

NETHERLANDS

“Let’s put the little flowers outside.’ The Dutch saying did not make to much sense at the start, but now I know it’s the Dutch way of saying, ‘Let’s throw a big party.’ Most important is that I discovered that life is all about learning the differences among us. My other favorite lessons where how to ride a bike, how to find reasons to celebrate all the time and how to become a more mature and sensitive young man. The Netherlands was my perfect start.” Norman Duarte, participant from Honduras, 1998-1999

Half the Netherlands lies below sea level on land created by walling off the Atlantic with dikes. Remarkably, the country’s low ocean-side half is more thickly settled than its higher eastern half—and Holland is Europe’s most densely populated country. Fortunately, the Dutch flair for meticulous organization plus a national preference for bicycles over cars help keep coastal cities from feeling overcrowded. Another contributor to maintaining peace is an acceptance of social trends that roil much of the world, such as same-sex marriage and euthanasia. In fact, one of the few viewpoints that can make Dutch citizens angry is that their relaxed social philosophy is wrong.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Netherlands was established in 1947. More than 300 AFS volunteers in nine regional chapters across the country work hard year-round to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. During the school year, AFS Netherlands hosts approximately 120 AFSers from as many as 23 countries.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in the Netherlands

Your flight will arrive in Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands. After the plane lands and you collect your baggage, you and your fellow AFSers will pass through customs and be met by AFS Netherlands staff and volunteers.

Arrival Orientation

After you have spent many long and tiring hours on the plane, the two-day arrival orientation, organized by staff and run by volunteers, will give you a chance to relax, meet other AFSers from around the world, ask questions and learn about AFS in the Netherlands as well as about Dutch culture.

Living in the Netherlands

Lifestyle and Family Living

The Dutch people are best characterized by their international outlook, tolerance of others’ beliefs, love of personal freedom and commitment to a society endeavoring to provide a reasonable standard of living for everyone. They take pride in their language and heritage, and they are hardworking, with a flair for the meticulous. The Dutch have a strong sense of family. A Dutchman’s home is his castle. It is clean, comfortable and cozy. Children help with the housework and respect the family’s rules. Parents expect to know when their children are going out and where they are going. AFSers will depend on their bicycles to go anywhere; a 16 km (10 mi) trip by bike would not be uncommon.

The structures of host families vary widely. Some have single parents (mostly mothers), some have very young or much older children or no children. In a large number of families, both parents work. Family time is mostly at dinner, on weekends and vacations. Family members are often very busy with their own schedules during the week.

Dutch host families, like AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family lives.

Placements are in small towns, but because Holland is such a small country, access to bigger towns and cities is easy. Some regions, particularly in the north, are very rural.

Dress and Appearance

Winter clothes are worn five to six months a year. Clothing suggestions: all sorts of pants, jeans, T-shirts, sweaters, sweatshirts, shorts, tennis shoes or sneakers, a swimsuit, a raincoat, and a lined winter jacket. On special occasions, more formal dress is expected: for girls a dress or blouse and skirt; for boys, slacks and tie.

Diet and Meals

Dutch food is simple and nourishing; the soups and vegetables are excellent. Dutch cuisine represents a mixture of European cooking styles. A typical meal consists of potatoes and gravy with vegetables in season and meat or fish. Many people eat pasta and rice (Chinese or Indonesian). In winter, it is common to make a heavy dish of potatoes mixed with a vegetable. Breakfast during the week can be a bit haphazard as individual family members fend for themselves, depending on their schedules. There is usually bread and cheese, marmalade or peanut butter. Often on Sundays, the family will eat a special breakfast together. Dinner is important. It is a time when most families get together to talk and socialize. It is not to be missed if you want to be part of the family. Most students will bring a packed lunch to school.

School

The Dutch school system has two main types of schools that AFSers can attend: HAVO and VWO. HAVO schools are liberal arts high schools which Dutch students attend for five years; graduates normally go on to business or technical school. Classes here include Dutch, English, math, physics, chemistry, history, geography, commercial and social sciences, economics and physical education. AFSers attending HAVO schools are placed with fourth-year students. VWO schools are for Dutch students planning on attending university, and AFSers attending these schools are placed with fourth- or fifth-year students. Classes in VWO schools are the same as the HAVO schools, except that students will focus on a specialty for their final two years. Specialities are language and commercial studies or science and math.

The start of school is staggered from one to three weeks among the various regions of Holland. This system was developed so the whole country would not go on vacation at once. School ends in July. There is a weeklong vacation in October, Christmas vacation, a spring vacation and a short break at Easter. Classes are from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., subject to variations allowed by course scheduling. Students commute to school by bicycle and must buy their own (at a cost of US\$100 to US\$150).

Most schools organize a trip abroad, for example to Paris, London, Prague or Rome. The cost will be around US\$700-800 and must be borne by the student. Some schools have started "survival weeks" in the Belgian Ardennes Forest. Special art and music schools are not easily available as it is difficult to enrol foreign students.

