HOLLAND
2018-19
The Big Three of Ajax, Feyenoord and PSV have played all 62 Eredivisie seasons since the professional league was founded in 1956 – and won all but six of them.

The top league in the Netherlands keeps interest alive by having four clubs play off for the fourth European place – among them possibly 2009 champions AZ Alkmaar, perhaps Vitesse Arnhem or ADO Den Haag, maybe Utrecht.

Usually with the exception of Rotterdam, each of the 18 top-tier clubs comes from a different town – Ajax Amsterdam have not had a credible local rival since the 1970s. This in turn means that clashes are fiercest between Den Haag and Amsterdam, Groningen and Heerenveen, Feyenoord and pretty much anyone else. It gave rise to a shocking hooligan problem later addressed by out-of-town, high-security stadia and ClubCards, limiting admission to members only.

These days, many low-risk fixtures have open ticket sales although, the Big Three excluded, stadium capacities are modest. Pay-on-the-day is rare, online sales [involving registration in Dutch] are the norm.

The byzantine system of promotion from the second-tier Eerste Divisie means that half the league reaches the end-of-season promotion play offs. This, in turn, means that a modest club with a modest pedigree, such FC Emmen in 2018, can be elevated to play the likes of Ajax and PSV. But however obscure the town, distances in the Netherlands are relatively short. The longest trek in 2018-19 Eredivisie, running almost the entire north-south extent of the country, is from Groningen to Sittard, a drive of three hours and just over 300km. The first-rate Dutch rail system runs on a nationwide chip card also valid for public transport everywhere. Groundhopping, assuming you can get a ticket, couldn’t be easier.

Most clubs play at modern grounds, some overhauled or rebuilt around the time of Euro 2000. Holland failed in its bid to co-host the 2018 World Cup but the standard of facilities remains high, with beer served at most grounds and designated family-friendly sectors.

The Netherlands has one major international airport in Amsterdam, with direct rail nationwide connections, and a budget hub in Eindhoven. Flights also go to Rotterdam-The Hague and Groningen.

Trains [ns.nl/en] and local public transport are served by one single nationwide OV-chipkaart. It can only be purchased (€7.50) at Dutch stations or sales points. Top up at machines then touch in and [don’t forget!] touch out on trams, buses and train platforms.

Purchasing individual tickets is also possible. For train tickets, except at Amsterdam Schiphol airport, there’s a charge for payments with foreign credit cards and not in cash.

Much of Holland is rural – Fortuna Sittard, say, feels like the middle of nowhere. Most clubs encourage cyclists and provide suitable facilities.
Major roads and motorways do not require toll payments. Parking in many cities is limited although most have park & ride schemes [P+R-locaties]. On Sundays, street parking is often free.

**Tables & trophies**

The Eredivisie consists of 18 teams who play each other home and away. At present, the winners do not gain automatic admission to the group stage of the Champions League but enter the third qualifying round. The runners-up go into the second qualifying round and third-place finishers into the second qualifying round of the Europa League.

For another berth in that same round, the four teams finishing 4-7 play off in two two-legged semi-finals and one two-legged final, away goals, extra-time and penalties deciding factors. The winners of the Dutch Cup qualify for the third qualifying round of the Europa League – and the Johan Cruyff Shield, the Dutch Super Cup curtain-raiser, against the league champions. If the cup winners have already qualified for Europe, their slot is passed down, with the eighth-placed league finisher making the Euro play-offs.

The last-placed team from the top division drops into the second-tier Eerste Divisie. Sides finishing 16 and 17 take part in the play-offs (aka Nacompetitie) with eight promotion hopefuls from the Eerste. This process involves three rounds, the relegation battlers joining at round two. Again, away goals, extra-time and penalties count.

The Eerste Divisie consists of 20 teams, including the youth sides of Ajax, PSV, Utrecht and AZ, who cannot be promoted to the Eredivisie. In 2018, Jong Ajax won the league but automatic promotion went to runners-up Fortuna Sittard.

The Eerste Divisie operates a period system. The season is divided into four quarters – the best team in each period qualifies for the promotion play-offs. The four highest-placed finishers in the overall season table, excluding period champions, also qualify. This creates the eight play-off participants from the Eerste. One team winning two or more periods passes a play-off berth down the overall table. With youth teams from major clubs excluded from promotion, in practice this means teams finishing tenth usually reach the play-offs.

Relegation from the Eerste is easy to figure out – there’s not any. The Dutch FA decided to keep the professional Eerste and third-tier, semi-pro Tweede (‘Second’) Divisie, separate. Tweede champions, in 2019 potentially historic Amsterdamsche FC, do not go up.

Tweede teams can, however, be relegated. The bottom two of the 18-team league drop down to the amateur Derde [Third] fourth tier. Those finishing 15 and 16 play off with the clubs finishing 2-4 in each of two Derde leagues, Saturday and Sunday, whose champions go up to the Tweede.

Below the Derde is a six-layer amateur pyramid, from Hoofdklasse to Eerste Klasse and way down to Vijfde Klasse. These, too, are divided into Saturday and Sunday leagues, and regionally.

Each match in the KNVB Beker, the Dutch Cup, is settled on the day, after extra-time and penalties if necessary. The First Preliminary Round in August involves 58 amateur teams from the Derde Divisie and district cup tournaments. Bizarrely, 32 play each other, but 26 receive byes to the Second Preliminary Round a few days later. This brings together the 16 winners, those 26 given free passage and 12 clubs from the semi-pro Tweede Divisie. This produces 27 winners.
The main tournament starts with the First Round in September; those 27 winners, all 34 professional clubs, the PSVs of this world always drawn away, plus three also-rans from the Tweede.

From there, it’s a straight knock-out (no seeding) up to the final in May, at Feyenoord’s De Kuip in Rotterdam.

Season’s dealings
The Eredivisie starts in mid-August and takes a winter break just before Christmas. It restarts the third week of January then runs up to mid-May.

A typical weekend would involve a Friday evening game at 8pm, Saturday ones at 6.30pm, 7.45pm and 8.45pm, then Sunday ones at 12.15pm, 2.30pm and 4.45pm. The last two league rounds are synchronised at 2.30pm on each Sunday.

Saturday afternoon games are rare. Occasional midweek games take place at 6.30pm, 7.45pm and 8.45pm. On the plus side, match times are set in stone until season’s end.

The Eerste Divisie kicks off, breaks and restarts at the same time, finishing earlier in May to allow for the play-offs. Games are played at 8pm on Fridays, with one at 8pm on Mondays, and occasional Saturday evening/Sunday afternoon fixtures.

Entry level
Despite the ClubCard system, most clubs make low-risk home matches, perhaps a dozen league fixtures of the 17, open to all. Apart from the Big Three and Heerenveen, stadium capacities hover around 20,000, some even lower than 10,000. As the average Eredivisie gate is 18,000, this means that ticket availability is often at a premium. Online sales require Dutch-language registration and, sometimes, a Dutch address. Pay-on-the-day is rare. Tickets are around €20, slightly less behind the goals, more along the sidelines. Prices increase by 20% for a visit by the Big Three and local rival. A stand is a tribune, a sector, vak. Uitvak is the away sector for bezoekers, visitors.

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The digital travel guide for football fans, liberoguide.com is the most up-to-date resource, city-by-city, club-by-club, to the game across Europe and North America. Using only original photos and first-hand research, taken and undertaken over five seasons, liberoguide.com has been put together to enhance every football weekend and Euro night experience. From airport to arena, downtown sports bar to hotel, liberoguide.com helps you get the best out of your visit to football’s furthest corners and showcase stadiums.
Amsterdam

Forward-thinking and multicultural, Amsterdam is represented by a flagship club in its own image: Ajax. This successful school of footballing excellence is as global a brand as the three crosses of the city emblem.

The famous thick red stripe running down the white shirt of Ajax is a symbol of intelligent football played by young players nurtured or moulded at the club. Three waves of star teams have made their mark in Europe and won silverware: the Ajax of Johan Cruyff of the 1970s; the Ajax of Marco van Basten (with Cruyff as coach) of the 1980s; and Louis van Gaal’s young Ajax of the 1990s. The latter heralded a new era, with the opening of the futuristic Amsterdam ArenA in 1996, a host of Euro 2000 and many Dutch international matches since. In 2018, it was renamed the Johan Cruyff Arena.

It’s a world away from the neighbourhood feel of the club’s former home of De Meer, where Ajax icon Johan Cruyff was raised. As a boy, Cruyff lived nearby and his mother took in the club’s laundry. A young Johan would hop over the road to turn out for the boys’ team.

The city’s second club, and its oldest, is Amsterdamsche FC. Founded in 1895, AFC run Saturday and Sunday teams, plus several at youth level. The club moved to its current home, Sportpark Goed Genoeg on De Boelelaan, near Amsterdam Zuid station, in 1962. In September 2018, it witnessed a rout when AFC took second-tier Telstar to the cleaners 5-0 in the Dutch Cup. AFC are currently challenging for promotion from the semi-pro Tweede Divisie to reach this same second tier in 2019-20. At the Goed Genoeg, the wonderful clubhouse bar overlooks the pitch and the one main stand lined with AFC-issue red-and-black seating.

Bearings
Amsterdam’s Schiphol Airport is 9km (6 miles) south-west of the city centre, connected by regular train (€4.30) to Centraal station and Amsterdam Bijlmer ArenA (€3.90), both about 15mins away. There are shared or private taxis bookable on the airport website, prices starting around €30.

City transport consists of buses, trams, four light rail/metro lines and ferries, accessed by the national OV-chipkaart (€7.50) available at station machines, tobaccoconists and convenience stores. A single journey without the OV-chipkaart is €3. There are also cards for 24-hour (€7.50), 48-hour (€12.50) travel, and so on.

HOLLAND 2018-19 Amsterdam

www.liberoguide.com/amsterdam
Iamsterdam (iamsterdam.com) has a hotel database and there’s a tourist office with hotel booking outside Centraal Station.

Convenient for the ArenA, right on the Bijlmer ArenA station concourse, the Hampton by Hilton Amsterdam is business-friendly, with a bar open to all pre- and post-match. A short walk from Overamstel station, on the No.50 metro line to the stadium, the towering Mercure Hotel Amsterdam City has a gym and sauna. Also near Overamstel is the mid-range Bastion Hotel Amsterdam/Amstel.

Hotels cluster around Centraal Station. These include, at the gateway to the Red Light district, the Prins Hendrik, best known for its unfortunate footnote in music history – it was here that jazzster Chet Baker jumped to his death. A plaque marks his memory – a bar beside the lobby is open to the public. Nearby, the Hotel International offers five-star luxury in a beautiful old shipping house. Just along a few buildings, rooms at the warren-like but boutique Mansion can be found for a snip on booking sites.

For something more individual, the WestCord Art Hotel Amsterdam near Museum Het Ship features original works by controversial artist/musician Herman Brood.

Close to Rembrandtplein, hotels allow for easy barhopping. The Hotel Atlanta above the St James’s Gate pub is comfortable and affordable. Also nearby are the three-star NH Schiller and the NH Carlton Amsterdam, built for the 1928 Olympics.

For the budget-conscious, Amsterdam has a number of hostel-like hotels and superior hostels. Hotel The Globe contains private rooms as well as dorms, plus one of the city’s biggest sports bars. St Christopher’s at the Winston is a superior hostel with an equally central location.

Beer
Sports bars and football-focused pubs abound, particularly on Rembrandtplein and around. These include the Satellite Sports Café and St James’s Gate, along with pubs such as the Three Sisters, the Old Bell, Hoopman, and, in the same family, the Hole in the Wall.

Coco’s Outback is a popular Aussie sports pub nearby, with 30 screens and attractive drinks deals. Round the corner, Regular & Jack shows most games in a lively, up-for-it atmosphere.

The Tara on nearby Rokin provide a nice pub feel with TV sport in focus.

Further towards the Red Light district, the Old Sailor is an age-old corner spot dotted with TV screens for football gawping, with a lively, chatty clientele creating a constant buzz around the bar.

Another tourist haunt is the Heineken Experience, with its own brew pub, just behind which O’Donnell’s goes big on live sport and live music – it has a large terrace, too.

Shop
The COPA Football Store near Centraal is an Aladdin’s cave of goodies, with everything from a moped plastered in Panini stickers to Tibetan national football shirts. Much comes from people’s own attics, giving the stock a real personal touch. ‘My First Football Shirt’ is one particular line. Angelo and Joël are usually happy to show you round.
Ajax

Record Dutch champions Ajax (english. ajax.nl) are four-time winners of Europe’s premier trophy. Ajax have always placed belief in youth, the classic example being all-time club icon Johan Cruyff.

Formed at the Café Oost Indië on Kalverstraat in 1900, Ajax came to the fore in the 1960s. An adventurous team under Rinus Michels, starring teenage prodigy Cruyff, won three straight Dutch titles.

Ajax adopted Total Football, a fluid system of interchanging positions, conducted by Cruyff. Ajax dominated the European Cup, before Cruyff headed for Spain. He returned to coach Ajax to a European trophy in 1987.

Under Total Football follower Louis van Gaal, a buccaneering Ajax swept to Champions League glory in 1995 with a 1-0 win over Milan.

Old boy Frank de Boer then led Ajax to four straight titles from 2011 to 2014. In 2017, a young Ajax side under Peter Bosz froze in the Europa League final against Manchester United, but gained much acclaim on the way.

Now manager Erik ten Hag is counting on stellar midfielders Dušan Tadić and Donny van de Beek to garner further European glory.

The 52,000-capacity Johan Cruyff ArenA is surrounded by commercial outlets in Bijlmer, south-east of town. Zuid (gates G-J, M) is the home end. At the opposing Noord (A-C, K), away fans are allocated sectors 416 and 417 through gate K in the north-west corner. Ajax tours and the Fanshop are found at the main entrance, Hoofdingang (gates D-F).

All transactions are by credit card.

**Transport**

Metro line 54 runs to Station Biljmer ArenA from Centraal, direction Gein.

