

COUNTRY

OVERVIEW

& PACKING

GUIDELINES



**Netherlands:
International Perspectives on
Sexuality and Gender**

Fall 2024

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COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Please note that information is subject to change based on shifting conditions in the US and the Netherlands.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Windmills, tulips, dikes, progressiveness, and tolerance—these are some of the stereotypes people associate with the Netherlands. Like all stereotypes, they tell only a part of the story, and they obscure the motivations of the persons telling – or writing – the story. The full story of the Netherlands is far more nuanced, and can only be told by expanding and centering the voices of those who have traditionally been excluded from the story of the Netherlands. This fuller story is one that will be unspooled during your time on the program; the stage for that semester-long project is set below.

First the province of sea-faring peoples, invaded by Germanic immigrants from the east, then part of the Holy Roman Empire, the Netherlands has always been a nation caught between local concerns and international imperatives. After escaping Spanish dominance in the sixteenth century, and spurred by religious as well as economic motives, the Netherlands dominated the seventeenth century, and was transformed into a colonial empire whose legacy of subjugation, race-making and wealth extraction has only recently become a subject of public debate. The eighteenth century would go on to reverse the country’s fortunes and global standing, and it barely survived disputes with its powerful English and French neighbors. In 1848, a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy was established under the House of Orange; this government continues until today. The Netherlands remained neutral in WWI but was subject to a brutal occupation by the Germans in WWII, which decimated its Jewish population. Indonesia and Suriname, the last of the major Dutch colonies, gained independence in the midcentury global move toward decolonization. Today, King Willem-Alexander sits on the throne, but his role is

almost entirely a ceremonial one, with all legislative, executive, and judicial power vested in the Dutch parliament, the office of the Prime Minister, and the courts, respectively. For the past 20 years, Dutch politics has been consumed by the interrelated questions of migration, integration, and the (changing) contours of Dutch identity, a debate that can be traced back to migration policies first developed in the wake of the dissolution of the Dutch colonial state.

In the “Migration, Gender, and Sexuality” course, you will delve deep into the evolution and current state of migration policies, which is characterized simultaneously by the rise of an anti-immigrant and ethno-nationalist politics and a countermovement spearheaded by Dutch persons of color.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Dutch weather is unpredictable. In the early spring and fall you may experience warm weather that lasts for weeks, or you may experience a solid week of cold, wet, dark, rainy days that can test your patience. In the winter months, there are spells of cold weather that may last from one week to two months. Rain is a constant, but one that people living in the Netherlands have come to accept.

Amsterdam, Netherlands: AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)				
FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	
42/31	48/34	55/38	63/45	
SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	
66/49	58/44	48/37	42/33	

LOCAL CUSTOMS

The Dutch are known for being direct, even blunt at times. Americans sometimes mistake this directness for rudeness or even anger. Conversely, Dutch people may mistake American politeness for superficiality, for example if you greet someone with “Hi, how are you?” a Dutch person may assume that you truly want to discuss how they are.

The Dutch do not believe it is impolite to discuss politics, religion, sexuality, or several other issues that some Americans are hesitant to bring up. Expect to be engaged on all of these issues, including gender and sexual identity, especially if you share with anyone the focus of your studies! You should also expect to have people openly disagree with you. Likewise, you should feel free and comfortable disagreeing with them as well. This is not considered rude or aggressive. On the contrary, it means that you are engaged in getting to know a person.

Please remember that Dutch people are speaking to you in what is *at least* their second language. Many people you meet will speak Dutch in public, another language at home, and English with you. Please suspend your judgment and extend some grace to your interlocutors when they trip over their words, or are unfamiliar with a term or concept that originates in US (campus) culture. This is your opportunity to serve as educators; many of the people you will meet will be eager to learn more about your perspectives!

When entering a room, it is generally expected that you greet and, if necessary, introduce yourself to everyone individually, usually with a handshake. Friends may greet each other with three kisses on the cheek.



Amsterdam is a city that moves by bicycle. And quickly. You can do your part by not walking in bike paths. If you do find yourself straying on the characteristically red bike paths, you can, at the very least, expect to hear the pointed dinging of a bell. More likely, you will get first-hand exposure to some creative swearing in Dutch!

DIET

Special Diets:

SIT Study Abroad provides experiential learning opportunities where students become embedded in their host community. As such, we strive to accommodate serious food allergies whenever possible, and the program team and your host families will do their level best to provide you with meals that take dietary restrictions into account.

