

The background of the entire page is a dense, colorful array of Dutch dollhouse buildings, known as 'Dorpen vanden Delftse Porseleinmanufaktur'. These miniature houses are arranged in rows, showcasing a variety of architectural styles, colors, and window patterns. The colors range from bright reds and oranges to muted browns and greys. Each house is intricately detailed with windows, doors, and even small signs or figures.

nuffic







Netherlands organization
for international cooperation
in higher education

your practical guide to living in Holland

your practical guide to living in Holland



Contents

	Preface	2
	1 Before you leave home	4
	2 Arrival and first days in Holland	12
	3 Holland in a nutshell	28
	4 How to ...	52
	5 Social life	90
	6 Education in Holland	114

Preface

Welcome to Holland. We are delighted with your decision to come and study here, along with thousands of other international students. Studying here means you will engage in another country where many things are simply different. At first these things might seem strange to you. First of all the language of course, but also the Dutch way of doing and saying things.

No matter what country you are from, you are bound to experience a culture shock. It is as simple as that. In general students will go through three phases: the so-called honeymoon phase, the I-hate-this-country-phase and finally the adjustment phase.

During the first phase you will probably like and feel excited about everything you see, hear and experience while in the second phase things might suddenly start to annoy you. By that time you might be feeling homesick, you might be missing your home country, family and friends. During the third phase you will acknowledge the cultural differences and see the benefits of living in the Netherlands. At the same time you will hopefully be able to look upon any downsides more objectively. During this phase students are usually better able to reflect on their own cultures.

Obviously the second phase is the most difficult one. If you notice the signs of the culture shock such as feelings of sadness, loneliness, homesickness or if you start questioning your decision to move to this place, rest assured that things will change for the better. Try to get involved in the social life and become active in your new environment. It does not matter whether you engage in sports, art, music or anything else you are interested in. As long as it is something you like doing and as long as you get to meet people. Also, do not hesitate to contact your mentors at the institution. They have seen it all before and will be delighted to help out.

This booklet will help you adapt to your new environment as quickly and smoothly as possible. It provides lots of practical information on living and studying in Holland. Unfortunately, this booklet will not prevent you from experiencing a culture shock and perhaps even an education shock, but it will definitely make you aware of these things and hopefully help you cope with them in the best possible way.

The very best of luck on your adventure and don't forget to have some fun.

Nuffic



Chapter 1

Before you leave home



Okay, so you have decided to go and study in the Netherlands (or Holland if you like). Congratulations, you have made an excellent choice. This country has many outstanding institutions for higher education. Now that you have decided on what and where to study and have been accepted, there are some practical things you will need to take care of.



Final preparations before leaving home include getting your papers (like passport and visa) and insurances organised, taking care of financial matters, housing and so on. Mind you, it can be difficult to find proper housing at reasonable prices, especially in cities like Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam and The Hague. There are many options for arranging the accommodation that suits you best, but considering the housing shortage make sure you start looking for a room as soon as possible. You may ask your host institution to help you or you may have a look on the internet. Websites like www.easykamer.nl and www.kamernet.nl are two Dutch room-finding services with an English language section. The rooms offered on these sites are particularly well-suited to students.



Check

Below is a short checklist that might come in handy while you are busy packing for your stay and study in Holland:

-
- Passport (make sure it is valid) or in some cases your birth certificate.
-
- Your entry visa (check for correct dates).
Check Chapter 2 for information about residence permits.
-
- Diplomas or certificates you already possess (you might consider leaving the originals at home and making good-quality copies to take along).
-
- Official letter from your host institution (stating that you have been accepted).
-
- Insurance papers (health, liability, etc.).
-
- Driver's license (make sure it is valid for the duration of your stay abroad and find out whether you may use it in the Netherlands: www.rijbewijs.nl).



- Housing contract (if you have already arranged for a place to stay).

- Money (preferably euro's, enough to help you through the first days) and/or a credit card (see Chapter 2).

- Tools like cell phone, laptop, camera.
And don't forget to bring the chargers!

- Summer and winter clothes (it may be a lot colder in Holland during winter than in your country).

- Medicine; make sure to bring your medicine with you if you cannot go without them. But be aware that not all medicines or medicinal herbs are allowed.

- Important numbers: fill out the inside cover for general emergency numbers, contact person from your higher education institution etc. Share numbers with relatives and friends before you leave.



Screenshot
www.studyinholland.nl

Not sure whether you have covered everything you need? Do not panic because Nuffic, the Netherlands organization for international cooperation in higher education, will be delighted to help out. For instance with the booklet that you are holding in your hands right now. You may also visit our website www.studyinholland.nl where you will find lots of useful information on what really matters and the things you should definitely make sure to bear in mind. Not only before you leave, but also upon arrival and during your stay. Also, you can check our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/studyinholland) and try to get in touch with other students. We wish you a pleasant and untroubled stay in the Netherlands.



Just don't be afraid
or creep into your shell.
Be open, and others
will open to you.

Name: Tân Vũ

Country: Vietnam

Level: Bachelor

Institution: The Hague University of
Applied Science

Subject: European Studies

I left for Holland when I was 17 without knowing anybody in this new country. All I knew was that I would live on my own with other international students in a world that would be completely new to me. I was very anxious. But now I always tell people one thing: don't think too much and don't bring too much. Except the clothes you need, everything can be bought here, even your traditional food.

Chapter 2

Arrival and first days in Holland



Welcome to Holland

You have arrived. Welcome to the Netherlands, the country where you will be spending a period of time studying, meeting new people and having fun. Hopefully your stay here will be pleasant, useful and successful. Make it the start of a great new phase in your life whether you are just starting your studies for the first time in the Netherlands or continuing a previous study programme. At first you will have to make a lot of choices to get organised. Enjoy your stay.

Make it the start of a successful new phase in your life.



Passing customs

Whoever enters Holland from outside the European Union (EU) must have a valid passport and in some cases you will need a visa as well. If you are a passenger arriving at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol (the fifth largest airport in Europe) or any other Dutch or closeby European airport this will be checked on your departure to Holland and again on arrival.



Follow the Arrivals and Exit signs to Passport Control. After passing through the control desk, you will arrive at the luggage carrousel located on the ground floor.

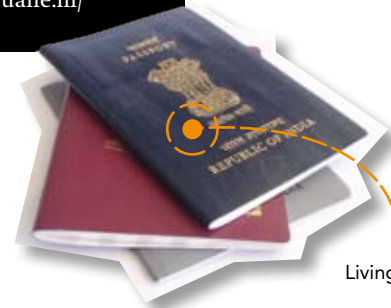
Once you have reclaimed your belongings, you can go to the Customs Security Control. If you have nothing to declare, you may simply pass through.



Imports

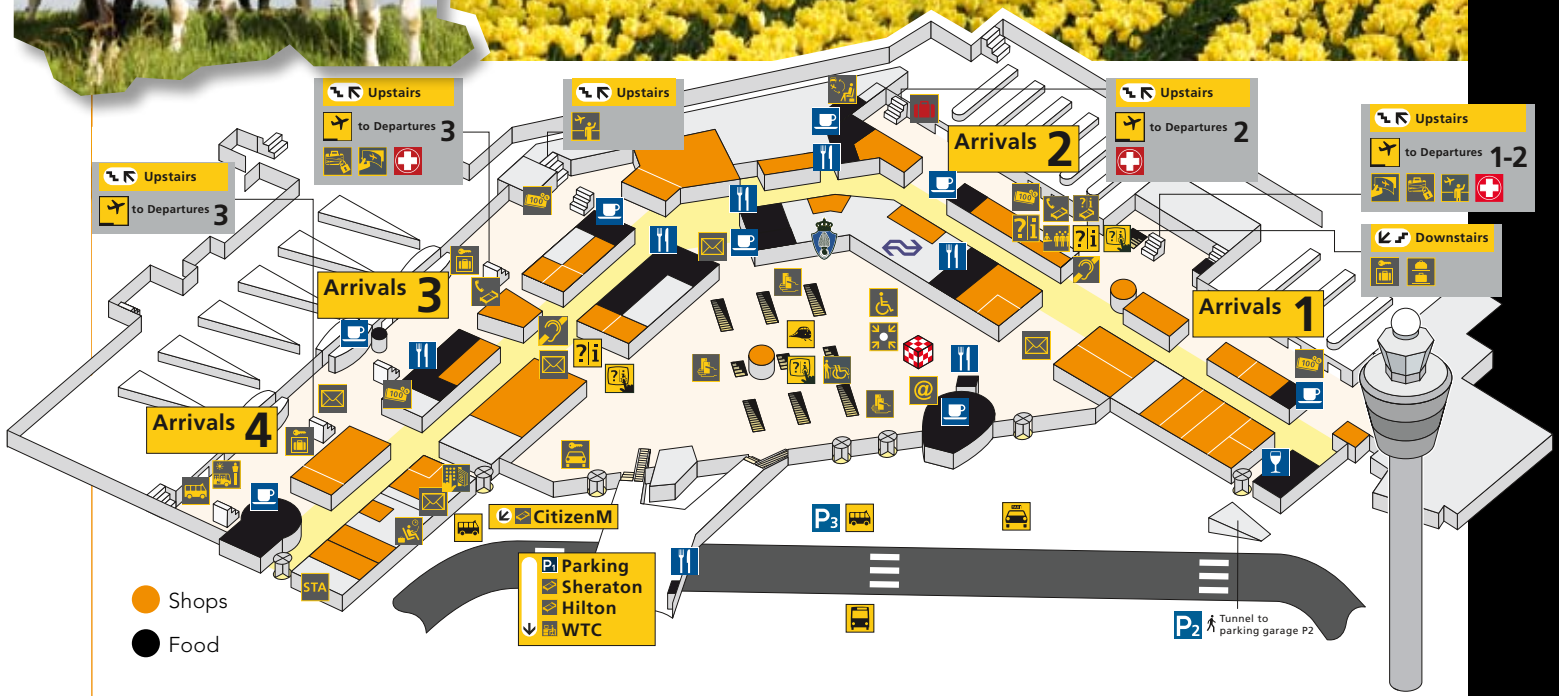
As a student it is not very probable that you will be carrying large amounts of money, but nevertheless you should be aware of the fact that all passengers entering or leaving the European Union with € 10,000 or more in cash must declare this to the Customs officials. In addition to banknotes, this regulation also applies to other negotiable instruments such as cheques. All merchandise imports must be reported to the Customs office too. Please note that not all medicines or medicinal herbs are allowed.

For more information, visit the customs website:
www.douane.nl/english





Arrivals & Schiphol Plaza



- Shops
- Food

Money in your pocket

Of course you will need money. A little pocket money is always very handy. How much you will need is difficult to say because this will of course depend on your personal situation. Obviously you must be able to pay for all kinds of small expenses, but it is not wise to carry large amounts of money. The question "how to get cash?" is easier to answer.

Several possibilities exist. If you are from outside the eurozone you can either buy euros in your home country or change money here. Those who have a credit card can draw money from a cash dispenser, but that is a rather expensive option.

You will find Dutch commercial banks such as Rabobank, ABN-Amro or ING in every city. If you want to change money on arrival, you can also go to GWK which is located at airports, most railway stations and many touristic places. At Schiphol Airport you will have the choice between ABN-Amro (opens at 06.00) and GWK (closes at 22.00). If you can show an international student card while changing money at GWK, you will be charged less.