**Bars**

Many gather in town at the Café Monico on Rembrandtplein and/or Café Hesp near Amstel station on Weesperzijde before heading to the ArenA.

At the main entrance to the stadium, chain venue FEBO has a terrace, two TV screens inside and live music laid on before and after matches. Nearby is a popular nameless bar by gate Zuid 6 – look out for the Grolsch and Guinness signs. Grolsch is also the attraction at the Grand Café 3 & 20 on De Passage.

**Tickets**

Tickets are only available from the Ajax website – availability is usually limited to lesser-attractive league fixtures.

**For visits of clubs such as Willem II, you pay €26 for a seat behind the goals, €31-€36 (€22 for over-65s) around the corner flags, and €52 for a place over the halfway line. Note that online sales are Dutch-only but relatively easy to negotiate.**

For all queries, tweet Ajax Fancare at https://twitter.com/ajaxfancare.

Shops

On the west side of the main entrance of the ArenA, the Ajax Fanshop proffers classic white/red combination shirts, along with away tops of black with gold shoulders.

**Transport**

Metro line 54 runs to Station Biljmer ArenA from Centraal, direction Gein. Allow 15 mins. The previous stop of Strandvliet is also reasonably close and more convenient for the Noord end.

The station is on a direct train line from Schiphol Airport, journey time 15 mins.

**Tickets**

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Rotterdam

Rotterdam prides itself on being the biggest of Holland’s big three football cities, ahead of Amsterdam and Eindhoven. While trailing behind both in terms of silverware, this lively port contains the country’s de facto national stadium, De Kuip, stage for the final of Euro 2000 and ten European deciders.

Home of 15-time Dutch champions Feyenoord since opening in 1937, De Kuip witnessed crazy scenes 80 years later when returning hero Dirk Kuyt grabbed a hat-trick in the last game of the 2016-17 campaign to bring the league title to Rotterdam for the first time this century. The next day, upwards of 150,000 celebrated outside Rotterdam’s City Hall, the main street of Coolingsel awash with red and white. Across town the previous week, modest Excelsior had put the party on ice by achieving a shock 3-0 win over their bigger city rivals. The result gave rise to an ugly street battle between Feyenoord fans and police – but granted Excelsior another season in Holland’s Eredivisie.

While Feyenoord enjoy the biggest populist support in the Netherlands, and sympathetic Excelsior generate respect for their solid fan base, Sparta are generally dismissed as being the unjustifiably favoured club of the establishment. Competition with Amsterdam may drive the agenda, in terms of staging prestigious events and the bitter Feyenoord-Ajax rivalry – but everyone wants to beat Sparta.

During Feyenoord’s long wait for another Dutch title, Sparta and Excelsior yo-yo’d between top and second tiers. Sparta last won the Dutch Cup in 1966 while Excelsior have only reached the final once, the derby clash of 1930 that saw the Kralingers go down 1-0 to Puck van Heel’s Feijenoord.

Bearings

Rotterdam The Hague Airport, used by British Airways and Dutch budget carrier Transavia, is 5.5km (3.5 miles) north of Rotterdam.

Bus No.33 runs from the terminal building to Rotterdam Centraal (every 10-15 min, journey time 20min). For this and all journeys in the Netherlands, you require an OV-chipkaart – €1.83 will be deducted for the airport-Centraal journey. The card itself will cost you €7.50. Otherwise, a single journey on Rotterdam public transport of metro, trams and buses is €3 from the driver (valid 1hr). A day pass from machines at metro stations and RET outlets is €7.50. All three grounds are too far to walk from Centraal – you’ll need to use the trams that run outside the main entrance. The city centre is a 10min stroll from the station.

The airport-recommended taxi (+31 10 262 0406) to town costs nearly €30. Stadstaxi Rotterdam (+31 10 81 82 82 3) quotes €23.

From the rail terminal at Amsterdam Schiphol Airport, a direct frequent train to Rotterdam Centraal takes 25min and costs €14.70, again with a chipcard. The slower service (50min) is €2.40 less.
The only hotel near De Kuip is the modest Benelux above vintage Feije bar Café Schuyer at Beijerlandselaan 47A.

Also convenient are the upscale chain hotels that line the No.23 tram route from Centraal to the stadium. These include the distinctive Inntel Rotterdam Centre, near Leuvehaven metro and Erasmus Bridge, with its panoramic views and eighth-floor spa. Also near the river, the Thon is the Rotterdam branch of this mid-range Norwegian chain.

Cheaper options around the bar vortex of Witte de Withstraat include the Home Hotel on the bar strip itself, an 80-room lodging suited to long- and short-term stays. Alongside, the exotic-looking Hotel Bazar reflects the ethnic kaleidoscope of food in the restaurant downstairs.

Nearby but in a quieter immediate locality, the cosmopolitan Bilderberg Parkhotel caters to the business crowd and discerning weekending couples. Round the corner, the Breitner exudes old-school charm with its friendly staff and cozy bar.

Several hotels surround Centraal station, most strikingly the towering Rotterdam Marriott immediately opposite. A short walk away on Schiekade, the Hotel Rotterdam City is a comfortable option with images of De Kuip in its equally neat café.

Under the orange umbrella of easyJet, easyHotel on Westblaak is handy and affordable.

Bed
Rotterdam Tourist Office (en. rotterdam.info) has a database of local accommodation.

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Beer
Rotterdam’s bar zone is Witte de Withstraat, and streets nearby, such as Nieuwe Binnenweg.

A few paces from the main strip, Panenka is a text-book example of how to convert a standard old café into a cult football bar by means of a retro theme, ie an unfashionable Czech penalty pioneer.

If you just need a quiet one on Witte de Withstraat, De Schouw is a lovely bar decked out in old beer ads and a little Feyenoord iconography. Crowded inside and out, De Witte Aap and the restaurant of the Hotel Bazar are more typical of what you’ll find here. Opposite, Wunderbar is choosy about its music, with a more Caribbean/junkyard feel inside, and nightspot/live venue WORM upstairs upstairs.

Those after a wider range of ales should head for the nearby Proeflokaal Rheijnhotel, with 21 types on tap and more than 100 by the bottle. On Nieuwe Binnenweg, the Kraftbar R’dam provides rarer beers with scheduled TV football while Café Stalles is an age-old favourite.

Around the commercial centre, Paddy Murphy’s is pretty much the only football-focused expat-type pub in town. The Café Purser on Keizerstraat appeals to the post-work party crowd, showing TV sport, as does Café Spiegel on Westewagenstraat, with a mainstream live-music agenda.

A great football bar for locals is the Eetcafe Schieland by the Hotel Rotterdam City on Schiekade. Feyenoord iconography, such as original newspaper cuttings of the 1970 European Cup Final, will hopefully survive the renovation of autumn 2018.

Around the Old Harbour, the Dutch Maritime Pub is not as venerable as it makes out but provides tourists with a pleasant waterside backdrop nonetheless.
Older than Feyenoord, SBV Excelsior (sbvexcelsior.nl) have benefitted from a player-share agreements with their more celebrated city rivals to help gain top-flight status, most recently in 2014.

Towards season’s end in 2016-17, the former satellite club caused a huge upset by tonking Feyenoord 3-0 at home, the result halting the visitors’ run to a long-awaited title. The unexpected result led to violent clashes in this leafy part of Rotterdam near the Erasmus University.

It was here, in this eastern district of Kralingen, where the club was formed in 1902. They played on the open ground of Woudestein, where their stadium of the same name is still located. De Kralingers would eventually acquire another nickname, the Oud-papier club, as Excelsior remained in the hands of owners involved in paper recycling.

A row between a teenager Robin van Persie and then coach Adrie Koster saw the later Manchester United star leave for Feyenoord in 1999 – and Premier League fame.

The home end, the south stand, was named after old boy Robin van Persie. The Noordtribune behind the opposite goal is divided into the Excelsior4All Tribune and the away sector (Bezoekers Tribune) nearest the Rob Albers Tribune on one sideline. On the facing sideline is the main stand, the Henk Zon Tribune, with press and VIP sections. In one corner between the home end and the Rob Albers Tribune is the Erasmus Tribune.

Transport
From Centraal, via Beurs, tram Nos.21 and 24 stop at Woudestein (15min, direction De Esch), on the main road by the stadium.

Tickets
Given the 4,400 capacity, tickets for Eredivisie games can be in short supply and are only offered for the Robin van Persie, Erasmus and Rob Albers Tribune.

The standard prices are €18 for the Robin van Persie or Erasmus Tribune, and €23 (€18/€10) to sit in the Rob Albers Tribune. On match days, prices rise by €5. For top fixtures such as Ajax, advance tickets are €30.

Email ticketing@sbvexcelsior.nl for all ticket enquiries.

Shop
A handful of regular souvenirs is available from the stadium bar on match days, staff happy to open up to any visitor who may turn up during the week.

Bars
Upscale destination restaurants stand either side of the main road by the stadium, contemporary Fred and more rustic IDRW, both kitchens run by star chefs.

The match day-only supporters’ bar in a stand-alone building by the stadium car park shows evidence of Robin van Persie’s visit, with pictures of the star player from boyhood and a handwritten note of thanks. Another mural illustrates Excelsior history, with photos of former club officials and their paper-recycling van.

Alongside, De Courant accommodates business clients on match days.
Ajax are moneyed, PSV run by a multinational – 2017 Dutch champions Feyenoord (feyenoord.com) are the people’s team. The day after that title win, 150,000 gathered around Rotterdam’s City Hall to celebrate. A fairy-tale hat-trick by Dirk Kuyt brought the Dutch crown to De Kuip, Feyenoord’s revered home, for the first time since 1999.

The stadium stands in the former shipbuilding district of Feijenoord south of the Maas, where the club was founded in 1908. A bowl (or tub, ‘kuip’) of a stadium, it was built in two tiers set on top of each other, without view-restricting supporting columns.

Chosen to host 11 European finals including Euro 2000, regular venue for Dutch Cup finals, De Kuip shares national duties with Amsterdam – it was here that Graham Taylor famously imploded on the touchline in 1993.

The home end is the Gerard Meijer Tribune (aka Stadiontribune), colour-coded yellow, with away fans usually allocated sector 66 in the green, Willem van Hanegem Tribune (aka Marathontribune) opposite.

Feyenoord City will be a new, 63,000-capacity stadium. Construction should begin in 2019, with Feyenoord playing at the new arena by 2022-23.

Transport
On match days, ticket-holders may travel free on public transport and a special train runs from Centraal – the terminus is across Olympiaweg facing the Olympiatriebune.

From stand C beside the main entrance of Centraal station, tram No.23 (every 7-10min) takes 20min to reach Stadion Feijenoord, calling at central Beurs.

Feyenoord

Tickets
Foreigners may purchase tickets for home games – though they must show ID when collecting them on match day. Many games sell out but there’s an online service for those with less demand. Prices start at around €30-€35 for seats at either end, in the Willem van Hanegem Tribune or Gerard Meijer Tribune. It’s €40-€60 in the Olympiatriebune and the Maastribune along each sideline.

An English-speaking receptionist can help with enquiries on +31 10 292 38 89 or email sales@feyenoord.nl.

Shops
There are two Feyenoord FanShops behind the Maastribune, and two in town, one by the main entrance of Centraal station.

Tours & museum
Stadium tours take place Wed-Sat, booked at the FanShop or on the club website. An English-language audio guide can be downloaded – details from the FanShop.

A visit to the Feyenoord Museum is part of the tour or it can be visited separately (€5/€2.50) on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons.

Bars
At Beijerlandselaan 47, the Café Schuyer is an age-old Feyenoord haunt. By the Stadion Feijenoord tram stop are family-friendly eateries and leisure attractions.

At the stadium, on the first floor of the Maasgebouw, Brasserie De Kuip operates Mon-Sat from 9am until 4pm/5pm. On match days, it’s members- and usually reservation-only. If you’re here for the stadium tour, you can enjoy a Club Zuid sandwich and a draught Brand to go with it.

During the game, the Heineken sold at kiosks (pay with tokens, betaalmunten) is 2% ‘events beer’. After the match, it switches to regular strength.

The Feyenoord faithful gather at the Supporters Home bar, its interior a history of red-and-white worship.
Alkmaar

North of Amsterdam, Alkmaar is home to one of the most successful Dutch sides in recent years. Alkmaar Zaanstreek, AZ to all, have qualified for Europe every season but two since 2009 – when they won the title.

Fans of Dundalk, Benfica and Lyon have discovered a pretty, medieval, canal-ringed town, with a stadium on the city outskirts to the south. UEFA Cup finalists in 1981, thrice Europa League quarter-finalists in recent years, AZ have been only one of two clubs in the last 55 years to break the Ajax-PSV-Feyenoord triopoly of the Dutch game.

All would point to Alkmaar being one of Holland’s historic football hubs. But AZ are a modern phenomenon – as the club’s former title of AZ ‘67 indicates, a reference to the year of its formation. Before AZ ‘67 there was Alkmaar ‘54, and before Alkmaar ‘54 there was a modest local amateur scene.

Bearings
From Amsterdam Schiphol Airport, 48km (30 miles) south of Alkmaar, a frequent train (£9.50) takes 50min, with one change at Amsterdam Sloterdijk. From Amsterdam Centraal (£7.50), it’s 35-40min.

Trains and local buses run on the OV-chipkaart system (£7.50) though paper tickets can be bought at Schiphol and on board local buses in Alkmaar.

Alkmaar station 10min north-west of the walkable city centre. The stadium is in the far south of town, a bus or taxi journey away.

Taxi Tervoort Alkmaar (+31 72 220 1393) is a reliable local firm offering airport transfers.

Bed
Alkmaar Tourist Information (www.hartvannoordholland.nl) has a hotel database and booking function.

Just the other side of the ring road from the stadium, the Golden Tulip is a top-quality four-star, with a spa and restaurant with its own wine cellar. The bar is also handy pre-match and there’s free parking.

