DUTCH EXPATS HOUSING.
HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS.

AREA GUIDE



THE COMPLETE EXPAT GUIDE TO

Rotterdam

Bold, international and refreshingly down to earth

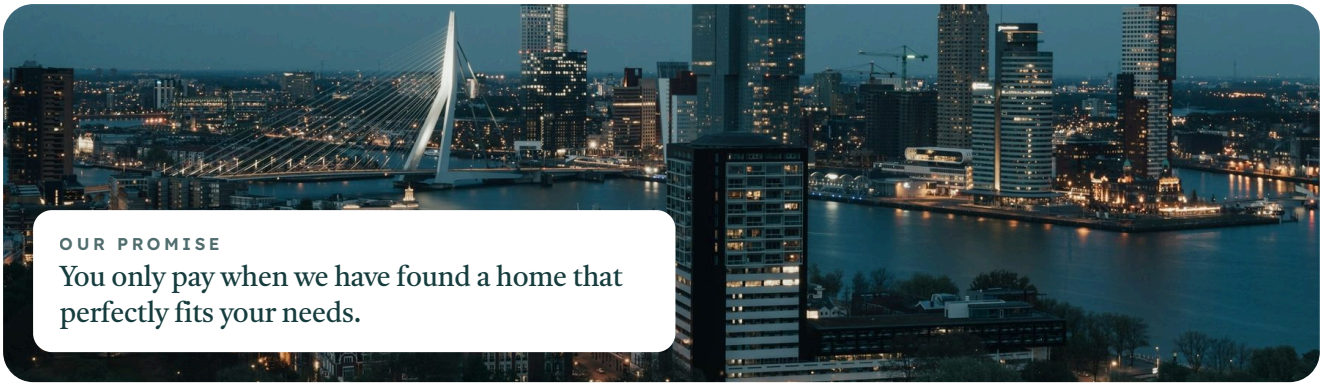
Edition 2026 / 2027 · Neighbourhoods, food, schools, healthcare, sports, cycling and Dutch life

www.dutchexpatshousing.nl

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Welcome to Rotterdam

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 Rotterdam 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.

01 Welcome
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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 Rotterdam

THE CITY THAT REBUILT ITSELF

Rotterdam was almost completely destroyed in May 1940 and chose not to rebuild the past. The result is the only Dutch city with a real skyline, the biggest port in Europe and a population that speaks more than 170 nationalities. Rotterdammers are famously direct: their motto is "geen woorden maar daden", no words but deeds. You get more space for your money than in Amsterdam, a serious food scene and the North Sea beach at the end of the metro line.

POPULATION	TYPICAL 2-BED RENT	TO SCHIPHOL	BEST FOR
about 670,000	€1,600 to €2,300 p/m	about 25 min by train	Professionals, families, creatives

Why internationals choose Rotterdam

- More space and newer buildings for your budget than Amsterdam or Utrecht
- Huge international employer base: port, energy, Unilever, Erasmus MC, consultancies and start-ups
- Rotterdam Centraal: high-speed trains to Amsterdam, Antwerp, Brussels and Paris
- Great international schools in Hillegersberg and Blijdorp
- A food and nightlife scene that punches far above its size

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

Rotterdam International Center: one appointment for municipal registration, your BSN and residence permit for highly skilled migrants. Ask your employer whether you qualify.

CHAPTER 02

Neighbourhoods

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



Centrum & Cool

Young professionals and couples

2-bed €1,700 to €2,400

High-rise living between the Markthal, the Coolsingel and Witte de Withstraat. Everything is walkable, the nightlife is on your doorstep and Rotterdam Centraal is ten minutes away.

LOCAL TIP

Saturday morning at the Binnenrotte market, then coffee on the terrace in front of the Markthal.

Scheepvaartkwartier & Het Park

Professionals, Erasmus MC staff

2-bed €1,700 to €2,500

The old shipping quarter: grand 19th century houses, tree lined streets and the green Het Park at the foot of the Euromast. Quiet, elegant and close to the Maas.

LOCAL TIP

Walk along the Westerkade at sunset and watch the ships pass under the Erasmusbrug.

CHAPTER 02

Neighbourhoods, continued

Kralingen

Families and nature lovers

2-bed €1,600 to €2,600 (houses higher)

Stately villas and 1920s homes around the Kralingse Bos and the Kralingse Plas lake. Home to Erasmus University, so the edges are lively with students while the heart is calm and green.

LOCAL TIP

Do the 5 km loop around the Kralingse Plas and stop for a drink on a terrace by the old windmills De Ster and De Lelie.

Hillegersberg

Families with children

2-bed €1,900 to €3,000+

Rotterdam's most village-like neighbourhood, built around the Bergse Plassen lakes. Detached houses, boating in summer and the American International School just around the corner.

