

Netherlands: International Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Fall 2025

Country Overview

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



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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.

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	

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Dutch weather is notoriously unpredictable. In the early spring and fall you may experience warm weather that lasts for weeks, or you may experience a solid week of chilly, wet, and gloomy, days that will have you bundling up when you get home. 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 – and

bike through!

LOCAL CUSTOMS

The Dutch are known for being direct, even bordering on blunt at times. Americans sometimes interpret this directness as rudeness, while the Dutch prize this as being forthright. Conversely, Dutch people may mistake American politeness for superficiality; if you greet someone with “Hi, how are you?” a Dutch person may assume that you truly want to discuss how they are doing.

The Dutch do not believe it is impolite to discuss politics, religion, sexuality, or other topics that some Americans are hesitant to bring up. You can expect the Dutch to raise all these issues, including their thoughts on gender and sexual identity, especially if you share with them the focus of your studies!

When they do, 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 runs on bicycle. If you want to keep it running smoothly, you can do your part by not walking in the bike lines, and by hugging the right-hand side of the bike lane if you are venturing out on a bike yourself. If you do find yourself straying on the characteristically red bike paths or veering into the center of the bike path, you can, at the very least, expect to hear the pointed ringing of a bicycle bell!

LOCAL DIET

Participating in the local food culture is a central aspect of daily life in the country. Special or restricted diets may not always be fully understood by your host family, although they may have previously hosted a student with similar dietary restrictions. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture.

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.

Strict gluten-free diets can be more difficult to accommodate, particularly when the program travels to Morocco, but you can manage it with forethought, patience, some flexibility, and the help of program staff, who will do their level best to accommodate your dietary needs and preferences. 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 allergies, please inform the office of Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing prior to the start of your program (studenthealth@sit.edu). We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.

MEAL PLANNING

Your homestay family will provide breakfast and dinner during the week and breakfast, lunch, and dinner on the weekend. The estimated cost for meals that are not provided is based on buying groceries and making your own meals for the meals that are not provided during program activities. If you plan on eating out regularly, you should budget more money.

Please remember to budget at least **\$793** for the meals that are not provided during the semester. For a breakdown of your program's estimated out-of-pocket expenses, please see the table in the **Money** section of this document.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

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



SIT recommends you do research prior to departure about the health, safety, and security specifics of the country(ies) you plan to visit. Consult the [U.S. Department of State](https://travel.state.gov) website and search their [Countries and Areas Archive](https://travel.state.gov/countries-and-areas) for international travel information and current travel advisories for each country. Search the Center for Disease Control [Traveler's Health](https://www.cdc.gov/travel) page to see travel health notices and vaccine requirements and recommendations for any country(ies) you plan to visit.

SIT recommends doing research ahead of time to stay up to date on 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. You should also reference the Health, Access, and Identity information on your program's [webpage](#).

If you have any questions, please reach out to the [Student Health, Safety, & Wellbeing Team](#). Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. For information regarding safety and security, emergency communications, SIT policies, health and personal property insurance, and general program tips, please read the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document and [Student Handbook](#).

There is easy access to high-quality medical facilities in the Netherlands, 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 legal in the Netherlands, nor is marijuana use as culturally acceptable as it is in some parts of the US. In Amsterdam specifically, smoking or consuming marijuana is regarded by locals as something only tourists do. While so-called “soft drugs” like cannabis are tolerated (and heavily regulated) in a few, specifically designated places, 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).***

HOUSING

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 your family may include a single mother of two small children or a large extended family with many people coming and going all the time. 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.

Each program’s homestay coordinator will be responsible for placing students in homestays. These placements are made first based on health concerns, including any allergies or dietary needs, to the extent possible. **Please note: to ensure the best fit for students and families, SIT may make final adjustments to homestay placements after student arrival in country. Therefore, SIT will not provide information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.**

We seek to foster increased cross-cultural understanding in students by immersing them in local culture through daily life in a new family and community. Students are expected to assume roles as family

members, respecting and following host family norms around communication, visitors, and activities of daily living.

On this program, you will be staying in 2 homestays, one in Amsterdam and one during our Morocco excursion. 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.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

Students should expect to share a room with one or more students during orientation and while on excursions. 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 staff will tell you how to rent a bicycle for the length of your stay in the Netherlands should you want to ride a bike while on the program.

COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication.

It's important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the term. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion.