Around the city centre, the King’s Inn on Koningsstraat is an ideal solution for a mid-range stay, a hotel/hostel mix. Also central, in a higher bracket, the Grand Hotel on Gedempte Nieuwesloot comprises 11 high-class rooms in a suitably grand, historic building.

More affordable, set right across from the train station, the Hotel Stade en Land is clean, convenient and comfortable, with 22 en-suite rooms and rates including breakfast. It offers cheap weekend deals in December and January. There are further weekend deals at the relaxing College Hotel Alkmaar by canalside Molenbuurt.

Beer
Two sport-friendly bars stand out in particular. Gunnery’s by the canal on Verdonkenoord is the only Irish-style pub, with regular parties, quality pub grub and the screening of most major sport channels. Facing it over the water, Tante Sannie is ideal for match-watching and DJ parties.

The Hielander on Ridderstraat is more a Scots restaurant and whisky bar, with evening-opening and reservations recommended at weekends.

For locals’ bars, head for the Houttil side of focal Waagplein, such as fun-focused Café ‘t Hartje and more football-friendly Café Berrie’s at No.24.

Finally, for a huge range of beers, you’ll find 18 types on draught at the classic Odeon on Hekelstraat, which also takes its pool and live music seriously.
AZ Alkmaar

Dutch champions in 2009, AZ (az.nl) are enjoying their best period since the early 1980s. Back then, coach George Keßler and striker Kees Kist took The Cheeseheads to a league title and a European final. The current purple patch dates back a decade, encompassing a second Dutch crown and the opening of a new ground, the AFAS Stadion.

Only one of two sides to break the Ajax-Feyenoord-PSV monopoly on Dutch football since DWS Amsterdam in 1964, AZ are backed by art-collecting financier, Dirk Scheringa. In 2006, Scheringa unveiled a new stadium on the southern outskirts of town. Built at a cost of €38 million, it matched the ambitions of well supported Dutch club trying to break into the Big Three.

The turning point came under Louis van Gaal in 2009 when AZ pipped Ajax to the title. Regular European qualification, a Dutch Cup win in 2013 and two Europa League quarter-finals have since kept the club in the Dutch elite.

Home fans gather in the Van der Ben-tribune, aka Ben-Side end. Away supporters are allocated sectors K and L of the Alkamaarder Hout-tribune, in one corner of the opposite goal. The main stand, Victorie-tribune, houses the club offices while behind the facing sideline, the Molenaar-tribune honours the brothers whose business savvy created the modern-day club.

Transport
The stadium is too far to walk from town. On match days, a free shuttle runs from Alkmaar station from two hours before kick-off, then back again after the game – naturally, it is in heavy demand.

The stadium is otherwise poorly served by city buses. From Alkmaar station, the hourly No.163 (direction Uitgeest) runs to Stadionweg and the half-hourly No.4 to Rhijnvis Feithlaan, just behind the Golden Tulip Hotel near the stadium. Each journey is 10-12min, 8-9 stops each.

Tickets
In theory, tickets are sold at the Fancentrum (Mon 1pm-5pm, Tue-Sat 10am-5pm) at the stadium and online. In practice, given the limited capacity of the AFAS Stadion, you need a Clubkaart, free from the club’s Dutch-only website.

The pricing system is similarly byzantine, with five categories of matches. The cheapest tickets are in sectors K and M, either side of the away supporters, with prices set at €20, rising to €30 for Ajax, PSV and Feyenoord. A decent seat in sectors P, Q and R in the Molenaar-tribune runs between €30 and €40, according to the opposition.

With capacity at 17,000 and an average gate of 15,000, availability is limited.

Shop & Museum
The Fancentrum (Mon 1pm-5pm, Tue-Sat 10am-5pm, match days) through the main entrance offers match scarves and frilly pennants. Alongside is a display of vintage shirts, archive photos and souvenirs from AZ’s European travels.

Bars
The only venue near the ground is the smart café/restaurant by the lobby of the Golden Tulip Hotel. Truffels, where reasonably dressed supporters gather for a pre-match drink.

At the ground, the Grand Café Van Gaal overlooking the pitch is open Mon-Fri 8.30am-5.30pm, offering breakfast and lunch. On match days, it’s reservation-only.
Almelo

Were it not for local club Heracles, recent if brief competitors in the Europa League, there would be little reason to visit Almelo. A grey former textile town, Almelo has been put on the map by football.

The city council, which financed the construction of the club’s Polman Stadion in 1999, renamed the club Heracles Almelo. Now when the ‘Heraclieden’ compete in Europe, as in 2016, the world sees ‘Almelo’. Previously, the club existed as AVC, then SC ’74.

Carrying the club name of yesteryear, amateurs AVC Heracles still wear the same black-and-white stripes as their forebears, and play at the same Bornsestraat ground as Heracles did for most of the 20th century. It was here that Heracles led their two title-winning campaigns, the first under English manager, Horace Colclough, in 1927. The ten Cate textile dynasty provided the wherewithal.

The move from Bornsestraat to the Polman Stadion in 1999 kept the ten Cate connection. The Almelo textile company diversified, creating artificial grass. Since Heracles gained promotion in 2005, top Eredivisie sides have run out onto ten Cate turf at the Polman Stadion.

Bearings

The nearest Dutch airport to Almelo is underused Groningen 86km (53.5 miles) away. Qbuzz buses Nos.9 and 100 run to Groningen station 30-40min away. From there, a regular train runs to Almelo (£23) with one change at Zwolle, journey time 1hr 40min.

Dutch trains and public transport run on the nationwide travel card, the OV-chipkaart (£7.50).

Amsterdam Schiphol is 159km (99 miles) away. From the terminal, a train runs direct to Almelo (£23).

Journey time is 1hr 50min, either direct service or changing at Amersfoort.

Two stations serve the town: Almelo, a 10min walk to the centre and, south of it, Almelo de Riet, a 10min walk to the stadium. It’s a 3min rail hop between them – it would be a good 30min walk.

Taxi Oost Almelo (+31 546 455 755) are based by the main station.

Bed

The top-quality Van der Valk Theaterhotel on Schouwbergplein has various lodging options, from budget to an outdoor jacuzzi and views of Almelo.

On equally central Marktstraat, the Huis van Bewaring offers contemporary comfort in a converted jail. The best rooms come with a roof terrace – one has its own sauna.

Just outside the town centre, the Preston Palace provides access to a subtropical water park, games, a cinema and live music.

All B&B options are a fair trek from town.

Beer

Almelo’s modest drinking options dot the pedestrianised centre, in particular Grotestraat, where The Shamrock lays on TV football and party nights. Alongside, Café de Stam shows Heracles games on a big screen. Over the road, ’t Hooihoes offers prime beers plus, bizarrely, an Escape Room game.

Towards the main square, Brasserie De Linde has a nice terrace, as does NeilZ on Marktplein. Still on Grotestraat, the landmark Taverne ’t Wetshuys dates back to 1691, when the ten Cate textile family first set up in Almelo.
Heracles Almelo

The success of Heracles Almelo (heracles.nl), European competitors in 2016, Dutch Cup finalists in 2012, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Heracles have been a top-flight proposition since 2005, after the local council linked the town’s name to the club’s and financed the construction of the Polman Stadion.

Opened in 1999, it was revamped and expanded in 2015 to accommodate a total of 12,080 seats. The home end is named after Steve Mokone, the first black South African player to star in Europe, whose two seasons at Heracles in the 1950s prompted a book and film about his life.

At the other end, away fans are allocated sectors GG and HH (Ingang/Gate 6) in the corner of the Folkert Velten Tribune, named after another Heracles legend.

Skyboxes and VIP places now line the Frits van der Etst Tribune, with the best affordable seats in sectors C-E over the halfway line in the Joop Schuman Tribune opposite.

Transport

The easiest and quickest way from town is to take the train from Almelo to Almelo de Riet (every 30min daily), a journey of three minutes. From de Riet station, head down Rietstraat then over main Henriëtte Roland Holstlaan and you’ll see a complex of sports pitches ahead. Just over Weezebeck canal is the Polman Stadion – allow 10-15min from de Riet station.

Closer to the ground, bus Nos.21 runs from Almelo main station every 30min to Almelo Stadion, a journey of under 10min. Bus Nos.22 and 66 stop at Almelo, Frederik van Eedenstraat by the canal, a 7-10min walk to the stadium through the park or keeping to the main roads, turning right at the roundabout.

Tickets

Tickets are distributed for several games in advance at the FanServiceShop and online. For low-risk fixtures, the FanServiceShop sells on the day.

With average gates around 11,000 and a capacity of 12,080, availability is pretty good for many games – and in three sections of the stadium – provided you purchase several weeks in advance.

Admission is €21 for the outer sectors in the home end and most seats behind the opposite goal, €26 in the outer sectors in B and F in the sideline Joop Schuman Tribune and €29 in middle sectors C-E there. A levy of €5 is charged for the visits of Ajax and Feyenoord.

For all information, email Ticketing@heracles.nl or call +31 546 817 070.

Shop

Choose between away light blue or classic black-and-white bar scarves, shirts of similar colour, or pick up a ‘Wij Zijn Heracles’ bottle opener at the FanServiceShop.

Bars

If you’re coming from de Riet and the park, the first thing you’ll see is the Oranje Nassau clubhouse, with scarves around the bar.

Near main entrance to the stadium, Wok in Vuur En Vlam is a large Chinese buffet restaurant – think meal and not a swift beer.

At the ground, Hart voor Heracles fans gather in the Supporters Kavee ‘t Hart while those lucky enough to gain entry to the VIP bar will have a luxurious view of the pitch.

HOLLAND 2018-19 Heracles Almelo

www.liberoguide.com/heracles-almelo
Arnhem

Bearing the yellow and black of Gelderland, Vitesse Arnhem are the oldest professional club currently competing in the top-flight Eredivisie. Frowned upon in Holland for also being the first Dutch club to have a moneyed foreign owner, Vitesse have a history more linked to England than the former USSR.

The railway hub of Arnhem is best known for its Bridge Too Far, the scene of war-time heroics made famous in film. Originally Vitesse were a cricket club that played along Rijnkade by the Dutch branch of the Rhine, near the bridge that would later become so famous.

A state-of-the-art stadium in Arnhem South ushered in the European era. A host of Euro 2000, the pioneering GelreDome, with a retractable roof and convertible pitch, witnessed Pippo Inzaghi convert a penalty for Italy and Bon Jovi strut their stuff that same summer.

The Yellow-and-Blacks, meanwhile, sank lower down the league and deeper in debt. Georgian businessman Merab Jordania, a midfielder during Dinamo Tbilisi’s golden years, took over but things got messy when Aleksandr Chigirinski stepped in.

A mate of Roman Abramovich, Chigirinski created close ties with Chelsea and sacked managers at will. With their first major silverware after 125 years of activity, the Dutch Cup in 2017, Vitesse remain a major player in the domestic game. How they’re perceived in Holland is another matter.

Hertogenbosch, Amsterdam Schiphol is the best option, with direct trains every 30min (1hr 15 journey time, €17 single). If you’ve just missed one, change at Utrecht.

The Dutch train network runs with the OV-Chipkaart (€7.50) also valid for local transport in towns and cities. Arnhem’s consists of trolleybuses, unique in Holland. Arnhem Taxis can be contacted on +31 26 260 2626.

Near the station, the Best Western Plus Hotel Haarhuis is named after the family who ran it a century ago. Destroyed in World War II, it was rebuilt and reopened in 2013. Nearby is the Hotel Old Dutch, a friendly guesthouse with a bar-restaurant.

Stylish B&B Vesting 10 sits in a grand property on the corner of Coehoornstraat.

With no hotels near the stadium, the Holiday Inn Express Arnhem at Nieuwe Oeverstraat 50 on the south side of town should be a reliable and convenient choice.

Bars

There’s a bar zone around the focal Korenmarkt, where you’ll find Murphy’s Home and TV matches. Mick O’Connells also shows sport while music-oriented The Move is a rare case of a bar being named after a Roy Wood group.

At Beekstraat 2, Café Meijers is a lovely old-school Dutch drinking spot. Locals also gather at De Wacht at Bovenbeekstraat 1, an intimate bohemian place with a savvy, regular clientele.

Best of the bunch is the Café Heeren van Aemstel on a corner of Kortestraat, an atmospheric hang-out for old Vitesse fans.

Visit Arnhem [en.visitarnhem.com] has a database of hotels.

Hotels

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**Vitesse Arnhem**

The news that an ex-Gazprom director, Valery Oyf, had taken over Vitesse Arnhem (vitesse.nl/en) in 2018 raised few eyebrows in Holland. Also connected to Millhouse Capital that manages the assets of Roman Abramovich, Oyf is the latest in a line of ex-Soviet entrepreneurs overseeing the club, dating back to 2010.

But it was long-term chairman Karel Aalbers who took Vitesse from forgotten lower-leaguers in the mid-1980s to Europe. After a long gap between the national league final in 1915 and promotion in 1989, Vitesse maintained an impressive domestic record through the 1990s. Aided by strikers such as Roy Makaay, Vitesse finished in the top six of the Eredivisie for 13 straight seasons, taking on the likes of Real Madrid, Parma and Bordeaux in Europe.

Aalbers also conceived of the GelreDome. Built with Euro 2000 in mind, this all-purpose arena on Arnhem’s southern outskirts has a 25,000 capacity for football and around 40,000 for the likes of AC/DC and Lady Gaga. Supporters are up close to the pitch, a detail insisted upon by Aalbers.

The stadium is arranged in two tiers around the ground, with West the main stand (Hoofdingang), Oost opposite, and Noord and Zuid behind each goal. Away fans are usually allocated the sectors 125/225 and 126/226 of the Noord end nearest the Oost Tribune, through gate Q. The Zuid (Theo Bos) Tribune is the home end.

**Transport**

From Arnhem Centraal, trolleybus No.7 runs every 15min and takes less than 10min to reach the GelreDome, five stops away. Only season-ticket holders are entitled to free transport up to 2hrs before and after the match; otherwise pay the driver €4.50 for a return ticket.

