

Koningsdag

“Queen’s Day” redirects here. For other uses, see [Queen’s Day \(disambiguation\)](#).

Koningsdag (Dutch pronunciation: [ˈkoːnɪŋsˌdɑx]) or **King’s Day** is a national holiday in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Celebrated on 27 April (26 April if the 27th is a Sunday), the date marks the birth of King Willem-Alexander.^[1]

From 1949, birthday of Queen Juliana (accession to the Throne September 4th 1948) to 2013, the day was known as *Koninginnedag* (Dutch pronunciation: [koːnɪˈɲɪnəˌdɑx]) or **Queen’s Day** celebrated April 30th. The holiday was first observed on 31 August 1885 as *Prinsessedag* or Princess’s Day, the fifth birthday of Princess Wilhelmina, heir to the Dutch throne. On her accession (September 6th 1898, having come of age August 31st), the holiday acquired the name *Koninginnedag*. When held on 31 August the holiday was the final day of school summer vacation, leading to its popularity among children. Following the accession of Wilhelmina’s daughter Juliana in 1948, the holiday was moved to Queen Juliana’s birthday on 30 April.

Juliana’s daughter, **Beatrix**, retained the celebration on 30 April after she ascended the throne in 1980, though her birthday was on 31 January.^[2] Beatrix altered her mother’s custom of receiving a floral parade at **Soestdijk Palace**, instead choosing to visit different Dutch towns each year and join in the festivities with her children. In 2009, the Queen was celebrating Queen’s Day in the city of **Apeldoorn** when a man attempted to attack her by trying to ram the Royal family’s bus with his car; instead he drove into a crowd of people and crashed into a monument: seven people in the crowd were killed, as was the driver.

Queen Beatrix abdicated on *Koninginnedag* 2013, and her son, Willem-Alexander, ascended the throne (the first king since the observance of the national holiday). As a result, the holiday became known as *Koningsdag* (“King’s Day”) from 2014 on, and the celebration was shifted three days back to 27 April, the king’s birthday.

Koningsdag is known for its nationwide *vrijmarkt* (“free market”), at which the Dutch sell their used items. It is also an opportunity for “orange madness” or *oranjegekte*, a kind of frenzy named for the national colour.

1 History

1.1 Wilhelmina (presided as princess 1885–1890, as queen 1890–1948)



Koninginnedag on 31 August 1932 in Amsterdam

Faced with an unpopular monarchy, in the 1880s the liberals in Dutch government sought a means of promoting national unity.^[3] King William III was disliked, but his four-year-old daughter Princess Wilhelmina was not.^[4] A holiday honouring King William had been intermittently held on his birthday, and J. W. R. Gerlach, editor of the newspaper *Utrechts Provinciaal en Stedelijk Dagblad*, proposed that the princess’s birthday be observed as an opportunity for patriotic celebration and national reconciliation.^[5] *Prinsessedag* or Princess’s Day was first celebrated in the Netherlands on 31 August 1885, Wilhelmina’s fifth birthday. The young princess was paraded through the streets, waving to the crowds.^[4] The first observance occurred only in Utrecht, but other municipalities quickly began to observe it, organizing activities for children.^[5] Further processions were held in the following years, and when Wilhelmina inherited the throne in 1890, *Prinsessedag* was renamed *Koninginnedag*, or Queen’s Day.^[4] By then almost every Dutch town and city was marking the holiday.^[5]

The celebration proved popular, and when the Queen came of age in 1898, her inauguration was postponed a week to 6 September so as not to interfere with *Koninginnedag*.^[6] The annual holiday fell on the final day of school summer vacation, which made it popular among schoolchildren.^[4] It is uncertain how much Wilhelmina enjoyed the festivities; although writer Mike Peek, in a 2011 magazine article about *Koninginnedag*, suggests she was enthusiastic,^[4] there is a story of Wilhelmina, after a

tired return from one of these birthday processions, making her doll bow until the toy's hair was dishevelled, and telling it, "Now you shall sit in a carriage and bow until your back aches, and see how much you like being a Queen!"^[7]

Koninginnedag 1902 not only honoured the Queen's birthday, but was celebrated with increased enthusiasm as it marked her recovery from serious illness.^[3] Wilhelmina rarely attended *Koninginnedag* festivities after reaching adulthood.^[8] She attended ceremonies for her silver jubilee in 1923, which included massive festivities in Amsterdam and The Hague, despite the Queen's request that large sums not be spent because economic conditions at the time were difficult. To ensure that even the poorer parts of the city were not excluded, bands played simultaneously at 28 locations across The Hague.^[9] Wilhelmina made further exceptions for such events as her fiftieth birthday in 1930.^[8] During the German occupation of the Netherlands during World War II, *Koninginnedag* celebrations were banned, and members of the Orange Committees, which organize the holiday events, destroyed their records for fear of German reprisals.^[6]

