

How to survive the expat challenge

No matter where you come from, living in another country always brings certain surprises regarding the habits and culture of your host country. If there are many differences between the cultures of your home country and your host country, the impact on your sense of belonging can be significant and lead to a real culture shock¹. Even within countries in close proximity differences exist. Though such differences are generally more subtle, it is important to take them into consideration.

Best Expat Survival Tips:

1. *Know what is coming and manage your own expectations*
2. *Realise that many experiences will not be completely new to you*
3. *Stay in touch with family and close friends back home*
4. *Look after your health and take time to relax*
5. *Enjoy life and meet people*
6. *Appreciate cultural differences*
7. *Do not be too hard on yourself*
8. *Accept help and assistance*



1. Know what is coming and manage your own expectations

Being aware of what you are likely to feel and experience helps to soften the psychological and emotional impact. The biggest shock of culture shock is not having expected it. Many expats expect The Netherlands is very easy to settle into, but even a modern, western country like The Netherlands has its own particular cultural challenges and it will definitely pay off to familiarise yourself with Dutch culture and etiquette.

2. Realise that many experiences will not be completely new to you

Even though the scale of change will be bigger and you may never have had to adjust to so many things at the same time, it is likely that you already have some experience with the challenges you are facing. For example, you might have moved house before, started a new job before, etc.



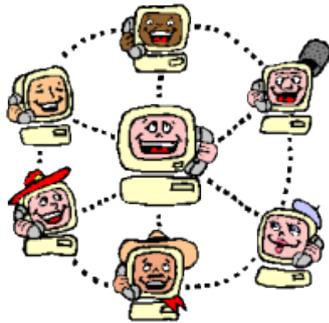
Trust yourself to already possess most of the skills and instincts that you are going to need to enjoy living in The Netherlands. Though you might need to enhance some of your skills or apply them more consciously, it is unlikely that you will have to start completely from scratch.

¹ Culture shock is the term used to describe the more pronounced reactions to the psychological disorientation most people experience when they move for an extended period of time into a culture markedly different from their own. For some people, the bout with culture shock is brief and hardly noticeable. For others, it can cause intense discomfort, often accompanied by hyperirritability, bitterness, resentment, homesickness, and depression. In some individuals, culture shock may be accompanied by distinct physical symptoms of illness.
(R. L. Kohls)

3. Stay in touch with family and close friends

When you are still in the process of getting settled in The Netherlands and making friends in your new environment, it is important to remain connected with people, whom you already know. Luckily in this day and age, there are many ways of keeping in touch with the people you left behind.

Keeping in touch with the home front:



- SKYPE enables you to communicate online (speech and video) for free, more info on: www.skype.com
- Webmail providers enable you to access your e-mailbox anywhere in the world via the internet. If you do not yet have internet-access at your home, there are many free wifi spots around and most Dutch libraries also have computers available with internet access.
- If you prefer to communicate by phone, check out companies that offer cheap rates on international calls, such as 1649 (www.bel1649.nl English option) or Teledump (www.teledump.nl, English version).

4. Look after your health and take time to relax

It takes time and effort to re-establish your routines. Also working and socialising with new people (possibly communicating in another language) requires more effort and energy than usual. Consequently, it is no wonder that you might feel exhausted at the end of the day. Therefore try to stay healthy by eating well and getting plenty of rest. As familiar activities and structure will help you to regain your balance more quickly, keep doing those things you normally do to unwind and relax.

5. Enjoy life and meet people

Do not stay indoors and/or become a total workaholic. There is plenty to do in and around Amsterdam. Go sightseeing, enrol yourself for Dutch lessons or start a (new) hobby/sports activity.

The region of Amsterdam hosts many expat groups and clubs and there is nothing wrong with joining them in order to make new friends quickly. No matter how sincere you are as an expat about crossing cultures, everybody needs to retreat now and then from the local particularities and relax in a more familiar setting.

6. Appreciate cultural differences

Approaching life abroad with an open mind is most useful. It will not prevent the occurrence of cultural differences, but it will help you to deal with them satisfactorily, i.e. take advantage of the situation at hand.

For example, the Dutch are known to be quite structured and organised. Therefore, it is not surprising that they tend to plan their social activities in advance instead of deciding to go for a drink or dinner on the spot.





How can you use this local knowledge to your advantage when making an effort to socialise with the Dutch?

Answer:

Bring your agenda and try to make your social appointments for next week!

Generally, you will find Dutch friendships tend to last for a long time, whereby friends stay loyal to each other, even if they do not meet regularly and/or live close-by.

7. Do not be too hard on yourself

Getting used to a new environment and another culture does not happen according to a tight time schedule and the process you are likely to go through is not a straight forward process. Accept that you will make mistakes, learn, and make other mistakes again. Do not worry too much about it, just remember you are not the only one. Such things happen to all expats everywhere in the world.

8. Accept help and assistance

Moving to and settling in another country is generally challenging, as there are many things to learn about and organise. Even though you are likely to have left your existing social support network behind, there is no need to figure it out all on your own.

Getting help to create both the work and social life you wish is a smart move to ensure you are going to enjoy your Dutch adventure. General information is widely available in public, but getting personal advice that takes into account your specific needs and circumstances is harder to obtain.



At Amstel Expats, we fully understand the specific challenges faced by expats, their partners and families. With our local knowledge and expertise, we help you deal with Dutch formalities and common practices, such as how to register for schools and medical care. We also provide local advice and information on reliable partners, housing agents, utilities, GP's, dentists, international and local schools, etc.

Whether you are working, looking after your family or both, understanding how things work in The Netherlands and building new (social) relationships are vitally important. We look forward to discussing your needs and meeting you in the near future!