A shuttle bus for season-ticket holders is also laid on from the station, with the same €4.50 return fare for everyone else.

**Tickets**

Advance tickets are available from the MijnVitesse store at the ground and online from the club. Tickets are also sold at the stadium on the day, with a €2 surcharge and the need to produce ID.

Home fans in the Zuid (Theo Bos) Tribune pay around €20 depending on the opposition, similarly at the other end, the Noord (Edward Sturing) Tribune. A half-decent seat in the Oost (Charly Bosveld) Tribune on the sidelines is €25, rising to €45 for the best seats in the West (Just Göbel) Tribune. Under-16s are charged around two-thirds of these prices.

For the visits of Ajax, Feyenoord and PSV (aka Topwedstrijden), prices rise around 20%.

For all details, email fanservice@vitesse.nl or call +31 26 880 7337.

**Shop**

Club shop MijnVitesse at the stadium proffers match tickets and yellow-and-black merchandise. Current second tops are navy blue with neon blue sleeves and markings.

**Bars**

Home fans swarm to the Supportershome Monnikenhuize set up in the stadium grounds and the Fanzone inside. Away fans and neutrals have to make do with the coffee, soft-drink and fast-food outlets set up on Horecaplein outside the main entrance or the Vitesse-branded drive-in hamburger chain nearby. Any proper drinking needs to be done in town.
Breda has a long-established football culture that surpasses nearby Tilburg for passion. While flagship team NAC Breda only has one distant Dutch title and a Dutch cup to show for more than a century of activity, the game's significance here is underlined by the city council stepping in to save the debt-ridden club in 2002.

Having built the FUJIFILM Stadium in 1996, NAC were struggling with the €13 million construction cost. The club sold the ground to the City, which now runs the 19,000-capacity venue north-west of town.

Co-host of the Women's Euro 2017, the stadium was renamed after NAC's most revered player, Antoon 'Rat' Verlegh. The Rat Verlegh Stadion is the home of The Rats, the NAC yellow army.

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**Bearings**

The nearest airport to Breda is Eindhoven, 51km (32 miles) away. There is no public transport between the two.

**Bus Nos.400 and 401** run every 10-15min from outside Arrivals to Eindhoven station, journey time 20min. Tickets are €4.24 from the machine at the stop or online from Hermes. The same journey costs €2.20 using the nationwide travel card, the OV-chipkaart (€7.50), also valid for rail journeys.

From Eindhoven station, a half-hourly train takes 35min to reach Breda (€11). From Amsterdam Schiphol airport, a direct train to Breda (€19, 50min journey time) also runs every half-hour.

**Breda station** is north of the city centre a 10min walk away. For the stadium, you'll need a local bus, run by Arriva.

The service also runs on the chipkaart system but you can pay on board, €3.75 for one journey (ritkaart), €6 for a one-day pass (dalurendagkaart).

**Taxi Breda** [+31 76 522 8888] has a fixed prices for airport transfers, €100 from Eindhoven, Rotterdam or Antwerp.

**Bed**

By the station, the Apollo Hotel Breda City Center fills a former post office with 88 arty rooms.

On Nieuwstraat, the Hotel Nassau Breda offers chic lodging, contemporary cuisine and cocktails. Also on the south side of town, the four-star Golden Tulip Keyser provides suitable comfort and convenience.

**Beer**

Pubs and bars dot the historic city centre, with many options around Vismarktstraat.

Right by the main church, O'Mearas provides plenty of TV football. Nearby on Schoolstraat, Mad Molly’s is run by a friendly couple and shows live sport. Alongside, Dunne provides a late-night drinking option.

On Vismarktstraat itself, Catch 22 is known for its plentiful beer choice. On Grote Markt, Heeren van Breda specialises in beers from nearby Belgium, with occasional live music. Café Vulling offers pool, darts and board games, its charming interior done out with old beer posters.

A few doors along, Café Sam Sam specialises in local gin, jenever, while ’t Hart van Breda is a local touchstone.

Nearby Café De Bommel on Halstraat has live sounds and organised football tournaments.

By the station, De Pint welcomes new arrivals with Dommelsch beer.
Returning to the top-flight Eredivisie in 2017, NAC Breda (nac.nl) are arguably the most passionately supported club in the Netherlands outside of the Big Three.

NAC’s only title win so far, in 1921, involved Antoon ‘Rat’ Verlegh. His 40-year service to Breda was recognised when the new-build stadium adopted his nickname in 2006.

Built at a cost of €13 million, the stadium was opened a year after Pierre van Hooijdonk’s departure to Celtic in 1995.

With improvements and expansion to 19,000 capacity, budget cuts led to relegation in 2015, after 15 straight seasons in the top tier. Facing eternal rivals Willem II in the play-off, Breda won the first leg 2-1, only to fall to lose 3-1 in Tilburg.

A year later, Breda’s Cyriel Dessers claimed a play-off hat-trick in Nijmegen to restore top-flight status.

Fanatical NAC fans occupy the B-Side, Vak E behind the north goal on Lunetstraat. Supporters in the opposite end create an echo chant, offset by noise from visiting followers alongside in sectors H/I at corner (Hoek) 4 of the Zuidtribune.

The main stand, Hoofdtribune, is split into three tiers with a dividing row of business seats. The single-level Eretribune runs along the opposite sideline.

Transport
The Rat Verlegh has its own Stadion stop on the No.2 bus from Breda rail terminus. Exiting the station, veer right and head for the furthest bus stop, Perron J. Buses leave every 15min Mon-Fri, every 30min Sat & Sun. Journey time is 12min.

To walk from the station takes 25min, keeping on the north side of the canal then right up Lunetstraat.

Tickets
With promotion in 2017, availability for many home games is limited. With a capacity of 19,000, the average gate for 2017-18 was just under 18,500.

A NAC clubcard is free but distribution is to a Dutch postal address. Email ticketing@nac.nl or call +31 76 521 4500.

Ticket sales are two weeks in advance online (voetbal.iticketsro.com/nac_breda).

For most fixtures in 2018-19, prices are set at around €20 for the B-Side and Vak G behind the goals, €25 in the sideline Eretribune and €30-€35 in the main Hoofdtribune.

A premium is added for top fixtures, for which a club card is needed.

Shop
The modest NAC Fanshop is on Lunetstraat by the Service- & Informatiedesk. There’s just enough room for a few rails of yellow-and-black shirts, with a smaller selection of second-choice white varieties.

Museum
The NAC Museum (Wed 1pm-4pm or email info@nacmuseum.nl) was funded and assembled by Breda fans. Note the commemorative watch presented to Fanny Petit for winning the 1921 national title.

Bars
There are no outlets around the stadium, not even at the Stada Stores shopping centre alongside.

On match days, home fans gather at the Café Beatrix on Lunetstraat. Round the corner, well-heeled visitors are entertained at De Parel van het Zuiden (‘The Pearl of the South’), sponsors and friends at De Cordial.

Visiting supporters should drink in town – and remember that football in Breda is pretty partisan.
Doetinchem

Regular competitors in Holland’s top flight, promoted back up in 2018, De Graafschap are the creation of a near blind football enthusiast whose legacy lives on in a grass-roots fan culture second to none in the Netherlands.

There is no place called De Graafschap. ‘The County’ are based in Doetinchem, the largest community in a rural area known as the Achterhoek. De Graafschap are the Achterhoekers, or the Superboeren (‘Super Farmers’).

The concept of the club as ‘The County’ and its blue-and-white colours come from founding father Johan ‘Joop’ Roodbergen, failing health when he set up De Graafschap in 1954. It then took the club nearly 20 years to reach the top-tier Eredivisie.

The Superboeren were transformed in the early 1970s by coach Piet de Visser, later right-hand man to Roman Abramovich at Chelsea. At Doetinchem, de Visser’s mastermind midfielder was Guus Hiddink, and this combination swept De Graafschap to the Eredivisie. Later de Visser helped find the players for Hiddink to make PSV an international success, and engineered the appointment of his former charge as Chelsea manager – it all started at De Vijverberg, the club’s home since its foundation.

Bearings
Dutch trains and public transport run on the nationwide OV-chipkaart (€7.50) system.

Eindhoven Airport is 86km (53 miles) south-west of Doetinchem. Outside Arrivals is the stop for the No.401 bus to Eindhoven station (every 10-15min, journey time 20min). From there, Doetinchem by rail takes 2hrs via ‘s-Hertogenbosch and Arnhem, single about €20.

From Amsterdam Schiphol or Centraal the train requires a change at Arnhem or Utrecht then Arnhem, overall journey time 1hr 45min-2hrs, around €20 single.

Doetinchem station is south of town a 10min walk away. The stadium is a 10min walk in the opposite direction, away from town.

Local buses are run by Arriva. Taxi firm Spenzer (+31 6 3650 2009) offers a set fare to/from Eindhoven or Amsterdam airports of €120.

Bed
Doetinchem has a VVV tourist information office (vvvdoetinchem.nl) but no English-language online resource.

There are two hotel options in town. The most central, Stadshotel De Graafschap, sits behind the main square, with doubles in the €100 range. Breakfast can be enjoyed on the roof terrace.

A short walk north, the upscale Ruim Zicht fills a stately property on Ruimzichtlaan, with fine cuisine and a fashionable bar.

Beer
The main bar strip is Grutstraat, just off the main square, where thousands celebrated after promotion in 2018. Run by the affable Tom Wonnink, Merley is the best option, a live-music venue with a TV screen for matches.

Round the corner by the cathedral, Paddy’s is the only pub in town, with Guinness and Grimbergen on draught, a decent menu and a TV for sport.

Alongside, locals fill the terraces of the bar/restaurants on the main square, the elegant Grand Café de Bank, funkier Trinity’s, food-oriented ‘t Zusje and sleek Stadscafé Simons.

For a real beer bar, the wonderful Raedthuys by the Town Hall changes its selection every month. Currently you’ll find cool UTberg from nearby Vragender.
Cult club from the rural east, the Super Farmers of De Graafschap (degraafschap.nl) gained promoted to the Eredivisie in 2018. Four times this century, the boys from Doetinchem have bounced back up to the top flight after a season or two of scrapping in the Eerste. With only three games won over the first half of the 2018-19 campaign, a play-off at the end would actually count as a bonus.

This is the kind of community club whose supporters fill the bar they built themselves by the main entrance of the De Vijverberg, just south of Doetinchem station.

It was here that De Graafschap played their first professional game in 1954. De Vijverberg was knocked up with wooden stands and a 12,500 capacity, shortly after the club’s foundation. Wood was then replaced by concrete and the modern-day stadium took shape. The West Stand became the Spinnekop home end, in honour of Liverpool’s Spion Kop. Opposite was the Groenendaal Stand, and along the sidelines were the north Roodbergen Stand and south Vijverberg.

The rebuilt De Vijverberg was intimate and closer to the pitch, with the corners closed to keep the atmosphere in. Current capacity stands at 12,600. A return to top-flight football in 2018-19 means a near full house every home game.

Standing sections 15 and 16 are immediately behind the goal in the home Spinnekop end. Away fans are allocated 550 seats in sectors 13 and 14, set by the corner with the main Vijverberg Stand.

**Transport**

The stadium is 10-15 minutes from Doetinchem station – turn right as you exit, head down Terborgseweg then follow the signposts as you veer diagonally left at the junction for Lijsterbeslaan. There’s no bus stop in the immediate vicinity of the stadium. A taxi would be around €6.

**Tickets**

Admission to most matches is exclusively to holders of a De Graafschap ClubCard, available free online. Tickets then become available three to four weeks in advance, again online. These must be printed not downloaded onto a mobile, as the stadium gates do not have suitable scanners to read them. Online registration and purchase is Dutch-only.

Ticket prices are affordable – around €16 behind the goals and in the corners, and around €20 in the sideline Roodbergen Stand. Under-17s are charged around €10-€12.

Supplements are added for the visits of Ajax, Feyenoord, PSV and Vitesse Arnhem.

**Shop**

The match-day only De Graafshop proffers blue-and-white merchandise by the main entrance for one hour either side of the game. Away tops for 2018-19 are canary yellow.

**Bars**

There are no bars or restaurants in the immediate vicinity of the stadium. Home fans and neutrals gather in the Supporters Kantine just inside the main entrance, where scarves from scores of clubs dangle over an island bar. Beer here, and at kiosks behind the Spinnekop, is Grolsch, purchased with tokens (munten) available from vendors alongside.

For information, contact the club on +31 314 368 450 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm) or email info@degraafschap.nl.
Eindhoven

The industrial city of Eindhoven is home to two venerable clubs. Current champions PSV dominated the Dutch game under Guus Hiddink in the 1980s and mid 2000s.

Holland's second most titled club is linked to the company they are named after, Philips. The firm developed with the town around it.

Shortly before the Philips brothers, Gerard and Anton, opened a sports field for their employees in 1910, local football enthusiasts founded EVV Eindhoven.

Wearing the blue and white colours of the city, the Eindhovense Voetbal Vereniging were the people's team, while the Philips Elftal, from 1913 the Philips Sport Vereniging, were representatives of privileged, successful industrialists.

EVV, today FC Eindhoven, first met PSV in the Lichtstad ('City of Light') derby in 1915. Either side of World War II, the Blauw-witten outshone their local rivals.

PSV stepped up a gear in the 1970s under coach Kees Rijvers. Ten years later, Hiddink’s PSV won the European Cup and the Lempkes ('Light Bulbs') made regular appearances in the Champions League.

EVW were relaunched as FC Eindhoven in 2002, based at Jan Louwers Stadion in Eindhoven’s leafy southern outskirts.

The Philips Stadion is conveniently located on the bus route from Eindhoven Airport, a short hop from the train station.

Bearings

Eindhoven Airport is 7.5km (4.5 miles) west of town.

Bus No.401 (every 10-30min) takes 20min to run from the terminal concourse to Eindhoven train station near the city centre. It also calls at PSV’s stadium, two stops from the station terminus. Tickets are €8 from the driver or €2.20 is docked from the nationwide travel card, the OV-chipkaart (€7.50).