1.2 Juliana (1948–1980)



Military parade in Arnhem, Koninginnedag 1958

Another summertime birthday celebration in the Netherlands was that of Wilhelmina's mother, Queen-Regent Emma, who after Wilhelmina attained adulthood generally spent her own birthday, 2 August, at Soestdijk Palace in Baarn. Until her death in 1934, Emma received an annual floral tribute from the townsfolk on her birthday. In 1937 Wilhelmina's daughter and heiress, Princess Juliana, took up residence at Soestdijk Palace following her marriage, and the townsfolk made their floral presentation to her, moving the date to Juliana's birthday, 30 April.^[8] In September 1948 Juliana ascended to the Dutch throne and from 1949 onwards *Koninginnedag* was on her birthday.^[10] The change in date attracted immediate approval from Dutch children, who gained an extra day of holiday. The first observance of the

holiday on the new date included a huge circus at the Amsterdam Olympic Stadium—one not attended by the royal family, who remained at Soestdijk Palace.^[11] Queen Juliana retained the floral tribute, staying each year on *Koninginnedag* at Soestdijk Palace to receive it. The parade became televised in the 1950s, and *Koninginnedag* increasingly became a national holiday, with workers given the day off.^[3] Juliana had a reputation as a "queen of the people", and according to Peek, "it felt as if she invited her subjects to the royal home".^[4]

In early 1966 Juliana's eldest daughter, Princess Beatrix, married Klaus-Georg von Amsberg. The marriage was controversial because the new Prince Claus (as he was dubbed) was a German, and Claus himself had served in the German Army during the war. Anti-German riots in Amsterdam marred the wedding day and the following observances of *Koninginnedag*. Fearing further demonstrations on the holiday, government officials decided to open Amsterdam city centre to the *vrijmarkt* ("free market") that had long been held on *Koninginnedag* in the outskirts of town, principally for children. The *vrijmarkt* occupied the space where demonstrations might have been held, and began a new custom.^[4]

1.3 Beatrix (1980–2013)



Queen Beatrix speaks with the mayor of The Hague, Wim Deetman in Scheveningen, Koninginnedag 2005.

When Queen Beatrix succeeded her mother Juliana on the latter's abdication on 30 April 1980, the new queen decided to keep the holiday on 30 April as a tribute to her

mother.^{[2][3]} (If 30 April fell on a Sunday, *Koninginnedag* was observed the previous day—this occurred most recently in 2006.^[12]) The reason was practical as well—Beatrix’s actual birthday on 31 January would have been less conducive to the traditional outdoor activities.^[10] Rather than remaining at the palace and letting the Dutch people come to her, Beatrix instead usually visited two towns each year for *Koninginnedag* celebrations.^[3] Local crafts and customs were demonstrated for the royal family, who had the opportunity to join in.^{[13][14]}

Koninginnedag celebrations have sometimes been affected or disrupted. In 1988 three British servicemen stationed in Germany who were in the Netherlands for *Koninginnedag* were killed in Irish Republican Army attacks.^[15] In 1996 the celebrations in Rotterdam were dampened by an alcohol ban, put in place following riots earlier in the week after local football club Feyenoord won the Dutch league championship.^[16] The Queen’s scheduled 2001 visits to Hoogeveen and Meppel were postponed for one year owing to an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease.^[17]

On 30 April 2009, Beatrix and other members of the royal family were at the town of Apeldoorn when a 38-year-old man, Karst Tate, drove his Suzuki Swift automobile into the crowd, narrowly missing the open-top bus the royal family members were riding on.^{[4][18]} Seven people were killed and further celebrations were cancelled.^[18] Tate died of injuries sustained in the attack soon afterwards and his exact motives remain unclear, though it appears his target was the royal family.^[4] The incident provoked questions about whether the royal family should continue to participate in the celebrations. However, Beatrix indicated that the tragedy would not stop her from meeting her people.^[13] In 2010, Beatrix and her family visited Wemeldinge and Middelburg, in Zeeland province. There were no incidents, and afterwards, the Queen thanked Zeeland for giving *Koninginnedag* back to her family, and to her country.^[4]

Queen Beatrix visited the following cities over the years on *Koninginnedag*:

On 28 January 2013 Queen Beatrix announced her abdication on 30 April 2013 in favour of her son, Willem-Alexander.^[20] Since this date coincided with *Koninginnedag* the royal family’s planned visit to De Rijp and Amstelveen was cancelled, although *Koninginnedag* 2013 was still celebrated throughout the country.

