

COUNTRY

OVERVIEW

& PACKING

GUIDELINES

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

Fall 2021

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COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Please note that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 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 the stereotypical images of the Netherlands. In fact, all are true, but they are only part of the rich and complex history of this small, densely populated country in Western Europe. First the province of sea peoples, invaded by Germanic immigrants from the east, then part of the enormous and wealthy Holy Roman Empire, the Netherlands has always been international and outward-facing. With the leadership of the dashing William of Orange, Holland escaped Spanish dominance in the sixteenth century – spurred by religious as well as economic motives – and ushered in an era of prosperity built on an enormous colonial empire that stretched around the globe. The eighteenth century was not kind to our little kingdom 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. King Willem-Alexander came to the throne in 2013 after his mother, Beatrix, abdicated. The Netherlands remained neutral in WWI, but was subject to brutal occupation by the Germans in WWII. Indonesia and Suriname, the last of the major Dutch colonies, gained independence in the midcentury global move toward decolonization.

Extremely open policies in the 70s led to waves of immigration that continue through the present. People from former Dutch colonies of Indonesia and Suriname, as well as “guest workers” from Spain, Italy, Morocco, Turkey, and more recently Eastern Europe contribute to a multi-cultural society. Over the past ten years, we have seen a growth in anti-immigrant sentiments, yet recently, we also

witnessed the growth of a strong anti-racism movement.

The economy is thriving, with one of the lowest unemployment rates in the European Union. While some austerity measures have chipped away at the welfare state since the economic crisis in 2008, the government still delivers a relatively high level of services to the population. The Netherlands is one of the founding nations of the European Union, and since 2002 the Euro has been the official currency.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Dutch weather is unpredictable. In the early spring and fall you may experience fine, 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 constant.

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. 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 a number of other issues that Americans are hesitant to bring up. Expect to be engaged on all of these issues,

including gender identity, on a regular basis. You should also expect to have people openly disagree with you. Likewise, you should feel free and comfortable disagreeing as well. This is not considered rude or aggressive. On the contrary, it means that you are engaged in getting to know a person. Americans' unwillingness to discuss meaningful issues is considered superficial, not polite.

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 do not be judgmental or rude when your interlocutors say something incorrectly or choose the wrong word.

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. Covid has cut down on this, but there is a lot of elbow-bumping these days.

Amsterdam is a city that moves by bicycle. Quickly. *Do not walk in bike paths.* At the very least you are going to hear the pointed dinging of a bell. More likely, you will get a first-hand exposure to some creative swearing in Dutch.



The Dutch speak very quietly. One of their main complaints about Americans is that they dominate a space with their big voices.

Public toilets with running water usually cost money; most places will allow you to pay the 50 cents with a bankcard. It is not acceptable to enter a café to use its bathroom without purchasing something. There is a hefty fine for public urination.

Dutch service is different than American service. Servers will leave you alone unless you signal them.

- Be prepared for “Dutch directness”
- Be prepared to talk about subjects Americans call “sensitive”
- Do not judge people who do not speak English as well as you
- Greet people when entering a room
- Don't walk in bicycle paths
- Pay attention to bike and tram bells
- Learn to speak softly in public settings like cafés and restaurants
- Expect to pay for public bathrooms
- Adjust your expectations in restaurants..

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 where possible, but simply cannot ensure that all dietary restrictions can be accommodated.

Students are encouraged to participate in the local food culture as a central aspect of daily life. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture. Due to the unique living and learning community central to all SIT programs, we cannot separate food and eating communally (including with your host family) from the program experience. Please consider local diet seriously when selecting your program of choice. Your admissions counselor is a great resource in better understanding the local diet.

Your host family will not be able to accommodate strict vegan, halal, or kosher diets. Strict gluten-free diets can be difficult to accommodate, particularly

while traveling, but you can manage it with forethought, patience, and flexibility.

In general, Dutch meals feature smaller portions than typical US meals, and snacking is not as common. Breakfast and lunch are simple meals, bread and cheese are core staples, often complemented with salads and spreads like hummus. Dinner is traditionally served at 6:00 PM, although times do vary.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform our office prior to the start of your program. We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is critical to having a successful semester. To help you do that, we have provided [Health Guidelines and Requirements](#) for your program. It is very important that you read the Health Guidelines and Requirements document as early as possible and examine it with your medical provider. The guidelines include recommended immunizations; a suggested calendar for immunizations and other prophylaxes; and valuable information on how to avoid exposure to common carriers of disease.

SIT will require COVID-19 vaccination for all U.S. students. Recognizing that not all international students will have access to vaccines by Fall 2021, SIT asks that international students who wish to travel in and who do not have access to a vaccine apply for an accommodation by emailing your admissions counselor.

The Health Guidelines and Requirements will also provide recommendations related to preventing the contraction and spread of COVID-19. Students will be provided with COVID-19 related information and requirements prior to your travel in order to provide you with the most up-to-date information. General information about SIT's response to COVID-19 can be found on our webpage here: <https://studyabroad.sit.edu/health-safety-and->

[well-being/risk-management/sit-health-and-safety-update-in-response-to-covid-19/](#)

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, accident and illness insurance, and general program tips, please read the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document and [Student Handbook](#).

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 in order 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.

Follow the advice of locals (in particular your host family)—e.g. if people in the area do not go jogging and tell you not to, listen to them and don't do it.

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 a special unit in the police (*Roze in Blauw—Pink in Blue*) dedicated to combating harassment based on sexual orientation. There is also *slachtofferhulp* available for victims of gay-bashing incidents and incidents of sexual violence. Please report any violence and know that the police will take these cases seriously!

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.** Always consult your homestay families when you are sick; they are your best resource for navigating the Dutch health care system.

