfectly fits your needs.

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02 Neighbourhoods
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*All information was checked in November 2026. Restaurants, opening hours and rents change; always check the website of a venue before you go.*

CHAPTER 01

# Welcome to Leiden

HOME OF THE OLDEST UNIVERSITY IN THE NETHERLANDS

Leiden has more canals per square metre than almost any Dutch city, the oldest university in the country (founded in 1575) and a history full of famous names: Rembrandt was born here and the Pilgrim Fathers lived here before sailing to America. Today Leiden is a lively, compact city with a booming Bio Science Park, Schiphol 15 minutes away and the beach and the bulb fields on your doorstep.

| POPULATION | TYPICAL 2-BED RENT | TO SCHIPHOL | BEST FOR |
|---|---|---|---|
| about 128,000 | €1,500 to €2,200 p/m | about 15 min by train | Academics, life science, families |

## Why internationals choose Leiden

- Leiden Bio Science Park: the largest life sciences cluster in the Netherlands
- Schiphol, Amsterdam and The Hague all within 35 minutes
- A compact, beautiful historic centre with a strong community feel
- Excellent international schooling in Oegstgeest, Leiderdorp and Voorschoten
- Beach in Katwijk and the Keukenhof bulb fields within cycling distance

### Rents in this guide

All rents are indicative monthly rents for unfurnished, mid-market homes in 2026, excluding utilities. Furnished homes and family houses are usually higher.

### Your official starting point

Expat Centre Leiden helps internationals with registration, BSN and permits. Leiden International Centre organises social events and Dutch lessons.

CHAPTER 02

# Neighbourhoods

Every neighbourhood in Leiden has its own character. Here is where our clients love to live, and who each area suits best.

## Binnenstad (historic centre)

**Couples and city lovers** | **2-bed €1,500 to €2,300**

Canal houses around the Pieterskerk, the Burcht and the Rapenburg, often called the most beautiful canal in the country. Lively, historic and full of students and academics.

LOCAL TIP

Look for the poems painted on the walls: Leiden has more than 100 'muurgedichten' in dozens of languages.

## Burgemeesterswijk

**Families and senior professionals**

**2-bed €1,900 to €3,000**

Stately villas and spacious early 20th century houses close to Leiden Centraal. Quiet, green and walking distance to everything.

LOCAL TIP

The Leidse Hout park is on your doorstep: playground, deer park and a tea house.

## Oegstgeest

**Expat families** | **2-bed €1,900 to €3,000**

A green, well-to-do village that has grown together with Leiden. Home to the Rijnlands Lyceum international school and many international families.

LOCAL TIP

Cycle to the Kagerplassen lakes in 15 minutes for swimming and sailing in summer.

## Merenwijk

**Families wanting space** | **2-bed €1,500 to €2,000**

A 1970s and 1980s family neighbourhood built around water and greenery, with houses with gardens and good primary schools.

LOCAL TIP

Children here learn to skate on the natural ice of the canals in a cold winter.

CHAPTER 02

# Neighbourhoods, continued

## Stevenshof

**Families on a budget** · **2-bed €1,500 to €2,000**

Neighbourhood on the west side of Leiden with family homes, its own shopping centre and a quick connection to The Hague.

LOCAL TIP

From Stevenshof you reach the dunes of Wassenaar by bike in about 20 minutes.

## Leiderdorp

**Families** · **2-bed €1,600 to €2,200**

Pleasant village across the river Rijn, with the Alrijne hospital, Elckerlyc International and plenty of family homes.

LOCAL TIP

Canoe or SUP along the Zijl and the Oude Rijn on a summer evening.

## Voorschoten

**Families between Leiden and The Hague**

**2-bed €1,800 to €2,800**

A green village with the senior school of the British School in the Netherlands and fast trains to both cities.

LOCAL TIP

Walk the Duivenvoorde castle estate on a Sunday morning.

CHAPTER 03

# Eat & drink

From brown cafés to rooftop lunches: the places locals actually go to.