Paying wit PIN

The best thing to do is to open your own bank account (called a *privérekening*) as soon as possible on arrival at your host institution. Your international office or contact person will refer you to a bank that can help you. In order to open a bank account you will need to visit the bank in person and bring a valid ID (passport or EU identity card) among other things. Once you have done that and once you have been accepted as a client you will receive a bank card (also called a *pinpas*) with a PIN code (Personal Identification Number). Paying with a bank card (*pinmen*) is the most popular way of paying at Dutch stores. You can use your bank card to pay for small and cheap as well as for large and expensive goods (provided you have enough money at your bank account of course). Credit cards are not accepted everywhere.

Needless to say you can also pay in cash. For those who come from outside the eurozone it is good to know that the one and two cent-coins are hardly ever used anymore. Both shopkeepers and customers found those coins simply annoying. Since about 2005 it has become common use to round prices off. So don't think you are being fooled.

You can find the PIN logo (Personal Identification Number) on all Dutch bank cards.



Things to do

If you are ready to read about permits and stuff like that, you must have found your way from the airport, railway station or border (in case you have travelled by car) to your own place in or near the city where you are going to study. Well done. Now it is time for you to take care of some important formalities. Not always a pleasurable thing to do, but it needs to be done. Don't hesitate, get it over with.



You need a residence permit

A residence permit looks like a credit card and proves that you are residing legally in the Netherlands. You will need to obtain a residence permit if you are a citizen of a country outside the European Union/ European Economic Area or Switzerland and in case you will be staying here for a period of more than three months. Your host institution (research university or university of applied sciences) will have to apply for a residence permit on your behalf within five days of your arrival in the Netherlands.

Nobody likes trouble. Therefore it is crucial that you leave your home country (or country where you legally reside) with the correct document: a short-stay visa if you will be staying for no more than three months or an MVV (Machtiging Voorlopig Verblijf) if you plan to stay for more than three months and if your nationality requires an MVV. Check the Student Visa Wizard to find out which procedures apply to you on account of your nationality and the period that you will be spending in the Netherlands: www.nuffic.nl/visa-wizard.



Smart: get your ISIC card

Getting an ISIC card (International Student Identity Card) is really a smart thing to do. It is your ticket to fantastic discounts and services at home and around the world.

The ISIC card is the only internationally recognised student ID. Every year more than 4.5 million students from over a hundred countries use this student card worldwide to benefit from great offers on travel, shopping, museums and much more.

For instance, you may use your ISIC card to save money as you travel around the world on a break from college. And back home it is just as useful. There is a countless number of student discounts on offer, so check what is available at your local restaurants, cinemas and shops. The ISIC card is a real student lifestyle card. Keep it in your pocket wherever you go – it will come in handy more often than you think.



Because the ISIC card is only available to full-time students, you must be able to prove you are currently studying full time at school, college or university. You can often get an ISIC card in the country where you are living. So if you are going to study abroad you can get the card before you set off. But of course you can also get the card after arriving in Holland.

For more information, check: www.isic.org



Working for extra money

Life is expensive, don't we all know it? Which is why most students are interested in earning money. As a foreign student you might want to earn money through paid work alongside your study.

However, you should keep in mind that the study load of most English study programmes and courses in the Netherlands is intense. Working and studying at the same time is not always recommended. In addition, you should check out which rules apply to your situation. If you have come from outside the EU/EEA or if you are Swiss citizen for instance, you may need a working permit (*tewerkstellingsvergunning*, TWV). Depending on your nationality you may only be allowed to work for a limited number of hours per week. Before you start working find out what rules apply to you.

The special student temporary employment agencies (there are many) should be able to offer proper help as they are perfectly familiar with the rules. Also, you will be at the right place for finding suitable work. Don't forget to mention any special skills or capacities.

What can you expect to be paid? In the Netherlands we have a system of legal minimum wages. For 2010 the minimum wage per month is € 1,407.60 for people of 23 years and older (per week € 324.85 and per day € 64.70). If you are younger, you will probably be paid less as the legal minimum wages will be lower: € 1,196.45 for 22 year-olds, € 1,020.50 for 21 year-olds, € 865.65 for 20 year-olds and so on.

Trainees

Traineeships are also seen as work. In some cases your employer will need to have a work permit for you. In other cases a so-called special 'trainee agreement' will be sufficient. To find out what is relevant in your case, download the factsheet *Immigration Procedures for Foreign Students on a Traineeship*.

You can find the factsheet at the Nuffic website:

www.nuffic.nl/working-while-studying





Because things will be very different from home, it will take you some time to get used to your new life. So don't panic!

Name: Fauziya Sayyed

Country: India

Level: Bachelor

Institution: HU University of Applied
Sciences Utrecht

Subject: Entrepreneurship for
Emerging Markets

When I arrived in Holland I had to register with the municipality, get my residence permit and open a bank account. I was amazed that there was no hassle at all. The international office was so helpful in these matters. They give you detailed information about how to do things and where to go. Another good thing to do is attend the open day before school starts, as it will help you find your way around.



Chapter 3

Holland in a nutshell



Geography

The geography of the Netherlands is rather unusual. Much of its land has been reclaimed from the sea and is protected by dikes. If you are going to study in cities like Amsterdam, Leiden, The Hague, Delft or Rotterdam you will be doing so below sea level. In Utrecht, Deventer, Wageningen, Eindhoven or Maastricht you will find yourself at a higher level (geographically of course).

Nevertheless, every tourist or visitor will notice how flat Holland is. Still, the surface is not entirely even: Zuidplaspolder (Nieuwerkerk aan den IJssel, almost in the centre of South Holland) is seven metres below sea level, while the **Vaalsenberg** (Mount Vaals) in the southern province of Limburg is 322.7 metres high.

Something else no-one overlooks is the fact that the Netherlands is densely populated. In fact, it is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and therefore highly urbanised, especially in the west and the central part of the country. Only three other countries with more than ten million inhabitants are more 'crowded' than Holland.

Our country is geographically – but also culturally – divided in north and south by the rivers Rhine (Rijn, coming in from Germany) and Meuse (Maas, coming in from Belgium). For the greatest part the Rhine in our country is called Waal. Together with the Scheldt (Schelde), Maas and Waal form a delta that stretches from Rotterdam (one of the biggest ports in the world) to the southern part of the province of Zeeland. The Amsterdam-Rhine canal provides the port of the capital with a passage in the direction of Germany. All these waterways are very important to the national economy.

Neighbouring countries are Germany in the east, Belgium in the south and England across the North Sea.



Area:

total: 41,526 km² (16,033 sq mi)
 land: 33,883 km² (13,082 sq mi)
 water: 7,643 km² (2,951 sq mi)

Land boundaries:

total: 1,027 km (638 mi)

Coastline:

451 km (280 mi)

Largest cities (est. 2009)

- 1) Amsterdam (North Holland) 767.000 inhabitants
- 2) Rotterdam (South Holland) 589.870 inh.
- 3) The Hague (South Holland) 488.370 inh.
- 4) Utrecht (Utrecht) 306,184 inh.
- 5) Eindhoven (North Brabant) 213.911 inh.



Climate

The Dutch climate is considered temperate, which means that there are distinct summer and winter seasons you can enjoy.

The sea climate in the Netherlands is very similar to that of the United Kingdom. Average summer temperatures range from 20°C to 25°C in July, the warmest month of the year, and August. But, on a glorious summer day the temperature might reach 30°C or more. Average winter temperatures in December and January, the coldest month of the year, are between 0°C and 10°C. During harsh winter periods the temperature may drop to between -5°C and -10°C or even lower. Luckily the central heating keeps the houses warm.

It only rains about seven or eight percent of the time (700 to 800 hours per year). With a total of about 690 to 900 mm precipitation per year on average, April and May are considered the driest months. As the Dutch love ice skating they are happy when it starts freezing in winter so they can enjoy themselves on the ice. But also, by the time the sun shines brightly and it is really hot, the Dutch love to go out and enjoy themselves on cafe terraces in cities and of course near the waterside (e.g. canals, lakes or the North sea).

Summer temperatures range
from 20°C to 25°C

Winter temperatures range
from 0°C to 10°C





The people

Besides the fact that the Dutch are friendly and open-minded, one of the first things you might notice about them is that they are quite tall. It is true. And the amazing fact is that in the space of about 150 years they have gone from being one of Europe's smallest people to the tallest people in the world.

Holland is only a small country with about 16,500,000 inhabitants. Traditionally the rivers Rhine and Meuse form a natural boundary for the socio-cultural division between north and south.

After learning the Dutch language to some extent, you may be able to distinguish the different accents or dialects as the official Dutch pronunciation has its roots in the Amsterdam-Haarlem-Leiden triangle.

Dialects and accents, religions and the economic conditions are different in the northern and southern part of the country. The people are also different in terms of sociology and the way they act. Generally, the northern Dutch are more pragmatic favouring a direct approach and displaying a less exuberant lifestyle than the southerners. The southern Dutch as a whole are usually described as being *bon vivants*. But even within north and south smaller regions exist with different values and customs. One of the things they have in common is their openness and general ability and willingness to speak English when meeting foreigners.



The Dutch are statistically the tallest people in the world.





Some famous Dutch people:

Painters: Rembrandt van Rijn, Johannes Vermeer, Frans Hals, **Vincent van Gogh**, Piet Mondriaan, M.C. Escher, Karel Appel.

Writers and poets: Jacob Cats, Hildebrand (Nicolaas Beets), Multatuli, Willem Frederik Hermans, Jan Wolkers, Gerard Reve, Harry Mulisch, Joost van den Vondel.

Philosophy: **Desiderius Erasmus**, **Hugo Grotius**, Baruch de Spinoza.

Movies: Paul Verhoeven (director), Carice van Houten (actress), Famke Janssen (actress), Jeroen Krabbé (actor), Rutger Hauer (actor).

Scientists: Antonie van Leeuwenhoek (microbiologist),

Christiaan Huygens (astronomist, physicist and mathematician), Jan Tinbergen (economist, founder of econometrics).

Sports: Johan Crujff, Marco van Basten (football), Fatima Moreira de Melo (field hockey), Richard Krajicek (tennis), Pieter van den Hoogenband (swimming), Sven Kramer (speed skating).

Popular music: Anouk, Kane, Waylon, André Rieu, Ilse de Lange, DJ Tiësto, DJ Armin van Buuren.

Other: Willem Duisenberg (first President of the European Central Bank), Doutzen Kroes (supermodel), Anton Corbijn (photographer), Rem Koolhaas (architect), Peter Stuyvesant (explorer and governor of New Amsterdam), Anton and Gerard Philips (founders of Royal Philips Electronics).





The system of our representative democracy is common in Europe. The government consists of the head of state and the cabinet (ministers and state secretaries), the States General (*Staten Generaal*). The States General comprises two chambers: the Senate or upper house (*Eerste Kamer*, 75 members) and the House of Representatives or lower house (*Tweede Kamer*, 150 members elected directly by the people every four years). Both houses have the right to set a budget and the right of interpellation, and they also discuss proposed legislation and review the cabinet's actions. Furthermore, the House of Representatives has the right to propose or amend legislation.

Some of the political parties are: CDA (Christian democrats), PvdA (social democrats), VVD (right-wing liberal democrats), D66 (left-wing liberal democrats), GroenLinks (Green Left, environmentalists), PVV (Party For Freedom), ChristenUnie (Christian democrats made up by mostly orthodox Protestant Christians), SP (socialist party) and SGP (orthodox, testimonial Protestant party with conservative policies).

