

Netherlands, Utrecht University Exchange Program Handbook 2019-2020

The Utrecht, Netherlands exchange program is offered by International Academic Programs (IAP) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in conjunction with Utrecht University (UU). This IAP Program Handbook supplements handbooks or materials you receive from Utrecht University as well as the general IAP Study Abroad Handbook and provides you with the most up-to-date information and advice available at the time of printing. Changes may occur before your departure or while you are abroad.

Questions about your program abroad (housing options, facilities abroad, etc.) as well as questions relating to your relationship with your host university or academics (e.g. course credit and equivalents, registration deadlines, etc.) should be directed to IAP at UW-Madison.

Contacts

On-Site Information

Your primary contact will be:

Ingrid Dijkstra & Cathelijne van Weelden
Student Exchange Coordinators (North America)
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Mailing address:
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Heidelberglaan 8
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The Netherlands

UW-Madison Information

International Academic Programs (IAP)
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Madison, WI 53706
(608) 265 6329
(608) 262 6998 fax
www.studyabroad.wisc.edu

Information for your IAP program-specific contacts is located under the Contacts tab in your MyStudyAbroad account.

Emergency Contact Information

In case of an emergency, call the main IAP number (608) 265 6329 between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday; after-hours or on weekends call the IAP staff on call at (608) 516 9440.

U.S. Department of State Registration

All program participants who are U.S. citizens must register with the U.S. Department of State before departure as this will help in case of a lost passport or other mishap. You can register on-line at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. If you are not a U.S. citizen, register at your home country's embassy or consulate.

Program Dates

The academic year of Utrecht University comprises two semesters, each of two periods. Lectures, classes and exams take place in these periods, although some faculties may slightly differ from the dates on the general academic calendar, posted here: <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/exchange-and-visiting-students/course-information/academic-calendar>

Exact dates may differ per faculty; therefore, it is important to consult your official acceptance letter or the website of your Utrecht faculty for further details. More information about your course schedule can be found on the website of your faculty: <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/exchange-and-visiting-students/course-information>

Introduction week (your on-site orientation) will be confirmed by Utrecht and vary by faculty. UW-Madison students must participate in the orientation session for incoming students their first semester in Utrecht. General orientation info is here: <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/exchange-and-visiting-students/arriving-and-living/upon-arrival/orientation-programme>

Preparation before Leaving

Immigration Documents

Passport: A passport is needed to travel to the Netherlands and to obtain your residence permit. Apply immediately for a passport if you do not already have one. Passport information and application forms can be found on the U.S. State Department website <http://travel.state.gov/passport/>. If you already have your passport, make sure it will be valid for at least 6 months beyond the length of your stay abroad.

Visa: U.S. citizens do not need a visa to enter the Netherlands. Non-U.S. citizens should consult with the Netherlands consulate for visa requirements.

Residence Permit: A residence permit is required for all non-EU citizens staying in the Netherlands for a period longer than 3 months. The International Office will help you submit an application for a residence permit and register with the local authorities. This information will be provided after UU has accepted you. **You will need to complete the process by the deadline given by UU International Office (usually 3 months prior to departure).** More information is available at <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/exchange-and-visiting-students/arriving-and-living/practical-matters>.

Handling Money Abroad

The official currency of the Netherlands is the Euro (EUR), with 1 Euro equaling 100 cents. You should bring some money with you in cash for incidental purchases as well as for bus and train fares. You are likely to need enough money to cover your first few weeks in the Netherlands, including your first two months' rent.

Banks: While it is possible for international students to open a bank account in the Netherlands, this may take a week or two to arrange after your arrival. The International Office and the bank ABN/AMRO, 4 Neude 4 (city center) have agreed that exchange students can open an account and receive an ABN/AMRO bankcard which can be used at ATMs and for university purchases. If you are staying in the Netherlands for less than one year, you may have to pay fees to open the account. If you are only here for a short period of time, you may wish to use your account back home if possible.

Information about opening a bank account tends to change regularly, therefore please refer to the following site for the latest information: <http://www.uu.nl/en/education/exchange-and-visiting-students/arriving-and-living/upon-arrival/money-matters>

ATM/Debit cards: Cash machines are available throughout Utrecht. Bring a U.S. ATM card with an international 4-digit pin number to access your checking account (not savings) overseas. Check with your bank prior to departure to make sure you will be able to access your funds from abroad with an ATM card and to inquire about any international withdrawal fees.

Credit cards: While well-known international credit cards are widely accepted in the Netherlands, they may be inconvenient to use for everyday shopping. Visa and MasterCard are the most commonly accepted credit cards.