The city’s bus network runs on the same chipkaart system – or pay €4 upon boarding. Eindhoven is mainly walkable, even the PSV stadium.

Pin Taxi Eindhoven (+31 611 48 38 28) charges €26 from the airport to town.

Bed

Eindhoven Tourist Office (thisiseindhoven.com/en) has a hotel database.

Near the PSV stadium, the Inntel Hotels Art Eindhoven is set in the former Philips factory. If you’re staying at the airport, the Tulip Inn is built into the terminal.

Towering outside the train station, The Student Hotel also offers rooms to tourists.

Walking distance away, the Crown Hotel Eindhoven is a branch of the Eden chain.

Facing it across Vestdijk, the Hotel NH Collection operates a Lazy Sundays scheme for 3pm check-outs.

Clustered around focal Markt, the Crown Inn is a reasonable three-star while on the same corner, the Queen has rooms to match its grand café downstairs.

The Pullman Eindhoven Cocagne appeals to demanding business travellers. The equally central Boutique Hotel Lumière probably wins out in Eindhoven’s hotel style wars.

Beer

Bars line Stratumseind. Sgt Pepper’s (No.49) and the Tipsy Duck (No.26) show football on TV, as does nearby O’Sheas.

Close to the station along Dommelstraat, the Trafalgar has been in operation since 1973. After-hours fun and live music can be had at concert venue Effenaar and cocktail/DJ haunt Plein 4. Around the corner, snooker club Rex opens late while D’N Hertog serves rare Belgian beers.
PSV Eindhoven

Runaway Dutch champions in 2015, last-gasp title winners in 2016, triumphant in 2018, **PSV Eindhoven** are based at the ground built by and named after their backers: Philips.

A works team, Philips Sport Verenigeng were formed at a company dinner to celebrate Dutch independence from Napoleon. PSV were crowned champions in 1929, by regional play-off.

Stadium and team improved after the war, PSV becoming Holland’s first club to appear in the European Cup.

With old boy Kees Rijvers as coach, PSV won the UEFA Cup in 1978. Ten years later, under Guus Hiddink, a side starring Ronald Koeman and Wim Kieft stormed the Dutch league and snuck through to win Europe’s premier trophy on penalties.

Three months later, Philips unveiled a modernised stadium with a friendly against Milan, PSV old boy Ruud Gullit and all.

With stars such as Ronaldo, Romario, Arjen Robben and Ruud van Nistelrooy, PSV won a dozen Dutch titles in 20 years – but never another European trophy.

The **Philips Stadium** co-hosted Euro 2000 when its all-seated capacity reached 33,000. Here Figo’s Portugal came back from 2-0 down to beat England 3-2.

Current capacity is 35,000. Away supporters are allocated upper sector MM between the Noord and West stands, accessed through gates 35 and 36.

Transport

The stadium has its own stop on the same bus line [No.401](#) that runs from the airport to the train station. From town, walk ten minutes turning right from the station, past Media Markt up Mathildelaan.

Tickets

As Dutch fans require a [Club Card](#) to attend a game, a package is the only way to see a league game at PSV.

A silver package is €62.50, a gold one €122.50, depending on ticket category. For Ajax and Feyenoord, prices rise to €85/€150. For all enquiries, email ticketoffice@psv.nl.

Bars

Around the stadium, Avant Garde is an upscale eaterie, [Coen & Willy](#) (a reference to post-war stars Dillen and van der Kuijien) is a popular match-day bar while the [De Blauwe Lotus](#) serves quality Asian cuisine. Pick of the bunch is [de verlenging](#) (‘Extra Time’), a large bar/restaurant decked out in iconography of PSV history. The bar leads to a VIP area of the ground where the match can be enjoyed over local Bavaria beer.

For hot drinks and snacks, [Caffee 1913](#) is by entrance 15.

Over the road from the club shop, [De Aftrap](#) is a supporters’ bar done out in colourful graffiti. Slightly further away, by the Inntel Hotel Art, [Usine](#) is a café-restaurant in an old industrial space, with deckchairs spread out in warm weather.
Emmen

When FC Emmen gained a surprise promotion in 2018 to the Dutch Eredivisie, few fans will have relished the trip to a planned city in deepest rural Drenthe. Emmen usually gives the outside world one reason to visit: its zoo.

While some 1.5 million people a year come for a Wildlands Adventure, FC Emmen, even during their promotion season of 2017-18, struggled to attract more than 3,000 for home games at De Oude Meerdijk.

Emmen were crowned Sunday Amateur champions in 1975, encouraging the move to a new-build sports park on the eastern outskirts of town.

With Emmen’s top-flight status in 2018-19, De Oude Meerdijk has seen its 8,000-plus capacity put to the test.

The last time this happened was in 2005, when a young Lionel Messi opened the scoring for eventual winners Argentina to beat Colombia here at the FIFA U-20 World Cup.

**Bearings**

Amsterdam Schiphol is 196km (122 miles) from Emmen. From the terminal, a train takes 2hr 15min to reach Emmen (€27), also changing at Zwolle. For the quickest service from Amsterdam Centraal (2hr 10min), you need to change at Almere and Zwolle.

Dutch trains and public transport across the country run on the nationwide travel card, the OV-chipkaart (€7.50). Touch in and touch out at the start and end of your journey.

Emmen train station is north of the mainly pedestrianised town centre a 10min walk away. The stadium is way out east – you’ll need a bus or taxi.

Local buses are run by Qbuzz - use your chipkaart or pay the driver €2.70 on board for a Eurokaartje paper ticket.

Taxi Dorenbos (+31 591 303 535) can be booked online (taxidorenbos.nl).

**Bed**

To stay over near the stadium, the B&B ‘t Oosterveld at Splitting 10 provides loft-like rooms at around €60 a twin.

Also convenient and far closer to the town centre, functional four-star Fletcher Hotel Emmen stands by the stop for the No.12 bus that serves the stadium and the station. For the station itself, the B&B Villa Emmen on Stationstraat is a friendly option.

Central, comfortable Stads-Hotel Boerland on Hoofdstraat offers half- and full-board deals, and doubles at €85.

Multicoloured Hotel Ten Cate provides contemporary lodging on Noordbargerstraat, its restaurant equipped with a big TV screen.

**Beer**

Bars and cafés line central Marktplein/Hoofdstraat and fill the nearby retail hubs – but few alleviate the sense of drinking in a 1970s’ shopping precinct.

One happy exception is De drie Paardjes, a lovely, lived-in pub whose wooden interior is brightened by framed football shirts and TV match action. The other bar with local character is Pierrot on Matissepassage, TV football part of its old-school allure.

Back on the main square, Café de Zwetser puts on DJs at weekends while De Brasserie alongside offers 150 beers by the bottle and has a Belgian beer café on the top floor.

For something more party-oriented, head round to Dalipassage, where DJs spin until late at the Grand Café Karakter. Alongside, the PLEIN Grand Café does twofers beers during happy hour.
FC Emmen

Formed in 1925, professional since 1985, FC Emmen reached the Eredivisie for the first time in 2018. Making their top-flight debut at Den Haag, Emmen won 2-1 but thereafter the campaign proved a predictable struggle, with heavy defeats at Ajax and PSV. In his first post as head coach, Dick Lukkien should be credited with getting Emmen up – then picking up vital points against Eredivisie clubs of considerably higher pedigree.

Emmen are based at De Oude Meerdijk, built in 1977. First named the Meerdijk Stadion, then Univé, then most recently JENS Vesting, the stadium comprises four stands. Home ultras, the Brigata Fanatico, gather in sectors 25 and 26 of the Jan van Beveren Tribune, named after Emmen’s most famous old boy. At the opposite end is the Noordtribune, where there are 400 seats for away fans in sectors 14 and 15 closest to the Oosttribune.

Along the sideline parallel to Stadionplein and car park, the main Hoofttribune was renovated and expanded as part of the 2001 rebuild. With seats in bright red, it contains the press area and skyboxes. The pitch is artificial.

For 2018-19, a capacity 8,300 or near it almost tripled what was the norm for FC Emmen when playing in the Eerste Divisie.

The stadium sits in a business and sport park, surrounded by other pitches. The few notable features are the match-day supporters bar and the club museum, a modest free-of-charge display open during office hours.

Transport
The stadium is on the eastern outskirts of town, too far to walk from the centre or station. Bus No.12 runs from stop H at the station, via the centre, to Stadionplein (every 30min, journey time from station 15min). Hourly bus No.26 does the same journey, calling at fewer stops, in 10min.

Taxi Dorenbos (+31 591 303 535) quotes €15 from station to stadium.

Tickets
While FC Emmen remain a top-flight proposition, filling De Oude Meerdijk to its 8,300 capacity, tickets are at a premium and distributed at two per person online – to members only. Contact info@fcemmen.nl to arrange membership, provided you do not hold a clubcard for any other Dutch team. Sales start a week before any upcoming home game, at 12.30pm on the Thursday. Seats are only available in the Oosttribune (€20, under-20s €16, under-11s €12) and behind the goals in the Jan van Beveren and Noordtribune (€16, €13, €10). Prices rise by 20% for a visit by Ajax, PSV and Feyenoord. There are no sales at the ground.

Shop
On match days, a kiosk operates by the stadium gates, stocking a modest selection of red-and-white souvenirs.

Bars
There are no bars in the business park surrounding the stadium but two restaurants facing each other across nearby Meerdijk offer meaty mains and standard beers: US-style Steakhouse Goodfella’s and standard Dutch De Serre.

Under the Oosttribune, the spacious, TV-equipped match-day Dug-Out bar is run by Emmen supporters and welcomes friendly neutrals, while the Brigata Fanatico ultras have their own little hut behind the Zuidtribune home end.
Groningen

A major northern trading centre, Groningen has recently been a regular destination on the European football circuit.

Flagship club FC Groningen, competitors in the top-flight Eredivisie every season but two since 1980, were Dutch Cup winners in 2015.

Groningen came good in the 1980s, when the Koeman brothers made their debuts. In 2005, the club moved to the new Euroborg Stadium, at a leisure hub south of town, Europapark.

Bearings

Used by Flybe for flights from London-Southend, Groningen has its own airport, 14km [nine miles] south-west of town. Shuttle bus 100 and scheduled service Qbuzz No.9 run to the main train station, Hoofdstation, journey time around 35min. The fare is €3 with a nationwide OV-chipkaart (€7.50), valid on trains and all public transport across Holland. Otherwise, buy a €5 Eurokaartje (valid 90min) from the driver. For shorter journeys in town, there’s a 1hr €2 Eurokaartje. Hoofdstation is a 5-10min walk from the city centre.

From Amsterdam Schiphol 192km (119 miles) away, an hourly train (€26, journey time 2hr 10min) runs direct to Groningen – change at Zwolle if you’ve just missed one. Note that trains run direct from Zwolle to Groningen Europapark beside the stadium – otherwise from Amsterdam, change at Groningen Hoofdstation.

TaxiCentrale Groningen (+31 50 549 7676) quotes €30 from Groningen airport.

Bed

Toerisme Groningen (toerisme.groningen.nl/en) lists local hotels.

Near Groningen station, the Martini opened in 1871 – today it’s a decent three-star with a quality restaurant. In the same group, the Bud Gett Hostel on central Rademarkt offers double and triple rooms as well as dorms, and 24hr reception.

The City Hotel Groningen is a handy mid-range option on Gedempte Kattendiep, with a sauna and roof terrace.

On Oosterstraat, the Hotel Schimmelpenninck Huys has a brasserie and in-house bakery.

The affordable Pension Tivoli on Kleine Hadingestraat is basic but cheap. Reception operates afternoon-only.

At the other end of the scale, the Prinsenhof on Martinkerkhof offers double and triple rooms as well as dorms, and 24hr reception.

On the main square, three-star Hotel de Doelen is, for price and location, ideal, with the Drie Gezusters café downstairs.

On Oude Boteringestraat, O’Ceallaigh features traditional music while Chaplin’s Pub has TV football.

Jut en Jul at Rademarkt 5 is a friendly spot with full focus on football when it matters. Graceful Café de Sleutel is set on the Noorderhaven waterfront.

Beer

Student-swamped Groningen is chock-a-block with bars. Starting on the main square of Grote Markt, De Groote Griet has a huge screen for soccer and a spacious terrace in summer. Alongside are the Drie Gezusters coffeehouse and its busy stablemate, Hoppe.

Behind, there’s another bar hub on Pooelastraat, with lively venues such as Oblomov and the Feest Café Klein.

Foreigner-friendly pubs with TV sport include The Dog’s Bollocks on Oude Boteringestraat, O’Malley’s on Oosterstraat and the Pacific Aussie Pub & BBQ next door. A fire in 2018 gutted much of the Pacific but it should reopen in 2019.

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Jut en Jul at Rademarkt 5 is a friendly spot with full focus on football when it matters. Graceful Café de Sleutel is set on the Noorderhaven waterfront.
The late 1990s saw a growing rivalry with Heerenveen, a Groningen-Friesland clash now referred to as the Derby of the North. Groningen’s reputation for fan trouble contrasted with the family-friendly image of their regional neighbours.

This began to change with the move to the new-build Euroborg in 2006, easier to police. The renamed Hitachi Capital Mobility Stadion has a capacity of 22,550 – attendances are 20,000-plus – with four two-tiered stands ranged close to the pitch. The home end, sectors A/AA-H/HH in the Tonny van Leeuwen Tribune, is named after the goalkeeper who died in a car crash in 1971.

Visiting supporters are allocated the upper tier, sectors OO, PP and QQ, the corner where the Piet Fransen Tribune meets the Koeman Tribune.

Transport
The Euroborg is just across from the purpose-built Groningen Europapark rail station. Trains leave frequently from Groningen main station, 1 stop/3min away, €2.20 with chipkaart.

There are buses too, the No.5 every 10-15min from the main square of Grote Markt (€1.50 with a chipkaart), journey time 20min.