Politics

The Dutch government is a so-called constitutional monarchy. The monarch acts as the head of state within the perimeters of the constitution. The monarch has to co-sign every law to make it valid, but does not interfere with daily decision making.

The Golden Carriage is used yearly on Prinsjesdag to bear the queen from the Noordeinde Palace to the Ridderzaal in order to pronounce the Speech from the Throne.



Economy

You have come to one of the world's richest countries. An excellent choice because in many respects, the Netherlands is a prosperous country where public health, average incomes and educational levels all have improved considerably over the last decades.

And it is true: the Netherlands is known as a nation of traders.

An image that was derived back in the 17th century, also known as the Golden Age, from successful long-distance trade, shipping and financial innovations.

Nowadays, the Dutch economy is particularly strong in the service industry. Over 80% of Dutch economic activity is service-based.

Nowadays with the main ports of Rotterdam (shipping) and Amsterdam (air transport) and direct connections to the European hinterland by rail, road and water, the country is an important European hub. Holland has an open economy which depends heavily on foreign trade. Stable industrial relations and, under normal circumstances, a fairly low unemployment rate and inflation are distinctive characteristics of the Dutch economy. Huge gas reserves present a strong point for the time being. The Dutch soil has an estimated 500.000 billion cubic metres of unconventional gas still hidden.





Some of the main industrial activities in the Netherlands are food processing, chemicals, petroleum refining and electrical machinery. The country's agricultural sector is highly mechanized and its knowledge and innovative techniques are exported to many other countries around the world. After the United States and France it is the third export country for agricultural products such as flowers and vegetables. Leading export markets are Germany (by far the most important trading partner), Belgium, the United Kingdom and France. Along with eleven of its EU partners the Netherlands began circulating the euro currency on 1 January 2002.

Holland is one of the leading European nations for attracting foreign direct investment.

The knowledge economy is one of the spearheads of economic policy in Holland. We strive to be one of the leading countries in that respect, although critics say we could do better. Nevertheless, investments are made and innovations in every possible field are stimulated. Education of course is important to push the Dutch knowledge economy to a higher level. The Netherlands claims that a high rate of international student participation in Dutch higher education is of vital importance for the continued development of this country's knowledge economy. So you could consider yourself a special kind of VIP.

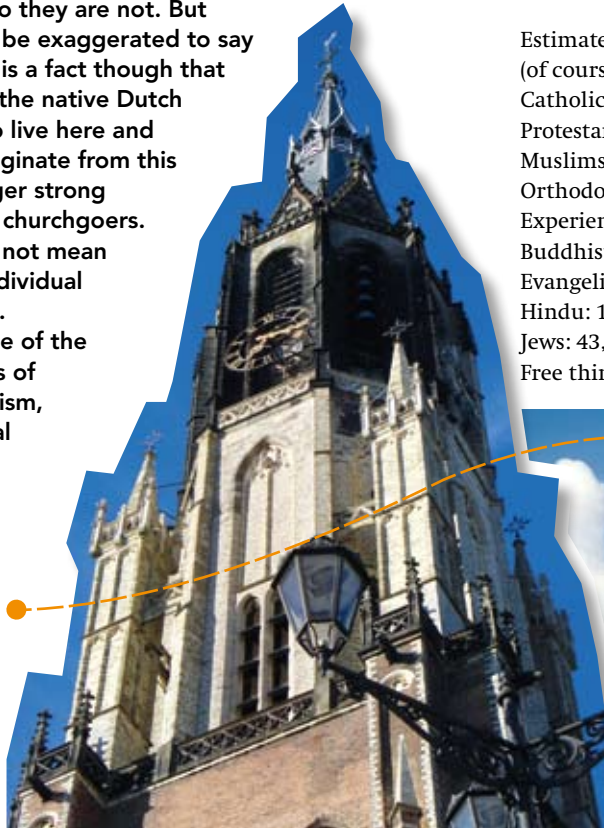




Religions

Whether you belong to Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism or any other religion, you will find that the Netherlands offers plenty of places and opportunities to practice your beliefs. Wherever you are in Holland, you will see a lot of churches. Does this mean that the Dutch are very religious people? No they are not. But then again it would be exaggerated to say 'on the contrary'. It is a fact though that today a majority of the native Dutch people (people who live here and whose ancestors originate from this country) are no longer strong believers or faithful churchgoers. Of course this does not mean they do not have individual spiritual convictions. A certain percentage of the Dutch are adherents of humanism, agnosticism, atheism or individual spirituality.

Holland offers plenty of places to practice your beliefs.



About half of the Dutch churchgoers and people who are registered at a congregation are Protestant. The other half is Roman Catholic. The southern provinces (North Brabant and Limburg) are mainly Catholic, the northern provinces are predominantly Protestant. Meanwhile the number of people who belong to the Islam is rising, although Catholicism and Protestantism continue to be the dominant religions.

Estimated numbers of people per religion in Holland (of course these figures vary every year):

Catholics: 4,406,000

Protestants: 1,944,000

Muslims: 944,000

Orthodox reformed: 238,000

Experiential reformed: 221,000

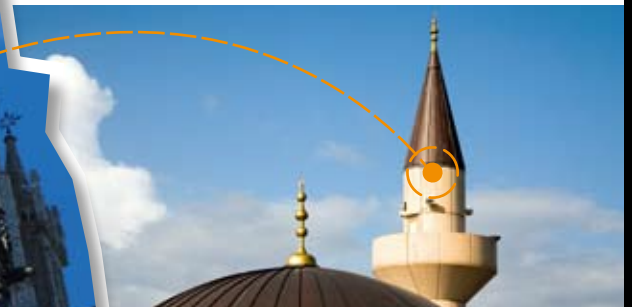
Buddhists: 170,000

Evangelic and Pentecostal communities: 148,000

Hindu: 100,000-215,000

Jews: 43,000

Free thinkers (*Vrijzinnigen*): 19,000



See Chapter 5 on how to find a place to practice your religion.



Practicing your own religion.

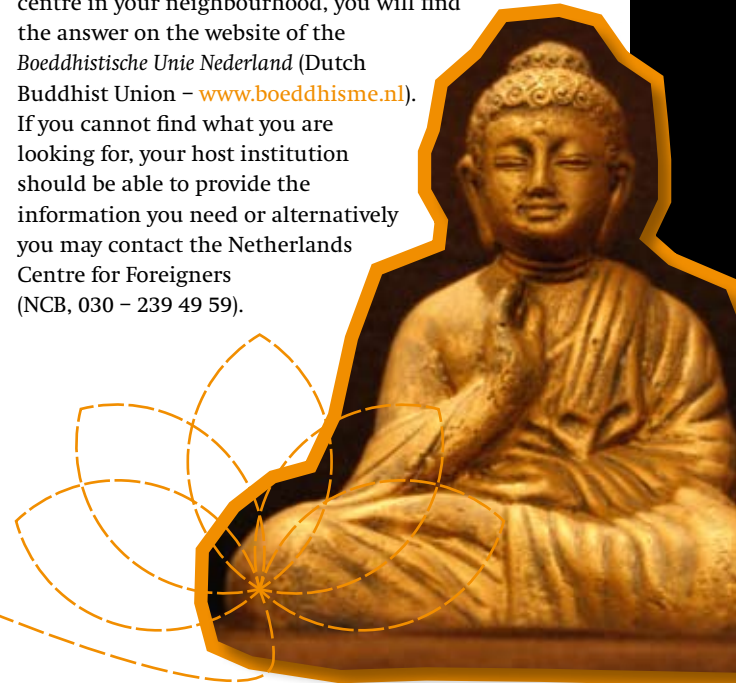
When it comes to religion, Holland has a lot to offer to people of all kinds of beliefs or convictions. Across the country you will find many Catholic and Protestant churches, mosques and synagogues, but also Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh places of worship. In many ways the Netherlands is a liberal country, but above all the Dutch strongly believe in freedom of thought and speech.

This of course includes religions. And though you will occasionally meet someone who is not particularly fond of religions or simply not interested, most Dutch people understand that every religion needs its own place of worship.

Being a traditionally Christian country, the number of churches in Holland is huge. According to a recent inventory there are about 8,500 to 9,000 churches and other places of worship to be found in this country. If you are looking for one that suits you, have a look at www.kerken.com. There are about 150 synagogues and some 450 mosques spread across the country. Their locations are quite easy to find on the internet. If you want to know where you can find a Buddhist meditation centre in your neighbourhood, you will find the answer on the website of the *Boeddhistische Unie Nederland* (Dutch Buddhist Union – www.boeddhisme.nl). If you cannot find what you are looking for, your host institution should be able to provide the information you need or alternatively you may contact the Netherlands Centre for Foreigners (NCB, 030 – 239 49 59).



Although Holland is a traditionally Christian country, you will find many different other places of worship.





True or false?

A boy once saved the land by putting his thumb in a hole in a dike

On a stormy afternoon a boy by the name of Hans Brinker was driving on his bicycle when he discovered a leak in the dike. By putting his thumb in the hole and staying there the whole night he managed to save the dike and thousands of people who lived behind it. Statues of this heroic boy exist in the cities of Harlingen and Spaarndam. It is just a small fictional story from the novel *Hans Brinker or The Silver Skates* written in 1864 by Mary Dodge who never even visited the Netherlands. The story is especially well-known in the United States. The statues were erected so the American tourists would not be disappointed.

So: not true.

Many American and Canadian names (names of cities for instance) are of Dutch origin

The city of New York was founded by Peter Stuyvesant (also the first governor, nowadays his name is mostly associated with the cigarette brand). At the time the city was called New Amsterdam. Harlem is named after the Dutch city of Haarlem (supposedly saved by Hans Brinker) and Brooklyn comes from Breukelen. But not only city names have a Dutch origin: Yankees for instance comes from the Dutch boys' names Jan and Kees, coleslaw was derived from *koolsla*, and dollar from *daalder* (one and a half guilder coin that existed in the 19th century).

So: true.

Everybody in Holland speaks English

Since English is taught at primary schools starting at the age of ten it is safe to say that almost everybody speaks well English. Most schoolchildren will continue to have English lessons until they leave school. English spoken movies and TV series keep up the language for most people. In many European countries movies and TV soaps are usually audio-synchronized in the country's own language. This is not the case in the Netherlands. On top of that most regions welcome a lot of tourists, so English could be considered the third language of the country. Third indeed, because in the north (the province Friesland) people speak Frisian called 'Fries' in Dutch and 'Frysk' in Frisian.

So: almost true.

Dutch people walk around in wooden shoes

Wooden clogs or *klompen* were traditionally worn by the Dutch as protective clothing on farms. This has earned them the nickname *cloggies* or *clog-wearers*. Today, Dutch clogs are primarily a beloved tourist souvenir. Despite the fact that most Dutch no longer wear *klompen* for everyday use, clogs remain popular by people working in their gardens, farms and by planters. Some of the Dutch also consider wearing clogs as being healthy for the wearers' feet.

So: partly true.



