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08 Interior of the Senate's assembly hall



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09 Wooden ornament in the stairwell of the Senate

10 Painted panel in the assembly hall

11 Portrait of King Willem II by J.A. Kruseman in the assembly hall

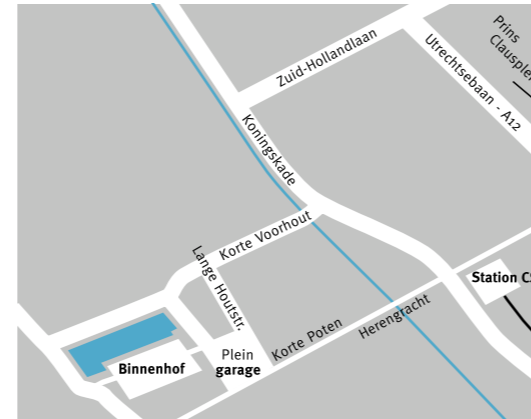
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How to reach the Binnenhof



Visitors coming by rail The Binnenhof can be reached on foot from The Hague's Central Station (CS) by way of Herengracht, Korte Poten and Het Plein (a walk of approx. 15 minutes).

Visitors coming by car From the Prins Clausplein motorway junction motorists should take Utrechtsebaan, followed by Zuid-Hollandlaan, Koningskade, Korte Voorhout and Lange Houtstraat. There is a car park under Het Plein, the square adjoining the Binnenhof.

der Staten-Generaal

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The building

For further information please contact the Senate's Communication and Protocol office

telephone +3170 312 92 00

fax +3170 312 93 90

e-mail communicatie@eerstekamer.nl

website www.eerstekamer.nl



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01 The Senate building viewed from the Hofvijver

02 The Senate building viewed from the Binnenhof

03 Detail of the tapestry in the assembly hall

04 The ceiling in the assembly hall

05 The gallery to the main entrance on the Binnenhof, with a view of the Ridderzaal

06 Johan van Oldenbarnevelt

07 Wooden ornaments in the assembly hall

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Building

The building in which the Dutch Senate is housed on the Binnenhof is rich in history. Most of the structures date back to the mid fifteenth century and consisted mainly of residences for the Stadholder's family. Later it also contained the assembly halls of the powerful States of Holland and West-Friesland (now the provinces of Noord-Holland and Zuid-Holland).

Prince Maurits was one of the occupants of the building, as was his nephew, the later Stadholder Willem II. On the instructions of Prince Maurits the corner tower at the edge of the Hofvijver lake was built in 1598. Another Stadholder who had quarters in the building and stayed there occasionally was Willem III, also King of England from 1688 (after the Glorious Revolution) to 1702 through his marriage to Mary Stuart.

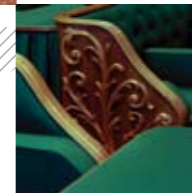
In 1651 part of the complex was demolished to make way for the building of an assembly hall for the States of Holland and West-Friesland, which was designed by architect Pieter Post. During the French occupation (1795-1813) the large assembly hall became part of a military school. During this period the building fell rapidly into disrepair and had to be restored after the French era. The Senate, which was formed in 1815, held its sittings in this assembly room from 1849 onwards.

Interior

The most striking feature of the Senate's assembly hall, which was thoroughly restored again in 1994-1995, is its richly decorated ceiling. The paintings are by Nicolaes Wielingh and Andries de Haen, and depict various nations with which Holland traded in the 17th century. Another notable feature of the hall is the life-sized painting of King Willem II by J.A. Kruseman, which was presented to the Senate by Willem II when his direct involvement with the Senate ended in 1848.



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Partially obscured from view by the galleries, installed in the hall in 1870, are two fine chimney pieces with seventeenth century paintings by Adriaan Hanneman and Jan Lievens, representing 'Peace' and 'War' respectively. Along the walls are also portraits (in the form of medallions) of famous Grand Pensionaries of the former States of Holland such as Johan van Oldenbarnevelt and Johan de Witt.

The costly tapestries that once adorned the walls disappeared during the French era and have never been found. During the last refurbishment every effort was made to ensure that the colours and patterns of the newly designed tapestries were as much in keeping with those of the ceiling as possible, thereby recreating the former unity between ceiling and walls.

Today the building is still used for meetings of the Senate. The Senate consists of 75 members, who usually hold their plenary sessions on Tuesdays. The main function of the Senate is to scrutinise legislative bills, but it also monitors the actions of the Government. The Senate may not amend bills; it may only pass or reject them. The debates mostly focus on the quality and legitimacy of the proposed legislation, in particular in relation to the Constitution and other statutory regulations. Other factors taken into account are the consequences of the bill in practice and its sustainability.

The plenary sessions are prepared in sessions of the standing and special committees. The plenary meetings are open to the public. Anyone wishing to attend a plenary meeting can sit in the public gallery (Binnenhof 23).