1.4 Willem-Alexander

On 30 April 2013, Queen’s Day, Willem-Alexander succeeded his mother Beatrix and became the first King of the Netherlands in 123 years. Consequently, from 2014 onwards the name has been changed from Queen’s Day to King’s Day. The date has also changed from 30 April to 27 April, which is the birthday of Willem-Alexander.^[1] On the first King’s Day – held on 26 April 2014 be-



Queen Beatrix and her son and heir Willem-Alexander, Prince of Orange (waving) visit Woudrichem in 2007



King Willem-Alexander, queen Maxima and princess Beatrix during the celebration of Koningsdag 2014 in De Rijp

cause 27 April 2014 was a Sunday – the king visited De Rijp and Amstelveen (originally planned to be visited by Queen Beatrix in 2013, but postponed due to her abdication).^[21]

King Willem-Alexander visited the following cities over the years on *Koningsdag*:

2 Activities

The festivities on *Koningsdag* are often organised by Orange Committees (Dutch: *Oranjecomité*), local associations^[22] that seek sponsorship and donations for their activities. In recent years some committees have

had difficulty in recruiting new members from among the younger Dutch.^[23]

2.1 Flea market



Vrijmarkt, Koninginnedag 2011, Deventer

The *vrijmarkt* (literally 'free market') is a nationwide flea market, at which many people sell their used goods. *Koningsdag* is the one day of the year that the Dutch government permits sales on the street without a permit and without the payment of value added tax.^[24] ING Bank found in 2011 that one in five Dutch residents planned to sell at the *vrijmarkt* and estimated they would earn €100 per person for a total turnover of €290 million. Over half of the Dutch people buy at the *vrijmarkt*; ING Bank predicted they would spend €28 each at the 2011 *vrijmarkt*.^[25] Queen Beatrix has been known to buy at the *vrijmarkt*; in 1995 she purchased a floor lamp.^[26] The bank also forecast that the lowest level of sales at the *vrijmarkt* in 2011 would be in the province of Limburg, site of Queen Beatrix's visit.^[25]

Among the most popular areas for the *vrijmarkt* in Amsterdam is the Jordaan quarter, but the wide Apollolaan in front of the Hilton hotel in southern Amsterdam is gaining in popularity. Children sell their cast-off toys or garments at the Vondelpark, also in southern Amsterdam, and in a spirit of fun passers-by often offer the young sellers more than they are asking for the goods.^[27] Until 1996 the *vrijmarkt* began the evening before and continued for 24 hours. This was ended in the hope of gaining a pause in the celebrations so preparations could be made for the daytime activities.^[4] Utrecht, uniquely among Dutch municipalities, retains the overnight *vrijmarkt*.^[19]

2.2 Festivities

Koningsdag now sees large-scale celebrations, with many concerts and special events in public spaces, particularly in Amsterdam. An outdoor concert is held on Amsterdam's Museumplein, where as many as 800,000 people

may gather. To aid visitors in returning home by train after the festivities outdoor events must end by 20:00, and the Museumplein show by 21:00.^[19] The city centre is closed to cars, and no trams ride in the heart of the city; people are urged to avoid Amsterdam Centraal railway station and use other stations if possible from their direction. International trains that normally begin or terminate at Amsterdam Centraal are instead directed to a suburban stop.^[28]



A concert given by the Dutch band Leaf in The Hague during Koninginnenacht in 2008



Revellers dressed in orange in Amsterdam, Koninginnedag 2007

In recent years parties and concerts have been held the evening before *Koningsdag*. Until 2013, nightclubs across the Netherlands organised special events for what became known as *Koninginnenacht* (Queen's Night).^[29] Many young people celebrate in the streets and squares (and in Amsterdam, the canals as well) throughout the night, and after all-night partying join the crowds at the *vrijmarkt*.^[13]

While King's Day celebrations take place throughout the Netherlands, Amsterdam is a popular destination for many revelers. Often the city's 750,000 residents are joined by up to 1 million visitors. In recent years Amsterdam authorities have taken some measures to try and stem the flow of visitors as the city simply became too full.^[30]

Those taking part in *Koningsdag* commonly dye their hair orange or wear orange clothing in honour of the House of Orange-Nassau, which rules over the Netherlands. Orange-coloured drinks are also popular.^[31] This colour choice is sometimes dubbed “orange madness”, or in Dutch, *oranjegekte*.^[13] A local Orange Committee member said of *Koninginnedag* in 2011:

Friendships—and community—will be formed. For me that’s really what Queen’s Day is all about. It’s not an outburst of patriotism, it’s not even about the popularity of the royal family. It’s about a sense of belonging. For one day, everybody is the same in Holland. Bright orange and barmy.^[6]

Children celebrate with a variety of games including *koekhappen* (in which they catch spice cake dangling from a string in their mouths) and *spijker poepen* (in which they tie string around their waist a nail dangling at one end, which they attempt to lower into a glass bottle).^[32]

2.3 Honours

Koningsdag is an opportunity for the monarch to honour citizens for their service to the Netherlands. In 2011, Queen Beatrix issued an honours list noting the work of 3,357 people, most of whom became members of the Order of Orange-Nassau.^[33]

3 Observance in Netherlands territories outside Europe

Koningsdag is also celebrated in Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten, constituent countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.^[13] It is less widely celebrated on the Caribbean island of Bonaire, also a part of the Kingdom, where the local celebration of Dia di Rincon (held on 30 April) is more popular.^[34]

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