Students are encouraged to participate in the local food culture as a central aspect of daily life. In Amsterdam especially, you will find that vegetarian and vegan diets are common, and that most restaurants have adapted their menus to reflect the growing popularity of these diets. That said, please consider the local diet seriously when selecting your program of choice. Your admissions counselor, as well as local program staff, are a great resource in better understanding the local diet.

Strict gluten-free diets can be more difficult to accommodate, particularly while traveling, but you can manage it with forethought, patience, and some flexibility. Strictly gluten-free meals are not as well understood (yet) as other restricted diets, although most grocery stores now have a gluten-free section. As with all food choices and diets, much will depend on you investing some time and effort to explain your dietary restrictions with program staff, your hosts, and servers at restaurants.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including food allergies, please inform SIT prior to the start of your program. We will offer you personalized advice that will help you navigate food during your semester in Amsterdam.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is essential to having a successful study abroad experience.

SIT recommends doing your own research to stay up to date on [CDC guidelines](#). It will be critical that you educate yourself about the potential health and safety hazards that may exist in your areas of travel and make informed decisions about what preventative measures to take prior to departure. SIT encourages students to have an informed discussion with your doctor and/or a travel clinician about what vaccines and other prophylactic medication you should receive.

Consider your normal routines for maintaining your physical and mental health & wellbeing. How might your program impact your ability to continue these routines? With this in mind, SIT strongly recommends bringing a full semester's supply of prescription medication(s). Getting a prescription filled outside of one's home country is very difficult, if not impossible. Equally challenging is receiving medication from home by mail. Therefore, students should bring an entire semester's worth of medication with them. Students are also advised to bring several extra inhalers and/or Epi-pens if prescribed.

Students should speak with their health care provider and/or a travel clinician and consult [CDC guidelines](#) regarding required and recommended immunizations and country regulations. Students participating on programs that require the yellow fever vaccine, will receive a signed and stamped "yellow card" after getting vaccinated, known as the International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP, which can be printed here). It is important to bring this card with you when traveling to the program. SIT recommends that students insert this document into their passport so that it is easily accessible when requested by immigration officials. Even if yellow fever is not a requirement for your program, it is good practice to bring a copy of your immunization record with you, including your Covid 19 immunization card(s).

If you have any questions, please reach out to the [Student Health Office](#).

Remember that while you are a student in a cultural education program in your host country, you are also an ambassador for your home country, home institution, and SIT Study Abroad. We ask all students to abide by all policies and guidelines to help maintain those important relationships as well as their own safety and wellbeing. Failure to abide by established guidelines may result in disciplinary measures.

Prior to excursions, local staff will brief you on health and security concerns. In case of medical emergencies, our staff has identified local hospitals and medical care facilities, including adequate and safe blood supplies.

There is easy access to high-quality medical facilities, though students are often surprised when a doctor will not see them because of a cold. Colds and flu are the most common illnesses that occur among students in Amsterdam and Dutch doctors do not prescribe antibiotics for common colds or the flu. You can always turn to local program staff for help when you are sick; they are your best resource for navigating the Dutch health care system.

DRUGS

Dutch drug policies are sometimes misunderstood. Marijuana is not strictly legal in the Netherlands, nor is it as culturally acceptable as it is in some parts of the US. Some drugs are tolerated (and heavily regulated) in a few, specifically designated places as part of a Dutch commitment to harm reduction, in which drug use is seen as a public health issue, rather than a criminal act. Drugs are not a regular part of life for most Dutch people, including young people. As an SIT student, ***you must abide by SIT's zero tolerance drug policy, which prohibits the use of all drugs (i.e. both soft and hard drugs, and regardless of their legal status in the Netherlands).***

HOMESTAYS

As many SIT Study Abroad alumni will tell you, the homestay experience can be one of the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of the program. We hope you will come prepared for the experience and committed to moving beyond

cultural immersion as you begin to question, distinguish, and analyze the host culture vis-à-vis your own culture and come to a deeper understanding of both.

Family structures vary in every culture. SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families, and homestays include traditional and non-traditional families, as well as single-person households. (Approximately 60% of housing in Amsterdam are single-person units.) Your family may include a single mother of two small children, a same-sex couple without children, or a large extended family with many people coming and going all the time, retirees, young professionals, and traditional families. Additionally, please bear in mind that, in many countries, the idea of what constitutes a “home” may be different from what you expect. You will need to be prepared to adapt to a new life with a new diet, a new schedule, new people, and new priorities and expectations. You will have your own room, but it may be smaller than you are used to. Students live with their homestay family for the whole of the program. Be aware that your commute to the program center may take up to 45 minutes and you may have to walk a kilometer or so to get to your transit stop.

