**Chapter 1: Dordrecht 800 years of history**

In 1220, Count William I of Holland granted Dordrecht its city privileges. That same year, he also gave away Dordrecht as a wedding gift. To his new wife, Maria of Leuven. An extraordinary and beautiful gift. But then again, Mary was not just any woman. Mary of Brabant, as she was actually called, was the most prominent noblewoman in Europe prior to her marriage to William I. She was married to the Welf Emperor Otto IV. After his death, she continued to use the title of Holy Roman Empress.

While her marriage to the Count of Holland in 1220 was mainly motivated by political reasons, the fledgling city of Dordrecht was a poetic and even romantic city. An incredible and exceptionally beautiful wedding gift. Mary immediately took to Dordrecht and was closely involved in her husband’s affairs.

By 1220, Dordrecht had all the characteristics of a real trade hub, but that year heralded a new phase following a number of events. Suddenly Dordrecht was a city and even Holland’s ‘premier’ city, which meant that the city had considerable political clout. Representatives from Dordrecht were the first to cast their vote in the States of Holland. Dordrecht flourished during the following years. The city was strategically located, making it an important trade hub. In 1299, Dordrecht was even granted staple rights, becoming an important staple city. Dordrecht mainly traded wine, wood and grain.

By 1400, Dordrecht’s population had swelled to 8,000, making it the largest city in Holland. But the city also experienced pitfalls. In 1421, Dordrecht effectively became an island after the St. Elizabeth’s flood. The island of Dordrecht as we still know it today. This natural disaster created new channels around Dordrecht. Unfortunately, this also meant that the city’s staple right was easier to evade. All that ‘new’ water also cut off Dordrecht from the south, which was a disaster for trade.

Dordrecht’s history is punctuated by periods of calamities and decline, as well as revivals. After the floods, Dordrecht would go on to play a leading role in Dutch history on several occasions. In 1572, representatives of all of Holland’s cities gathered in Dordrecht for the First Assembly of Free States. William of Orange was officially recognised as Stadtholder of Holland during this meeting, and the representatives expressed their support for the uprising against the Spanish. In 1618-1619, another historic event took place in Dordrecht, which the city and its population celebrated last year: the Synod of Dort, where the decision was made to translate the Bible into Dutch.

Dordrecht’s famous past spans 800 years. From premier city of Holland to having an empress as its governess. From an influential trading hub to a place where important decisions were made. From illustrious highlights to disastrous pitfalls, which the city overcame time and again. Thanks to this evolution, Dordrecht has become the majestic city it is today, where the past is still very much visible and where the city’s history is palpable on its old streets and in its ports. Dordrecht, a city we can be proud of!

**Chapter 2: Highlights of Dordrecht**

**Historic ports**

The city’s history really comes to life when you take a stroll around its lovely inner ports. Dordrecht is a centuries-old trading hub because of its strategic location on the water. In 1299, Count John granted the city a vital staple right, ensuring that all goods that were transported by barge had to first be unloaded and stored in the city’s warehouses. These goods were then sold and/or loaded onto barges again. Today the names of the warehouses, streets and jetties still remind us of the flourishing wood, wine, sugar and grain trade.

**Grote Kerk**

The ‘blunt’ leaning tower of Grote Kerk has defined Dordrecht’s skyline for many centuries. Originally the church should have had a spire, and was intended to be 108 metres tall. Due to ground subsidence, the tower already started to lean during the church’s construction, forcing the architect to stop at 65 metres. The tower is almost 2 metres off kilter, meaning it leans even more than the world-famous Tower of Pisa. Climb up the 275 steps to the top of the church to enjoy a magnificent panoramic view of the city.

**Groothoofd**

You have a lovely view of the confluence of three rivers, when you walk through Groothoofdspoort gate, coming from the city centre. This is where Oude Maas, Noord and Beneden Merwede merge. This is Europe’s busiest shipping junction, with thousands of vessels passing through every year. In the past, this is also where most ships used to moor. Counts, kings and other important figures would set foot on land here, when they visited the city. It is said that even Napoleon arrived here.

**Museums**

Dordrecht is a real museum city. The Dordrechts Museum is one of the leading museums in the Netherlands. This year, it hosts an exhibition about Aelbert Cuyp and his contemporaries, among other things.