Tickets
You don’t need a ClubCard (€5) for most games, though it does give you priority when tickets are first distributed. General sale starts a few weeks before the match, online (kaartverkoop.fcgroningen.nl) and in person, first at the FanCorner Groningen (Mon-Fri 10am-5.30pm, Sat 10am-5pm) where the main stand meets the Tonny van Leeuwen Tribune.

Purchases are possible with a credit card issued by a non-Dutch bank but the obligatory registration process is in Dutch. You can email the club at info@fcgroningen.nl or call +31 50 5 87 87 87.

You’ll pay €18 for a seat in the corners and behind the goals, €25 down the sidelines and €29 for the best seats in sectors L and M. Prices increase by €4 for games with Heerenveen, Ajax, Feyenoord and PSV.

Shop
All thing green and white are stocked in the FanCorner by the main stand and Tonny van Leeuwen Tribune.

Bars
The Euroborg is part of the Europapark leisure complex out of the city centre – you won’t find any street-corner bar.

Stadium outlets fill FC Groningen Horeca close to the Fan Corner. As long as you’re not an away fan, the most suitable spot is the Hattrick’s Pub, lined with framed black-and-white photos of FC Groningen action. For visiting supporters, there’s little nearby choice. The Fair Play Casino serves soft drinks to over-18s only. Opposite, the outlet at the Plaza Sportiva gym contains the Laifood pan-Asian eatery.

Tickets are later sold at convenience store Primera, such as the one at Nieuwe Ebbingestraat 2 near the NH Hotel de Ville.

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The Hague

In 2015, for the club’s 110th anniversary, the mayor of The Hague opened a museum to ADO Den Haag. Playing in the municipal colours of green and yellow, ADO have long been the city’s main representatives on the football pitch – but all too rarely Holland’s flag-bearers in Europe.

A governmental centre of half a million people, the third largest city in the Netherlands, The Hague has always trailed behind the big three of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Eindhoven in footballing terms.

Home of national champions in ice hockey, rugby and darts, this city of embassies and international tribunals has never laid on a heroes’ welcome for the Dutch champions in peacetime.

In 2007, ADO moved to the high-security Kyocera Stadion, renamed the Cars Jeans in 2017.

Bearings
The Hague shares its airport with Rotterdam. There’s no direct public transport to The Hague, 20km (12.5 miles) away.

Rotterdam city bus No.33 (every 10min) runs to Meijersplein station, where Metro E (every 10min) serves Den Haag Centraal (26min).

For this and all journeys in the Netherlands, you require an OV-chipkaart (€7.50) – about €4.20 will be deducted for the airport-Den Haag journey.

In town, public transport consists of trams and buses, running on the same Chipkaart system. A single ticket is otherwise €3.50 [valid 60min] from the driver, a day pass €6.50.

From the airport, an HTMC taxi (+31 70 390 77 22) local to The Hague charges €45.

From Amsterdam Schiphol airport, a frequent direct train to Den Haag Centraal (€8.30) takes 30min. An HTMC taxi charges €67.

Bed
The Hague VVV Tourist Office (denhaag.com/en/tourist-office) has a hotel database.

For historic character and boutique touches, the Corona on Buitenhof is set in a former Dutch coffeehouse. Near the transport hub of NOI, close to Centraal, Het Spinnewiel is a handy, affordable option.

Hofkwatier, including the Parkhotel, the Novotel Den Haag City Centre and the Paleis.

Beer
The city’s bar hub is in the tangle of streets around Papestraat and Oude Molstraat. Key venue there is the Muziekcafe de Paap, formerly the Het Hof van Berlijn café, where ADO Den Haag were formed in 1905, now a music venue.

Alongside, the wonderful De Libertijn is a convincing candidate for best bar in town. Run by fans of Red Star Belgrade, it has pool tables and TV football.

Nearby, Café ‘t Hoekpandje is another classic spot, a timeless corner bar dating back to 1874. Green-and-yellow ADO scarves (‘The Return of the Legend’) surround old Tizer ads and a dartboard.

Round the corner, flag-decked Ned Kelly’s has been a stalwart pub for decades.

For live sport on big screens and sought-after beers, The Fiddler has its own microbrewery and meat deals. Nearby, the Huppel Pub is a popular spot.

By day, the main square, Grote Markt, is a fair choice for drinks. De Boterwaag is usually lively.
ADO Den Haag

The ADO of ADO Den Haag (adodenhaag.nl) stands for ‘Alles Door Oefenen’, ‘Everything Through Practice’. For decades, though, the flagship club of The Hague has had far too much practice at finishing mid-table.

ADO’s position of tenth in the all-time Dutch league table is a poor reflection on the third biggest city in the Netherlands and its governmental centre.

Aiming to reverse this state of affairs, in 2014 wealthy Chinese entrepreneur Wang Hui bought the club for nearly $9 million. Despite this, ADO remain mid-table.

Moving to the Cars Jeans Stadion in 2007, ADO are cheered on by club mascot Storky. The new-build stadium holds 15,000. Even of such a reasonably modest size, the ground has been nicknamed by fans ‘A Hague coffee’, always poured out to fill half the cup.

Created with security in mind, the Cars Jeans Stadion features Happy Crowd Control, photos taken of each spectator as they enter the ground.

Home fans occupy the Aad Mansveld Tribune, sectors F-J. Away ones are allocated Gastenvak X, accessed via gates 25–26, opposite. Alongside is the family sector, named after one of Mansveld’s team-mates, Lex Schoenmaker.

Neutrals are best located in the sideline Haaglanden Tribune, press and VIPs facing it in the Eretribune.

Transport

There’s no tram stop by the stadium – the nearest one is Forepark. 10min from Den Haag Centraal by tram Nos.3 or 4, or metro line E (every 5-10min, 10min journey time).

At Forepark, turn right at street level as you come out onto a main road, Donau. Walk straight ahead, past various warehouses and Sallo’s restaurant. The road bends right, bringing the stadium into view. Allow 10min.

Alternatively, get the train from Centraal to Den Haag Ypenburg, 1 stop (7min) away. Cross under the motorway to Donau, bear left – the stadium is head, 7min away.

Tickets

The ticket office at the stadium opens Tue-Thur noon-6pm, Fri noon-8pm. Tickets are also distributed at Primera newsagents – there are a couple close to Den Haag Centraal. If buying in person, you’ll need to show ID.

Online prices are €2 cheaper – for most league games, €19 instead of €21 in the Aad Mansveld Tribune, €27.50 instead of €29.50 in the Haaglanden. For children up to 12, it’s €12-€17/€14-€19 respectively. A Club Card (€10) is required for games against Ajax, Feyenoord and Utrecht.

Shop

The Fanshop behind the Aad Mansveld Tribune sells all manner of green-and-yellow gear, including car wing-mirror covers, iPhone cases and greetings cards – new baby ones featuring the club stork, of course.

Museum

Opened in 2015, the ADO Den Haag Museum displays the medals and trophies won in ADO’s title years, 1942 and 1943.

Bars

On the way to the stadium from Forepark, there’s only one venue: Sallo’s. This contemporary brasserie overlooks the business park that provides the weekday clientele here.

At the stadium, a hut behind the Aad Mansveld Tribune opens on match days for home fans. The main outlet is the Brasserie by the Zuiderpark corner (entrance 5-6). Match-day admission is by reservation only – contact events@adodenhaag.nl.
Heerenveen

You would be forgiven for thinking that Heerenveen is the main city of Friesland, a defiantly independent province at the northern tip of the Netherlands.

Its football club, Sportclub Heerenveen, wear the blue-and-white stripes of the provincial flag, and play Frisian anthem ‘De Alde Friezen’ before each home game.

But SC Heerenveen, ‘De Superfriezen’ (‘The Super Frisians’) represent a modest community a third the size of the actual capital, Leeuwarden. While the Friesland patriots have been regular European competitors, local rivals SC Cambuur of Leeuwarden are in the lower-tier Eredivisie.

Heerenveen’s home is the Abe Lenstra Stadion, east of the compact town centre, named after the revered player who led the club to nine northern provincial titles during and after the war.

Bearings
Amsterdam’s Schiphol airport is 138km (86 miles) from Heerenveen. An hourly train runs direct to Heerenveen – another service requires a change of platforms at Zwolle. In each case, journey time is just under 2hrs, a single ticket €24.

Dutch trains and public transport run on the nationwide OV-chipkaart (€7.50) system.

Heerenveen train station is north-west of the centre – the stadium is south-east. To the right of the train station as you exit is the bus terminus, services run by Arriva on the chipkaart system. You can also pay on board, €2 per ride.

The centre is compact and pedestrianised. Taxicentrale Heerenveen (+31 513 203 333) has a fixed rate for Schiphol airport of €149.

Bed
The Heerenveen website (ngoudenplak.nl/English) has a Dutch-language accommodation database.

There are no hotels in the town centre. The closest one to town is the mid-range Hajé, near the junction for the A7 from the Businesspark Friesland-West and the A32 for the stadium. To walk to the stadium about 1.5km away, a canalside path runs by the motorway. The centre of Heerenveen is the same distance.

Way south-east of both town and stadium, the Golden Tulip Tjaard Orangewoud offers a spa, pool and restaurant a taxi journey away. The four-star Fletcher Hotel-Restaurant Heidehof has tennis courts, a bowling alley and a French-inspired restaurant. It’s linked to town and stadium by the hourly No.115 bus that runs until late in the evening.

In Leeuwarden, the mid-range Oranje opposite the station is convenient for the train to Heerenveen (€6) 20min away.

Beer
Bars are clustered where Vleesmarkt meets Oude Koemarkt, inside a bend in the canal. Sport is usually a prominent feature – the sport of speed skating.

Café It Houtsje on Oude Koemarkt displays a shirt signed by Olympic champion Eric Heiden. The once football-oriented Café Paul Kruger next door is now an extension of restaurant De Lachende Koe.

Also here, Café Bleeker gets lively on Saturday nights, as does De Blauwe Kater diagonally opposite. Alongside, Eetcafé de Buurman concentrates on grilled meat and beer. Nearby De Swetser on Vleesmarkt attracts a younger crowd with late-night party fun.

By the canal on Nieuwstraat, Heerenveen’s football fraternity gather at Café de Skoffel, an honest, hard-drinking bar geared towards rock music and darts.
European competitors ten times since 1998, Sportclub Heerenveen (sc-heerenveen.nl/welcome) not only represent the modest community of Heerenveen but Friesland, a province of northern Netherlands with its own flag, language and anthem. All combine for the displays of regional pride whenever Heerenveen – Hearrenfean to locals, or ‘Fean’ for short – stride out onto the pitch at the Abe Lenstra Stadion.

Named after the best player to have come out of Heerenveen – in fact, one of the best to have come out of Holland – the stadium is a modern arena of 26,000 capacity.

Opened in 1994, the ground was expanded two-fold before Heerenveen embarked on six consecutive campaigns in the UEFA Cup/Europa League, five of them lengthy and lucrative. Even in a poor season such as 2015-16, average gates are 23,000-plus – anything less than a near full house is rare.

Heerenveen fans proved themselves sensible enough to occupy a standing section, Vak STA, behind the goal in the home Noordtribune – there’s no fencing either. The sectors around it, 11, 13, 411 and 414, are designated as ‘active seating’, ie many spectators will be on their feet at certain times of the game. This rounded approach to crowd management ensures a lively atmosphere every game – Frisian pride does the rest.

Away fans are allocated the south-east corner of the ground, between the Zuidtribune and sideline Oosttribune, accessed through entrances L and M.

Transport
Abe Lenstra Boulevard has its own stop beside the stadium, served by bus Nos.17, 48 and 115 from the terminus next to Heerenveen train station. It’s a short journey and infrequently served at weekends – you’re as well hopping into a taxi or strolling across town, overall walking time station to stadium 20min. If you’re in town already, it’s 7-10min via Van Kleffenslaan – the continuation of Nieuwstraat, site of fans’ bar de Skoffel.

Tickets
Advance tickets go on sale several weeks before the match, online (ticketing.sc-heerenveen.nl) [Dutch-language only], through the club app on Apple and Android, and in person from the Feansjop club store behind the Westtribune on Abe Lenstra Boulevard.

A club card is not essential but check with supporterservice@sc-heerenveen.nl or phone the club office (Mon-Fri 8.30am-5pm) on +31 513 612 100. Pay on the day can happen but not for bigger games.

The best seat costs €26 in the sideline West- or Osttribune. It’s €23/€21 to sit/stand behind the goal in the Noordtribune but availability is extremely limited at best, and €23 for a seat in the Zuidtribune end. For the visits of Groningen, Ajax, Feyenoord and PSV, prices rise by €6.

Shop
Amid the blue-and-white merchandise in the Feansjop behind the Westtribune, you’ll find Heerenveen umbrellas, frilly pennants and Nordic hats, and a surprising number of books related to all-time best player Abe Lenstra.

Bars
Family-friendly outlets fill the Fryslân Fean Plaza, the largest supporters’ hospitality area in Holland. For a simple beer and snack, the main match-day bar/restaurant by entrance A behind the Westtribune has tables spilling onto the forecourt and tasteful framed images of Abe Lenstra inside.
In a narrow strip of the Netherlands squeezed between Belgium and Germany, Sittard is a typical Limburg town, with a pretty market square and a strange local dialect.

Flagship football club Fortuna Sittard celebrated their 50th anniversary in 2018 with promotion to the top-flight Eredivisie after an absence of nearly two decades. Fans turned Markt square into a field of yellow and green during the celebrations.

The club plays at the Fortuna Sittard Stadion south of town, walking distance from the train station.

**Bearings**

The nearest airport to Sittard is Maastricht Aachen 16km (ten miles) south-west of town. Arriva bus No.30 runs from the terminal to Sittard bus station, by the train station, twice an hour Mon-Fri, hourly at weekends. Journey time is 30min.