Each program’s homestay coordinator will be responsible for placing students in homestays. These placements are made with care and based on several variables, including health concerns.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

During orientation and excursions, students stay in hostels and modest hotels.

TRANSPORTATION

Homestays are located in various parts of Amsterdam, all within bike riding or public transportation commuting distance to the SIT office (up to 45 minutes). We will provide you with a transport card that works within the city limits of Amsterdam, and allows you unlimited use of the bus, metro, or tram throughout the semester. Amsterdam also has an extensive network of bicycle paths, and we will review bicycle norms and safety guidelines during orientation. SIT Amsterdam will tell

you how to rent a bicycle for the length of your stay in the Netherlands should you want access to a bike while on the program.

PHONES AND E-MAIL

As part of SIT’s commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working cell phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls, including a data plan so that your phone is operational when you are away from wifi. If needed, during orientation SIT Study Abroad staff can assist students in purchasing a local SIM card, and how to acquire minutes for calls and texting.

During orientation, the SIT Study Abroad staff can help students sort out how to purchase and use their smartphone. Students will make the decision as to whether they purchase a local sim card and obtain a local number, or they can use an international plan from the U.S.

You will have access to Wi-Fi at the SIT Study Center during regular opening hours, as well as 24/7 internet access at your homestay.

MAIL

DHL, UPS, and FedEx services are available. USPS will be handed off to PostNL when it arrives in the Netherlands. When given the option, it is always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package.

Please be aware that packages sent to the Netherlands may be subject to import taxes; these fees will be the responsibility of the recipient and must be paid at time of delivery.

Posted letters and packages may be sent to the following address:

Student Name
c/o SIT Study Abroad
Nieuwe Looiersstraat 31 – 3
1017 VA Amsterdam
the Netherlands

MONEY

In addition to tuition, the SIT Study Abroad program fees cover room and board throughout the program. When students travel with the program their meals will be provided as well, either in a group setting or with stipends. SIT will cover daily commuting costs, if any, and excursions that are part of the normal program itinerary. **Any domestic travel, interpretation services, or supplies necessary for the ISP/Internship are the students' responsibility.** Please plan accordingly.

The euro is the currency in the Netherlands, the same currency that is used in most of the European Union. A Visa, MasterCard, or American Express credit card can be useful for emergencies and medical expenses—**although, unlike in the US, credit cards are not as extensively accepted in general stores.** The most convenient and recommended way to access money is to bring your ATM card from your bank. Also, it is good to have a small amount of cash for traveling and emergencies.

You should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans, and make sure that you understand the ins and outs of withdrawing money and using your card when abroad. You should also check the costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be high. Before you leave for the Netherlands, check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you are abroad.

Following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for textbooks, ISP/Internship related expenses, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Figures are based on recent student evaluations. Remember, though, that individual spending habits vary widely. These costs are averages.

The suggested total amount of money to set aside for your time in Amsterdam ranges from **US \$2,375-2,825**. To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any additional expenditures you may have on the program.

Check current exchange rates:
<http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

Please budget approximately:

Personal spending: (from past student suggestions)	\$1,700-2,200
Books, printing, supplies:	\$150
Up-front medical costs: (you will get reimbursed for medical costs)	\$200
COVID-19 Test(s) (optional; costs may vary)	\$100-250
Damage/repair deposit for bike rental:	\$75
Estimated total:	\$2,375-2,825

VISITORS AND FREE TIME

Although we understand that students may receive visitors during the program, please be aware that students will not be excused from program components to attend to visitors. For more information on this, please consult the [Attendance and Participation](#) section of the [Student Handbook](#).

Please note that any visitors during the course of the program must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad homestay families can accommodate only their assigned student and, due to contractual understandings with SIT, are not expected to host students' guests.