Information on cost of living is on your IAP cost sheet and here:

<https://www.uu.nl/en/education/exchange-and-visiting-students/arriving-and-living/costs-of-living>

Packing

Packing light is a good idea as most items you will need will be available for purchase in the Netherlands. Clothing and shoes can be expensive to buy in the Netherlands. Students at Utrecht University are generally well-dressed; it is a good idea to bring one or two dressy outfits for formal occasions. Bringing clothes to layer is also a good idea. Some packing suggestions:

- ☐ four passport-size photographs for various forms
- ☐ long pants
- ☐ a coat & warmer layer below (essential)
- ☐ long sleeve shirts
- ☐ sweater/fleece
- ☐ small gifts (for roommates, new friends)
- ☐ an appointment book or agenda
- ☐ a warm scarf, hat, mittens/gloves
- ☐ walking shoes other than tennis shoes
- ☐ waterproof jacket

- ❑ travel bag for shorter trips

Travel and Arrival

You are responsible for making your own travel arrangements. The major airport in the Netherlands is Schiphol Amsterdam Airport (AMS) <http://www.schiphol.nl/>.

Arrival in Amsterdam: After arrival at Schiphol Amsterdam Airport, you will need to take a train to Utrecht Central Station. The train station at Amsterdam's airport is part of Schiphol Plaza, so just follow directions for 'trains'. Train tickets are available from the ticket machines near the platforms at Schiphol Plaza or from the ticket offices at Schiphol Plaza. There is a direct train to Utrecht every 30 minutes, and the journey takes approximately half an hour. Buy a one way ticket ('enkele reis') to Utrecht Central Station. When in doubt, you can always ask someone at the ticket office. From Utrecht Central Station you can either take a bus or a taxi to your accommodations. Transit information is detailed here: <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/exchange-and-visiting-students/arriving-and-living/upon-arrival/getting-there>

We highly recommend that you ask for a mentor from ESN (Erasmus Student Network). ESN assists all foreign students integrating into Dutch student life, organizing different activities ranging from excursions to parties. International students may also contact the ESN individually for mentor assistance. You can complete an online "I want a mentor" form at www.esn-utrecht.nl or email info@esn-utrecht.nl. If you request to have a mentor, your mentor will meet you at the Utrecht Central Station and help you pick up your keys and get to your new room. Make sure that you contact the mentor prior to your arrival (time, meeting place, etc.) to ensure someone will be there to meet you.

It is important to inform your landlord in Utrecht of your expected date and time of arrival approximately one week before you leave. Submit a copy of your complete flight itinerary to your Utrecht landlord and/or ESN mentor.

The Academic Program

Utrecht University

Of all thirteen Dutch universities, Utrecht has the deepest historical roots. Its origins lie in the early Middle Ages and are closely linked with the history of the city of Utrecht. The formal establishments of the university in the modern sense of the word came about relatively late. It was not until 1634 that Utrecht established an illustrious school and two years later, the States General of the Province of Utrecht officially declared the school a university.

Founded in 1636, the university has grown over the span of three and a half centuries into a diversified international institution, housing almost all major academic disciplines. Utrecht University is the largest and most renowned university in the Netherlands, with nearly 30,000 students and over 6,000 staff members. UU does not consist of one large campus, hence you will need to take a bus from the center of town to reach the various faculties. Lectures may be given in historic premises in the characteristic city centre of Utrecht, or in ultramodern buildings in De Uithof, the university campus. Some of the buildings in De Uithof are in fact internationally renowned architectural works of art, such as the Educatorium and the Minnaert Building.

Utrecht University: <http://www.uu.nl>

Utrecht University Exchange Office: <http://www.uu.nl/en/education/exchange-and-visiting-students>

Q-Desk (Frequently Asked Questions for Students): www.qdesk.uu.nl

Netherlands Educational System

Utrecht University uses the European Bachelors and Masters system. The duration of a bachelors program is three years. After obtaining a bachelor's degree, students may continue their studies during one or two years in order to obtain a master's degree. These include: teacher training course (1 year), vocational training in, for example, Medicine, Pharmacy and Law (max. two years), and research training, leading to the degree of doctor (dr.) which, as a Ph.D., is gained after 3 or 4 years of additional study and research, culminating in a dissertation. Those who go on for a doctorate are not registered as students, but as temporary employees of the university.

Dutch students will only be admitted at a university after finishing the pre-university education VWO. This is comparable to the first two years of US college/university. This pre-university education is one reason that Dutch students choose their major right at the beginning of their university studies. The first 2 years of the study are compulsory; thereafter students can specialize and choose their own programme to a certain extent.

