

THE STARFISH



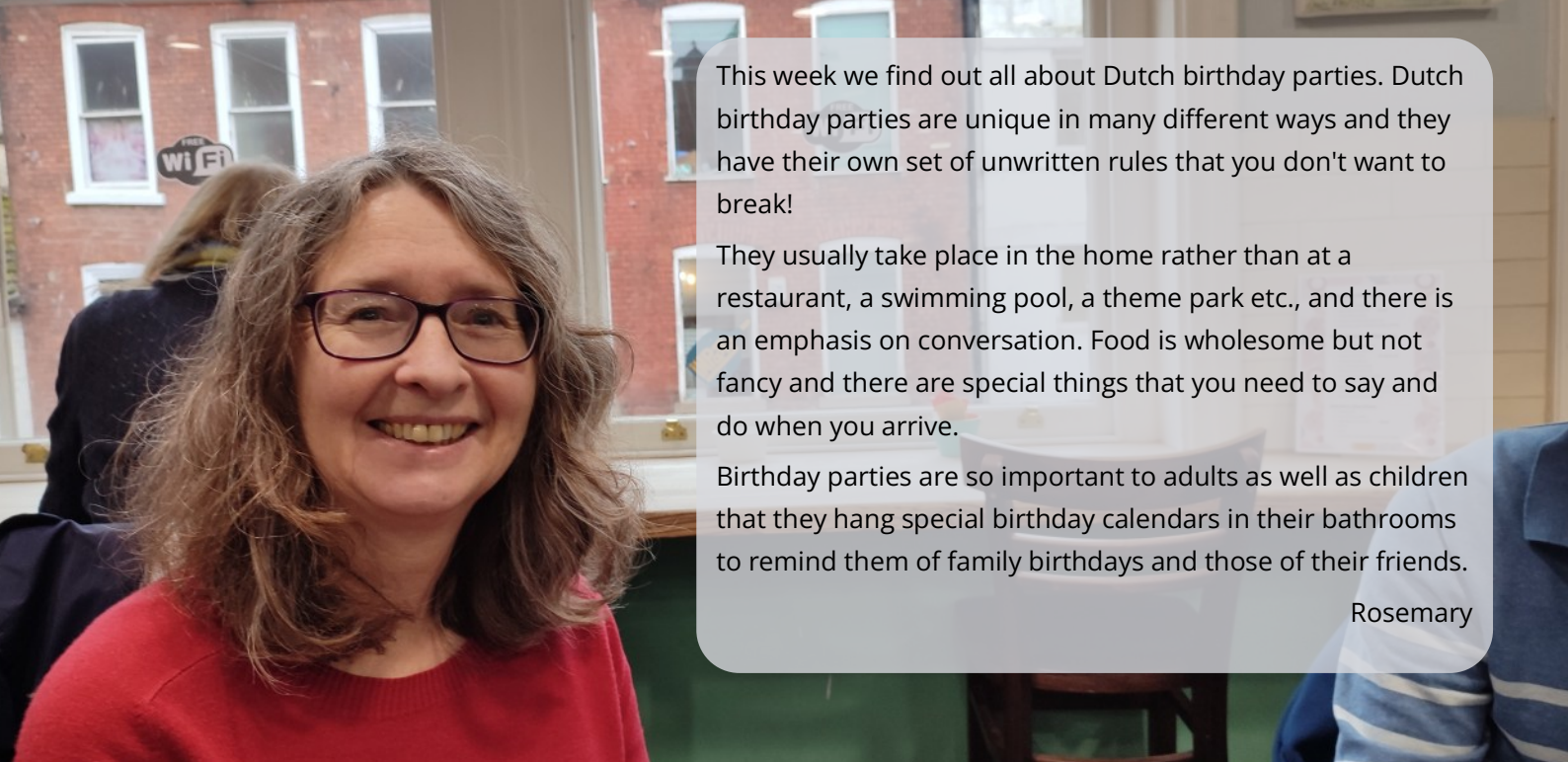
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**OUR WORLD RAY -
THE NETHERLANDS**

THIS WEEK

Dutch Birthday
Parties





This week we find out all about Dutch birthday parties. Dutch birthday parties are unique in many different ways and they have their own set of unwritten rules that you don't want to break!