## Iconic Leiden

| | |
|---|---|
| **Annie's**<br>HOOGSTRAAT | Restaurant with a floating terrace on the canal in the heart of the city. The terrace of Leiden on a sunny day. |
| **Het Prentenkabinet**<br>KLOKSTEEG | Refined dinner in a historic building next to the Pieterskerk. |
| **Het Koetshuys De Burcht**<br>BURGSTEEG | Café restaurant at the foot of the medieval Burcht, with a lovely garden terrace. |
| **Saturday market**<br>NIEUWE RIJN & BOTERMARKT | One of the best markets in the region, along the canals in the centre. |

## Bars & brown cafés

| | |
|---|---|
| **Café De Bonte Koe**<br>HOOIGRACHT | Brown café in a former butcher's shop with beautiful tiles. A true Leiden classic. |
| **Student cafés around the Breestraat**<br>CENTRE | Leiden is a student city: cheap beer, long nights and friendly crowds. |

## Very Dutch, very Leiden

| | |
|---|---|
| **Leidse kaas**<br>CHEESE SHOPS & MARKET | The local cheese with cumin seeds, made in the region for centuries. |
| **Hutspot, haring en wittebrood**<br>3 OCTOBER | On Leidens Ontzet the whole city eats stew of potato, carrot and onion, plus herring with white bread, to celebrate the end of the Spanish siege in 1574. |

## Markets

| | |
|---|---|
| **Leiden market**<br>WEDNESDAY & SATURDAY | Along the Nieuwe Rijn and Botermarkt: food, cheese, fish, flowers and more. |

CHAPTER 04

# Schools & education

School is compulsory from age 5 and most children start at 4. Subsidised international schools cost a fraction of private schools but have waiting lists, so contact them as soon as your move is confirmed.

## International schools

| | |
|---|---|
| **International School Rijnlands Lyceum Oegstgeest (ISRLO)**<br>OEGSTGEEST | Secondary school with IB Middle Years and Diploma Programme, government subsidised. |
| **Elckerlyc International School**<br>LEIDERDORP | Subsidised international primary following the International Primary Curriculum. |
| **British School in the Netherlands, senior school**<br>VOORSCHOTEN | British curriculum and IB Diploma, a short bike or train ride from Leiden. |

### International or Dutch school?

Staying two or three years? An international school keeps your child's education portable. Staying longer, or with young children? Many expat families choose a local Dutch school: children become fluent within a year and make friends in the neighbourhood. Bilingual secondary schools offer a middle way.

CHAPTER 04

# Schools & education, continued

## Dutch and bilingual education

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|---|---|
| **Dutch primary schools (basisschool)**<br>EVERY NEIGHBOURHOOD | Free and close to home. Children aged 4 to 12 learn Dutch quickly here. |
| **Bilingual secondary (TTO)**<br>LEIDEN REGION | Several schools offer bilingual streams with a Dutch diploma. |

## Universities & higher education

| | |
|---|---|
| **Leiden University**<br>CENTRE & BIO SCIENCE PARK | The oldest university in the Netherlands and a top research university. |
| **Leiden University of Applied Sciences**<br>BIO SCIENCE PARK | Applied programmes in life sciences, care and technology. |

### Childcare (kinderopvang)

Daycare (kinderdagverblijf) for ages 0 to 4 and after school care (BSO) for ages 4 to 12. Working parents can receive childcare benefit (kinderopvangtoeslag) through the Dutch tax office. Put your child on a waiting list as early as possible.

CHAPTER 05

# Healthcare

## Hospitals

| | |
|---|---|
| **LUMC**<br>NEXT TO LEIDEN CENTRAAL | Academic hospital and one of the leading medical centres in Europe, including the Willem-Alexander Children's Hospital. |
| **Alrijne Ziekenhuis**<br>LEIDERDORP | General hospital with emergency department, serving Leiden and the surrounding villages. |

## How Dutch healthcare works

| | |
|---|---|
| **112** | The emergency number for police, ambulance and fire brigade. |
| **Huisarts (GP)** | Register with a GP close to your home as soon as you have an address. The GP is the gatekeeper: you need a referral for hospital care. |
| **Huisartsenpost** | Out of hours GP service for evenings, nights and weekends. Always call first. |
| **Health insurance** | Basic insurance (basisverzekering) is mandatory within four months of registering or starting work, and is backdated. Compare policies every year in November and December. |
| **Own risk (eigen risico)** | The first part of your yearly medical costs is paid by you. GP visits are free of this. |
| **Dentist & physio** | For adults these are only covered by supplementary insurance (aanvullende verzekering). |
| **Apotheek** | Pharmacy. Prescriptions from your GP go straight to your registered pharmacy. |
| **Children** | The consultatiebureau checks babies and young children and gives vaccinations, free of charge. |
| **Kraamzorg** | After giving birth a maternity nurse comes to your home for about a week. Book it early in your pregnancy. |