Course Information

Courses: Utrecht University consists of 7 Faculties which each offer specific educational programs, focusing on one subject field rather than covering a broad spectrum of courses. The Faculties are listed here: <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/exchange-and-visiting-students/course-information>

Many UU faculties offer both bachelor's- and master's-level degree courses. Because of the differences in the educational system, most UW-Madison juniors and seniors will take courses at the A or B level (the first or second year of coursework for Dutch students). Courses at the C level are more equivalent to a graduate level course here in the United States. International exchange students meeting the requirements may enter (some of) these master courses as well, depending on your educational history, the prerequisites of the course, and the faculty policy.

Course Levels for Bachelor Students:

- Level 1 = Introductory
- Level 2 = Intermediate
- Level 3 = Advanced

Note: Most international exchange students apply for courses within the regular Faculties; you may not apply for courses within the University College Utrecht.

After Utrecht University reviews your exchange application, you will receive an acceptance and course enrollment for your specific faculty which will specify your Faculty Orientation date as well as the dates your courses begin (Note: each Faculty has slightly different start dates). All students will also participate in a general international student orientation in Utrecht. Typically, students will also confirm

their course selection when they receive their acceptance packet from Utrecht. **Utrecht University recommends that exchange students try to choose courses within one faculty.**

Dutch Language Courses: While many of the Dutch people you meet will speak excellent English, it is strongly encouraged that you take Dutch before you depart. This will help you not only in day-to-day circumstances such as traveling and reading signs and menus, but speaking Dutch greatly increases your ability to get to know both the culture and the people.

At present (subject to change), neither Utrecht University nor the Babel language institute on the UU campus offer Dutch language courses *for academic credit*. Students looking to continue their Dutch language studies abroad may do so on a non-credit basis through these resources:

<https://www.uu.nl/en/education/exchange-and-visiting-students/arriving-and-living/upon-arrival/learning-dutch>. Please contact your Study Abroad Advisor if you have any questions about taking Dutch while on this exchange program.

Registration: The Course Selection Form you filled out with your application notifies the Exchange Office what faculties you are interested in studying in. This form does not complete your registration. Your application is sent to the faculty/faculties where you are interested in taking classes for review. The International Office typically advises exchange students to pick courses from just one faculty. You can apply for more than one faculty, but it can be hard to combine time tables. Upon acceptance by the faculty the exchange officer will notify you of the result. About one month after acceptance the individual faculties will send you course enrollment information. Each faculty is different. If you plan to take courses in more than one faculty, please pay careful attention to the directions from each.

You will receive a student number (called an F-number) and become a student of a “main” faculty (depending on your major). You can register for courses at the student desk of the faculty where you wish to take a class(es). **You must always register as a student of a faculty in general and for each course you wish to take.**

It is extremely difficult to change your course enrollment after classes begin. Courses administratively dropped after the start of classes may still appear on your transcript as an “F”. To avoid having an “F” on your transcript, please refer to the “Drop” section below.

Course Equivalent Requests and My Study Abroad: Each course you take abroad must be assigned a UW-Madison “equivalent” course in order for your grades and credits to be recorded on your UW-Madison transcript. In order to establish UW-Madison course equivalents for your study abroad courses, you will submit a Course Equivalent Requests through your MyStudyAbroad (MySA) account. Detailed information on the UW course equivalent process is available in the IAP Study Abroad Handbook.

Credits

Conversions: In the Netherlands, an academic year consists of 60 ECTS credits. ECTS (European Credits Transfer System) credits are a numerical value (between 1 and 60) allocated to course units to describe the student workload required to complete them. They reflect the quantity of work each course unit requires in relation to the total quality of work necessary to complete a full year of academic study at Utrecht University, that is, lectures, practical work, seminars, tutorials, field work, private study (in the

library or at home) and examinations or other assessment activities. ECTS is thus based on a full student workload and not limited to contact hours only.

1 full academic year = 60 ECTS credit
1 semester = 30 ECTS credit

An average course consists of 200 study hours (classes, preparation, and exams are included), and thus equals 7.5 ECTS credit-points. In general, students at the university take 4 courses each semester.

Please be very careful when selecting courses. Note that courses offered may carry fewer than the 5 ECTS (equivalent to 3 UW credits). Courses must be worth at least 2.5 ECTS to be approved at UW. Courses under 2.5 ECTS should be combined with other courses of similar content to create a UW course equivalent. The combined courses should be at least 5 ECTS to provide meaningful credit.

For example: *Systematic Botany* (2 ECTS) and *Practical course with Field Exercise in Systematic Botany* (3 ECTS) = UW's Botany 400 (3 UW credits).