*The biggest difference
(I noticed immediately
compared to my own
country was the food).*

Name: Dalinda Isabel Sánchez Vidaña

Country: Mexico

Level: Master

Institution: Utrecht University

Subject: Drug Innovation

The most surprising thing about Dutch people is that they are so efficient in everything they do. Everything is perfectly planned and scheduled and I have learnt a lot from that. What I like most about Dutch people is that they are always willing to help each other: from students or tourists who are lost to somebody who just fell off their bike.



Chapter 4

How to ...



Nederlands
Dutch
gemeentehuis
town hall
groente
vegetable
bushalte
bus stop

Learning the Dutch language

Though Dutch people speak English well, you may want to learn some Dutch as a part of your study in Holland experience. Learning basics of the Dutch language can make it much easier to get in touch with other students and make some Dutch friends. Although Dutch can be a tricky language to learn over 5 million people have mastered it as a second language. As a native language it is spoken by over 22 million people, most of which live in the Netherlands of course but also in Belgium (Flanders) and Suriname (a former colony in South-America). The inhabitants of Caribbean islands like Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao, that are part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, are also able to speak Dutch.



Quite frankly, both grammatically and in terms of pronunciation Dutch is not an easy language to learn. Especially the guttural way in which the Dutch pronounce the 'g' and in many cases also the 'ch' causes a lot of foreign visitors to raise their eyebrows. They often wonder if speaking this way doesn't hurt your throat. (No it doesn't.) Dutch grammar is also quite complicated. Not in the least because there are so many exceptions to almost every rule.

Your advantage

It could prove worthwhile learning the language to some extent. It really is to your advantage to be able to decipher what is written on the packages of all kinds of products at the supermarket and to read articles in the local or national newspapers. Even more important: how nice would it be if you – to a certain level – could understand what people around you are talking about? Of course, as most of the Dutch speak English you can always have a conversation in that language. But you will find the Dutch very appreciative if you make an effort to learn some simple words (like *goedemorgen*, *goedemiddag* and *goedenavond* meaning good morning, good afternoon and good evening) or short sentences.

There are several options for learning Dutch. You can try to teach yourself by investing in a good phrasebook. If you want to try by yourself, make sure you buy a good dictionary and a qualitative 'Dutch for beginners' book.

But we also recommend asking your institution whether they offer Dutch classes for foreign students. Many institutions offer (free) Dutch courses or will at least have information on where to find good courses. You can also make inquiries at the city hall. There is a rather large national network of language institutes offering so-called NT2 Dutch courses to people as a second language. *Veel succes!* (Good luck!)





A few simple sentences to start with:

Ik spreek maar een klein beetje Nederlands.

I only speak a few Dutch words.

Wilt u dat nog eens langzaam herhalen?

Would you please repeat this slowly?

Weet u waar de tram- of bushalte is?

Excuse me, where do I find the tram or bus stop?

Ik zoek het gemeentehuis?

Where can I find the town hall?

Is hier een supermarkt in de buurt?

Is there a supermarket in the neighbourhood?

Dat is lekkere groente.

This vegetable tastes nice.

Ik eet geen vlees (vis).

I don't eat meat (fish).

Kunt u mij vertellen hoe ik bij de universiteit kom?

Could you tell me the directions to the university?

Mag ik twee bier?

Two beer please?

Wil je ook iets drinken?

Can I get you something to drink?

Wat kost dat?

How much is this?

Ga je mee naar de film?

Do you want to come along to the cinema/movies?

Ik ga vanavond uit.

I am going out tonight.

Ik zit in mijn eerste/tweede/derde/vierde jaar.

I'm in my first/second/third/fourth year.

Ik studeer over zes maanden af.

I'll graduate in six months.



Getting around

Holland is a small country, measuring only 300 kilometres from north to south and only 170 from east to west. Despite its modest size, getting from A to B in a densely populated country like Holland (with 488 km² the highest density in Europe) is not always easy. Traffic jams every morning and evening and sometimes even during weekends are quite normal. Taking this into account and also from an environmental perspective, public transport is highly stimulated. Okay, if you travel by train during rush hours most seats will be taken. And the same applies to trams and busses in the cities. Although popular lines become rather crowded during peak hours, in general public transportation is reasonably well organized and comfortable.

Nederlandse Spoorwegen (www.ns.nl) is the national train company running between all main cities. Without delays travelling from the centre of Amsterdam to the centre of The Hague for example will take you less than 45 minutes. Trains to most cities run several times every hour. You can buy train tickets at the yellow vending machines that you will find at every train station. The instructions on the machines are also available in English. At some stations you can also buy tickets at the service desk. Please note that when you buy tickets at the service desk, they may ask for a small service fee.



At www.ns.nl or www.journeyplanner.9292.nl you can plan your trip and see how long it will take and how much it will cost you to get to your destination. Both websites are available in English and provide information on the trains (NS) including door to door travel advice (9292).



Payment system

The public transport payment system underwent a major transformation in 2009 and 2010. The traditional paper *strippenkaart* used for bus and tram is gradually being replaced by the so-called *OV-chipkaart* (*OV* stands for *openbaar vervoer*, meaning public transport). Instead of paying per zone as was the case with the *strippenkaart*, now one pays for the exact distance travelled. Depending on where you stay, you may already be able to travel with the *OV-chipkaart*.

To buy a personal *OV-chipkaart* visit www.ov-chipkaart.nl. You will need a passport photo. And to pay with *iDeal* means you will need a Dutch bank account and a Dutch address. Or you can buy an anonymous *OV-chipkaart* (that anyone can use) at the railway station, the local transport company or a newspaper shop. *Strippenkaarten* can be bought at any newspaper shop.

In cities where the *OV-chip* system is already in use, you will need to swipe the card whenever you get on or off the bus, tram and metro, even on the days on which you get to travel for free. Travelling (also by train) in areas that still have not introduced the *OV-chipkaart* system means you will have to buy a ticket.

Taxis

As public transport is usually good enough to get pretty much anywhere you want, taxis are less popular than in some other countries. Dutch taxis are expensive and unlike in many other European countries they are not allowed to pick up people on the street except by reservation or at a taxi stand (in Dutch: *taxi standplaats*).

If you have a train ticket travelling to smaller cities you can take a train or *OV-taxi*. This is a shared door-to-door taxi service available at a low, fixed price.



OV-chip system logo.



Strippenkaart

Bikes

Most people in Holland ride bikes. It is an extremely popular (and healthy) way to get from A to B. The Dutch do not hesitate to cover long distances on their bicycles. And you will find that it is an easy way of getting to the institution at which you are studying. So why not consider buying a second-hand bike, you won't regret it. Several bike shops offer good and reasonably priced (second-hand) bicycles.

Never buy a bike from anyone who may offer you a ridiculously cheap bike on the street. The odds are that this bike will be stolen. That would make you a receiver which of course is punishable. And although the bikes sold at the shops are more expensive, eventually they will prove to be cheaper because they are well maintained.

Bear in mind that riding a bike in the evening without proper lighting will cost you a fine if the police happen to see you. And do not forget to secure your bike with a firm lock before you leave it on the street. Make sure to fasten your bike to a lantern pole, a fence or leave it at one of the many bike sheds or it will probably be gone by the time you get back.



Because the Dutch have a long bicycle tradition, several measures are taken to make riding a bike perfectly safe. From the smallest village to bigger cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam or The Hague, there are cycle tracks everywhere. They are easy to recognise because they are usually painted red and have their own traffic lights. One important tip however: watch out for the tram tracks whenever you are on the bicycle, or you may take a nasty spill.

Car and motorcycle

If you have come to Holland by car or motorcycle, mind the validity of your driver's license. If it was issued in one of the EU and countries such as Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein or Switzerland, it will remain valid in Holland for ten years. Driver's licenses that were issued in other countries will only be valid here for a period of 185 days. If you want to keep on driving after this period you will need a Dutch driver's license. Which means you will have about six months to get one.

For more information, check: www.rijbewijs.nl



Making a trip

Perhaps you would like to leave things behind and make a short trip abroad. On the internet you will undoubtedly find many interesting offers. A short Google search will show you some rather cheap trips by train or plane to European capitals like London, Brussels, Paris or Berlin. They are all worth the visit and it does not take much time to get there. Holland is a great place to start your trip through Europe.

Or how about discovering Holland itself? This small country will surprise you in what it has to offer. Popular tourist attractions include Volendam (if you are interested in traditional and local costumes), the Delta works in the province of Zeeland (an impressive series of

constructions built between 1950 and 1997 to protect a large area of land from the sea) and Keukenhof in Lisse where during spring you can admire flowers (and especially **tulips**) in many astonishing colours.

Are you more into art? Check out the Dutch museums that expose the great works of world-famous painters like Rembrandt van Rijn, Johannes Vermeer or Jan Steen. If these masters from the Golden Age in Holland are 'too old' for you, you may be more interested in exhibitions of more modern painters like Mondriaan and Van Gogh. Or maybe you do not want to see paintings at all but prefer technology, science or something quite different. No problem! Holland has the highest museum density in the world. Start your trip at www.museum.nl.





Daily expenses

Whether the Netherlands is an expensive country to live in is hard to say and depends largely on the country you live in at the moment and your own lifestyle. Compared to this you will have to budget higher or lower costs for your daily spending. Experience has shown that students spend roughly between € 800 and € 1,100 a month including housing and insurance costs.



Food

Basic daily expenses include food, public transport and clothing. As will probably be also the case in your own country: how much you spend will depend on your choice where to shop. For food and toiletries there is a broad range of different possibilities. Daily food markets and discount supermarkets like *Lidl* and *Aldi* charge less than high-end supermarket chains such as *Albert Heijn* and *Jumbo*.

Many supermarkets have special weekly offers that could have your interest. They are advertised in weekly store magazines, which are sampled door to door in your neighbourhood or can be found at the store itself. Or perhaps even easier, visit the supermarket's websites to see what's on offer the coming week (simply Google the name of your supermarket).

The Netherlands being a multi-cultured society is also reflected in the high variety of specialist shops, take aways and products sold at the open air markets, Especially in the larger cities you can buy food and other goods from many countries like China, Indonesia, Turkey, Morocco to name but a few and find shops that cater for your special needs like kosher food or Halal meat.

For more information, check:

www.nuffic.nl/financing-your-stay



Other products

Kruidvat and *Trekpleister* are both inexpensive chemist store chains offering lots of low priced articles besides their regular assortment of toiletries (e.g. shampoo and toothpaste).

On clothes and shoes you can spend as little or as much as you like depending on your budget. In every city centre you will find many stores ranging from the cheaper discount shops to more sophisticated boutiques. Looking good, however, does not necessarily mean you have to spend a fortune. Ask fellow students for tips and recommendations.



Drop is the favourite type of sweets for Dutch people.

Opening hours

Shops are usually open Monday to Saturday from 9.00 until approximately 18.00. However, opening hours can vary from place to place. For instance, large supermarket chains are open Monday to Saturday usually from 9.00 until 20.00 or 21.00, at some you may even shop on Sundays. Most cities have *Koopzondagen*. This means shops are open on specific Sundays (e.g. first Sunday of every month) or even on every Sunday, as is the case in some of the country's large cities. Always check for opening hours as they may vary.

Paying the rent

Holland is not familiar with the on-campus accommodation tradition. On average you will have to spend a substantial part of your monthly budget (say one-third) on paying the rent of your room in or near your university town. This can be in a shared house with other students or as a lodger with a family. Most rental contracts run for at least six months or a year when you are enrolled in a course program.