**Monuments**

Dordrecht’s amazing history is reflected on almost every street corner with more than 1000 of national monuments in the city centre alone, including buildings in various different styles, from the gothic to Jugendstil. Striking buildings that are worth seeing include the Town Hall, ‘t Zeepaert and the Kijck over den Dijck Mill.

**Biesbosch**

Biesbosch National Park offers a unique nature experience as one of the few freshwater tidal areas in Europe. This adventurous maze of rivers, ponds and willow forests is just a 5-km drive or walk from the city centre. Discover the park’s rugged nature, in an electric boat, in a canoe, or on foot and spot plenty of birds, fish and who knows, maybe even a beaver!

**Chapter 3: Cultural Dordrecht**

Dordrecht has 12 large(r) and small(er) museums. And also Biesbosch National Park is nearby.

**Dordrechts Museum**

The magnificent collection of this museum, which was founded in 1842, spans six centuries of Dutch painting. Here you can admire rare 16th century altarpieces and works by the famous 17th century landscape painter Aelbert Cuyp and the Rembrandt school of Dordrecht, with such representatives as Nicolaes Maes, Ferdinand Bol and Arent de Gelder. The museum has works by the 18th century animal painter Aert Schouman, famous painters of the Hague School such as Mesdag, Weissenbruch and the Maris brothers and Amsterdam Impressionists such as Breitner and Isaac Israels. It also has a unique collection of paintings and drawings by Ary Scheffer, who was born in Dordrecht and who was one of the leading romantic painters of the 19th century. From the end of September, you can visit the amazing Cuyp exhibition here.

Museumstraat 40 – [www.dordrechtsmuseum.nl](http://www.dordrechtsmuseum.nl)

**Huis Van Gijn**

You can see how the rich lived in Dordrecht around 1900 in the Van Gijn House Museum along Nieuwe Haven, where time seems to have stopped 100 years ago. When you walk through the former home of the banker and collector Simon van Gijn (1836-1922), it feels as if you’re taking a journey back in time. You almost expect the occupants to come bursting through the front door any minute now. Simon van Gijn’s collections are also exhibited in the museum, including his collection of doll’s houses in the attic, among others.

Nieuwe Haven 30 – [www.huisvangijn.nl](http://www.huisvangijn.nl)

**Het Hof van Nederland**

Het Hof van Nederland is a place of national historical significance. Thanks to a multimedia presentation, you can experience the First Assembly of the Free States that took place in Dordrecht in 1572, which heralded the birth of the Netherlands, as if you were actually there. You can also learn more about the early Golden Age of the 14th century, when Dordrecht was the most important city in the Netherlands. It’s also a good place to learn more about the influence of the Synod of Dort on the Dutch language and culture and discover Dordrecht as the city of Johan and Cornelis de Witt, of the Biesbosch, and of a flood emergency.

Hof 6 – [www.hethofvannederland.nl](http://www.hethofvannederland.nl)

**Museum 40-45**

Museum 1940-1945 gives you a better idea about the resistance efforts and the events of World War II in Dordrecht and the region. Every gallery has a specific theme, such as mobilisation, national socialism, the resistance and the occupation.

Nieuwe Haven 27 – [www.museum19401945.nl](http://www.museum19401945.nl)

**Nationaal Onderwijsmuseum**

The National Education Museum has the world’s largest education collection, with over 390,000 objects. The museum highlights various aspects of education and its influence on youth culture in a lively and versatile exhibition.

The museum’s location also makes your visit more interesting: the De Holland building, which dates from 1939, is one of several striking buildings by the creative architect Sybold van Ravesteyn (1889-1983).

Burgemeester de Raadtsingel 97 - www.onderwijsmuseum.nl

**Het Dordts Patriciërshuis**

This unique townhouse with authentic period rooms is situated along Wolwevershaven. It has a collection of Louis XVI style furniture and various utensils from that era. This museum is mainly a historic dwelling, but its collection features several good drawings and paintings, including works by the 18th century painters C. Kuipers, A. Schouman, J.C. Schotel and L. de Koningh. In the cellar, you can watch historic films about the origin of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The round Maas Room, with its impressive views of Europe’s busiest river confluences, is quite unique.