They usually take place in the home rather than at a restaurant, a swimming pool, a theme park etc., and there is an emphasis on conversation. Food is wholesome but not fancy and there are special things that you need to say and do when you arrive.

Birthday parties are so important to adults as well as children that they hang special birthday calendars in their bathrooms to remind them of family birthdays and those of their friends.

Rosemary

Birthday Party Quiz

1. Can you name two games played at Dutch birthday parties?
2. How might the birthday person's chair be decorated?
3. Do the Dutch think punctuality is important?
4. What kind of cake is popular at Dutch parties?
5. What does 'seeing Abraham' or 'seeing Sarah' mean?

Click on the Starfish!



If you see a starfish click on it for a link to a short YouTube clip



Word Alert!

Words in **bold** are explained further in the Glossary on page 12.

TEDEd

If you see the **TEDEd** symbol, click on it for extension material on a particular topic



Back issues of *The Starfish* are available on Padlet—click on this Padlet symbol

The decorations

The room

It is customary to decorate the party room with bunting and balloons. The Dutch colours – red, white, blue and orange – are favoured and balloons might have the birthday person's age on them.



How to Make A Floral Chair

The chair

A lovely tradition that the Dutch have is to decorate a chair for the party person with flowers (seasonal fresh flowers or paper ones) and streamers or balloons. Often a vine may be woven round the chair as a support for the seasonal flowers.

As the person is to sit on the chair, care needs to be taken to choose flowers that will not stain their clothes. It is also important to choose flowers that will last and not fade after a few minutes without water (or use *oasis*).



The circle

At a Dutch party everyone sits in a circle to facilitate conversation. It also means that nothing is secret and everyone is watching your every move (as you help yourself to an extra handful of snacks maybe).

You will also be noticed if you arrive early or late for the celebration, both of which are seen as a

crime in Dutch etiquette.

There is an additional problem to sitting round in a circle in that it is not easy to manage your drinks and nibbles and this can lead to spillages. Some young people have started moving away from the circle tradition to allow music and dancing.



What Nobody Tells
You About Dutch
Birthday Party



You Won't Believe
This Dutch Birthday
Tradition

Image: Photo by Tima Miroshnichenko:
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/a-group-of-friends-celebrating-5804888/>

Greetings



Happy Birthday! In
Dutch

When we go to a birthday party in the UK it is usual to wish the birthday child (or adult) 'Happy Birthday' on arrival.

In the Netherlands a very different ritual exists. On arriving at the party each guest not only greets the birthday person, but also each member of the family sat round in the circle saying what could be translated as 'Greetings for x's birthday'. This greeting is accompanied

by three kisses or a handshake.

Dutch for Happy Birthday is 'Gefeliciteerd' (congratulations) or 'Gefeliciteerd met je verjaardag' (Happy Birthday to you).

If you are greeting say the mother of the birthday girl you would say 'Gefeliciteerd met je dochter' (Congratulations with your daughter).

Image: Photo by Gustavo Fring: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/kids-standing-near-the-table-7155961/>



It is my birthday!

Birthday songs



Lang zal ze leven



Er is er een jarig,
hoera, hoera

There is a selection of birthday songs which are popular at Dutch birthday parties, the most common of which is **Lang zal hij/ze leven** (Long shall he/she live).

Lang zal hij/ze leven,
Lang zal hij/ze leven,
Lang zal hij/ze leven, In de gloria,
In de gloria,
Hip, hip, hip, hoera!
Hip, hip, hip, hoera!
Hip, hip, hip, hoera!

Another favourite is **Er is er een jarig hoera-hoera** (It's someone's birthday today, hurrah, hurrah)

Er is er een jarig hoera-hoera
Dat kun je wel zien dat is hij/zij.
Wij vinden het allen zo prettig ja-ja,
En daarom zingen wij blij:
Hij/zij leve lang hoera-hoera,
Hij/zij leve la-ang hoera.

