

Every international has to get used to certain aspects of his/her host country. Most people need some time to better understand the local culture and habits.

If there are many differences between your home country and your host country, the impact on your sense of belonging is likely to be significant.

However, you do not always have to go far to feel lost and insecure. But don't worry, being aware of some of the local challenges is the best way to survive your international adventure.



10 Survival tips for internationals moving to & living in the Netherlands

1. Prepare well for work, accommodation & start school search asap (if children are involved)
2. Be realistic and manage your own expectations
3. Realise that many experiences are not completely new
4. Stay in touch with family and close friends back home
5. Look after your health and take time to relax
6. Enjoy life and meet (new) people
7. Be proactive in overcoming cultural hurdles
8. Do not be too hard on yourself
9. Accept some local help and assistance
10. Learn the local language

1. Prepare well for work, accommodation & start school search asap

WORK

If you do not have a job yet, check your job chances beforehand by getting into contact with one or more recruitment agencies. They give you an update on the current job situation and are able to tell you if diplomas are valid in the Netherlands. Alternatively, you can have your diploma(s) checked by Nuffic, the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education. Some recruiters specialise in jobs for internationals, such as Undutchables, Adams Multilingual Recruitment and Blue Lynx. There are also recruitment companies focussing on IT-hiring, e.g. WKL Consultancy and Venderion. If you have found a job and/or you are transferring with your company, check with HR/Management if you are allowed to make an orientation visit to get a feel of local life.

ACCOMMODATION

Finding affordable accommodation is generally a big challenge for internationals. Especially in the Amsterdam region, rental prices have rocketed. If you have lots of money, the perfect place is something to strive for. If not, it certainly helps to list down your accommodation requirements clearly and prioritise them (together if you are bringing a partner), as you are likely to have to make some compromises. To better understand the Dutch rental market, it helps to check what is on offer on the online housing sites: Funda and Pararius (English language option available).

START SCHOOL SEARCH ASAP (IF CHILDREN ARE INVOLVED)

Regardless of their nationality, all children aged 5-18 are required by law to participate in an approved education programme when residing in the Netherlands. A selection of international schools is available, but be aware that fees are considerable and that -in some areas, e.g. around Amsterdam- it can be quite difficult to find a place at school for your children. Recently, an increasing number of international children have also joined local schools. Here, it is important to realise that the common language is Dutch. Some of the local schools offer intensive Dutch language training programmes to help international children learn Dutch more quickly.

2. Be realistic and manage your own expectations

The biggest shock of culture shock is not expecting 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, therefore it helps to be aware of Dutch traditions and customs.

Also, relocating to another country is very different from spending time on holiday. Realise you are not a tourist!



Living abroad sounds glamorous and it is likely to bring you some new, exciting and fun experiences, but your daily tasks still have to be done no matter where you live, so be realistic in your expectations of your daily life.

3. Remember that many experiences are not completely new

Trust yourself to already possess most of the skills and instincts that you are going to need to enjoy living in the Netherlands. 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 most of the challenges you are facing, such as: moving house or starting a new job. 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.

4. Stay in touch with family and close friends back home

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, there are many ways to keep in touch with the people you left behind.



- Social media, such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram make it easy to post updates, photos, etc. and view those of your family and friends.
- SKYPE, FaceTime and WhatsApp enable free calls.
- If you do not yet have internet access organised at your home address, there are many free WIFI spots.
- Most Dutch libraries also have computers, which you are allowed to use for internet access.

5. 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. Adhering to familiar activities and keeping a regular structure will also help you to regain your balance more quickly. If possible, try to keep doing the things you would normally do to unwind and relax.

6. Enjoy life and meet (new) people

There is plenty to do in and around Amsterdam, so do not stay indoors and/or become a total workaholic. Go sightseeing or start a (new) hobby/sports activity. The region of Amsterdam hosts many international meetup groups and clubs and they are generally an effective way of making new friends quickly. Most internationals enjoy having a mixed group of international and local friends. However, it takes time to build such a network and sometimes it may also be nice to retreat a little from the local particularities and relax in a more familiar setting.

7. Be proactive in overcoming cultural hurdles

Of course we all have our personal preferences, but approaching life abroad with an open mind helps you to 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 well in advance instead of going for a drink or dinner on the spot.

Using this local knowledge to your advantage is easy. If you would like to socialise more with the Dutch, bring your own agenda and suggest a social appointment for next week!



Generally, you will find that 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 anymore.

8. Do not be too hard on yourself

Getting used to a new environment and another culture does not happen overnight and the process you are likely to go through is not a straight forward one. Accept that you are probably going to make some mistakes. Do not get too upset, just learn from it, try again or try something new. Remember, you are not the only one. It happens to all internationals and it is a good thing, as international exposure gives you the opportunity to learn and develop yourself as a person.

9. Accept some local help and assistance

Moving to and settling in another country is challenging, as there are many things to learn 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.



Local information in English is widely available online and generally a good start. However, depending upon your personal circumstances, it might be more effective and less stressful to get some personal advice that takes into account your specific needs.

Getting local support to create the work and social life you want, is a smart move to make sure that you will enjoy your Dutch adventure.

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.

10. Learn the local language

In our experience, one of the most important aspects of making yourself feel at home is learning to speak (some) Dutch to ease local communications. Unfortunately, many internationals never get round to taking Dutch language lessons and the ones who do often struggle to use Dutch in real life.

Please don't give up! As daunting as it may seem at first, learning Dutch can be fun and using Dutch in practice is likely to enrich your local life and enhance your sense of belonging.

Our Boost Your Dutch Training Programme has been specifically developed to take advantage of the extensive skill set & life experiences of internationals.

This new and innovative approach accelerates your learning process and provides a no-stress, friendly atmosphere for learning Dutch as a second language.



BOOST YOUR DUTCH: FUN, FAST, INTERACTIVE, NATIVE INSIGHTS, INTERNATIONAL MINDSET



“Whether you are working, looking after your family or both, it is vitally important to understand how things work in the Netherlands and feel supported whilst you are settling-in and building a new life.”

Monique den Haan, founder of Amstel Expats

Amstel Expats Mission: “Making life easy for internationals living in the Netherlands!”

We look forward to discussing your needs and meeting you in the near future. Please contact us.

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Alternatively, visit our website: www.amstelexpats.nl