Visit our [Contact & Communication](#) page for practices on program communication, emergency communication, and home institution communication.

PHONES AND INTERNET

[Cell Phone Policy](#)

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 wi-fi. If needed, during orientation SIT staff can assist students in purchasing a local SIM card and acquiring minutes for calls and texting. Failure to maintain a working phone capable of making and receiving calls/texts will be considered a conduct violation and a breach of our student code.

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 Dutch number, or whether they will use an international plan purchased in the U.S.

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

MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive** and can be **problematic**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged. Mailing prescription medication abroad is illegal.

For this program, DHL, FedEx, and UPS **services are available in-country**. Despite cheaper prices, reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised due to delays and unreliability. When given the option, it's always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package.

If it is necessary for someone to send you mail then posted letters and packages should be sent to the following address:

Student Name

c/o SIT Study Abroad Amsterdam
WG-Plein 100-873
1054 SG Amsterdam
The Netherlands

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. |

MONEY

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.

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

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you don't inform these companies that you will be away, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. You should also check on costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be very expensive. Renewing and receiving reissued credit and debit cards while on the program will be an expensive and highly inconvenient process. Before you leave for your program, please check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you are abroad. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

We suggest that you budget between **US\$3,218 to 3,718** for out-of-pocket costs not covered by the Tuition and Housing Fees. 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 exceptional expenditures you may have on the program. Please carefully consider your personal spending habits when creating your out-of-pocket expense budget. Some items to consider are meals not provided by the program, textbooks, Independent Study Project or Internship-related expenses not covered by the program, interpretation services, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Use the average estimates below as a guide to help you plan for out-of-pocket expenses.

Please budget approximately:

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	1,700-2,200 USD
Meals not provided	793 USD
Books, printing, supplies:	150 USD
Up-front medical costs:	500 USD
Damage/repair deposit for bike rental:	75 USD
Estimated total:	3,218-3,718 USD

Please note that up-front medical costs can vary widely. Though you are completely covered by SIT's travel insurance GeoBlue, which you can read more about on our [Participant Insurance](#) page, you still may need to pay up-front for medical care and then file for reimbursement.

VISITORS AND FREE TIME

SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that visits are scheduled for dates after the formal conclusion of the program. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to visitors. See the [Attendance and Participation Policy](#).

If a visitor does come while a program is in progress, they must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad homestay families can accommodate only their assigned student and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students' guests.

We understand that you want to have your family and friends share 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 would like to prepare 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.

INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

Please read our full [Independent Travel](#) policy for our definition, guidelines and how to access our independent travel notification form. Please note that independent travel is only allowed during program free time and students will not be excused from program activities to travel. SIT is not responsible for any costs of student independent travel including logistics, preparations, cancelation fees, change fees, and any other costs associated with independent travel. We highly recommend you wait to book any independent travel until AFTER arriving on program and receiving the final academic schedule from your program.

CODE OF CONDUCT AND POLICIES

SIT maintains a [Code of Conduct](#) and clear institutional [policies](#) regarding student behavior through a commitment to mutual learning and respect for others. Visit the policy page for detailed policies around academic integrity, alcohol and drug use, anti-harassment and non-discrimination, attendance and participation, credit hours, equal education opportunities, grading, housing, independent travel, prohibited activities, religious holiday observance, sexual harassment and misconduct, and withdrawal among others.



Packing Guidelines

LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad. We recommend a small daypack, which will also be useful for short excursions when on the program.

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, which will be your personal property and responsibility to look after. It is recommended that you insure your laptop, smartphone, or other valuables for full coverage in the event of loss or theft (SIT insurance does not cover personal property).

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters.
<http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/>.

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.

GIFTS

As you might imagine, it is best to be prepared with a gift to offer your homestay family in gratitude for their hospitality and as a means to share a part of your culture with them. We suggest one or two gifts that the whole family can enjoy. You may also wish to consider gifts for people outside your homestay family. Try to choose gifts that represent you or the part of the country and/or community you live in. Think about what your city, state, or local artisans produce. Draw upon your personal interests or hobbies for ideas. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank your family. Remember to bring pictures of your friends and family to share.



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 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 ask an alumni contact: <https://studyabroad.sit.edu/admissions-aid/application-process/contact-a-former-student/>.

Don't miss the Packing List below!

Packing List

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

Packing List sample:

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

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

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.