Wolwevershaven 9 – [www.dordtspatriciershuis.nl](http://www.dordtspatriciershuis.nl)

**Binnenvaartmuseum Dordrecht**

You can learn more about inland shipping, and its past, present and future, in this museum, which was established by the De Binnenvaart Association on board the René Siegfried.

Maasstraat 13 - www.debinnenvaart.nl/binnenvaartmuseum

**Nationaal Landschapskundig Museum**

This museum has a collection of photos, old and more recent maps, scale models and ordnance surveys of Dutch landscapes. Only open on Saturday.

Reeweg Oost 145

**Museum Twintighoeven**

This museum showcases the cultural history of the Island of Dordrecht since the St Elizabeth’s flood of 1421. Open on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday.

Noorderelsweg 2A - www.twintighoeven.nl

**Wüst Auto Museum**

A unique private collection, with over 50 cars, which spans the entire history of cars.

Mijlweg 81 – www.carelwustmuseum.nl

**Boekdruk Museum Dordrecht**

Graphic museum where you can see how books were printed from 1450 until 1950.

Reewegpad 22 - www.boekdrukmuseum.nl

**Sterrenwacht Mercurius**

Presentation of all the planets in our solar system and facts about space. On clear nights you can use the telescope to see the sun, moon and stars.

Baanhoekweg 75 - [www.sterrenwacht-mercurius.nl](http://www.sterrenwacht-mercurius.nl)

**Chapter 4: The City of thousand and one monuments...**

Dordrecht has buildings that date from the Middle Ages, typical façades, warehouses, merchant’s dwellings, churches and courtyards, which all combine to make Dordrecht a real monument city. In fact, there are over 1,000 monuments in the city centre alone, and they all have their own story to tell.

Below is a selection of the most famous monuments in Dordrecht:

**Grote Kerk**

The ‘blunt’ leaning tower of Grote Kerk has defined Dordrecht’s skyline for many centuries. Originally the church should have had a spire, and was intended to be 108 metres tall. Due to ground subsidence, the tower already started to lean during the church’s construction, forcing the architect to stop at 65 metres. The tower is almost 2 metres off kilter, meaning it leans even more than the world-famous Tower of Pisa. Climb up the 275 steps to the top of the church to enjoy a magnificent panoramic view of the city.

Lange Geldersekade 2 - www.grotekerk-dordrecht.nl

**Town Hall**

Dordrecht’s Town Hall can be quite misleading. Nothing is what it seems in this striking monument. The building’s neoclassical façade, which dates from the 19th century, conceals the medieval secret behind it. This building, with its cross-vaulted cellars and roof with original timber construction, originally was a market hall, which was built in 1383 for Flemish merchants who traded cloth here. The municipal council only moved in in 1544. Nowadays, you can visit the hunting room, as well as the 18th century prison cells in the attic and the wedding hall with murals by Reinier Kennedy.

Stadhuisplein 1

**Groothoofd| Groothoofdspoort**

Groothoofd is situated at the confluence of three rivers, making it Europe’s busiest shipping junction. This is where Oude Maas, Noord and Beneden Merwede merge. Groothoofspoort traditionally was Dordrecht’s most important city gate. Nowadays, you can still see the water from here. The old, late-gothic gate was built around 1440-1450. A new renaissance gate was later built around it in 1617-1618. The original turret made way for a dome in 1692. On the land side, you can see Dordrecht’s coat of arms, while the waterside features a sculpture of the Dordrecht virgin flanked by the coats of arms of Dutch cities that maintained friendly relations with Dordrecht.

Boomstraat 39

**Molen Kyck over den Dyck**

You can’t help but notice the mill when you walk around Dordrecht. It’s also the only remaining mill in the city. This tall, round, stone smock mill with a gallery, which dates from 1713, originally supplied malt to the beer breweries. Over time, it became a grain mill. The mill and shop are open on Saturdays.

Noordendijk 144 - www.molen-dordrecht.nl

**Het Hof van Nederland and Augustijnenkerk**

Het Hof van Nederland is a place of national historical significance. In 1572, the First Assembly of the Free States was held here: an important event, and the harbinger of the creation of the independent Republic of the Netherlands. This historic venue has since been turned into a museum.

The Augustijnenkerk dates from 1293/1450 and belonged to the Augustinian monastery. This monastery played a significant role in the civilian and religious history of the oldest city of Holland and the Republic of the United Netherlands.

