



FACTS

The popularity of the colour orange is related to Oranje, the name of the Dutch royal family

The House of Orange has its roots in what is now Germany

The relationship between Orange and the Netherlands arose in resistance to Spanish dominance in the 16th century

The leader of the resistance, William of Orange, is the 'Father of the Fatherland'

Most Dutch people feel quite comfortable with the monarchy, but 'King Football' is more popular

Orange

When the Dutch football team plays a major tournament, the country succumbs to orange fever. Entire neighbourhoods are decorated with orange garlands and flags, and residents watch television in the street.

The colour of monarchs and merriment

The Dutch monarchy has mostly ceremonial significance. Although not passionate royalists, most Dutch feel quite comfortable with the constitutional monarchy. Once a year, on *Koningsdag* (King's Day), the country dresses up in orange and the royal family is a source of communal celebration.

On *Koningsdag*, April 27, the Netherlands celebrates the King's birthday. In most towns and villages large markets are held, surrounded by all manner of festivities. Full of good cheer and draped in orange, the Dutch crowd market stalls and terraces, and the party ends in fireworks and, for many, a hefty Orange hangover.

The monarch joins the celebrations, traditionally visiting two towns in which he is treated to demonstrations of sack racing, clog-making, herring-gutting and other traditional activities. Willem-Alexander (or 'Alex', as he is popularly known) shows his best side, shaking hands and showing interest in every drawing handed to him by beaming pre-schoolers.

King Willem-Alexander is somewhat more outgoing and closer to the people than his mother Beatrix, who abdicated from the throne in 2013 after reigning for 33 years. In his early years as Crown Prince, Willem-Alexander turned out to be a sports fan who exuberantly celebrated Dutch sporting victories, earning him the unflattering nickname 'Prins Pils' ('Prince of Beer'). Later on, he became dedicated to an ultra-Dutch discipline: water management. 'Prins Pils' now became 'Prins Water' ('Prince of Water'). Also thanks to his marriage to the extrovert Argentinean Máxima Zorreguieta, who is by far the most popular member of the royal family, the Prince developed a personality that is appreciated by many Dutch: serious, interested and unifying.

The House of Orange, to its benefit, is seen by most Dutch people as relatively 'normal'. In other monarchies, their modest palaces would at best be used for keeping the royal carriages. In many respects the House of Orange is a truly Dutch royal family, although their roots lie in the medieval county of Nassau, in what is now the country's big neighbour, Germany.

Through strategic marriages, the Nassaus acquired sizeable territories and influence in the regions that would later be known as the Netherlands. The clan

also inherited the principality of Orange in the south of France, so that in the mid-1500s, the title 'Prince of Orange', together with the possessions of the Nassaus in the Low Countries, ended up with a certain William, nicknamed 'the Silent'. At the time, the Netherlands was an unwilling part of a large Spanish kingdom, and the influential William gradually became the leader of the resistance to the Spanish domination. Partly on William's initiative, seven regions joined together in revolt.

On the King's birthday, he visits traditional demonstrations of sack racing, clog-making and herring-gutting.

01 King's Day celebrations on an Amsterdam canal 02 Orange treats 03 Tin containing orange sprinkles and showing the portrait of the former Queen Beatrix 04 Celebrating King's Day





Flags and pennants

The red-white-and-blue Dutch flag first appeared in the 16th century in the struggle against Spanish dominance. This first flag had orange in its upper bar as a tribute by the insurgents to their leader, William of Orange. This is the source of the slogan *Oranje boven!* [Up with Orange!]. Blue and white were the livery colours of the principality of Orange. When the House of Orange was temporarily driven out of the Republic during the French Period (1795-1814), the orange in the flag made way for red. There was bickering over the flag well into the last century: should it be red or orange after all? It remained red-white-and-blue, but by way of compromise, an orange pennant is attached to the top of the flagpole on King's Day and on the birthdays of other members of the Royal Household. Another peculiarity is that the flag is flown at half-mast on May 4, Remembrance Day. The Netherlands is the only country in the world with such a variety of ways of flying the flag.



Due to a strange confluence of circumstances, the revolt resulted in 1588 in the birth of the independent Republic of the Seven United Netherlands, the predecessor of the modern Netherlands, but William himself never saw this. He was murdered in 1584 in Delft by a bounty hunter, sent by the Spanish. He was buried in a tomb in Delft's New Church, where almost all deceased members of the royal family have been buried since. The struggle against Spain ended in 1648 with a victory for the Republic, and William of Orange entered the history books as the 'Father of the Fatherland'.

William's deeds marked the start of a strong bond between the House of Orange and the Netherlands, which is aptly described as a marriage. Like any marriage, it has had its ups and downs. When in 1815 the

Netherlands became a constitutional monarchy, known officially as the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the House of Orange became its sovereigns. Nevertheless, there were also moments in which the Orange's lust for power clashed with the civic culture of the Dutch.

Today, the Dutch are not fervent royalists, but most of the population feels quite comfortable with the constitutional monarchy. The House of Orange causes a small minority to see red, especially because of a fair number of scandals involving the royal family. An unnecessary institution that causes trouble and costs a bundle in taxes as well, is not something they are attached to. There is also more principled resistance: a small number of people dismiss the hereditary monarchy as being anti-democratic. There is even some symbolic yapping

from a Republican Society from time to time.

Such grumbling is manifest in a recurring discussion about the role and power of the monarch. Is it not time that the monarchy become entirely ceremonial? No, according to a parliamentary majority. The King should be more than a mere 'ribbon cutter'. It is fine that he is a member of the government – after all, he has no political power. As head of state, he has a number of formal tasks that are largely ceremonial in any case.

The average Dutch person is not bothered and faithfully puts on an orange T-shirt on the King's birthday. The festivities on the occasion of Liberation Day – the commemoration of the end of the Nazi occupation during the Second World War on May 5 – have a similar orange character.

In recent decades, the 'orange feeling' has spread to other events as well. If the Dutch football team is in a major tournament, the country succumbs to orange fever. Streets and entire neighbourhoods are decorated with orange garlands, flags and banners, and neighbours watch television together in the street, united in conviviality and unbridled happiness in their orange shirts. ■

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