

Dealing with the Dutch

Never ask someone from Maastricht to subtitle what he says. It's an old joke when locals speak their dialect. Limburgers are rightly proud of their official regional dialect and all its local variations, differing even from town to town. But don't worry, Dutch is understood and spoken all over the area and the locals are remarkably multilingual. Selbstverständlich pas de problem, as they say.

This page will introduce you to some of the more specific habits of the Dutch.

Every country has its own customs, and the Netherlands is no different in this respect. The Netherlands has the reputation of being a very tolerant and flexible country. But that doesn't mean the Dutch don't like to follow rules and procedures: they greatly appreciate correct behaviour, both in their private lives and in business. Here are a just few points to watch.

Business dinners

Business dinners often take place in a restaurant. Business will be high on the agenda. Other topics of conversation may be more informal and even personal. The Dutch con-

sider it perfectly normal to discuss business immediately and frankly.

Promotional gifts

The Dutch don't normally exchange promotional gifts during lunch or dinner. However, if this is done at the table, the present is unwrapped straightaway. Don't spend more than about 1 50 on any gift or it may be regarded as a bribe!

Upfront and honest

The Dutch are very businesslike and upfront. They may openly disagree with you, and they expect you to tell them if you disagree with them. 'Yes' to a Dutch person means 'yes'. They're not familiar with the idea of saying 'yes' out of politeness, and can get very upset if you seem to change your mind later.

Complaining and teasing

The Dutch love to complain, particularly about the weather: it's always too hot, too cold or too wet. Many conversations, including in business, start with a discussion of the weather. The Dutch also enjoy teasing each other, though it is usually in good fun. They'll like it if you join in these teasing exchanges, as long as remarks don't become hurtful or sexist.