[www.hethofvannederland.nl](http://www.hethofvannederland.nl) - [www.augustijnenkerk.nl](http://www.augustijnenkerk.nl)

**’t Zeepaert**

’t Zeepaert in Wijnstraat is one of the best-preserved gothic dwellings in the Netherlands and a unique building, comprising a front and a back part. It dates from 1495 and was built on the remnants of a stone house from 1300.

Wijnstraat 113

**Courtyards**

As you walk through the city you'll come across quaint courtyards, tiny pocket oases of tranquillity in the bustling city. In Museumstraat, you can find the 38 houses of Arend Maartenshof, which line a courtyard garden with centuries-old trees and a well. This almshouse, which was originally built for poverty-stricken women, was founded in 1625 by Arend Maartenszoon. The houses of Regentenhof or Lenghenhof, as it is also known, are just up the road, between Bagijnhof and Vriesestraat. This women’s almshouse, which was managed by regents and dates from 1755, comprises four connecting courtyards with gates.

**Chapter 5: Biesbosch National Park**

Where else in the Netherlands can you find a city that looks just like a film set and is centrally located in the Randstad, but is just a short drive from an oasis of tranquillity?

If you need a bit of peace and quiet and want to withdraw to greener pastures, then head to the Biesbosch National Park to enjoy a unique nature experience in one of the few freshwater tidal areas in Europe. This adventurous maze of rivers, ponds, reed and willow forests is just five kilometres from the city centre.

It’s the place to spot stunning birds such as the egret, the great crested grebe and the bluethroat. And perhaps you may also be lucky enough to see one of the beavers who has built his dam in one of the marshes. The Biesbosch Centre is the best place to start. Here you can hop on board a boat and join a tour or rent a boat to explore the creeks yourself.

Do you prefer a nice, long walk? Follow the Griendmuseum trail (6 km) in that case. This trail, which highlights the area’s natural diversity, also shows how the griendwerkers or willow cutters used to live in Biesbosch.

The Biesbosch Centre also organises various boat tours. Take in the beautiful nature from the Sterling while the guide tells you all there is to know about this area’s natural assets. Children will love the beaver tours. Set off in a boat in search of beavers and their dams.

Had your fill? Then take the ferry from Kop van ‘t Land to the Brabant side of Biesbosch National Park.

**Chapter 6: Anecdotes and things worth knowing**

**Schapenkoppen**

For centuries, the people of Dordrecht have been known as the ‘Sheep’s Heads’. The name was inspired by a story from the Middle Ages, when Dordrecht was a powerful and prosperous trade hub with staple rights.

This meant that Dordrecht could levy taxes on all the goods that were imported to and exported from the city. Two Dordrecht residents, who had bought a sheep in Alblasserwaard, were not inclined to pay. As they were making their way back to Dordrecht, they spotted a scarecrow in a field near Papendrecht. They stole its clothes and used it to disguise the sheep. Upon their arrival at Riedijkspoort, they propped up the sheep between them, holding it by its front legs. To all intents and purposes, it looked as if three men were about to enter the city, although the middle one seemed a bit wobbly on his legs. Everything went as planned, but just as the men were about to walk on, the poor sheep let out a plaintive baaaah. The animal was exposed and the men were forced to pay the tax they owed on the spot. Of course, the story soon made the rounds. From then on, the people of Dordrecht were known as the ‘Schapenkoppen’ or ‘Sheep’s Heads’.

**Hoe dichter bij Dordt….**

‘Hoe dichter bij Dordt, hoe rotter het wordt’. This is a popular saying in the Netherlands. Meaning the closer you get to Dordrecht, the more rotten it becomes.

But what does it actually mean? The city’s staple rights played a role in this. In 1299, the young Count John I granted the important staple right to the City of Dordrecht. This meant that any goods that were transported by barge had to first be unloaded and stored in the city’s warehouses. Then they had to be sold and loaded onto barges again. This was a time-consuming process, costing a great deal of money. Over time, as the trade flourished, the boats became larger, but the rivers did not become any deeper. As a result, many ships stranded near Dordrecht. So now you understand how this saying originated...

….**drecht**

Dordrecht is situated in the Drechtsteden region (Dordrecht, Papendrecht, Zwijndrecht and Sliedrecht), but where does the word ‘drecht’ come from?

