

Cycling in the Netherlands

adapted from **the Bike Blog by Laura Laker**

- 1 Who builds a bicycle road on a 32km-long sea dyke? A seemingly infinite straight line of smooth tarmac on the Afsluitdijk, bordered on both sides by sea? The Dutch, that's who, and I'm grateful for it.
- 2 As someone who loves cycling despite the conditions on UK roads, I wanted to see what it was like cycling in a country where cycling is a normal way to travel. None of your hodgepodge of paint that prioritises cars and disappears at junctions that you see in the UK: this is cycling taken seriously. Separate, smooth, well-maintained bicycle roads cross the country, and are often more direct than motor traffic routes. They have their own junctions, with sign posts, where you give way only to other cyclists, and have to negotiate a few runners and walkers. When a bike road meets a car road there are dedicated bike crossing points, often where those in motor vehicles give way to bikes.
- 3 Because of this decent infrastructure there is a remarkable variety of people cycling, of all ages and from all walks of life. There are old couples riding side by side on e-bikes on long bicycle roads between country towns. There are people in normal clothes riding in astonishing numbers in the cities at rush hour. There are parents with kids, sometimes one on the front, one on the back, even kids standing on pannier racks and holding nonchalantly on to the cycling adult's shoulders. There are children cycling unaccompanied to and from school, and cycling and playing in the streets, even in Amsterdam.



- 4 People can still be cranky here, of course, and city roads, even bike lanes, can be hectic. People still do daft things on bikes, behind the wheels of vehicles and on foot because, well, people are people, and prone to taking risks, having bad moods and lapses in concentration. The difference is there's room for error here, perhaps one reason why people are more forgiving of mistakes.
- 5 Another important factor contributing towards the safety enjoyed by Dutch cyclists, is the country's strict liability laws – in a collision between a faster, larger vehicle and a slower, more vulnerable one, the former is found liable by default, unless its driver can prove otherwise. Those on foot are protected from cyclists and both are protected from motor vehicles. You can sense the respect drivers of motor vehicles give cyclists, and in a month I experienced none of the near misses, or aggressive driving that are almost a daily occurrence in London.
- 6 Where British residential streets, including mine, are too often a race track for rat runners, Dutch streets are quiet, clean and peaceful – an extension of people's homes, not simply thoroughfares for motor traffic. It was a revelation to me just how great residential streets can be and how easily, with a bit of investment, our streets could become better places for everyone.

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