Costs will depend largely on the city in which you have decided to study, whatever is included in the rent and the arrangements made by the institution. In cities such as Amsterdam, Utrecht and Leiden a reasonably priced accommodation, say € 500 or less, is very hard to find because of a shortage on the student housing market. In other cities prices can be more reasonable. An average room in Holland will cost anywhere between € 250 and € 600 a month. It is advisable to check what bills are included in the rent, as this may have a large impact on your budget. For some accommodations rent will include gas, electricity, TV and internet, for others you will be expected to pay these costs separately. Check with the institution whether you are obliged to pay municipal taxes if accommodation is offered by the institution.

Lease contracts

The lease contract will determine what a room costs, whether it is a short-term lease or one for a longer period of time. It will also tell you which other facilities like bathroom, kitchen and garden are yours to use or to share

with others. Most agencies and landlords are reliable and will offer you a clear and reasonable lease contract. It is wise to check if your lease contract is sound with your institution. Beware of people who will want you to pay considerable amounts of money before you even get to see the room they say they have available, or before they let you rent it.

Avoid unpleasant surprises and make sure you get the answers to all of your questions and find out exactly how much you are going to pay monthly.



If you are looking for a (new) room, check out websites like www.studentenkamers.nl or www.kamernet.nl.

Furnishing your room

Large retail stores such as *Ikea*, *Kwantum* and *Leen Bakker* sell inexpensive furniture and have special offers on a regular basis. If you want to furnish your room at the lowest possible costs, an internet site like www.marktplaats.nl where people sell their used stuff at very low prices is a good place to look.

Student discounts

The remaining part of your income will probably be spent on leisure, books, travel and other expenses. Cinema tickets are about € 9.30, however most cinemas offer student discounts. Many bars, restaurants, museums and even retailers like America Today give student discounts. Most of them will ask you to submit a student card that you have received from your institution. You should check in advance if a student discount is available. Especially for international students, the International Student Identity Card (ISIC) can provide some interesting discounts and offers on travel, shopping, museums and more. Find out more at the ISIC website www.isic.org. Most university faculties have their own study association (*studievereniging*). Joining them will make you eligible for all kinds of deductions (e.g. study books).



Dinner habits

In student houses it is not unusual to cook and eat together, either by appointment or through a sign-in-for-the-day system. You will find that supermarkets offer a great variety of bread, potatoes, pasta, rice, vegetables, meat and fish, fruit and anything else you might need to prepare a tasty and healthy meal for yourself or your friends. Also, check out the local outdoor market that is usually held once or twice a week in every city. Find out which stands sell good quality at reasonable prices.

Melting pot

The traditional Dutch cuisine is famous for being quite sober. However, today the traditional way of cooking is practiced less and less. This means that eating in the Netherlands is not at all a bland affair. A hot meal used to consist of mostly potatoes, vegetables and meat or fish (for those of you who are up for a challenge: see also the recipe on page 75). Nowadays dishes from all over the world, from Italian and Mexican to Greek and Thai delicacies, have found their way into



Dutch kitchens. Due to the ties with Indonesia this country's cuisine has become part of the Dutch eating culture. Dishes like *Rijsttafel*, best to be described as rice accompanied by (up to 30) dishes of all kinds of spicy meat, fish, vegetables and Saté (roasted meat with spicy peanut butter sauce) are considered as typical Dutch and you should make sure to try them at least once. A typical Dutch lunch consists of a sandwich and milk. If you like snacks, try *patat* (French fries) and *kroket* (deep fried roll made of ragout).



Eating out

No time to cook or want to eat out with friends without spending a fortune? Every city has many restaurants that offer meals at reasonable prices. *Chinees-Indische* (Chinese-Indonesian) restaurants, *eetcafe's* (pubs serving food) and pizzeria's are affordable options. Also, do not hesitate to ask your fellow students where to enjoy a delicious meal without having to pay too much. Cooking together with a small group of people and eating at your institution's restaurant are good alternatives for a nice but inexpensive meal.



When you are eating out with a group it is custom to pay for your own food. Although this is practice in other countries too, it is called Going Dutch. The Dutch often have dinner rather early, usually around 18.30. Although you may notice that especially in student communities, dinner is enjoyed much later in the evening. Nevertheless, keep in mind that most kitchens at restaurants close around 22.00.

Table etiquette in the Netherlands may differ from your own eating habits. Food is eaten with a knife, fork and spoon; chopsticks are only used in Asian restaurants. Meat is sliced while eating and both knife and fork are used during dinner.



A basic Dutch diner

Stamppot, a mashed dish served as a complete meal, is a popular and cheap Dutch winter dish. The basic ingredient is a floury potato cooked with either a root vegetable like carrot (*hutspot*), cabbage (*zuurkool* and *boerenkool*) or mashed with uncooked finer leaved vegetables like endive (*andijviestamppot*) and served with smoked sausage and bacon. If you want to cook a Dutch dish the recipe below is a good option: simple, easy to prepare, cheap and healthy.



Stamppot met andijvie en spekjes

Mashed potatoes with endive and crispy baked bacon

Serves 4

You need:

- 400 g (3/4 lb) endive, one piece or ready sliced
- 250 g (1/2 lb) smoked bacon bits
- 1 kg (2 lbs) floury potatoes
- 25 g (1 oz, 2 tbsp) butter
- milk to mix
- salt and pepper



Preparation:

- Wash and drain the endive, shred finely if needed.
- Fry the bacon bits until crisp and reserve the fat.
- Peel the potatoes and cook them in water with 1/2 a tbsp of salt in a large pan for 20 minutes.
- Drain the potatoes with the butter and add milk until you have a thick puree.
- Fold in the shredded endive, bacon bits together with the fat.
- Return to the heat to warm through and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Rich option:

Add 150 g of tiny cheese cubes to the puree.

Vegetarian option:

Skip the bacon and use instead 250 g of tiny cubes of Dutch cheese (*jong belegen Goudse kaas* is a good choice) and mix them into the puree together with the endive.



Your good health

Without exaggeration, medical care in the Netherlands is in league with the best in the world. Hospitals and other medical facilities are generally excellent and comply with strict rules. So if you have to rely on medical services you are in good hands. Another advantage for people from abroad: doctors, nurses and paramedics, almost everyone speaks English.



Finding a doctor and a dentist

First of all, let's hope you won't need a doctor at all while you are in Holland. But to be well prepared, it is best to find a family doctor or GP (in Dutch: *huisarts*) soon after you have settled in. So where do you start looking? The easiest way of course is to ask fellow students or your contact at your institution. Some institutions collaborate with doctors and dentists. If not, they will be able to tell you where you can find a doctor's practice nearby (but you can choose any *huisarts* you like, even if he is not located in your neighbourhood).

If – for whatever reason – this way of finding a doctor or dentist is not an option, you may go to the city hall and ask for a *gemeentegids*. That is a booklet full of practical and useful information about lots and lots of subjects. Actually, you will probably also find this kind of ‘guide through town’ on the internet. Another very easy way of finding doctors and dentists is of course checking the Yellow Pages (which you will also find on the internet). Look under *Artsen* or *Huisartsen* and for dentists under *Tandartsen* or *Tandartspraktijken*. By the way, in Dutch a pharmacist is called an *apotheker*.

At night or during weekends there are always family doctors or GPs on duty (*doktersdiensten*). If you should need one, just call the number of your own physician and the answering machine will tell you whether he is on duty or what number to call. Towns with hospitals are usually provided with the so-called *huisartsenpost* which you may visit after opening hours or in the weekend. There is always a family doctor present, but it is highly appreciated if you call first.



Dutch doctors do not prescribe too much medicine or antibiotics.

During visits

In all cases you should know that Dutch family doctors or GPs are on tight schedules. So they do not have much time to listen to long and complicated stories. Be brief, unashamed and straightforward, that is the best way to get the answers and the treatment you need. You will need a prescription to get certain medicine at the pharmacy.



Emergency

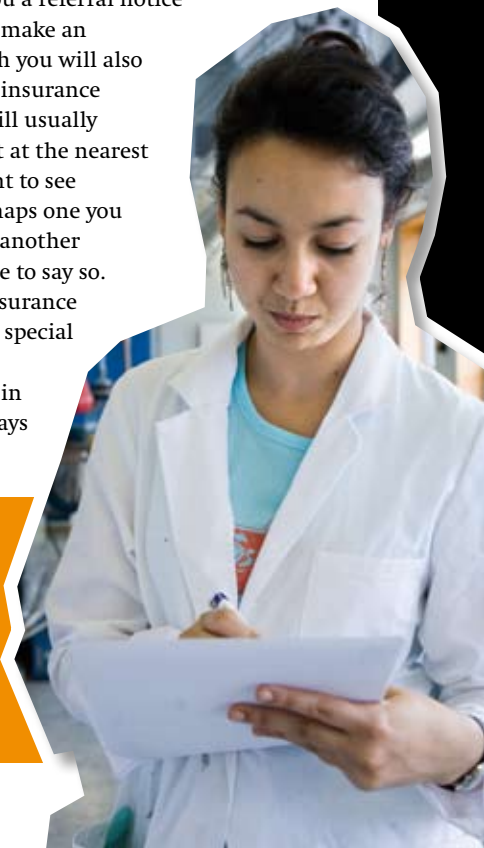
In case of an emergency you can go straight to the First Aid section of the hospital (*EHBO* or *Eerste Hulp Bij Ongelukken*). If you (or someone else that you are trying to help) are unable to get there, you can either call your own physician or the emergency number by dialling 112.

The specialist

For a more complicated illness or injury you might need to see a specialist. If you want your insurance company to pay for the costs you will have to go to your family doctor first. Always check in advance whether costs are covered by your insurance. The family doctor will evaluate your condition and – if necessary – recommend a specialist. Your doctor will give you a referral notice which you will need to make an appointment and which you will also need to submit to your insurance company. The doctor will usually recommend a specialist at the nearest hospital. But if you want to see another specialist (perhaps one you have been to before) or another hospital, do not hesitate to say so. Always check if your insurance company will cover the special treatment you need. Alternative treatments in particular may not always be (fully) covered.

Emergency numbers

For police,
ambulance, fire
department: 112
General number for
police: 0900 8844





Staying in touch

Staying in touch with your parents, family and friends is easy nowadays. Thanks to the internet you are only one e-mail away. And of course you may use MSN, Yahoo (or any other chat program) and Skype. If they do not have internet at home you can always rely on Bell's magnificent invention: the telephone. Using a mobile phone is very easy and comfortable, but might prove to be rather expensive if you are going to make a long-distance call. If possible, use a fixed telephone line where it is less expensive to phone home. If you do not have a fixed line at your disposal you can always turn to a phone house (Dutch: *belhuis*) that offers special rates for long-distance calls. Ask around or check the (online) Yellow Pages to find one near you.



Mobile phone

Nevertheless you may want a mobile phone to keep in touch with your Dutch or international friends. To get a mobile phone you can go to several stores. You will find stores like *BelCompany*, *The Phone House*, *t for telecom*, *T-Mobile Shop* and lots of local telecom retailers in every town. The main providers are *KPN* (once the national

telephone company), *Vodafone*, *T-Mobile* and *Tele2*. Two other providers, *Hi* and *Telfort*, are *KPN* labels. You have three choices: a subscription with a contract and monthly bills (and often a free or cheap phone, depending on your choice of model), pre-paid service (you can buy cards with call units at the telecom shops, supermarkets, cigar shops and bookstores) and Sim Only (in case you already have your own mobile phone and only need a Dutch sim-card). The first option is often a contract for at least one year, therefore the latter can be financially most attractive if you are staying for less than a year. You can find out your best alternative at every specialised shop.