LOCAL TIP

Rent a sloep (little electric boat) on the Bergse Plassen on a warm Sunday, like every Rotterdam family does.

Blijdorp

Families and commuters

2-bed €1,500 to €2,100

A tidy 1930s neighbourhood just north of Rotterdam Centraal with the famous Diergaarde Blijdorp zoo, the Roel Langerak park and the Rotterdam International Secondary School.

LOCAL TIP

Buy a yearly zoo pass: locals pop in for an hour after school or on a rainy Sunday.

Liskwartier & Oude Noorden

Creatives and first-time movers

2-bed €1,400 to €1,900

Characterful pre-war streets with independent coffee bars, vintage shops and the Zwaanshals. A real neighbourhood feel, slightly cheaper and very gezellig.

LOCAL TIP

Follow the Rotte river north from here on your bike; within 15 minutes you are in the polder.

CHAPTER 02

Neighbourhoods, continued

Kop van Zuid & Katendrecht

Professionals who love water views

2-bed €1,700 to €2,600

Iconic towers like De Rotterdam and New Orleans, the old Holland America Line terminal and the former sailors' district Katendrecht, now full of restaurants around the Deliplein.

LOCAL TIP

Take the water taxi across the Maas instead of the bridge: it is quicker than you think and a great way to show off the city to visitors.

Good to know

Rotterdam-Zuid is large and varied. Kop van Zuid and Katendrecht are very popular, while some areas further south are less suited to newcomers. Ask us before you sign anything south of the river.

CHAPTER 03

Eat & drink

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



Iconic Rotterdam

Markthal BLAAK	The horseshoe shaped market hall with a giant painted ceiling. Fresh produce, stroopwafels, cheese and dozens of food stalls under one roof.
Dudok MEENT	Grand café in an old office building, famous all over the country for its apple pie (appeltaart met slagroom).
Hotel New York KOP VAN ZUID	Restaurant in the former head office of the Holland America Line, where emigrants left for America. Oysters, classics and a view of the skyline.
De Ballentent PARKHAVEN	A Rotterdam institution on the water. Order the bal gehakt, a huge home style meatball, with fries and gravy.

CHAPTER 03

Eat & drink, continued

Dinner & date night

Witte de Withstraat COOL	Rotterdam's cultural street. Restaurants, galleries and bars side by side; perfect for wandering until something looks good.
Bazar WITTE DE WITHSTRAAT	Colourful Middle Eastern restaurant and hotel, great for a big group and a budget friendly dinner.
Deliplein KATENDRECHT	A square packed with restaurants and terraces in the former sailors' district, with the theatre De Nieuwe Luxor around the corner.
Op het Dak SCHIEBLOCK	Lunch café on a rooftop farm above the city, with vegetables grown a few metres away.

Bars & brown cafés

Café De Witte Aap WITTE DE WITHSTRAAT	The legendary corner bar where the whole city meets for a drink. Busy, loud and very Rotterdam.
Biergarten Rotterdam SCHIESTRAAT	Open air beer garden near Rotterdam Centraal. On a summer Friday after work this is where everybody goes for a borrel.
Euromast HET PARK	Have a drink 96 metres above the city. A classic first stop for visiting family.

CHAPTER 03

Eat & drink, continued

Very Dutch, very Rotterdam

The kapsalon
EVERYWHERE

Fries, shawarma, melted Gouda and salad in one tray. It was invented in a Rotterdam snack bar in 2003 and is now eaten all over the country. Every Rotterdammer has an opinion about where to get the best one.

Chinatown
WEST-KRUISKADE

One of the oldest Chinese communities in Europe, with Asian supermarkets and authentic restaurants.

Fresh herring
FISH STALLS

Between June and autumn, order a 'broodje haring' with onions and pickles at any vishandel.

Markets

Centrummarkt Binnenrotte
TUESDAY & SATURDAY

One of the largest markets in the country, next to the Markthal. Fruit, cheese, fish, fabrics and flowers.

Afrikaandermarkt
WEDNESDAY & SATURDAY

Lively, multicultural market in Rotterdam-Zuid with the best prices in town.

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

American International School of Rotterdam (AISR) HILLEGERSBERG	Private international school from early years to grade 12, IB programmes, strong community feel.
Rotterdam International Secondary School (RISS) BLIJDORP	IB Middle Years and Diploma Programme. Part of the Wolfert van Borselen group and government subsidised, so fees are far lower than private schools.
De Blijberg International Primary ROTTERDAM WEST	Subsidised international primary education following the International Primary Curriculum. Waiting lists happen, so apply early.

