

## How to survive your international 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 shock<sup>1</sup>. However, even the customs of countries in close proximity of each other can reveal cultural differences. Though such differences might be more subtle, it is still important to take them into consideration.

### **8 International Survival Tips:**

- *Know what is coming and manage your own expectations*
- *Realise that many experiences will not be completely new to you*
- *Stay in touch with family and close friends back home*
- *Look after your health and take time to relax*
- *Enjoy life and meet (new) people*
- *Appreciate cultural differences*
- *Do not be too hard on yourself*
- *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. Be aware that the biggest shock of culture shock is not having expected it! Many internationals expect the Netherlands is an easy country 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 is bigger than you might have been used to dealing with before, it is also likely that you already have some experience with many of the challenges you encounter, such as: moving house or starting a new job in your home country.



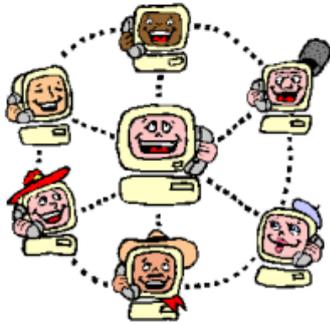
Trust yourself to already possess most of the skills and instincts that you are going to need to enjoy living in the Netherlands. Though you might need to enhance some of your skills or apply them more consciously, it is unlikely that you will have to start completely from scratch.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.



Fortunately in this day and age, there are many ways of keeping in touch with the people you left behind:

- Social media, such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, make it easy to post your updates, photo's, etc. and view those of your family and friends.
- SKYPE, FaceTime and WhatsApp enable you to call for free.
- There are many free WIFI spots around, if you do not yet have internet access organised at your home address.
- Also most Dutch libraries have computers available with internet access.

### 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 (new) 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 international meetup groups and clubs, they are generally an effective way of making new friends quickly. No matter how sincere you are as an international citizen 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 instance, 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 to use this local knowledge to your advantage when making an effort to socialise with the Dutch? The best answer? Check 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 one. Accept that you are likely to make some mistakes, learn, and make some other mistakes again. Do not worry too much about it, just remember you are not the only one. Such things happen to all international travellers and citizens around the world.

## 8. Accept help and assistance

Moving to and settling in another country is challenging, as there are many things to learn about and organise. 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 in English is widely available online, but getting personal advice that takes into account your specific needs and circumstances might be somewhat harder to obtain.



At Amstel Expats, we fully understand the specific challenges faced by internationals. 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 information on reliable partners, housing agents, utilities, GP's, dentists, 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!

Amstel Expats is founded by Monique den Haan, who has hands-on experience settling in under international circumstances.

Call Monique directly on: +31 (06) 497 68 628 or send your e-mail to: [monique@amstelexpats.nl](mailto:monique@amstelexpats.nl)