Internet

As a student, it is important for you to have access to the internet. Most institutions provide wireless internet access in every institutional building and also at the library. If you have your own laptop, you can use these connections. If not, you can log in to one of the institution's computers. You will receive your log in credentials upon arrival.

Whether you have access to the internet at home will depend on whether it is included in your rent. Some student houses share one internet connection. If you want to have your own internet connection check for special offers. internet service providers (ISPs) in this country are (in alphabetical order): *Alice*, *Het Net*, *KPN*, *Online*, *Tele2*, *Telfort*, *UPC*, *XS4ALL* and *Ziggo*. *Het Net*, *Telfort* and *XS4ALL* are *KPN* brands with their own propositions, *UPC* and *Ziggo* are cable companies. On the internet you will find many websites that compare speed, prices, quality and possibilities. Just Google the words 'internet abonnement prijs-vergelijking' and you will find the information you need. Do not forget to ask your fellow students what choice they have made.





When I left home, I was very nervous. Little did I know that the Netherlands would become my home far away from home.

Name: Mathenge Mwehe

Country: Kenya

Level: Master

Institution: ITC

Subject: Geo-Information Science &
Earth Observation for Urban
Planning and Management

Within a few days after my arrival the institution arranged a social gathering where all international students met and socialized with local Dutch people. I learnt a lot about the culture and the food and a few simple Dutch words. This made my everyday life easier as I felt no hesitation to ask for directions around town or where to find supermarkets and what kind of food to buy.



Chapter 5

Social life



After you covered all formalities, furnished your room and started your study, it is time to have some fun. Go out, meet new people and fellow students, fall in love if you like. But to do that you must be able to communicate properly. As cultures differ it is a good thing to learn a few things about the Dutch culture and habits. Maybe some of these habits will seem strange to you, but in general the Dutch are quite easygoing. This chapter will help you get started. Enjoy.



Basic Dutch etiquette

When moving to another country you may not know exactly how to address people in the proper way. In general, the Dutch are easygoing when it comes to formalities. They more or less see and treat everyone equally. Maybe you will be taken aback a little by the fact that especially in the academic world, the relationship between students and the academic staff is usually informal in the way that they address each other by saying *jij* (the informal word for 'you') and by their first names.



Saying hello

When they get together, friends will usually say 'Hi' to each other and sometimes shake hands. If the friend concerned is female, you may add three kisses on the cheeks usually starting on the right side. Of course, if you do not feel comfortable doing it this way, you can get by with shaking hands instead.

To get you started here are a few sentences which could come in handy (for more Dutch phrases see Chapter 4):

Hoi/hallo

Hoe gaat het met je?

Hi/hello, how are you?

Goedemorgen, hoe gaat het met jou?

Good morning, how are you?

Tot ziens

Goodbye

Mag ik een koffie/thee/biertje/etc. van u?

Can I have a coffee/tea/beer/etc please?

Kan ik dat boek van je lenen?

Could I borrow your book?



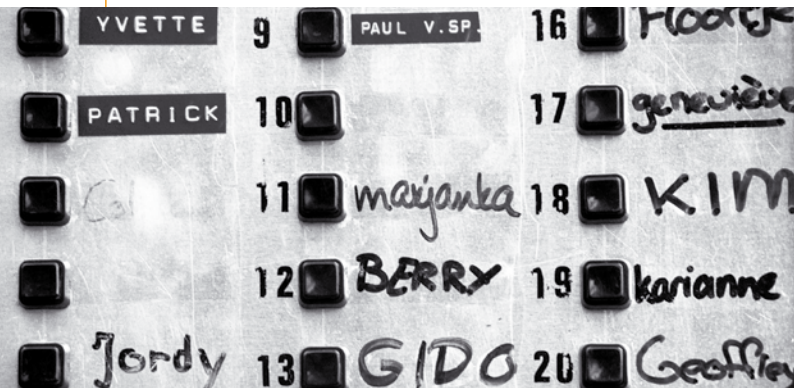
Being on time

Although we mentioned earlier that in general the Dutch are quite easygoing, there is one thing you should mind however: it is being on time. In some cultures – including European ones – being on time is not really a big issue. But in most western European countries like Holland it definitely is. It is customary to be a few minutes early or simply on time when you are meeting someone. Perhaps being a few minutes late won't matter, but the Dutch (even Dutch students) expect you to take traffic jams into consideration and the possibility of trains not running on time. So, if you have an appointment, make sure you leave home on time. Punctuality is highly appreciated.

Gezellig!

Now *there* is a word you will be hearing quite often while you are in the Netherlands. It is probably the word most (international) students will mention if they had to name a typically Dutch word. You will not find it in any other language and for the Dutch it is a very important issue in daily life. It is best described as “congenial people getting together in a warm and pleasant atmosphere to have a good time”.





Visiting friends

The Dutch like to make their homes look welcoming and cosy and are quick at getting on friendly terms with other people. That is probably why the Dutch like to invite people at home more often rather than meet up with them at a pub or restaurant as is customary in some other countries. This does not mean you can drop by unannounced whenever you like. Although the Dutch are very open and welcoming, most of them appreciate their privacy and like to know beforehand if you want to come over. So make sure to give people a call if you plan to visit. Make an appointment when you are meeting someone at your institution or a sports club for instance.

If you are living in a student house with other Dutch students, there is a privacy rule you should observe: if your door is closed, it means others may only enter with your permission (a knock on the door); if your door is open others are free to call on you.

Bringing a gift

When visiting fellow students or friends, you will usually be offered something to drink and sometimes a bite to eat as well. Between good friends it is not customary to bring a gift when they are having a cup of tea or coffee together. If you are about to visit someone you have not met before, a little gift like cakes or flowers will be perfect. If you have been invited over for dinner or lunch, it is customary to offer the host a little token of your appreciation; flowers or a bottle of wine are good options.

The Dutch love flowers. You will find a bunch of fresh flowers in almost every living room.





'We're all equal'

For centuries the country's historical ties with other parts of the world has brought people of non-Dutch origin to settle in the Netherlands. This makes the Dutch generally open-minded, freedom loving and usually tolerant towards foreigners.

The Dutch believe each person is unique. They try to be fair by treating everyone the same. That is why the Dutch will quote criteria, rules and regulations – because these affect everyone equally. In general the Dutch resist giving preferential treatment to anyone. Society is based on a non-hierarchical system, in fact they even avoid ranking people in terms of merit and it is customary to treat every person with the same amount of respect.

To the Dutch the social system proves how much we care about equal human rights. Knowing this it won't surprise you that the Dutch feel strongly about the right for everyone to decent housing, food, education and healthcare – regardless of the income. To make sure nobody has to live in poverty they pay quite a lot of taxes without complaining (too much). Of course (conservative) people exist who fear this system of solidarity might be abused, but the majority truly believes no one should be excluded.

One of the consequences of believing in this system is that everyone wants to express their opinion about it.

We already mentioned the so-called 'polder model'; the Dutch strive for consensus on all matters.

A 'polder' is a piece of land completely surrounded by dykes to protect it from high waters. Small mistakes in the management of such a piece of land can result in a disaster. So the people living there and using the land have to work together in the best possible way and treat each other as equals. Hence the strong Dutch feeling about being equal and the polder model in which everyone has something to say.





Openness

Another distinctive characteristic of the Dutch is their openness and direct way of acting and speaking.

In general the Dutch are quite helpful and interested in speaking to foreigners. They speak in a way you might have to get used to at first. The Dutch don't beat about the bush. They say whatever is on their minds and this direct way of speech can be pretty intimidating if you are not used to this. If people from your culture are more reserved, the Dutch way may seem impolite and curt. However appearances are indeed deceptive. The Dutch will mean no harm by giving their opinions in a curt way and they do appreciate a fierce debate regardless of the participants' status or ranks. It can be considered an intrinsic value because of their love for freedom and a strong sense of equality. As a result of this, the Dutch are not easily offended. You can use this to your advantage; while your language skills are still mediocre it can be hard to express yourself effectively. So if you happen to express yourself rather bluntly, be assured the person you are talking to will hardly be offended.

As always there are exceptions to the rules. Generally speaking the Dutch are calm people and they do not express their emotions as openly as you may be used to. However, the Dutch are also very proud people. When it comes to soccer games, the Dutch show their love for the national team by dressing up in orange hats, wigs, t-shirts and much more. You better be warned!

Tolerance

The Dutch are internationally known as broad-minded and tolerant people. And it is true: the legislation on social and political issues such as homosexuality, euthanasia, abortion, soft drugs and more is rather progressive.

But as the world has changed a lot in the first years of this millennium, so has Holland. The Netherlands today can still offer a picturesque tranquillity, but all kinds of events both internally and internationally have also left their marks on this country. They have given rise to public and political debate about immigration and minority groups. However, there is a zero-tolerance policy on matters such as aggression, misuse of drugs and alcohol, using public transport without buying a ticket and so on.





Meeting fellow students

Studying abroad means you will have plenty of opportunities to make new Dutch and international friends. Remember most Dutch are open-minded, welcoming to foreigners and interested in meeting new people. So use this to your advantage. At first the Dutch may seem a little bit close-mouthed and you may find it hard to fit in. But don't give up, as soon as you've gotten to know a few better, they will make loyal friends.



Something you should definitely join is the introduction week (*introductieweek*) of the institution where you are about to start studying as a first-year student. It is held the week before the start of the academic year. It is a great way of getting to know all different aspects of your institution, student life, the town you will be studying in and to meet the study and students associations (*studieverenigingen* and *studentenverenigingen*). Furthermore, you will gain information on all kinds of interesting organizations like sports, drama or cultural clubs offering favourable student rates.

In addition, many institutions organize special introduction weeks for international students regardless of their level of study. During these introduction weeks you will become acquainted with Dutch traditions, have some practicalities taken care of etc.



Studieverenigingen are associations of which members study the same course. They offer practical study facilities and internships as well as interesting services such as book discounts, lectures and excursions relevant to your study subject. Also, they offer social events like parties, 'going away for the weekend', etcetera. These activities can be either informal or very formal, depending on the club concerned.

Studentenverenigingen consist of students and former students and are run by students. They all have their specific mission, usually a social one: stimulating interaction between fellow students and former students. Other missions are based on promoting contact between students who share a special interest like political ideology, a philosophical principle, religious beliefs, international relations or any activities like a particular sport or hobby.

Besides these Dutch associations and clubs, international student associations exist like AISEC and AEGEE which are worth to investigate. Visit their websites: www.aiesec.nl, www.aegee.org.

There may also be special associations for students from one particular country. Check with your institution whether they can recommend any.

There are quite a few student associations with a rowing club.

Come out of your shell

Studieverenigingen and *studentenverenigingen* are about much more than having drinks and partying. Foremost they offer an invaluable possibility to make the most of your period of study over here. In that case you are spoilt with choice, however the most important thing is to find an association or activity that suits you best. Do not be put off by their straightforwardness, the Dutch mean no harm. Come out of your shell and get to know people of all walks of life so you can enrich your life both socially and professionally during your time as a student.



