

IDENTITIES ABROAD: NETHERLANDS*



IDENTITIES ABROAD

As you prepare for your education abroad program, you may be considering how your own identities may or may not interact with the host culture in similar or different ways than they do at home. Below you will find country-specific information on potential challenges for students who are from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in education abroad programs. This information, adapted from the Diversity Network's Country Diversity Notes (via [Diversity Abroad](#)), is intended to assist you in exploring how you might be received abroad based on your race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religion, or ability.

The information below features a country overview for the Netherlands as well as information pertinent to the socio-cultural climate that U.S. students of diverse backgrounds can reasonably expect while living in the country. It also offers bulleted information noting facts that may directly relate to student experiences in the country. Links with additional information resources on the various topics are also offered.

The below information provides a bird's-eye view of diversity matters in the country as they pertain to U.S. students. IEGI understands the below information is not exhaustive or inclusive of all possible student identities and experiences. We encourage you to conduct further research and chat with relevant points of contact including your program advisor, faculty leader, or peers who have traveled to the Netherlands, to gain a greater understanding of your host country and/or city.

If you would like to speak with us about any questions pertaining to diversity and inclusivity abroad, please contact us at study.abroad@purchase.edu and we will answer your inquiry to the best of our ability and/or refer you to others with the expertise that you need. Additionally, if you are interested in discussing other geographical locations, please don't hesitate to contact us.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

FAST FACTS:

Capital: Amsterdam

Population: 17,280,397 (July 2020 est.)

Language(s): Dutch, with some regional languages

Religions: Roman Catholic 23.6%, Protestant 14.9% (includes Dutch Reformed 6.4%, Protestant Church of The Netherlands 5.6%, Calvinist 2.9%), Muslim 5.1%, other 5.6% (includes Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish), none 50.7% (2017 est.)

Ethnic groups: Dutch 76.9%, EU 6.4%, Turkish 2.4%, Moroccan 2.3%, Indonesian 2.1%, German 2.1%, Surinamese 2%, Polish 1%, other 4.8% (2018 est.)



The Netherlands is located in Western Europe between Belgium and Germany along the coast of the North Sea. Known by many around the world as Holland, this inaccurate term actually only refers to a specific region of The Netherlands. Previously part of the Holy Roman Empire, the country became known as a seafaring and commercial power by the 17th century, and was established as

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the Kingdom of The Netherlands in 1815, boasting various colonies and settlements around the world. A relatively small country, The Netherlands is one of the most densely populated countries in the world with a population in excess of 17 million.

The Netherlands has a long tradition of quality higher education, dating back to the 16th century. Thirteen Dutch institutions are included in the top 400 on the [2021 QS World University Rankings](#), with nine in the global top 200 including: Utrecht University (121); Leiden University and University of Groningen (tied at 128); and Erasmus University Rotterdam (197). Tilburg University appears on the list at 368. This impressive collection of universities as well as the prevalence of the English-language positions makes The Netherlands as an attractive destination for international students.

Approximately 26% of Dutch land is actually below sea level; and almost half of the country's land was reclaimed from the sea within the past 100 years. With this in mind, flooding is a persistent concern in The Netherlands although extensive infrastructure provides residents with a high degree of security. Travelers to The Netherlands can generally get around by bicycle, the mode of transportation preferred by the Dutch. Amsterdam, the country's capital, is widely recognized as a vibrant city with a liberal ethos and The Hague -- the governmental seat -- is home to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Recognized as a [World Bank High-Income Country](#), the average [Numbeo Cost of Living](#) is 2.72% higher than in the United States (aggregate data for all cities, rent not considered).

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Review current travel risks for The Netherlands:

- [U.S Department of State Travel Risks](#)
- [Safe Travel to the Netherlands](#)

The [Institute of International Education \(IIE\) Open Doors](#) report notes that 3,966 U.S. students participated in education abroad programs in The Netherlands during the 2017-2018 academic year, a 15.4% increase from the year prior making the Netherlands one of the top 20 destinations for U.S. education abroad students.

ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR:

In general, the Dutch deny the existence of racism and discrimination in The Netherlands; however, recent debates around immigration and the traditional Sinterklaas festival -- featuring Dutch residents in "black face" -- have caused racial and ethnically-based tension. The Dutch Sinterklaas (St. Nicholas) festival often centers around Zwarte Piet (Black Pete), an impish clown with a black face who accompanies the bearded St. Nicholas (Sinterklaas). The character is derived from 17th-century paintings of Moorish slaves, and many Dutch with African ancestry find it offensive. While immigrants and their descendants continue to be viewed as culturally distinct groups, diversity is increasingly seen as something that obstructs integration into Dutch society.

NOTES:

- ["Allochtoon"](#) is a term used to describe a Dutch resident born outside the Netherlands, or with at least one parent born outside of the country. In popular speech, this term is often used to refer to those perceived to be non-Western such as those with Turkish, Latin American, African or Asian heritage.
- For some Dutch, the term "foreigner" can be synonymous with Muslim, Turkish, Moroccan, or other group perceived to be non-Western, regardless of Dutch citizenship status.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 in The Netherlands](#) (see Section 6: Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons; National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities), US Department of State
- [World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples](#), Minority Rights Group International
- [The Netherlands Might be Tolerant, but Racism Exists for People of Color](#), The Undeclared

SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER OR QUEER STUDENTS:

In April of 2001, The Netherlands became the first country to legalize same-sex marriage. Since that time, many other countries have followed suit. While discrimination does exist, LGBTQ individuals generally blend into societal life in The Netherlands without receiving undue attention. Surveys show that more than 95% of Dutch people consistently approve of same-sex relationships, but approximately 10% of Dutch people voice hostility towards transgender people. Despite the high level of acceptance, harassment of and violence towards members of the LGBTQ community occasionally occurs.

NOTES

- The Amsterdam police force employs a unit, termed the Pink in Blue, dedicated to protecting the rights of LGBTQ individuals and to make it easier to report discriminatory incidents.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Acceptance of Homosexuality in the Netherlands: Then and Now](#), Utrecht University News
- [COC Netherlands](#), Advocacy group for LGBTQ rights in The Netherlands
- [How LGBT Friendly is the Netherlands?](#), Once Upon a Journey
- [Living in the Netherlands as a Transgender Expat](#), ExpatFocus
- [Sexual Orientation Laws in the World \(December 2019\)](#), ILGA, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association

PHYSICAL DISABILITY IN THE NETHERLANDS

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES:

The law prohibits discrimination in The Netherlands and The Act on Equal Treatment of Disabled and Chronically Ill People gives disabled people the right to the adaptations necessary to enable them to participate fully in society. With this in mind, students with various disabilities will generally find The Netherlands to be a welcoming place. While implementation of these legal standards has not been exhaustive, individuals with various disabilities can expect to have access to plentiful resources in The Netherlands. The rail system, for example, [has information specific to travelers with a functional disability on the website](#) and travel assistants to assist disabled travelers. If you require specific accommodations, you are encouraged to discuss these with both the disability resources office on your home campus and your program provider/host university as early as possible prior to departure.

NOTES:

- Many adaptations have been made with regard to accessibility in The Netherlands; however, certain venues -- especially older buildings such as museums -- have not yet been adapted.
- It is possible to rent modified bicycles and beach wheelchairs.
- Travelers with mobility concerns can reference the [Accessible Guide through Amsterdam City Guide](#) for suggested self-guided tours and attractions.
- Although you can purchase many prescription and non-prescription medications at pharmacies, some common U.S. medications may not be available and thus it is recommended by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs that travelers carry prescription medication in original packaging, along with a doctor's prescription. As a precaution, travelers should check with the U.S. Embassy website to find a list of medical facilities. As a precaution, you should check with the U.S. Embassy website to find a list of medical facilities. A list of providers can also be found in your SUNY-sponsored health insurance portal.
- If students are hearing impaired, or traveling with someone who has a hearing impairment, they should check with potential hosts to determine whether they have: visual adaptation aids for telephone ringers, smoke alarms, fire alarms, doorbell, audio loop systems, amplification on telephone handsets and televisions with teletext.
- For travelers with visual impairment, it is important to check whether accommodations welcome their guide dog, as well as: having markings denoting changes in floor space and height, braille instructions for appliances and controls and use of large print.