It is possible to have courses approved as 2 UW credits instead of 3 UW credits. However, if you are taking courses to apply to major, certificate or college requirements, the ECTS must be equivalent to the UW courses credits. For example, Botany 130 is 5 credits at UW. If this course is needed for your major, certificate, or college requirement, you need to combine Utrecht courses to equal at least 9 ECTS. If you have any questions on course credit, please contact your IAP Study Abroad Advisor.

Credit Conversion Scale:

ECTS Credits	UW Madison Credits
2.5	2
3	2
4	2
5 or 5,5	3
6 or 6,5	3
7 or 7,5	4
8	4
9	5
10	5
12	6
12,5	7
15	8

Limits and Load: UW-Madison students are required to be enrolled full-time when studying in the Netherlands. Students must enroll in the equivalent of 12 UW-Madison credits each semester, with 18 credits as the maximum.

Pass/Fail/Drop/Audit

You must take all UU courses for a grade. However, you may request a pass/fail grade to be recorded on your UW transcript. You must submit the pass/fail request through your MySA portal by the deadline indicated in your MySA. UU will record your numerical grade, and IAP will translate that grade to the UW pass/fail grading scale if you complete the pass/fail request.

Dropping and adding classes at Utrecht is complicated. Consult the Utrecht International Office for UU drop policies and procedures. If you intend to drop a class after initially registering for it in Utrecht, **you MUST contact your Study Abroad Advisor** as well as drop the CER through your MyStudyAbroad by the deadline listed in your MySA. Refer to the IAP Study Abroad Handbook for additional Academic Policies.

Grades and Grade Conversions

The grading system used by Dutch universities is based on number scale of 1 (very poor) to 10 (outstanding). The following scale has been established for translating grades from UU to UW-Madison:

<u>Utrecht University</u>	<u>University of Wisconsin-Madison</u>
7.5 - 10	A
7.0 - 7.4	AB
6.5 - 6.9	B
6.0 - 6.4	BC
5.5 - 5.9	C
5.0 - 5.4	D
0.0 - 4.9	F
NP (no participation)	F
NC (no credit)	F

The grade reporting system is quite different in Utrecht than it is in Madison. You will receive a computer print-out of courses taken in your main faculty. Upon completion of your program, Utrecht University will send an official university transcript to IAP.

Living Abroad

The Netherlands

While commonly referred to as Holland, the official name of this country is The Netherlands. Strictly speaking, Holland is the name of two provinces in the west: North Holland and South Holland. To the east, the Netherlands borders Germany, to the south Belgium, and to the north and west the North Sea. It is a small country; the longest distance from north to south can be driven in a mere four hours. The landscape is extremely flat, and as a result, wind is an almost constant feature. Water is everywhere--lakes, rivers, and canals of many types. The population is over 16 million people, and over 60% of this population lives in an area that covers one-sixth of the country (the *Randstad*, which is defined by drawing a line connecting Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht). A few years ago, it was the second most crowded country in the world (after Bangladesh) but it's also one of the leading exporters of food. This is possible because of the extreme care the Dutch take in land use.

The Netherlands has a moderate climate (30 to 40 F in the winter), but the weather often includes drizzling rain, chilly winds, etc. The weather is best characterized by its instability: what looks like a rainy day in the morning might turn out to be a warm and sunny day and the other way around. Extreme weather (snow, tropical temperatures) is rare and usually does not last long. Hence, it is important to be prepared for all types of weather. An umbrella won't be enough to protect you against virtually horizontal rain.

Study in Holland: www.studyin.nl/

Dutch Tourist Office: <http://www.holland.com/global/tourism.htm>

Utrecht

Utrecht is the fourth largest city in the country with a population of approximately 300,000. Of this number, nearly 50,000 are students at the city's university and numerous academies. It is an old cathedral city, with many medieval churches and canals with canal level cellars, which are typical of Utrecht. It is also a modern city with large shopping centers, numerous cafes, museums and theaters.

Utrecht tourist information: <http://www.12utrecht.nl/welcome-to-utrecht/>

Housing

Utrecht is a city of higher education, and students make up a considerable part of its population. This has a very positive effect on the atmosphere in the city, but it also means that the demand for student housing usually exceeds the supply, and finding a place to stay in Utrecht can be a real challenge. Utrecht University wants to assist its international students as much as possible in finding suitable temporary accommodation.