Dutch trains and public transport run on the nationwide OV-chipkaart (€7.50) system. Touching in (and out!) with your OV-chipkaart costs far less than buying a ticket from the driver.

Taxi Sittard Geleen (+31 46 26 00 206) should charge around €40-€50 to/from the airport, a 15min journey by car.

**Eindhoven Airport** is 84km (52 miles) away, with a direct train connection every 30-30min (45min journey time, €14 single). From the airport terminus, head straight out to the stop for the No.401 buses to Eindhoven station (every 10-15min, journey time 20min).

From Amsterdam Schiphol, the train requires a change at Utrecht, overall journey time 2hr 10min, €25 single.

**Bed**

In Sittard-Geleen (insittardgeleen.nl) has a detailed hotel database in English.

Opened in 2013 right by Fortuna Sittard Stadion, the Hotel City Resort offers match packages of an overnight stay, two-course dinner, ticket and free use of the extensive sports and spa facilities.

Facing each other over a crossroads between Sittard station and town centre, mid-range De Prins has been in the hospitality trade for 80 years while family-run Oranje Hotel Sittard dates back to the late 1920s and was renovated in 2017.

On the main square, De Limbourg Sittard was restored in 2015 but retains its historic look, its restaurant terrace occupying a large space by St Michael’s Church.

Round the corner, the Hotel Merici features contemporary four-star rooms with flat-screen LCD TVs and rain showers filling a former monastery. In the same price bracket, historic Casa Mia was converted into a B&B in 2017.

Further round the square, Tapperie De Gats and Het Hophuys are also ale specialists. Just behind on Limbrichterstraat, De Kup is another classic old bar woven into Sittard’s urban fabric. Also close to the square, Café `T Sjelterhoes dates back over a century and puts up a screen for big games.

**Beer**

Bars and restaurants line the main square, Markt. The most prominent is Café Schtad Zitterd, a much-loved local landmark. Alongside, De Buren has a big screen for matches. Across the square, Café de Hollande also shows games and offers many beers on tap and by the bottle.

In Sittard-Geleen (insittardgeleen.nl) has a detailed hotel database in English.
Fortuna Sittard

Celebrating the club’s 50th anniversary by gaining promotion to the top-tier Eredivisie in 2018, Fortuna Sittard (fortunasittard.nl) divided their first five decades between the first and second flights.

During that time, Sittard reached two cup finals, losing both but gaining access to Europe, only to be tonked by Everton on their way to the Cup-Winners’ Cup win in 1985.

The Fortuna Sittard Stadion features a hotel alongside, with an ALDI supermarket within.

Capacity is 12,500, fine when average gates were under 2,000 in the Eredivisie. Even in the promotion season of 2017-18, it was under 5,000. Now, with Ajax, Feyenoord and nearest rivals Venlo and PSV coming to town, tickets are like hen’s teeth.

Home fans occupy the north goal, Fernando Ricksen Side. Visiting supporters are allocated a section of the Zuidertribune nearest the main stand. This allows for easier policing along Madridstraat (surrounding streets are named after major European football cities, Milan, Madrid, Lisbon and... Zürich).

The main stand, across from the hotel, is lined with skyboxes. Behind are the club shop and supporters’ bar, and a bust of cult hero Fernando Ricksen with his forearms clenched in celebration. The other sideline stand is divided into Vak C-E.

Transport

Buses are hardly worth the bother. From Perron D on the concourse alongside the Sittard train station, bus No.32 runs every 25-30min Mon-Sat, hourly Sun to Parijsboulevard/Stadion two stops away. You may as well either walk or take a taxi. Head right out of Sittard station towards the railway bridge, cross it and keep going in the same direction, ideally up Europaboulevard. A taxi should cost around €8-€9. Coming back from the stadium, it may be an idea to ask the adjoining hotel to call a cab for you – it’s €12 into town.

Tickets

With most home games in 2018-19 either sold out or close to it, availability will be a real issue while Fortuna are in the top flight.

Online sales first require Dutch-only registration, although people living outside the Netherlands are not exempt.

If there are any tickets left, the offices at the stadium open 1hr before kick-off. These hours are sometimes extended. The other option is ticket resales agency viagogo.

For details on availability and sales, email the club at tickets@fortunasittard.nl.

The best seats are in Vak A and D either side of the halfway line, €21 or €29.50 for premium ‘Topduels’. Everywhere else, it’s €17.50/€25, plus discounts. These are all online prices – it’s €2 extra per ticket when bought in person.

Shop

The Fanshop usually only operates on match days, with occasional Friday opening if Saturday demand will be heavy.

Bars

Many gather at the Restaurant Medals at the City Resort Hotel behind the main stand. On offer are Bavaria and Swinkels beer on draught, plus mixed meat platters and filling main dishes.

Behind the main stand, by the Fernando Ricksen statue, the supporters’ match-day bar 10 Beers And A Hattrick would welcome neutrals but not away fans. DJs spin loud anthems for pre- and post-match parties.
Between Eindhoven and Rotterdam, Tilburg lacks the illustrious football heritage of either, the main square of this former textile hub filling with supporters whenever flagship club Willem II gain promotion or enjoy a cup run.

Nearest local rivals NAC Breda, with whom Willem II contest the Brabant derby, dismiss the club as 'Stillem II' ('Silent II').

Named after the Dutch monarch who fought alongside Wellington at Waterloo, Willem II, the Tricolores, sport the patriotic red, white and blue of the Dutch flag. Tilburg was where Willem II, the king, had his headquarters during the Belgian Revolution of 1830 – the modern-day border is now almost walking distance from the town, and closer to the Koning Willem II Stadion that stands on the town’s southern outskirts.

Bearings
Eindhoven is the nearest airport to Tilburg, 31km (19 miles) away.

Trains and local transport run on the Dutch OV-chipkaart (€7.50) system – top up as you go.

To the right as you exit the airport terminal, bus Nos.400 and 401 (€3.50, €2.20 with an OV-chipkaart) run to Eindhoven station 20-25min away, where a half-hourly train takes 20-30min to reach Tilburg (€7).

From Amsterdam Schiphol airport, for Tilburg change trains at Breda or Den Bosch (’s Hertogenbosch), overall journey time 1hr 30min, €19 single.

Tilburg station is just north of the town centre a short walk away. The stadium is on the southern outskirts and you’ll need a bus or taxi. Local buses are run by Arriva on the OV-chipkaart system. A single journey (nikaart) is otherwise €3.70, a day ticket (dalurendagkaart) €6. Taxi Tilburg (+31 13 777 7777) quotes €69 from Eindhoven airport.

Bed
Tourist Office VVV Tilburg has no English-language hotel information.

The nearest hotel to the stadium is a standard ibis just off the motorway but you’re far from town. Further along the south ring road at Kempenbaan 2, the Bastion Tilburg is comfortable but still out of the centre.

In town, the two hotels overlooking the main square of Heuvel are the Mercure Tilburg Centrum and, alongside, the independent City Hotel Tilburg, with a traditional bar.

By the station, Het Wapen von Tilburg is a hostel-like, old-school inn whose seven rooms, five of them twin, have shared bathrooms.

Beer
Tilburg was built for a bar-crawl – in fact, you’ll see ‘Kroegentocht’ displayed inside some venues in the pub hubs of Heuvel and nearby Piusplein, indicating the place is ticked off as part of a beer traipse.

On terrace-lined Heuvel, Stofel is good for seasonal beers. Alongside, the Café-Bar Heuvel 15 puts the accent on wine, while late-night Le Clochard is party-focused. Look out for ‘3rd Half’ happy hour on Saturday evenings, with seats on the heated terrace at a premium.

Over on Paleisring, Ruby’s goes big on TV sport. On nearby Oude Markt, the Café Anvers offers a choice of 100 mainly but not exclusively Belgian beers, ten on draught.

The stately Stadscafé Meesters stands on the same narrow street, Monumentstraat, as the Café Marinus, where Willem II were formed in 1896.
Willem II

Named after the Dutch leader at Waterloo later headquartered here, Willem II (willem-ii.nl/Willem-II) have rarely performed royal heroics on the football field. Three times champions of Holland, once during World War I, twice in the 1950s, the flagship club of Tilburg in North Brabant has been bouncing between top and second tier for most of the modern era.

The club has long had a policy of showcasing talent then selling on to bigger clubs. Later Arsenal star Marc Overmars played a season in Tilburg before joining Ajax, the revenue going towards the modernisation of the Koning Willem II Stadion.

The site, south of town towards the Belgian border, has seen football action for almost a century. First a municipal sports park, it welcomed Willem II in 1923. A long-mooted rebuild began in 1992 with the construction of the present-day stadium.

Capacity is an all-seated 14,500. Home fans occupy sectors A-C behind the Kingside goal, filled with season-ticket holders. Away fans are allocated sector (Vak) D, segregated but right next to the home end. For certain high-risk games, against NAC Breda in particular, there is an agreement not to allow away fans in.

Transport
From perron 8 at Tilburg station, Arriva bus No.8 (destination Het Laar/ Laarstraat; Mon-Sat every 20min, Sat eve/Sun every 30min) takes 10min/8 stops to reach Laarstraat. From the bus stop, keep walking in the same direction for 200 yards along the main road of Oude Goirlese Weg – you’ll see the stadium diagonally opposite at the main junction with Ringbaan Zuid.

Regional De Lijn bus No.450 (direction Turnhout in Belgium) runs hourly from Tilburg station (perron B), arriving right by the ground at the Stadion stop itself.

Tickets
A club card generally isn’t required for ticket purchase at Willem II. For high-risk fixtures, though, such as the derby with NAC Breda, sales are limited to registered supporters at two per person.

Tickets are sold at the stadium reception office (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm), transactions in cash or by debit card only. There are also print-at-home e-ticket sales at voetbal.iticketsro.com/willem_II/.

For low-risk games, there are also sales on the day from 90min before kick-off, by cash or debit card.

For all enquiries, contact +31 13 549 0590 or email ticketing@willem-ii.nl.

The cheapest seats are behind the south goal, sectors L and N, €22, M being €25. The home north end opposite is season-ticket holders only. Opposite the main stand, the Lange zijde, prices are €27.50 and it’s €35 in the main Eretribune.

Games with Ajax, Feyenoord, PSV and NAC Breda are all €5 extra (under-12s €2.50) and require registration.

Shop
To the left of the main entrance, the Willem II Fanshop is a large store with a black-and-white mural of the club’s title-winning team of the 1950s and club mascot Kingo in various forms.

Bars
There are no bars around the ground. In the main building, the large match-day supporters’ bar, the Jupilercafé D’n Beitel, opens from 2hrs before kick-off and also to screen Willem II away games.
Utrecht

Representing the historic destination of Utrecht, second only to Amsterdam during Holland’s Golden Age, flagship club FC Utrecht are a fairly modern construct.

The fourth largest city in the Netherlands, this railway hub lagged behind Arnhem and Deventer where football was concerned. Before a single Dutch league was created in 1954, amateur clubs from Utrecht barely figured in the higher regional division, let alone the national playoffs.

To redress this imbalance, the most prominent local sides combined to create FC Utrecht in 1970.

With this new identity came an increase in hooliganism. The Galgenwaard was rebuilt with security in mind in 1982. Since then, FC Utrecht have won three Dutch Cups and competed regularly in Europe, hosting Liverpool and Celtic at their compact ground south-east of the city centre, surrounded by outlets, offices and a petrol station.

A nationwide OV-chipkaart (€7.50) is valid on trains and all public transport across Holland.

In Utrecht, local trams and buses are run by U-OV, €6.20 for day pass, €2.90/€4.50 for a single ticket, from machines by platforms. Using the OV-chipkaart is much cheaper.

Utrecht station is just west of the city centre – the stadium is south-east, and too far to walk – trams leave from the CS Jaarbeurszijde stop next to the station.

Taxi Utrecht 24 (+31 30 260 7000) accepts credit cards and has a flat rate of €47 to Schiphol.

Bed
Visit Utrecht has an excellent English-language hotel database.

The nearest lodging to the Galgenwaard, ’t Singelhuis at Tolsteegsingel 44, is a high-end B&B with one room and one apartment – and rates to match. Just over the water, La Perle on Twijnstraat is of similar style and price, over €100/double. On the same stretch, B&B Hartje is beautifully located by the canal.

At the stadium end of the city centre, the chic Court Hotel on Korte Nieuwstraat has a hefty price tag.

Behind the City Theatre, the wallet-friendly Hostel/B&B Utrecht City Center provides dorm lodging and private singles/doubles. The affordable Apollo Utrecht City Centre at Vredenburg 14 is a short walk from the train station. Also central, the Hotel NH Centre

Utrecht at Janskerkhof offers late Sunday check-outs and bike rental in the Old Town.

Beer
There are bars all over the city centre, more bohemian ones at the southern end near the university.

Canal-facing Kafe België on Oudegracht is one of the better choices, big on football and bigger on Belgian beers. Laid-back Ledig Erf at Tolsteegbrug stages beer festivals on its large terrace.

Back on Oudegracht, grand Winkel van Sinkel is a local landmark. Pub-like Florin on Nobelstraat hosts quiz nights and stand-up comedy – Mick O’Connells on Jansdam has multiple big-screen sport and pub grub.

Another venue for football-watching is the ten-screen Pool Café on Ganzenmarkt, with 12 full-size billiard tables. For an honest Dutch bar, Café de Stadsgenoot sits on Breedstraat north of the historic centre.
Three-time Dutch Cup winners and regular European competitors, FC Utrecht (fcutrecht.nl) haven’t dropped out of Holland’s top flight since their formation in 1970. Always behind the Big Three of Ajax, PSV and Feyenoord – as typified by the sale of a young Dirk Kuyt in 2003 – Utrecht represent the fourth biggest city in the Netherlands, never a prominent football hub in the amateur era.

With the backing of the local council and Dutch FA, Utrecht were created from three long-established local teams. Settling on a red-and-white kit – the colours of the city’s coat-of-arms – the new club adopted the stadium, Galgenwaard, of its most successful predecessor, DOS.