Going out

Surely studying is not the only thing you want to be doing while you are in Holland. Having fun and meeting other people (including fellow students) is also very important. So why not hit the town! Most cities with institutions for higher education have plenty of cafés (the Dutch often use the word *kroeg*), nightclubs and discotheques. Officially a good place to find information about places of entertainment is the tourist information centre (VVV), but if you walk or cycle through town, you are bound to find what you are looking for. The Dutch like to have fun and are known for their open-minded approach, so a night out in the Netherlands can be something of an eye-opener.

A few tips

We already mentioned 'going Dutch' in another chapter of this book. If you are going out with friends you will have a few options. Either each will pay for his own drinks or alternatively each member in the group will pay for a round of drinks (*een rondje geven*). Which means that if you accept the drinks, you are morally obliged to pay for a round yourself as well. If you are on your own and you meet someone, unless you are explicitly offered a drink, each will simply have to pay for himself. And although this is not compulsory, at restaurants and bars it is generally expected of you to give a tip (*een fooi*). You are free to decide on how much you want to give, but basically about 10% is normal.



As in many other European countries smoking is no longer allowed in pubs, bars or clubs. But some of them have special separated spaces where smokers can still light a cigarette.

When going to a nightclub or discotheque you are well advised to dress properly. The bouncers (heavy dudes called *uitsmijters* in Dutch) at the doors of some clubs might send you away just for wearing sneakers or sport shoes, while next door you will be most welcome. Friends or fellow students will be happy to tell you what to wear to which club. But it is a fact that all a bouncers has to do to send you away, is to say that the place is already dangerously crowded. Getting angry will get you nowhere (or maybe to a police station), staying calm and friendly will usually help.

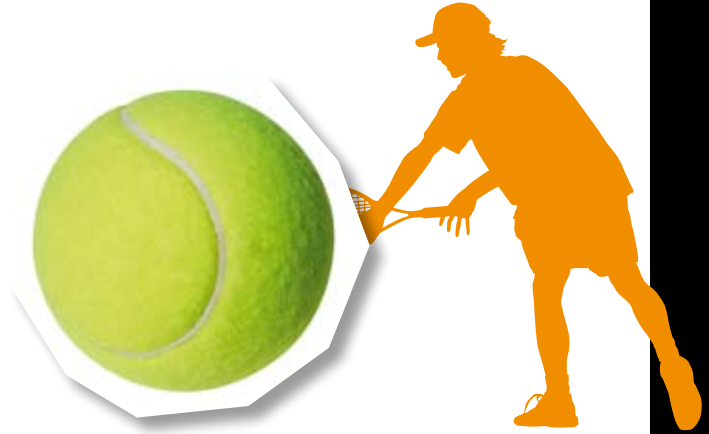
Just like almost everywhere else in the world Saturday night is party time. But in Dutch university towns Thursday is also a typical night (for students) to go out.

Some institutions have their own cafe for their students.



Spending time on sports

The Dutch are sport-minded people. They love watching sports competitions. Especially football – or soccer – bicycle races, field hockey, tennis, GP F1, speed skating and darts. But they also love to work out. Holland offers a huge number of sports clubs for all kinds of sports. So whether you prefer recreational sport or if you are fascinated by competition you will find what you like, no matter where you live. There are well-organized leagues and – in general – clean and modern facilities. Most institutions have their own sport clubs and facilities, so they should be easy to find.



But if you are interested in something quite different or if you want to meet people outside the student community, you won't have a hard time finding what you are looking for. Check the town guide (Dutch: *gemeentegids*) which should also be available on the internet for sport clubs (*sportverenigingen*) and simply pick the ones you like. Chances are you will have a wide choice (certainly when it is football you play). The best thing to do is to get on your bike and visit the clubs that appeal to you. Have a chat with the club's manager or receptionist and don't forget to ask if they offer membership discounts for students. Look around for a while and if possible talk to some of the players before or after a match. Have a drink at the canteen (*kantine*). See if you like the atmosphere and mentality. Make a choice and... have fun!





Public holidays and special Dutch days

Like any other country the Netherlands too has its own special national days. *Koninginnedag* (Queen's Day) on 30 April for example. This used to be the birthday of the former queen Juliana. But when her daughter Beatrix (born on 31 January) succeeded her in 1980, she decided that 30 April should live on as *Koninginnedag*. On this day there are festivities in every city and town in Holland. Bands will be playing and artists will be performing on every square. There are flea markets along the canals and in parks and crowds of people are enjoying themselves on the streets and at cafés.



Bevrijdingsdag (Liberation Day) is celebrated on 5 May. Every five years this day is a public holiday (2005, 2010, 2015, 2020 and so on).

Sinterklaas (Saint Nicholas' Eve is on 5 December) is the day every child looks forward to as they get presents. *Sinterklaas* is based on America's Santa Claus. Dutch children are lucky: they get presents twice – with *Sinterklaas* and Christmas. Other public holidays are:

Nieuwjaarsdag New Year's Day – 1 January

Goede Vrijdag Good Friday – three days before Easter

Pasen Easter (Easter Sunday and Easter Monday)

Pinksteren Whitsun (Whit Sunday and Whit Monday)

Kerstmis Christmas (Christmas Day and Boxing Day), 25 and 26 December.

And let's not forget these important days (these are not public holidays):

Valentijnsdag Valentine's Day – 14 February

Carnaval Carnival – varies, 40 days before Easter (only in southern regions)

Nationale Dodenherdenking Memorial Day – 4 May

Moederdag Mother's day – second Sunday in May

Vaderdag Father's day – third Sunday in June

Prinsjesdag (Day of the Princes) is the day on which the reigning monarch addresses a joint session of the Dutch Senate (*Eerste Kamer*) and House of Representatives (*Tweede Kamer*) before the nation's budget for next year is presented – third Tuesday in September

Dierendag Animal's day – 4 October



It is really nice when everyone comes together at a given time during the day.

Name: Randy Möwes

Country: Germany

Level: Bachelor

Institution: University of Twente

Subject: Educational Sciences

I have friends all over the campus and in the city. I would advise everyone who comes to the Netherlands to move into a student flat. It does not have to be that big but it really makes it easier to get to know lots of people. And it is so much fun! We have dinner together every evening and often watch movies together or play board games. And of course on Thursdays (the night when students traditionally go out in Holland) and during the weekends we like to go out to parties together.



Chapter 6

Education in Holland



So far we have covered many aspects including the Dutch climate, traffic, food, clothes, religion and the Dutch way of doing things. The Dutch educational system, the content and structure of the study programme may also be different from what is customary in your country.

Most foreign students experience the entry level as being different to that of other students. For instance, you may already have mastered a topic that is new to others. On the other hand, you may find yourself struggling with topics that are a piece of cake to other students, requiring remedial study on your side. Perhaps you have mastered skills that are not required in Holland and lack those skills that are much needed such as selective and critical reading skills and academic writing skills. So at first you may feel a little bit 'different'. But that's OK.



The educational style (the combination of lecturers' teaching and assessment strategies and the study strategies that are expected from the students) is also strongly influenced by being abroad and in a different culture. Over the years quite a lot of foreign students have reported that during the first few months of the course, they had experienced more difficulties because of the (unexpected) educational shock rather than the (expected) cultural shock. Knowing this in advance will give you a certain advantage.

The Dutch education style can be quite different from what you are used to.



Courses can be offered in several educational styles and will probably be different from what you are used to back home. Therefore in this chapter we will summarise the main characteristics of the Dutch educational style. And as we explain matters, your challenge will be to put your set of values, expectations and culture aside for a while and try to join your study programme with an open mind. This may not be an easy task. So we wish you the very best of luck.

Your own opinion

Having your own opinion and being critical is highly appreciated in Holland. Already at a young age kids are encouraged to develop their own ideas and take a critical view of things. If in your country students have to master the existing knowledge first before their own opinion is appreciated, you will be facing a great challenge. For example, when writing a paper copying information from other authors and simply preparing a summary will not suffice. You will be expected to make your own selection of information sources, develop your own line of thinking and include your own conclusions and/or recommendations.



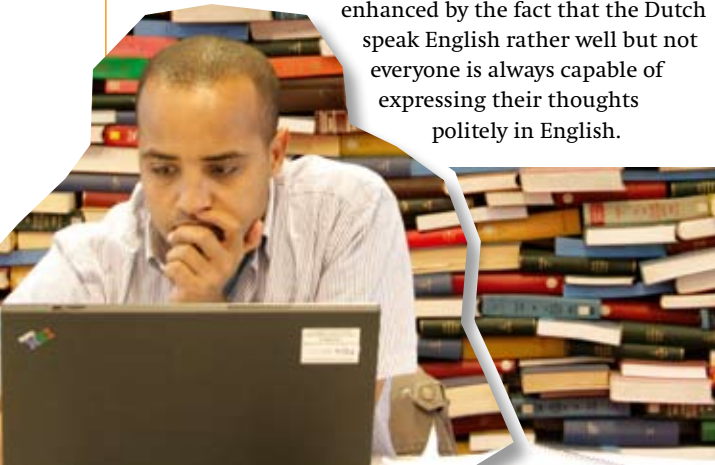
Brutal honesty

As said earlier you do not have to be the best student, but nevertheless students are expected to be visible in class, participate in discussions and show what they are capable of. Besides the high appreciation of having an opinion of your own and being critical, giving a presentation to a group of Dutch students for the first time might prove to be quite a difficult experience. Certainly when after the presentation students will start asking questions and commenting on your work which they are expected to do. They will be straightforward and say exactly what they think. To avoid losing face is less important.

Individualism

Dutch society is rather individualistic. Showing lecturers and fellow-students how critical you are is considered to be more important than being loyal to other students as a group. To you this might seem a quite brutal form of honesty, in Holland it is simply the way people

communicate. This brutality may be enhanced by the fact that the Dutch speak English rather well but not everyone is always capable of expressing their thoughts politely in English.



Intercultural friendships

Given the above cultural differences Dutch students may consider foreign students to be passive, easily offended, only capable of memorizing and reproducing course materials, very much focused on marks and not quite honest about their opinions and ideas. Foreign students, on the other hand, might experience Dutch students as noisy in class, disrespectful to lecturers, show-offs, lazy and negative. The best thing to do in an international classroom would be to overcome prejudices and try to listen to each other and become friends. What a triumph this would be if you would succeed in doing so.



Equatorial society

As we stated earlier in Chapter 5, the equality of all human beings is a fundamental value in Dutch society. Differences in class, wealth, status, sex, age or race may never influence the classroom. Whatever students' background may be, everybody will be treated the same way.

This value means that a rather informal relationship exists between lecturers and students. Calling lecturers by their first names is acceptable at most institutes. Use of titles is not common. Lecturers will be friendly but the relationship will be a professional and never a personal one, and will not be extended outside office hours. The main difference is that the lecturer has the expertise the student is yet to gain. So students are treated as grownups who are able to take care of themselves. As long as you do not raise any issue, the lecturer will assume everything is going well.

Rules are rules

Within the Dutch society rules and regulations are very important. Dutch society is based on rules. Exceptions to these rules, especially for individuals, are rare. To the Dutch rules are there to guarantee fair and equal treatment for everyone.

Independence

Research universities and universities of applied sciences in Holland expect their students to be independent. Lecturers will inform their students on what they expect them to do (read certain books, write articles, prepare for exams), but will leave the planning of these tasks up to them. Assignments may be more 'open' than you are used to (with few instructions and room to choose your own approach) and it will be up to you to decide on whether you will be attending a lecture (however, some modules have the *aanwezigheidsplicht*: the obligation to attend).



