



## PROGRAM COUNTRY: THE NETHERLANDS

*STS – more than 50 years of experience in student exchange programs all over the world*



The Netherlands – windmills, tulips, bicycles and social tolerance. The Netherlands is often referred as Holland. This is however misguided, since the provinces of north and south Holland in the western Netherlands are only two of the country's twelve provinces. The Netherlands is a densely populated and geographically low-lying country (its name literally means "low countries" or "lowlands"). The country is popularly known for its windmills, clogs (wooden shoes), tulips, bicycles and social

tolerance. Its liberal policies receive international attention. The country is host to the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.

### COUNTRY INFORMATION

**Area:** about 16.000 square kilometres

**Population:** approximately 16 million

**Capital:** Amsterdam

**Language:** Dutch

**National Holiday:** April 30 (Queens Day)

There is a popular saying in the Netherlands which goes as follows: Just act normal, that by itself is crazy enough. This saying has a lot of truth in it. In fact, it means that you should behave in such a way that others do not find this behavior exaggerated or irritating. Dutch are very open to foreigners, therefore exchange students should have no problem in finding new friends. The Netherlands has a lot to offer: museums, historic sights, old cities, and of course windmills and tulips. The public transportation system is very well developed with a good train- and bus system. But there are also some 20 million bikes in the Netherlands, and the basic means of transportation will be a bike.

The national language is Dutch. It is only spoken in the Netherlands and parts of Belgium. Dutch takes time and a lot of effort to understand and speak.

The climate is in the temperature zone. Winters are generally mild, with temperatures slightly above zero degrees Celsius, and summers quite cool with temperatures around 20 degrees. Normally the weather is pretty rainy in the Netherlands.

The Dutch are world-travellers. They are known for their keen approach to doing business worldwide. Many Dutch speak sev-

eral languages and the first multinational company was already established in the 17th century called the VOC (United Trade Company).

The Netherlands used to have many colonies and even though Columbus "discovered" America, the Dutch made the first settlements in the new country. New York was first named New Amsterdam and many places in New York still refer to the dutch heritage. The 17th century was called "the golden century". The Netherlands was famous for its art, painters, (Rembrandt, Vermeer) and architecture. The dark side of the Netherlands during this time was their attitude towards slavery. The dutch were probably the biggest trader in slaves from Africa.

Nowadays the Dutch are still very internationally oriented, but also known for their talents in sports such as football and ice-skating. There are many dutch football-players play in the English, Spanish and Italian league, and the national team is amongst the best in the world.

### SCHOOL LIFE

In the Netherlands there are various types of secondary schools. The options are VMBO (pre-vocational secondary education), HAVO (senior general secondary education) and VWO (pre-university education). All three types of secondary education are for children aged 12 and over, and they begin with a period of 'basic secondary education'. This usually lasts three years and consists of a broad core curriculum for all pupils. The three types differ widely from each other in terms of the length of the course and the level of education. Exchange students are most often placed in the HAVO or VWO schools. The HAVO schools are 5 years in length and students are then placed in the 4th year. The VWO schools are 6 years in length and the students are placed in the 5th year.

It is the guidance counsellor or someone from the administrative board who decides which classes an exchange student can take as well as which grade or form they will attend. However, STS Netherlands is always there to discuss the possibilities with the guidance counsellor and the exchange student so that the best possible choices can be made. Exchange students should be prepared to invest time in their homework. The level of education at the



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VWO is usually higher than what a student is used to at home. This, combined with studying in the Dutch language, makes it a real challenge. Teachers do expect that exchange students learn the Dutch language fast. They will not translate course material in to English or any other language.

In the HAVO and VWO, typical classes are Dutch, English, another foreign language (either French or German), maths, economics, physics, history, biology, chemistry, geography, physical education, art and independent study hours. The school week lasts from Monday through Friday, and typically consists of 30 to 35 lessons of 50 minutes each. The length of each school day may vary, depending on the schedule. It is not expected that exchange students can fully participate in the classes in the beginning, however, it is expected that students attend the classes. Not only does it help the students to get to know the others in the class, it also puts them in an environment where Dutch is the only language spoken. Teachers do expect the students to make an effort to learn Dutch.

## HOST FAMILY LIFE

Families in the Netherlands (or Holland as it is often called) are generally small. The average number of children in a family is two. Many women work, (mainly part-time) especially when the children have reached school age. This means that Dutch youngsters learn to be independent at a young age.

Housing in the Netherlands may be different than what the students are used to from home. There are about 16 million inhabitants living on a small piece of land at the coast of the North Sea. Space is limited and has to be divided between towns and villages, industry, agriculture and nature. In most towns and villages, families live in houses that are connected to each other. They usually have a small garden. In the bigger towns and cities many people live in apartment complexes.

Meals are important and most often taken together. Breakfast is usually light and quick with bread, cheese, cold meat and jam. Some families tend to have longer breakfasts on the weekends or they have brunch. For lunch, the students bring their own sandwiches to school. In most schools, the students can buy softdrinks, coffee or tea, potato chips and cookies. Dinner gathers the whole family, and it is a time to share the feelings and happenings of the day. Usually dinner takes place between 6–7 pm. The entire family helps out with cooking, setting the table and clearing up afterwards. Presence at the table is a must, even if somebody is not hungry, because it is a moment of mutual sharing.

There is some typical Dutch food such as a mixture of cooked potatoes and certain vegetables. Cooked potatoes are almost always served at dinner, next to vegetables and meats. The exchange students should try everything. The Dutch culture is very open to foreign foods, so the Dutch eat a variety of foods (Chinese, Italian, Mexican, French etc). Salads are also popular.

The main transportation mode in the Netherlands for youngsters is the bike. Almost everybody rides a bike to get to school, friends, sports clubs etc. If the student does not know how to ride a bike before he or she comes to the Netherlands, he or she should learn it at home beforehand. Host families are not obliged to either buy or lend the student a bike. The student must be prepared to buy one in the Netherlands. It is possible to buy good second hand bicycles for about 100 EUR. The public transportation system is well developed, so that also gives students a possibility to move around and visit other places.

Teenagers seldom go out alone. They usually gather in small groups at somebody's house, before going out. It is not uncommon to meet at somebody's house before going to the school dance, discotheque, café or other event. Usually the host parents request that the students are at home by the set curfew. The curfew will depend on the confidence the parents have in their children and exchange students; it might be stricter in the beginning and possibly adjusted as time goes on. However, host parents would like to be informed about where, when and with whom. This should not be regarded as 'controlling', but rather as an interest in the safety of the student and a feeling of responsibility towards the parents.

Students are strongly urged to become involved in extra-curricular activities outside of school, such as sports, clubs, social events, art, music, or drama, as long as these activities do not interfere with their academic progress. There are many clubs a student can join. Whereas in many countries extra-curricular activities are tied to the school, in the Netherlands these activities are outside of the school arena.

Many schools do offer benefits, such as discounts to the theatre. They also organise trips to other countries that students most often can join. These trips may vary from a survival trip in Belgium to skiing in Austria to a discovery tour in Greece.

## PROGRAM EXTRAS

STS organises two weekends for the students. One in the beginning of March and one in September. We do sightseeing, and the accommodation is usually in a hostel. The costs are reasonable, some 75 euro for the whole weekend (excluding travelling costs) and we expect all the inbound students to participate.

## European Tour

In the end of June, STS Head Office offers an amazing three-week bus tour around Europe. You get to visit 10 countries together with students from all over the world. The price includes accommodation, half board, sightseeing, most entrances and activities, Disneyland in Paris etc. Please see separate sheet for more detailed information regarding this tour.



*All information is subject to change.*