DRUGS

Dutch drug policies are widely misunderstood. Marijuana is not strictly legal in the Netherlands, *nor is it as culturally acceptable* as it is in the US. Some drugs are tolerated (and heavily regulated) in a few places as part of a sophisticated and very effective drug control policy, in which drugs are seen as a public health, rather than a criminal, issue. Drugs are not a regular part of life for most Dutch people, including young people. ***You must abide by the SIT drug policy: drug use is prohibited.***

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, and 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 gay 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 be as much as 45 minutes to an hour.

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

Please note: SIT will not provide information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.

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 an hour). Amsterdam has an extensive network of bicycle paths, and we will review bicycle norms and safety guidelines during orientation. SIT Amsterdam will rent a bicycle for you for the length of your stay in the Netherlands. If you want a helmet you should bring your own from home. Trams, buses, and the metro allow you to explore the city as well.

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 Wi-Fi, 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.

PHONES AND E-MAIL

As part of SIT’s commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working smart phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls throughout the duration of the program. Students are required to either (a) bring an open, unlocked smart phone from the U.S. to the program that is able to accept a local SIM card, and is compatible with and usable at the program location, (b) work with the staff within the first week upon arrival in country to purchase a

smart phone locally, or (c) bring a dual SIM smart phone. **DO NOT purchase an international plan** unless you have a dual SIM phone. We discourage this for regular smart phones because your homestay family will not be able to communicate with you as they would have to call internationally.

During orientation the SIT Study Abroad staff can help students sort out how to use their smart phone, how to purchase and use an appropriate local SIM card, and how to acquire minutes for calls and texting. **SIT Study Abroad requires that each student have a local number for communication with the homestay family and program staff.**

While we recognize that alternative communication methods like Facetime, Skype, and WhatsApp can be free or cheaper than cell service, those programs alone do not meet our emergency communication needs. **Local cellular capacity on each student's phone is required for the duration of the program. This is not negotiable.** Students are required to maintain a minimum amount of phone credits at all times for emergency calls. Full compliance with this policy is expected.

Local SIM cards will only cost 15 Euros (USD \$ 15.80) and local smart phone prices will vary depending on the type of smart phone you purchase.

The SIT program center provides internet access during posted hours, but it is not great. You will find Wi-Fi in most cafés throughout Amsterdam. Please note that you will have internet access in most, but not all, host families' homes. If you want to guarantee access to round-the-clock internet access, you should budget extra money for loads of data.

MAILINGS

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's always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package.

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, 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 as throughout 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.** It is easy to transfer money to the Netherlands should it become necessary. The most convenient and recommended way to access money is to bring your ATM card from your bank—but make sure you check with your bank before you leave to be certain that your card is usable in Europe. 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. 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 high. 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.

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.

A suggested total amount of money to budget 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 exceptional expenditures you may have on the program, including travel costs for your planned ISP/Internship or a specific personal expense. ***Please note that Amsterdam is a large, modern city. If you intend to go clubbing, eat out extravagantly, or shop for a whole new wardrobe, your expenses could be considerably more.***

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 Entry Test(s) (may be required for entry; subject to change and costs may vary)	\$100-250
Potential ISP/Internship travel expenses:	\$200

Damage/repair deposit for bike rental:	\$75
Estimated total:	\$2,375-2,825

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. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to visitors. See 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.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments, even during the ISP/Internship. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby during the program will be limited. Your admissions counselor can advise you about particular interests you may have. 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 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.

Students typically bring a large rolling suitcase. It is recommended that you bring a smaller bag or small suitcase to pack for the excursions so you do not need to carry your largest bag.

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. Students also recommend bringing only clothes that you love, as you will be wearing the same thing over and over again. You will need clothes and footwear that can handle rain and wet streets while on a bicycle (think of a rain coat 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.

If you plan to do interviews, make sure your phone has a record function or you have a separate recorder.

Students will have internet access at the program office, at the Amsterdam Public Library (Openbare Bibliotheek Amsterdam), and at ATRIA (Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History). The Public Library is open 10:00AM – 10:00PM, seven days a week; ATRIA is open Tuesday to Friday, 10:00AM – 5:00PM. Both organizations have free wireless access for personal computers. Most, but not all host families will have Internet access.

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

It is wise 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. Pack a couple of small gifts for children, such as small games, bubbles, or a Frisbee. 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

Bring enough shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, tampons, contact lens supplies, etc. for only the first week or so. These items they can easily be bought in Amsterdam. Most over the counter medicines are available here but may be more expensive. Over the counter allergy meds, in particular, are much cheaper and more widely available in the states. Something like Bendadryl is available only via prescription. Dutch cold medicine is far inferior to its American counterparts. 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 an 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 sneakers (if you plan to exercise)
- 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)
- Rain pants if you have a good pair. They are also cheaply and widely available in Amsterdam.
- 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

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- You've received the proper immunizations for the Netherlands (please see the [Health Guidelines & Requirements](#) document for the details)
- Small bath towel, washcloth and soap Many hostels, including your orientation location, do not provide towels automatically.
- Extra pair of glasses or contacts, if needed
- Contact cleaning/soaking liquid, if needed (enough for orientation week)

- Adequate supply of prescription medication (including birth control pills) and vitamins, if needed, **to last the entire program!**

To prevent the contraction and spread of COVID-19 students should come prepared with:

- At least 3 reusable masks* and gloves for personal protection (disposable masks will also be available)
- Hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol for use when soap and water is not readily available
- Anti-bacterial wipes or solution to wipe down high-touch surfaces, especially while traveling from the US

*Cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around others. Masks help reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 both by close contact and by airborne transmission. Masks must have two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric. Do not wear face shields alone (evaluation of the effectiveness of face shields is ongoing but is unknown at this time).

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

OPTIONAL

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