We understand that you want to have your family and friends share in your experience in Amsterdam, but we would advise you to consider carefully when the best time might be for them to visit. The SIT program model is rigorous and academically demanding, and frequent visitors can sometimes be a source of distraction.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments, which culminate in a month-long period of interning or doing independent research. That said, students have one day off each week (also known as the "Independent Study Day"), which they can use either for self-study, to explore Amsterdam, or to pursue their own interests. If you have a particular hobby or interest that you must keep up with, your admissions counselor can advise

you about how best to incorporate this into the program. For example, if you must keep in shape for your next athletic season, or if you play a musical instrument and want to know whether to bring it, we can help you to understand your schedule and any concerns or limitations that may exist.

Please note that you will not have a long break during the program, such as Thanksgiving or Spring Break.

PACKING GUIDELINES

LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You must be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad.

Students typically bring a large rolling suitcase. It is recommended that you bring a smaller bag or small suitcase to pack for the excursion, so you do not need to bring your large suitcase with you on the excursion.

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the “General Health Tips” section in the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) pre-departure document.)

Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (<http://www.tsa.gov>) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

CLOTHING GUIDELINES

You should pack at least a two-week supply of clothes. **Plan to dress in layers**; as it gets warmer or colder, you can simply eliminate or add layers. Don't bring clothes that you will only wear once. You will need clothes and footwear that can handle rain and wet streets while on a bicycle (think of a raincoat and rain pants!).

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is **required** that you bring a laptop computer. The computer will be your personal property and responsibility. SIT does not provide personal property insurance and it is recommended that you insure your computer or other valuables for full

coverage. For details on SIT's insurance, please see the full Description of Coverage on our [Student Insurance](#). SIT is not responsible for any duty tax you may have to pay when you enter the country, theft, or loss.

Be sure to bring a plug adapter for your computer or plan to purchase one immediately upon arrival.

Do not have your laptop mailed to you while in the Netherlands. Do not put your laptop in your checked luggage.

Most assignments will be submitted electronically. In case of computer problems, there are reliable service centers available in Amsterdam for both PCs and Macs.

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage, and electrical adapters. <http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/>. You can also purchase adapter plugs and converters in Amsterdam if needed.

GIFTS

You may want to bring gifts – one or two the entire family can enjoy – for your homestay families that reflect the part of the country and/or community you come from. Think about what your city, state, or local artisans produce. Draw upon your personal interests or hobbies for ideas. Previous students have packed Vermont maple syrup, candles from their local feminist coop, coffee from Seattle, and beeswax from the hives on their family farm. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank your family. You may also want to bring pictures of your friends and family to share with your hosts.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

You only need to bring enough shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, tampons, contact lens supplies, etc. for the first night on the program. These items they can easily be bought in Amsterdam, and program staff will make sure that time is set aside for you to go to a grocery store or drug store. Most over the counter medicines are available here but may be more expensive. Over the counter allergy medications are much cheaper and more widely available in the States. There is no need to bring an entire pharmacy with you, but you will be happy to have a three-month supply of cetirizine if you take it regularly. Most homestay families have laundry facilities in their homes. Laundromats are also available in Amsterdam and on excursion.

ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or [Contact a Former Student](#).

Don't miss the Packing List on the next page!

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director.



PACKING LIST

CLOTHING

- 3 - 4 pants or skirts
- 5 - 6 blouses or shirts
- 2 sweaters (1 warm)
- Underwear (10-day supply)
- Socks (10-day supply)
- Warm sleepwear
- Exercise/sports clothes (depending on your interests)
- 1 pair comfortable, everyday shoes, which are good for walking and cycling
- 1 pair gym shoes
- 1 pair winter (waterproof) boots or wet weather shoes
- Cold weather, all-purpose **waterproof** coat is necessary (perhaps a raincoat with a zip-in lining would be better than both a raincoat and a winter coat)
- Swimsuit

OPTIONAL

- Bathrobe (might be good to have, but shouldn't be too bulky)

Medications

- Remember to bring an adequate supply of prescription medication (including birth control pills) and vitamins, if needed, ***to last the entire program!***
- Please note that medicines that are very common in the US – like Adderall or Xanax – can be difficult verging on impossible to get in the Netherlands and the rest of Europe.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- 2 paper photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- A digital copy of your passport
- Photocopy of visa (if applicable)
- Proof of COVID-19 Vaccine encouraged

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Extra pair of glasses or contacts, if needed
- Contact cleaning/soaking liquid, if needed (enough for orientation week)

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Travel alarm clock if your phone won't do
- School supplies to get you started during orientation (notebook, journal, pens, etc.).
- Camera
- Hat and sunglasses
- Voice recorder for interviews
- Laptop