ADDITIONAL LINKS

- [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 in The Netherlands](#) (see Section 6: Discrimination, Societal Abuses and Trafficking in Persons; Persons with Disabilities), U.S. Department of State
- [Resources for Americans Traveling Abroad with Disabilities](#), Mobility International USA
- [Study Abroad: Amanda goes to the Netherlands \(Video\)](#), Arizona State University
- [Travelers with Disabilities, U.S. State Department](#) (see section under Local Laws & Special Circumstances)

- [Traveling with Disabilities and Medications](#), Transportation Security Administration

RELIGION IN THE NETHERLANDS

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS STUDENTS:

From 1900 to 1960, Dutch society was separated into four pillars: Catholics, Protestants, Socialists, and Liberals. These groups were recipients of federal funding allowing for separate institutions such as schools and community organizations. Known as vertical pillarization, this policy was cast aside as the Dutch immigrant community began to expand in the 20th century. In recent years, anti-Muslim sentiment has been on the rise with the growth of the Dutch Muslim community. In June 2018, the government enacted a ban of face coverings in schools and some public spaces. Proponents of the law proposed the ban, which took effect August 1, 2019, as a means of social integration. Hundreds of anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic attacks were reported in 2017, although there was a decline in the number of incidents against both groups from 2016 to 2017. Today, the country is largely secular. [More than 20% of Dutch churches have been converted](#) into secular spaces.

NOTES:

- The Netherlands has one of the largest Muslim populations (5%) in the E. U.
- Since “de-pillarization”, an increasing percentage of the Dutch population identifies as secular, with no religious affiliation.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: The Netherlands](#), U.S. Department of State
- [Faith-Based Travel Information](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel
- [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 in The Netherlands](#) (see Section 6: Discrimination, Societal Abuses and Trafficking in Persons on Anti-Semitism, U.S. Department of State
- [Mosques & Prayer Time in The Netherlands](#), IslamicFinder.org
- [The Netherlands just passed a law banning face veils in public buildings](#), Vox

WOMEN IN THE NETHERLANDS

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FEMALE STUDENTS:

The Netherlands is thought to be a very safe country, however, women traveling alone should follow ‘common sense’ safety precautions as they would in the U.S. Sexual harassment is illegal in the workplace. Outside of the workplace, sexual harassment can only be prosecuted if considered sexual violence. Discrimination based on gender is illegal.

NOTES:

- Female students who travel to The Netherlands can expect a level of protection and respect equivalent to the U.S.
- While there are free public urinals, female-identifying travelers should expect to pay approximately 50 cents for public toilets or should purchase something in a cafe to use their restrooms.
- Street harassment occurs but is reported to be less frequent than in other European destinations.
- The Netherlands ranked 27th (out of 149 countries) on the [2018 Global Gender Gap Index](#) conducted by the World Economic Forum.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Frommer's Tips for Women Travelers](#), The Netherlands
- [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 in The Netherlands](#) (see Section 6 on Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons, subheading for Women)
- [Information for Women Travelers](#), U.S. Department of State

REFERENCES

Maps, flag and country facts are from the [CIA World Factbook Online](#)
[CIA World Factbook](#) | [IIE Open Doors Report](#) | [Lonely Planet Netherlands](#)

Please note: The content within the resources provided were last reviewed in July 2020 and as such could have changed. Views expressed in links provided or in sub-links within the document do not necessarily reflect the views of the Purchase Office for Global Education.