So in general you might say that you will be expected to determine the study strategy that suits you best. The same applies to exercises and assignments. Some will have to be finished in detail while others are more about understanding the essence.



Active learning

Active learning is the best approach, is the general belief in Holland. This means that you will have to ask yourself questions and try to find the answers by studying. Does what I read answer my questions? Do I agree? What's missing? Are there any alternative solutions? And what are the consequences? Memorizing and reproducing study material is considered nothing but a first step. The emphasis though is on developing academic and professional skills.

This should lead to appreciating 'own opinions' and 'being critical' but also to interaction in class and understanding how exams work. During exams the questions that get most points are the questions that require insight, application or conclusions that cannot be found literally in books. The most flexible exams are those during which students may bring and use their books (open book exams).

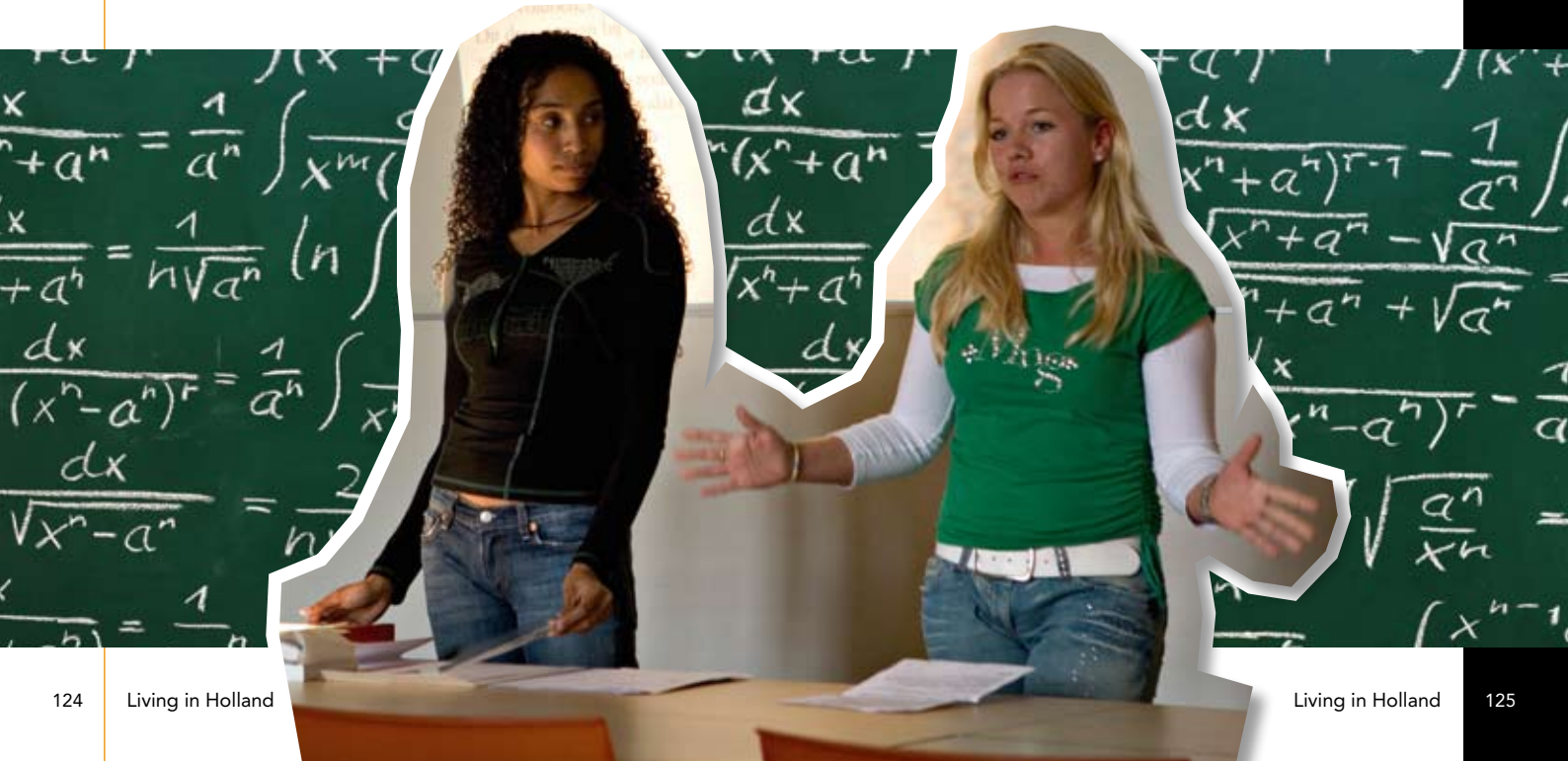
Asking yourself whether you understand the course material is an important aspect of Dutch education.



Interaction in class

Interaction in class is highly appreciated. You will be expected to think about the knowledge that is presented to you and develop and express your own opinion. Find any weaknesses for example or come up with alternatives. Don't be passive, but ask questions instead and be critical about what lecturers or fellow students say to be true. Asking questions is seen as a sign of interest, not as disrespect. To start discussions, lecturers will usually ask

questions. Wrong answers or contributions are considered 'tools' that are used to help students understand the content. So the lecturer will correct these answers in class or have this done by other students. The purpose is not to humiliate those who gave the wrong answers but to get everyone involved and make sure students learn from each other. Lecturers appreciate critical discussions. Also, you will often be working in groups. The goal is to learn to work together and perform better in a group instead of individually.





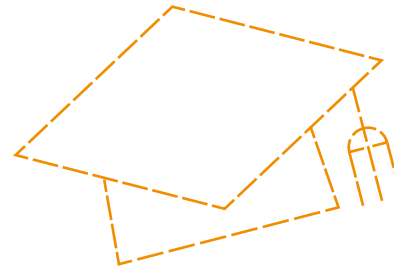
Grading system

There are many different grading systems in the world using numbers or letters. In the Netherlands the marking system is from 1 to 10 or 1 to 100 with 6 or 60 being the pass mark. Several other countries use the same marking system but have a lower pass mark, 5(0) or 4(0).

This does not necessarily mean that courses are tougher in the Netherlands. It can be easier to get a 60 in the Netherlands than a 40 in another country.

An 80 in the Netherlands is considered a very good mark, since most marks are between 60 and 80. A higher mark (> 80) can only be earned by very good students. Therefore, to make a fair comparison between grading systems you should have a look at the average percentage of students in higher education who got a certain mark in previous years:

	The Netherlands		Your country
9.5 – 10	excellent	1 %	
8.5 – 9.4	excellent	5 %	
7.5 – 8.4	very good	23 %	
6.5 – 7.4	good	30 %	
5.5 – 6.4	pass	30 %	
0 – 5.4	fail	11 %	





Higher Education – Dutch style

Lecturer-student relationship

formal -----●----- informal
equal -----●----- hierarchical

- Informal contact between lecturers and students.
- Calling lecturers by their first names is acceptable at most institutes; use of titles is uncommon.
- Relation is businesslike; does not extend outside office hours.
- Students are treated as grownups, able to take care of themselves. If you do not raise an issue, the lecturer will assume everything is going well.
- Lecturers may comment on your work while other students are present (It is nothing personal; it is all about content).
- Students may openly comment on what the lecturer has presented.
- Saying “No” to lecturers is acceptable.

Interaction in class

one way -----●----- two way
communication -----●----- communication

- Lecturers ask students questions.
- Students are welcome to ask questions in class.
- Discussions in class are considered helpful.
- Teamwork is considered a good way of learning (from each other).

Student-student relationship

individualists -----●----- group

- All students are equal; age, status, gender or professional background is irrelevant.
- Students operate individually; loyalty to students in class is irrelevant.
- When students present their work in class, fellow-students may openly comment including friends (It is nothing personal; it is all about content).
- Students are not so much interested in obtaining high marks but rather in passing the course.
- Being interested in the rank in class or being (too) competitive is not done.

Regulating the learning process

lecturer -----●----- student

- Students are expected to study actively.
- Students are expected to study rather independently, making their own schedules.
- Students are expected to choose their own reading and study strategies.
- Students are expected to decide for themselves on when they have done/studied enough.
- Lectures are often not compulsory.
- Lecturers switch roles often; in some situations they act as an expert, in others they may act as a coach who helps students make their own decisions on what and how to study.
- Lecturers will give assignments with detailed instructions but also open assignments where the student has to decide what to do and how to handle things.



Aim of learning

understanding of theory ● professional and/or academic skills

- Memorizing and understanding things is considered important but only as the first step of learning. More emphasis is on developing academic and/or professional skills. Students are expected to use knowledge (applying, combining, selecting, and concluding).
- Developing your own opinion and a critical attitude towards knowledge is important.

Use of resources and media

many ● few

- Many practical sessions on computers; one student per computer.
- Fieldwork tools are available for practical training.
- Students are expected to have basic practical skills in advance (computer skills, lab skills, field skills).
- Books are randomly available for self-study. Lectures are used to introduce the topic; not to cover all content.
- More compulsory and recommended literature available than students can study in the time available. Students are expected to have skills in selecting literature as well as the relevant sections for detailed study.

Assessment and grading

- Exams will consist of questions that require students to reproduce knowledge but also questions that need application, combining, criticizing and drawing conclusions.
- Exams can be 'closed book' exams or 'open book' exams.
- Marking system is from 1 to 10 or 1 to 100, with 6 or 60 being the pass mark.
- Most students get a mark between 6/60 and 8/80.
- Grading is absolute with a fixed minimum score for passing.
- Rules are rules. Norms for grading and assessment regulations are hardly ever changed.



The Dutch way of teaching encourages more interaction between instructors and students, group discussions and case studies than what I was used to.



Name: Zena Salum Kongoi

Country: Tanzania

Level: Post graduate course

Institution: Maastricht School of Management

Subject: Environmental Management

Coming from a country with a different education system, I found it a bit difficult to adjust to a new education system during my first week. Especially when it involved a lot of interaction and becoming used to Dutch punctuality. But all in all, I quickly adapted to the Dutch way of life by being open-minded and ready to learn from new experiences. Since then, my life hasn't been the same.

Netherlands organization
for international cooperation
in higher education

Nuffic is the Netherlands organization for international cooperation in higher education. Our motto is Linking Knowledge Worldwide. This means linking people, because it's knowledge that makes us unique as people. Nuffic works in line with Dutch government policy to serve students and higher education institutions in three key areas:

Capacity Building & Scholarships

Administrating international mobility programmes (scholarships) and institutional cooperation programmes.

Communication

Providing information about higher education systems in the Netherlands and in other countries; providing credential evaluation services; providing information in the Netherlands about studying abroad, and in other countries about studying in Holland; promoting Dutch higher education in other countries; encouraging international mobility.

Knowledge & Innovation

Conducting studies into international cooperation in higher education; providing information to expert groups and consultation forums; transferring our knowledge of international cooperation in higher education through courses and seminars.

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Colophon

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www.ind.nl

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Scholarship contact

☎

☎

Your institution

☎

Student registration number

☎

Passport number

☎

Parents

☎

☎

Your new address

Street

☎

Postal code

☎

City

☎

Local council office:

☎

Citizen service number
(burgerservicenummer)

☎