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

Dutch primary schools (basisschool) EVERY NEIGHBOURHOOD	Free, children start at age 4. Young children usually pick up Dutch within a year. Most schools have open days in autumn and winter.
Bilingual secondary (TTO) SEVERAL SCHOOLS	Wolfert Tweetalig and other schools teach part of the curriculum in English. A great middle way for families staying long term.
Taalschakelklas / newcomer classes VIA THE MUNICIPALITY	Special classes that teach Dutch to newly arrived children before they join a regular school.

Universities & higher education

Erasmus University Rotterdam KRALINGEN (WOUDESTEIN)	Top business school (RSM), economics, law and medicine.
Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences SEVERAL CAMPUSES	Practical bachelor programmes, many in English.
Codarts CENTRUM	University of the arts for music, dance and circus.

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

Erasmus MC CENTRUM / DIJKZIGT	Academic hospital and one of the largest in Europe. Includes the Sophia Children's Hospital.
Franciscus Gasthuis & Vlietland ROTTERDAM NOORD / SCHIEDAM	General hospital serving Blijdorp, Hillegersberg, Schiebroek and the north side of the city.
Maasstad Ziekenhuis ROTTERDAM-ZUID	Large teaching hospital south of the river.
Ikazia Ziekenhuis ROTTERDAM-ZUID	General hospital with a well known maternity department.

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.

HC Rotterdam HOCKEY	One of the biggest hockey clubs in the Netherlands, with teams for every age and level, including beginners. Hockey is the Dutch family sport: join and you join a social life.
KR&ZV De Maas ROWING & SAILING	Historic rowing and sailing club on the Kralingse Plas. Learn to row in a few weeks.
Feyenoord, Sparta & Excelsior FOOTBALL (WATCH)	Three professional clubs in one city. A match in De Kuip is an experience you will never forget.
VOC Rotterdam CRICKET & FOOTBALL	A traditional club that is very welcoming to internationals, especially in cricket.
Rotterdamse Rugby Club RUGBY	Friendly club with a big international membership.
Kralingse Bos RUNNING & OUTDOOR	Forest, lake and running trails a few minutes from the centre. The Rotterdam Marathon in April is one of the fastest in the world.
Hoek van Holland beach BEACH & SURFING	Take metro line B to the end of the line and you are at the North Sea in about 50 minutes.
Padel, tennis & gyms EVERYWHERE	Padel is booming. Basic-Fit and many boutique gyms have English speaking staff.

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 Rotterdam, from an easy Sunday loop to a proper day out.

5 km	**Kralingse Plas loop** Easy, flat loop around the lake past the windmills. Perfect for your first Sunday ride.
25 km return	**Along the Rotte to the Rottemeren** Start in Oude Noorden and follow the river Rotte north into the green polders and lakes. Stop at a theehuis along the water.
25 km one way	**Rotterdam to Kinderdijk** Ride east along the Maas to the 19 UNESCO listed windmills of Kinderdijk. Tired legs? Take the Waterbus back with your bike.
15 km one way	**Rotterdam to Delft** Through historic Delfshaven and along the Delfshavense Schie to Delft's Markt. Lunch on the square and take the train back.

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

- RET runs metro, tram and bus. Tap in and out with your bank card or an OV-chipkaart.
- Rotterdam Centraal: Intercity Direct to Schiphol in about 25 minutes, Amsterdam in about 40 minutes.
- Rotterdam The Hague Airport is in the north of the city, handy for London and city trips.
- Water taxis and the Waterbus connect the city across the Maas and to Dordrecht and Kinderdijk.
- Most Rotterdammers cycle; the city has wide, separated bike lanes almost everywhere.

Day trips from Rotterdam

Kinderdijk DAY TRIP	The famous windmills, 30 minutes by Waterbus.
Delft DAY TRIP	Canals, Delft Blue and Vermeer, 12 minutes by train.
Gouda DAY TRIP	Cheese market on Thursday mornings in summer, 20 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 Rotterdam

Geen woorden maar daden	Rotterdammers value doing over talking. Be direct and on time, and you will fit right in.
Pick a football club	Feyenoord is a religion here. Wearing red and white on match day starts many conversations.
Summer on the water	Swim at official spots on the Kralingse Plas or head to the beach at Hoek van Holland.
Architecture tours	Visit the Cube Houses, the Markthal and the Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen, the world's first publicly accessible art depot.

The Rotterdam calendar

January/February	International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR)
April	NN Marathon Rotterdam: the whole city comes out to cheer
July	North Sea Jazz Festival and the Rotterdam summer carnival
September	Wereldhavendagen: the World Port Days, free boat trips and open ships
December	Christmas lights and ice skating in the city centre

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.



DUTCH EXPATS HOUSING.
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CHAPTER 11 · HOW WE HELP

Your new home in Rotterdam, 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.

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