*In an emergency always call 112. For urgent medical questions outside office hours call the huisartsenpost of your area.*

CHAPTER 06

# Sports & clubs

The fastest way to make Dutch friends? Join a club (vereniging). Clubs are run by volunteers, have their own clubhouse with a bar, and the drinks after the match matter as much as the match itself.

| | |
|---|---|
| **LMHC Roomburg**<br>HOCKEY | The big hockey club of Leiden, with teams for all ages and levels. |
| **Njord**<br>ROWING | One of the oldest student rowing clubs in the country, on the Galgewater. |
| **Watersports on the Kagerplassen**<br>SAILING, SUP & SWIMMING | Lakes just north of the city with sailing schools and boat rentals. |
| **Vijf Meibad**<br>SWIMMING | Outdoor swimming pool, a summer favourite for families. |
| **Leidse Hout & Cronesteyn**<br>RUNNING & WALKING | Parks for every type of runner. The Leiden Marathon runs through the historic centre. |
| **Tennis & padel clubs**<br>RACKET SPORTS | Many clubs in Leiden, Oegstgeest and Leiderdorp with English speaking members. |

### Tip: the kantine

Members are expected to help out a few times a year, for example behind the bar or as a referee for youth teams. It is the best way to get to know people.

CHAPTER 07

# Cycling routes

The Dutch have more bikes than people. These are our favourite rides from Leiden, from an easy Sunday loop to a proper day out.



| | |
|---|---|
| 40 km loop | **Bulb fields route**<br>From Leiden via Sassenheim and Lisse to the Keukenhof and back along the coast. Best from late March to early May when the fields are in bloom. |
| 10 km one way | **Leiden to Katwijk beach**<br>Follow the Oude Rijn to the sea. Fish and chips on the boulevard and back before dinner. |
| 25 km | **Kagerplassen loop**<br>Around the lakes via Warmond and the small ferries. Real Dutch water landscape. |
| 20 km one way | **Leiden to The Hague via the dunes**<br>Through Wassenaar and the Meijendel dunes to Scheveningen. |

## Cycling the Dutch way

- Lights front and rear are mandatory after dark.
- Holding your phone while cycling is forbidden and fined.
- Traffic from the right has priority unless signs or 'shark teeth' road markings say otherwise.
- Use two good locks, one of them a chain lock attached to something fixed.
- Buy second hand at a bike shop, or start with a subscription bike (for example Swapfiets) while you settle in.

CHAPTER 08

# Getting around

- Leiden Centraal: Schiphol in about 15 minutes, Amsterdam in about 35, The Hague in about 12.
- Buses connect the villages and the coast; R-net lines are fast and frequent.
- The historic centre is compact: walk or cycle everywhere.

## Day trips from Leiden

| | |
|---|---|
| **Keukenhof**<br>DAY TRIP | The world's most famous flower garden, 25 minutes away. |
| **Katwijk & Noordwijk**<br>DAY TRIP | Wide beaches and dunes. |
| **Amsterdam**<br>DAY TRIP | 35 minutes by train. |

### Public transport tips

Always check in and out. Use the NS app and 9292 for journey planning. If you travel by train often, an NS subscription with off-peak discount pays for itself quickly.

*Plan bike trips with the free 'knooppunten' (junction) network: numbered signposts that let you link routes together.*

CHAPTER 09

# Live like a local

## Only in Leiden

| | |
|---|---|
| City of discoveries | Einstein lectured here, the first Dutch tulip bulbs were planted in the Hortus Botanicus and the city still celebrates science everywhere. |
| Leidens Ontzet | 3 October is a local holiday with a fair, a parade and free hutspot. Do not plan a meeting that day. |
| Pilgrim Fathers | The Pilgrims lived in Leiden for over ten years. Americans love the free walking tours. |
| Rembrandt's birthplace | Follow the Rembrandt route and visit the Lakenhal museum. |

## The Leiden calendar

| | |
|---|---|
| Late March to May | Bulb season and the Keukenhof |
| May | Leiden Marathon |
| July | Lakenfeesten: summer festival in the centre |
| 3 October | Leidens Ontzet: the biggest party of the year |
| December | Christmas market and the floating Christmas market on the canals |