Translation

It's someone's birthday today hurrah hurrah
It's easy to see that it's him/ her
All of us think it's really nice
And that's why we happily sing.
Let him/her live long hurrah hurrah
Let him/her live long hurrah

Party food

If you are going to a Dutch birthday party don't expect the food to be fancy although it might be tasty.

The food normally consists of nibbles like cheese and olive on sticks, bitterballen, crisps or peanuts. These will be accompanied by tea and coffee and maybe beer. At some point during the evening the host whose birthday it is will probably go in the kitchen and come out with a big container of soup (tomato and meatballs, chicken or mushroom), which they dole out and at some point, there will be cake (not the iced version we like but more likely an apple tart or similar). There is no official cake cutting but it is common for the birthday person to blow out candles and make a wish.



Appeltaart bakken
met Koopmans

If you're not an apple tart fan you might opt for Slagroomtaart (Dutch cream cake) to share with your guests.

Image: Dutch apple pie with slagroom Flickr



Werkwijze
Slagroomtaart

Cards, presents and the birthday calendar



We do THIS for
school birthdays in
Holland



It is customary to bring small presents for the birthday person who will open them there and then with everyone watching. If the present is something that they already have, they will probably tell you so and expect you to exchange it for something else (they do not consider this rude).

If you are attending the birthday celebration you will not be expected to bring a card. these are

usually sent by those who are unable to attend.

Birthday parties are so much part of the Dutch way of life that it is common to find a birthday calendar on the bathroom wall so that they don't forget these important occasions. This is preferred to a digital calendar on a phone or computer. The Dutch birthday calendar tradition dates back to the 19th century.

The games

When they fancy a change from sitting in a circle the Dutch may decide to play some traditional party games like these:

Koekhappen (cookie biting)

Very similar to our UK game of eating doughnuts

hanging from strings without using our hands.

Spijkerpoepen (nail pooping)

A player has a nail attached by string to their trousers. They must use hip and leg movements to get the nail into the bottle.

Sjoelbak (Shuffleboard)

Players slide pucks through holes to score points.

Eierrace (egg and spoon)

As in the UK

Blikgooien (tin throwing)

Players throw cans or other objects into a target.



International
Students Try Dutch
Games



King's Day: students
play some typical
Dutch games!

50th Birthday traditions

Probably the most important birthday to celebrate in the Netherlands is the 50th. Men who turned 50 are said to have 'seen Abraham' and women who turned 50 are said to have 'seen Sarah', referring to the *elderly biblical couple*. In the Bible it says that Jesus refers to Abraham seeing the day he was to become a Messiah.

It is common to put a giant inflatable doll around 4 metres tall in front of the house on this milestone birthday which may be customised to represent the birthday person. People often honk their horns as they drive by the house to acknowledge the celebration.



Dutch delight with orange to celebrate King's 50th birthday



These traditions are there to draw attention to the wisdom and experience gained by the person over 50 years.

Last time . . .

We heard about Dutch sports and
leisure activities



GLOSSARY

Abraham and Sarah: Sarah is the wife of Abraham, the mother of Isaac, and thus the ancestress of all Israel. Sarah is unable to have children for most of her life and but in her old age she gives birth to Isaac. The Bible explains that Sarai was her earlier name and that she was

renamed at the annunciation of the birth of Isaac.

oasis: Oasis is a trademarked name for wet floral foam used for real flower arranging. It soaks up water like a sponge and acts both as a preservative to prolong the life of the flowers and a support to hold them in place. It is often green, but is also available in many other colours, such as purple, red, yellow, and brown.



Image Photo by Vitaly Gariev: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-holding-birthday-cake-at-part-23495684/>

Koningsdag (King Day)

This is a national holiday in the Netherlands and celebrates the King's birthday on April 27th. Various activities take place on this day. One of these is the nationwide 'Vrijmarkt' (flea market) where people sell used goods. Children often sell their castoff toys at the Vandelpark in Amsterdam. There are also outdoor concerts and parades and the king gives out honours to deserving citizens.



Koningsdag 2017. Amstel, Amsterdam.
Wikimedia Commons

Next Issue

Number 190

Easter in the Netherlands

8th April 2025



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Netherlands



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