Teen Life

Dutch teenagers like to watch TV, read and get together with friends. The most popular sport is soccer. After school, kids go to hobby clubs or sports clubs (soccer, tennis, volleyball or field hockey), take music lessons, etc. In winter, skating is popular as are water sports in summer such as sailing, surfing and swimming. Sports are an important part of student life but are not part of the school curriculum. Instead, they are an out-of-school activity. The expenses of club fees must be paid by the participant.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Netherlands will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things, while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

During the first month of your stay, your host family will assist you with a self-directed Dutch language course. Although many people in the Netherlands are fluent in English, you must be committed to learning Dutch in order to become well integrated both at school and at home. Volunteers will help monitor your progress and provide additional guidance if necessary. At the end of the month, you will get together with other AFSers in your area for a language test and a chance for an informal evaluation of how things are going at home and in school. There is also a mid-stay orientation camp. Traditionally, chapter activities throughout the year include a New Year's celebration and a Culture Day in March or April. In the spring, you may also choose to help arrange and take part in an optional short-term exchange in another part of the Netherlands.

And last, but definitely not least, is the "End-of-Stay." You will get together with other AFSers right before you return home. The "End-of-Stay" is about looking back at your sojourn and sharing memories with other AFSers. It is also about thinking of the future.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in the Netherlands, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Netherlands. We strongly discourage travelling on your own or with friends.

Spending Money

AFS recommends that US\$1,500 in traveller's checks should be sufficient for an entire year to cover spending. You may also be able to open a Dutch bank account.

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do such things as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the expenses are your responsibility. Spending more than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them.

Safety and Support

The Netherlands is a very safe country, and you should do well if you follow the normal precautions you would use in your own country.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Dutch person. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medical purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Netherlands may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for the Netherlands (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require any medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices in your region and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. It is your responsibility to obtain

your visa and pay the fees. However, AFS will let you know how to proceed and will provide you with the documents you need to apply for the visa.

Program Prices

All participants are required to pay participation fee **and** do a mandatory fundraising. To get further information, please visit our website www.afscanada.org or contact us.

The program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

The Netherlands is blessed with a fascinating geography. About a quarter of its territory is below sea level, and the country would flood if there were no dikes.

The Netherlands, also known unofficially as Holland, borders the North Sea on the north and west, Germany on the east, and Belgium on the south. The Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, islands in the Caribbean, are part of the Netherlands.

Much of the western part, situated below sea level, is covered with clay and peat soils interspersed with canals, rivers and arms of the sea. Farther to the east, the land lies slightly above sea level and is flat or gently rolling. The elevation rarely exceeds 50m (160ft). Most of the land is devoted to agriculture; only small areas of forest and heath remain.

The most densely populated region of the Netherlands is the Randstad, principally four large cities (Amsterdam, the Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht) and smaller towns (including Haarlem, Leiden and Delft), with an agricultural green heart (*groenehart*) in the western part of the Netherlands.

The climate is temperate, and rain is frequent year-round. Winters can be cold or mild; the average temperature range in winter is between -10°C and 4°C (14°F and 40°F) and in summer between 16°C and 28°C (60°F and 80°F).

Population

The Netherlands has a population of 15.9 million; 83% are Dutch, 17% are Moroccans, Turks and other ethnic groups, including Dutch citizens who have emigrated from the country's islands in the Caribbean. Amsterdam is the capital; Rotterdam is the principal port city.

Language

Dutch is spoken throughout the Netherlands, and Frisian is also spoken in the northeast province of Friesland.

Government

The Netherlands has a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliament. The upper chamber has 75 members and the lower chamber has 150.

Religion

36% of the Dutch are Roman Catholic, 27% are Protestant, and 6% belong to other churches; the rest are unaffiliated with any religion. Religion plays a relatively small role in the lives of many Dutch people who do not attend services, even if they feel they belong to a particular religion.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key Dutch words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To further familiarize yourself with life in the Netherlands, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about the Netherlands and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to the Netherlands. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living as a Dutch person. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or AFS Interculture Canada office. In addition, AFS Netherlands will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

Dutch people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country. We wish you a wonderful experience!

Curiously Netherlands

☀ With 465 people per km² (744 per mi²), the Netherlands is the most densely populated country in Europe.

How to Apply

You first have to fill out the Preliminary Application form that you can find on our website at www.afscanada.org. If you don't have access to Internet, call us at (514) 288-3282 or 1-800-361-7248 and we will send you the document by mail.

Quick Facts

Student age (upon arrival)	16 years to 18 years	
Country data	Size	41,526 km ² (16,029 mi ²)
	Population	15,981,472
	Official Language	Dutch
	Government	Constitutional monarchy
	Currency	1€ (euro) = 100 cents
Useful website	www.holland.com	
AFS Netherlands website	http://www.afs.nl/	