The word has several meanings. It literally means a stream with its own natural course, which is influenced by the tides. But it can also refer to a place in the river where you could easily wade across.

This is where the first residents of the city settled. They were mainly fishermen.

**The Synod of Dort**

To put an end to the religious strife within the Protestant Church, the decision was made to organise the Synod of Dort in 1618/1619. The outcome of this important international ecclesiastical meeting were the Canons of Dort and the initiation of the first official Dutch Bible translation. The translation of the State Bible was completed in 1637. The Synod and the Statenvertaling (‘States translation’) had a huge impact on the ecclesiastic and cultural history of the Netherlands and on the Dutch language. Unfortunately the building where the Synod of Dort took place no longer exists. It was situated near Kloveniersdoelen.

**Sons of Dordrecht**

You can see a bronze sculpture of Johan and Cornelis de Witt on Visbrug. They were born in Grotekerksbuurt. Cornelis was the mayor of Dordrecht, while his brother Jan served as Grand Pensionary. In 1672, the two brothers were lynched during the violent political and social unrest in The Hague. Their murder illustrates the opposition between the States party and the Orangists.

Aelbert Cuyp (1620-1691) was one of the leading painters of the Dutch Golden Age. He spent his entire life in Dordrecht and his fame was largely local. Around 1750, he was discovered in England, leading to a real Cuyp frenzy. No other artist became this popular in such a short period of time. By 1800, it was almost impossible to find Cuyp’s paintings in the Netherlands. Most of his paintings now belong to British collections.

The house where the writer Top Naeff (1878-1953) was born can be found at Nieuwe Haven, near Lange IJzeren Brug. She is best known for her book ‘Schoolidyllen’, which was published in 1900.

The poet, translator and writer Cees Buddingh (1918-1985) was a born and bred *Dordtenaar*. The city is frequently featured in his poets and diaries.

Ary Scheffer (1795-1858) who was born in Dordrecht, moved to Paris where he became a famous romantic painter. You can find his statue on the Scheffersplein.

More recent famous sons and daughters of Dordrecht include the author Ronald Giphart, the actress Caroline de Bruijn, the football player René van der Gijp, the singer Nielson, radio DJ Mattie Valk, the biologist Freek Vonk and the O’g3ne ladies.

**The Frikadel**

The commercial frikandel was originally launched in 1954 in Dordrecht. A butcher’s hand named Gerrit de Vries used to make meatballs, which he sold to eateries. He was forced to change his product after the Warenwet or Commodities Act took effect. He came up with a cunning solution, changing the meatball’s shape but sticking with the same recipe. The meatball became a sausage. A German woman who owned one of the snack bars that de Vries supplied came up with a name. The Germans had a flat meatball, which they called a Frikadelle. De Vries adopted the name, calling it a frikadel (without the ‘n’). Five years later, Deurne-based snack producer Beckers perfected the frika(n)del.

**Chapter 7: Shopping**

No day trip to Dordrecht is complete without a visit to some fun, local stores. The combination of large retail chains and small local shops makes shopping in Dordrecht even more fun. Most of the shops in Dordrecht are located on Statenplein and the shopping streets that give out onto it. Definitely worth checking out, but don’t hesitate to stray from the beaten path too!

Explore the beautiful streets around Statenplein, which combine surprising shops with magical historic surroundings.

The large retail chains and local shops make shopping in Dordrecht even more fun. Most of the city’s shops are located at Statenplein and the shopping streets that give out onto it. Definitely worth checking out, but don’t hesitate to stray from the beaten path too! Visit surprising specialty stores such as the centuries-old Vreekens’ Zaden on Voorstraat or the artisan Rutte & Zn distillery on Vriesestraat, Harry Faber van der Meulen’s Pop-Up Bookshop on Kuipershaven and In Vicino Sei where you can buy Janou Bode’s niche fragrances in Vlak. The many shops that are filled to the rafters with vintage items, curiosities, books and antiques are difficult to resist. And surely nothing can be more satisfying than buying that one item that you’ve been searching for forever.

Most of the art, antiques and vintage shops are open every first Sunday of the month over lunch as part of the Kunstrondje Dordt initiative. Do you intend to visit Dordrecht on another day? No need to worry as most of these shops are also open on other days. You can pick up a list of shops, with their opening hours, from the tourist information office.