Renowned coach Dick Advocaat of Zenit, Rangers and PSV fame has had an immediate effect since arriving in September 2018, though he’ll be looking for more goals if direct European qualification is to be achieved.

From oval velodrome to hooligan-proof rectangular football ground to 21st-century all-seater, the Galgenwaard has moved with the times in quite dramatic fashion. Today it has four stands close to the pitch, office blocks at each corner, and business around the exterior.

Current capacity is 23,750. The home Bunnikside occupies one end. Away fans are allocated sectors V and W of the Cityside (west) end nearest the Zuidzijde south sideline, whose U sector can also be used for visiting supporters.

**Transport**
On match days, a shuttle bus leaves CS Jaarbeurszijde stop on the Zuid side of the Utrecht Centraal 90min before kick-off, returning for up to 1hr after the final whistle. This service is direct but far busier than regular public transport. It requires a €2 token, sold at the pick-up points.

Also from CS Jaarbeurszijde, city bus No.41 takes 10min to reach Stadion Galgenwaard beside the stadium, leaving Perron D5 every 15min daily, running until after 11pm.

**Tickets**
More than half the home games during the domestic season require a Clubkaart (fcutrecht.nl/clubkaart), issued free via a Dutch-only application form. Applicants may not hold membership for any other Dutch club.

Tickets are distributed three weeks before each match through the Fanshop by the main entrance and online. For less attractive fixtures, admission can be bought on the day with a €1 surcharge.

**Bars**
There are no bars near the ground, only outlets within the stadium building, with varying degrees of suitability pre- or post-match. If you need Japanese cuisine, Sushi Today can provide. Number Four is hired out according to occasion while stylish bar/restaurant DITO behind the Zuidtribune might put on post-match DJs to encourage fans to linger.
**Venlo**

Walking distance from the German border in the far southern province of Limburg, Venlo is home to one of the most venerable clubs in the Netherlands.

Founded in 1903, VVV-Venlo had their heyday in the 1950s when two of the most revered names of the pre-Cruyff era, Faas Wilkes and Venlo-born Jan Klaassens, ran out for The Good Old.

Klaassens was Venlo through and through. His father, Sjraar, ran a café on Venlo’s main street, Parade, which later incorporated the cigar shop that VVV bestowed upon Klaassens in gratitude once he retired. Twenty years after his death in 1983, the club transformed it into a one-player museum, filled with memorabilia.

Dutch trains and public transport run on the nationwide OV-chipkaart (€7.50) system. Touching in with your OV-chipkaart to Eindhoven station will cost just over €2, a loose ticket from the machine by the stop is €3.50.

**Beer**

Bars line the main street of Parade and sidestreets leading off it. At No.69, Shannon’s Irish Pub features live music, live TV sport and late opening hours at weekends. Next door, alongside the Jan Klaassens Museum, the Café Vader Klaassens was once run by the father of the famous VVV player, but has since been given over to the rock fraternity. Keef not Klaassens is given a prominent spot on the wall.

**Bed**

Venlo Tourist Information (lustforlimburg.com) has a hotel database.

Immediately opposite the station, the Hotel Wilhelmina is a cosy three-star with a decent restaurant. Nearby, in the same family, the Hotel American has 18 rooms and a brasserie. Also here, you’ll find the more down-to-earth cheapie, the Stationshotel.

Further into town, right on Parade, the Hotel Puur is trendier and more contemporary.

**Bearings**

A number of airports surround Venlo. Perhaps the most convenient is Eindhoven, 71km (44 miles) away, with a direct train connection every 30min (40min journey time, €10 single). From the airport terminus, head straight out to the stop for the Nos.400/401 buses to Eindhoven station (every 10-15min, journey time 20min).

**Station De Koel** was built to replace it, where VVV have been based since 1972.

From Amsterdam Schiphol, a direct train runs every 30min, €24, journey time 2hr 10min. From Amsterdam Centraal, you need to change at Utrecht or Roermond.

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Immediately opposite the station, the Hotel Wilhelmina is a cozy three-star with a decent restaurant. Nearby, in the same family, the Hotel American has 18 rooms and a brasserie. Also here, you’ll find the more down-to-earth cheapie, the Station Hotel.

Further into town, right on Parade, the Hotel Puur is trendier and more contemporary.

**Beer**

Bars line the main street of Parade and sidestreets leading off it. At No.69, Shannon’s Irish Pub features live music, live TV sport and late opening hours at weekends. Next door, alongside the Jan Klaassens Museum, the Café Vader Klaassens was once run by the father of the famous VVV player, but has since been given over to the rock fraternity. Keef not Klaassens is given a prominent spot on the wall.

Opposite, the Café Mundo weekend nightspot shows games at weekends.

**Bearings**

A number of airports surround Venlo. Perhaps the most convenient is Eindhoven, 71km (44 miles) away, with a direct train connection every 30min (40min journey time, €10 single). From the airport terminus, head straight out to the stop for the Nos.400/401 buses to Eindhoven station (every 10-15min, journey time 20min).

From Amsterdam Schiphol, a direct train runs every 30min, €24, journey time 2hr 10min. From Amsterdam Centraal, you need to change at Utrecht or Roermond.

**Bed**

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Top-flight competitors VVV-Venlo (vvv-venlo.nl) have sniffed at the Dutch title only once, in 1961. The Good Old finished third, behind a 100-goal Feyenoord machine powered by former Venlo midfield legend Jan Klaassens. A Klaassens museum was later created in the cigar shop VVV gifted him, and a statue stands outside De Koel, the club’s modest ground.

Today the 8,000-capacity Seacon Stadion – De Koel is named after its sponsors.

In Holland, this quaint ground is known for the long staircase used by players to run down onto the pitch. As of 2013, this pitch is artificial turf.

In 2017, the club assumed ownership of the stadium, outgoing club chairman Hai Berden instigating a €12.5-million rebuild of De Koel starting in 2018. The result will be an all-covered stadium of 12,000 capacity.

De Koel currently consists of five standing sections in the Hai Berden-tribune, two standing sections (Gastenvak) for away fans in the top corner of the Westtribune behind the opposite goal, with open seating in front and roofed alongside. Open seating also lines the main Nordtribune, with covered seats in the business section behind. Opposite, the seated Zuidtribune is roofed.

The ticket office and club shop are at the main entrance.

**Transport**

The stadium is a 15min walk down Kaldenkerkerweg from Venlo train station, in the opposite direction to town. From Perron C on the concourse by the station, bus No.2 runs every 30min (every hr Sun) seven stops to Spechtweg, just off the main road to the stadium 2min away.

**Tickets**

Tickets become available two weeks before the match, first online, by creating an account at Dutch-only Mijn VVV-Venlo (mijn.vvv-venlo.nl), then in person at the FanCentre (Mon–Fri 8.30am–12.45pm, 1.30pm–5pm) by the entrance to the stadium on Kaldenkerkerweg. A €2.50 levy is charged for over-the-counter sales.

For most games, a ClubCard is not required – the visits of Ajax, PSV and Feyenoord is a prerequisite. The ClubCard is valid for five years and is issued free.

A match-day ticket outlet also operates at the main entrance from 90 minutes before kick-off – check with the club ticketing@vvv-venlo.nl about availability and any ClubCard requirement. Tickets cannot be arranged by email, however.

The cheapest admission (€22.50, under-18s €15, under-14s €10) is standing in the Hai Berden-tribune. The cheapest seats are in the open Westtribune and Nordtribune at €20 each. Covered seating in the Westtribune is €28.

It’s €33 to sit in the sectors (Z1–Z2, Z6–Z7) of the sideline Zuidtribune nearest the goals, €38 over the halfway line (Z3–Z5).

For the visits of Ajax, Feyenoord and PSV, a €10 levy is charged, and you’ll have to arrange a ClubCard.

**Shop**

The club shop at the FanCentre stocks yellow-and-black first kits, the red change strip, badges, scarves and keyrings.

**Bars**

Just past the stadium on Kaldenkerkerweg, De Kraal is a century-old rustic restaurant that once served VVV’s first ground of the same name.

At De Koel, the Lindeboom VoetbalCafé behind the main stand is a match-day bar for home fans and neutrals, with music laid on.
Zwolle

The story of football in Zwolle, capital of Overijssel province in north-central Netherlands, is one of merger, business and progress. Flagship club PEC Zwolle hide a whole patchwork of history behind their simple, three-letter acronym.

In 1910, at the Hotel Koenders on focal Grote Markt, two local clubs agreed to combine forces: P for Prins Hendrik, E for Ende Desespereert Nimmer and C for Combinatie.

In 1935, PEC moved into the municipal Gemeentelijk Sportpark, later referred to as Oosterenkstadion after the surrounding area. The club developed a rivalry with Go Ahead Eagles of Deventer, the so-called IJsselderby, and have been a top-flight fixture since 2012. In 2014, they won the Dutch Cup. Until it was knocked down in 2007, the Oosterenkstadion was also the base for Holland’s women’s football team. Opened in 2009, the new stadium is now the MAC3PARK. It sits in a complex comprising training pitches, a hotel, retail outlets and, controversially, a casino.

Bearings

Amsterdam Schiphol is 121km (75 miles) from Zwolle. From the terminal, a half-hourly train runs direct to Zwolle (€21). Journey time is 1hr 10min. Dutch trains and public transport across the country run on the nationwide travel card, the OV-chipkaart (€7.50). Touch in and touch out at the start and end of your journey.

Zwolle station is south-west of the city’s historic centre a short walk away. PEC’s stadium is a fair trek east of town. Local buses, run by Regio IJsselmond, also run on the chipkaart system. A ticket is otherwise €2.30 from the driver.

Based near the station, Taxi Zwolle (+31 38 337 7297) can run you to the stadium for around €16.

Bed

Zwolle Tourist Information (zwolle.nl) has a simple but Dutch-only hotel database.

Right beside the MAC3PARK Stadion, the four-star Hotel Lumen is part of the 2007-09 stadium rebuild. On match days, you can hire one of the skyboxes or reserve a table at the upscale Bluefinger Lounge restaurant.

By the station, stately Pillows Grand Hotel Ter Borch underwent a major redesign in 2017. Alongside, the Bilderberg Grand Hotel Wientjes is another contemporary makeover of a landmark building, in this case the former mayor’s residence.

In the city centre on Rode Torenplein, the more modest Hanze Hotel Zwolle is set on the foundations of the medieval gateway into town. Rates are around €100-€110 without breakfast.

For a reliable mainstream chain, near the historic centre but and walking distance to the stadium, the Campanile on Schuttevaerkaade comprises 55 doubles, four singles and a restaurant where a buffet breakfast is served.

Beer

Bars dot the historic centre, with drinking and dining options on Melkmarkt. There the Belgische Keizer is one – its Zaal De Staminée has a pull-down screen. Nearby, the homely De Vier Jaargetijden offers sought-after Yakima Red on draught and Brewdog by the bottle.

Voorstraat attracts younger drinkers, who gather at student-only, multi-bar Het Vliegende Paard. The one pub in town is Sally O’Briens on Bethlehemskerkplein, great for big-screen TV football – and with 11 beers on draught.

HOLLAND 2018-19 Zwolle

www.liberoguide.com/zwolle
PEC Zwolle

Dutch Cup winners in 2014, PEC Zwolle (peczwolle.nl) are still feeling the loss of coach Ron Jans, who bowed out in 2017 after taking his home-town club to Europe.

As a striker in the late 1970s, Jans also spearheaded Zwolle’s previous purple patch.

Apart from these two brief spells, Zwolle were mainly a second-tier outfit, representing a trading town in Overijssel.

The MAC3PARK Stadion (‘Mac Drie Park Stadion’) stands on the site of the former Oosterenkstadion, built in 1934. It was here, 50 years later, that Johan Cruyff played his last official match, and the main stand was later named after him. Following the 2007 rebuild, this became the Henk Timmer Tribune, a fans’ poll also deciding on the Fred Patrick Tribune opposite and the Klaas Drost Tribune behind the south goal. Away fans are allocated the three sectors nearest the Fred Patrick Tribune.

The home north end was more named by a public outcry when Marten Eibrink, who had twice saved Zwolle from ruin, had not been among the suggested stand names. The PEC crew sit in upper sectors 1-5, and stand in sectors 2-4.

Expanded to 14,000 capacity in 2018, the MAC3PARK Stadion is perhaps the only one in Europe with an area specifically for blind supporters. The Blindentribune in sector 30 allows the sightless, and their companion (guide dogs are not encouraged) to enjoy the game thanks to a headset and warm drinks during the game.

Transport
Several buses serve the stadium north-east of the town centre. The No.3 leaves from Stand A3 outside the station, reaching ‘Stadion’ nine stops away in under 15min. The No.8 sets off from Stand B. Bus line 1 from Stand A2 goes as far as Sophia Hoofdingang, by the hospital, a short walk to the south stand.

Tickets
With capacity at 14,000 and average gate of 13,000-plus, few tickets are sold on the day. In addition, most home games are only open to holders of a ClubCard (€7.50, four-year validity) – applicants have to register online in Dutch and may not be a member of another club.

Advance purchases are distributed via the Fanshop and online. Most areas of the ground, apart from the main Henk Timmer Tribune, will have some kind of availability a few weeks ahead of time.

To sit or stand behind the home north goal is €18, to sit in the opposite Klaas Drost Tribune, €18–€22. Along the sideline Fred Patrick Tribune, it’s €18–€31.50. For top games against Ajax, PSV and Feyenoord, prices rise by €5–€6.

Shop
Behind the main stand on Ceintuurbaan, the PEC Zwolle Fanshop proffers home shirts of blue-and-white hoops, away tops in white and third-choice in black.

Bars
Behind the main stand, the Bluefinger Restaurant in the Lumen Hotel offers pre-match meals with wine at around €50/head. The good news is there’s not only a Bluefinger Lounge bar, but it’s open 24 hours a day. Sensible non-hotel residents are welcome to use it.

Home fans gather in the Jupiler Supporterscafe behind the home north end.