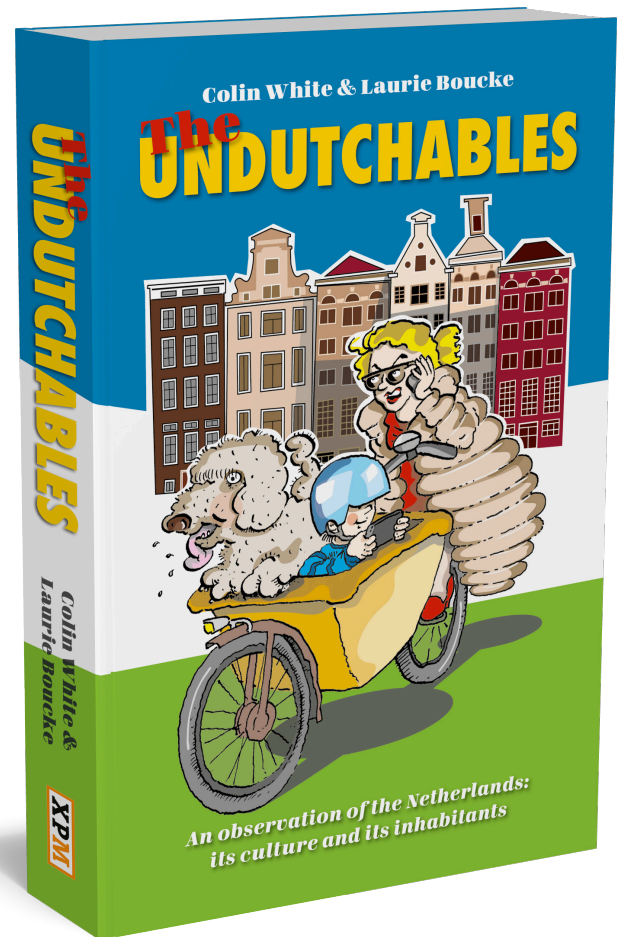


# The Undutchables:

an observation of the Netherlands, its culture and inhabitants

## A survival kit for expats

Now in its 9<sup>th</sup> edition, *The Undutchables: an observation of the Netherlands, its culture and its inhabitants* was first published back in 1989, and since then it has effortlessly claimed its spot as a bestseller that captures the essence of the contemporary Dutch lifestyle with a delightful dash of humor.



Co-authored by Colin White and Laurie Boucke, combining 22 years in the Netherlands, at the time of the first edition, this book introduced the term *Undutchables* subsequently inspiring an employment agency, a New Zealand radio program, sports teams, nightclubs, rock bands and merchandising group.

This linguistic game, reminiscent of the *Untouchables*, serves as a brilliant backdrop for the exploration of Dutch culture through the lens of expatriates. Within its chapters, the book shines a light on the quirks and idiosyncrasies of Dutch culture, picturing anecdotes and observations of the Dutch way of life, work culture, social interactions, architecture, and the occasional customs that may lead to comical misunderstandings between Dutch and foreigners. It illustrates vividly the stereotypes and peculiar traits that anyone happening to reside in the Netherlands

can identify with and share a hearty laugh over. Indeed, humour becomes the reading key to approach this book, where wit and affection are the authors' lenses to explore the cultural differences.

Johannes van Dam, the book's very first reviewer, noted that through "*The Undutchables*" he had his first really good look at that side of the Dutch that is hidden from themselves by themselves. A very exact yet funny way discloses all the secrets about us that we really would have preferred to keep to ourselves."<sup>1</sup> Van Dam's enthusiastic endorsement blasted the book's popularity in the Netherlands.

In conclusion, "*The Undutchables*" is a recommended read and an indispensable pal for any expatriate striving to embrace life in the Netherlands. This book »

<sup>1</sup> Het Parool, 1989

BY GIULIA  
QUARESIMA

## Book Review | The Undutchables

is an enlightening guide, blending entertainment and insights over the understanding and appreciation for this unique culture.

### Here some extracts:

#### Customs

Cloggies firmly believe their manners are impeccable, but to an aware foreigner they are as rare as a dike-mender's drill... or so it seems. If you feel you are trapped in Rudeland, you are not alone. The sharp tongue and lack of finesse are hard for many to stomach, but to the Dutch these are the hallmark of honesty and virtue since "you always know where you stand". The fact that we don't all want to know exactly where we are standing, sitting or lying is immaterial. (page 116)

#### Language

The Dutch language, in its written form, looks like someone sat on a typewriter (The Dutch Courier, Australia).

To become an accepted member of Dutch society, we recommend

you practice the following sign language, preferably in private:

- Place hand parallel to ear, three inches from ear. Oscillate hand in forward/aft direction at medium speed. This means delicious (lekker)
- Make a double thumbs-up gesture with lateral

pumping action from the elbows, whilst religiously chanting OMSTERDOM. This means, I like where I live.

- Spread fingers, palms uppermost, and extend forearms. Tilt head to one side as you emit a sound not unlike a sick cow: jaaaa. This means, I don't really believe you.

See chapter 4 – Driving, for special sign languages when driving (page 118)

#### Bikes

They are called fiets, probably because that's what power them. [...] Bicycles are used in many roles: as personal limousine, good vehicle, freight wagon and taxi, thanks mainly to a twisted tubular steel accessory – the carrier. The carrier carries crates, kids, cats and canines alike. In the absence of these household items, it provides a rear seat for one or more passengers (traditionally the girlfriend, boyfriend, wife, husband, friend, house plant – or any combination of these)

[...] your secret weapon to build confidence is mounted on the handlebars – it's that rusty round audio alarm called fietsbel. Here is how to use it:

- Select your target of opportunity (aka pedestrian)
- Stealthy approach the pedestrian (preferably from the rear) and maintain a collision course
- Two seconds from impact, sound alarm device with one "ching-ching". Any more than a single ching-ching will reveal you true cycling status.
- The tricky part: immediately swerve to the left or to the right to avoid the impending collision. Note that it will take a few practice runs before you can accurately predict the evasive action that the target will take.
- Fire a salvo of verbal insults into the air, then select your next target. Repeat procedure. (pages 137-141)

#### A brand-new chapter - Making Ends Meet

A new addition to the 9th edition is the chapter related to work and welfare in the Netherlands. From the hiring process, to individual rights, to benefits and insurance, this chapter gives an informative and funny insight on the country's job culture. And remember, in the Netherlands, Work revolves around holiday (page 185) <<