## National days to know

| | |
|---|---|
| 27 April | Koningsdag (King's Day): wear orange, the whole country is one big street party and flea market |
| 4 & 5 May | Remembrance Day (two minutes of silence at 20:00 on 4 May) and Liberation Day festivals |
| 5 December | Sinterklaas: gifts and poems, the most important children's celebration |
| 31 December | Oud en Nieuw: oliebollen, fireworks and New Year's dives |

CHAPTER 09

# The Dutch way

## Ten words you will hear on day one

### Gezellig
Cosy, warm, fun together. The most Dutch word there is; you will hear it every day.

### Borrel
Drinks and snacks after work, often on Friday. Say yes to the first invitation.

### Lekker
Tasty, but also nice, good or comfortable. 'Lekker weer' means nice weather.

### Uitwaaien
Walking in strong wind to clear your head, ideally on the beach.

### Doe maar normaal
Just act normal. The Dutch dislike showing off.

### Tikkie
A payment request via your banking app. Splitting the bill is completely normal.

### Huisarts
Your family doctor and your first stop for every medical question.

### Fietsenstalling
Bicycle parking. Never leave your bike outside one near a station.

### Gefeliciteerd
Congratulations. At a birthday you congratulate everyone in the room.

### Hoi / Doei
Hi / Bye. Informal and used by everybody, even at work.

## Dutch habits, explained

| | |
|---|---|
| Dinner at six | Most Dutch families eat between 18:00 and 19:00. Restaurants are busy early. |
| The agenda | Social plans are made weeks ahead. Spontaneous visits are rare, so do not take it personally. |
| Directness | Dutch feedback is honest and to the point. It is meant as respect, not rudeness. |
| The birthday circle | At home birthdays guests sit in a circle and congratulate the whole family. Bring flowers. |
| Paying by card | Debit card (PIN) is king. Some shops and restaurants do not accept credit cards. |
| Shopping hours | Shops usually close around 18:00, with a late shopping evening (koopavond) once a week. Most city centres open on Sunday. |
| Rain gear, not umbrellas | Wind breaks umbrellas. Buy a proper rain jacket, or rain trousers if you cycle daily. |
| Waste separation | Separate paper, glass, plastic and organic waste. Your municipality sends a calendar. |

CHAPTER 10

# Your first 30 days

Print this page and tick the boxes. Our clients get help with almost every step.

- [ ] **Register at the municipality (gemeente)**
  Within 5 days of arrival. You receive your BSN, the number you need for everything.
- [ ] **Apply for DigiD**
  Your digital ID for taxes, healthcare and government websites.
- [ ] **Open a Dutch bank account**
  Needed for your salary, rent and Tikkies. We arrange this with ING.
- [ ] **Take out health insurance**
  Mandatory and backdated to your registration date.
- [ ] **Register with a GP and a dentist**
  Do this before you need one; some practices have waiting lists.
- [ ] **Apply for the 30% ruling**
  If you qualify, your employer applies within four months of your start date.
- [ ] **Set up energy, water and internet**
  Many rental homes come empty, so arrange this before you move in.
- [ ] **Furnish your home**
  Rent a complete furniture package if you do not ship your own.
- [ ] **Get a bike and two locks**
  The fastest way to get around every Dutch city.
- [ ] **Public transport**
  Tap in and out with your contactless bank card (OVpay) or get a personal OV-chipkaart.
- [ ] **Schools and childcare**
  Register early; international schools and popular daycares have waiting lists. Check whether you qualify for childcare benefit (kinderopvangtoeslag).
- [ ] **Driving**
  Check whether you can exchange your driving licence. A short lease car bridges the first months.




CHAPTER 11 · HOW WE HELP

# Your new home in Leiden, found for you.

Our team searches the rental market for you every day, including homes that are not online yet. From the first call to the day you get your keys. And you only pay when we have found your home.

### Complete housing search

From intake call to signed contract. Personal search with daily matches, often before homes reach the public portals.

### Off-market network

Access to homes from our network of rental agents before they are published.

### Viewings & negotiation

We request viewings, prepare your file and write your rental proposal.

### Contract check

We explain the Dutch rental contract in English before you sign.

### Utilities & internet

Energy, water and wifi arranged through our partner Easy Nuts.

### Furniture packages

Move into a fully furnished home with our partner Keypro.

### Bank account & 30% ruling

Bank account via ING and the 30% ruling with Tax Globalizers.

### Short lease cars & moving

Mobility via Blankert Shortlease and international moving with our partners.

**Book a free consultation at www.dutchexpatshousing.nl**

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