Utrecht University does not own any housing or accommodation. Instead, the University has an agreement with SSH Short Stay Solutions and Holland2Stay, local housing corporations that offer temporary furnished housing. They reserve a range of furnished accommodation especially for international students of Utrecht University. The University covers the administrative fee if you make use of this offer. However, Utrecht University does not guarantee the availability of housing, and the number of reserved accommodation is limited. **Apply as early as possible if you do not want to be responsible for finding independent housing in Utrecht!**

For information on to reserve housing, please follow the directions sent to you by Utrecht University and refer to the following website: <http://www.uu.nl/en/education/exchange-and-visiting-students/arriving-and-living/finding-accommodation>

If you arrive before the start of your rental contract, after office hours or during the weekend, you may need to spend a night in a hostel or hotel. Affordable options are: Budget hostel Strowis (www.strowis.nl) in Utrecht city-center, Bed and Breakfast Utrecht City Center or Hostel Stay Okay (www.stayokay.nl) in Bunnik. For information on other tourist accommodation, you can also check the official Utrecht Tourist information website.

Meals: Most students do their own cooking or eat in some of the less expensive cafeterias or restaurants in the university area. Refrigerators are small, so the Dutch often shop daily or every other day for food. Breakfast might be bread and jam or cheese, a similar meal possibly with soup or salad for

lunch and an evening meal of potatoes and vegetables and a small amount of meat. There are a fairly large variety of ethnic restaurants in Utrecht.

The university has self-service restaurants on different locations. They all offer lunches with bread, soup and (warm) snacks. Vegetarian soup and snacks are available. The restaurant in the Educatorium and the Bologna restaurant offer warm meals at dinner time. The Bologna restaurant requires a reservation in advance. The restaurants are closed in the weekend and on holidays. During summer break and the Christmas holidays some are closed and some have limited opening hours. In the main library in De Uithof campus you find the coffee bar Gutenberg which serves coffee, tea and some snacks.

Some student organizations have their own restaurant where their members cook. Usually the restaurant is only open to members of the organization but C.S. Veritas (www.veritas.nl) is an exception. The Veritas restaurant is open on weekdays. Dinner starts at 7:00 p.m. but you have to make a reservation before 4:00 p.m. by calling +31 (0)30 230 8040. Vegetarian meals are available.

To buy something at a vending (*slot*) machine you need either a “chipknip” on your Dutch ATM bankcard or a special “slot machine card.” The slot machine card is available at the university restaurants. You must pay a deposit of 5 Euro and the value of the slot machine card: 10, 20, 30 or 40 Euros. You cannot use coins in the slot machines.

Student Life

Student organizations: There are many student organizations in Utrecht you can join. Some focus on offering a good time while others centre around a religion, a sport or a shared cultural interest (singing, photography). Most faculties have their own student organization, which, besides organizing social activities, also organizes lectures and excursions which may be useful to your studies. Some of the student organizations are internationally oriented:

- Utrecht Erasmus Student Network (ESN): www.esn-utrecht.nl
- Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe: www.aegée-utrecht.nl
- European Geography Association: <http://www.egea.eu/entities/utrecht/>
- Utrechtse Studentenvereniging voor Internationale Betrekkingen: www.sib-utrecht.nl
- Christian Union: <https://www.facebook.com/christianunionutrecht>

Student Services can provide you with a complete overview of all student associations in Utrecht (in Dutch). You might want to ask the student organization whether a membership is valuable if you don't know Dutch.

Students most often make friends (both Dutch and other foreign students) through their classes and their living situations. There is also a wide variety of nightlife including bars and nightclubs. Each University Faculty building also has a coffee bar as a place to read and meet with friends.

The Cultural Student Centre De Salon (in De Uithof) is an ideal meeting place for university students and staff. De Uitwijk also shows films for free, organizes exhibitions, and offers affordable creative courses such as yoga, photography and painting.

International and Cultural Centre ParnassOs is located in the historic city centre. It not only offers cultural facilities for students and staff of Utrecht University, but also has a strong international element. ParnassOs is home to a number of organizations that look after the University's foreign guests, such as ESN Utrecht, the International Neighbor Group and AEGEE. ParnassOs also houses scientists and students from abroad.

ESN (Erasmus Student Network) is a European program for European exchange students. Although you will not be considered an Erasmus student, you will be allowed to participate in the activities organized for Erasmus students. Past participants recommend signing up for a mentor as a way to meet Dutch students and get oriented to Utrecht when you first arrive. You can meet Dutch students during the ESN meetings every Tuesday evening. If you stay for the entire year, you can sign up to be an ESN mentor for the second semester. One past participant suggested becoming an ESN mentor and requesting a non-American student so that you can expand your social network of international students while taking part in a Dutch organization. The ESN organizes social events such as tours of the city, excursions to Amsterdam, sporting events, and other activities.

Sports facilities: Utrecht University provides excellent sports facilities in its Olympos Sports Centre www.olympus.nl. It provides top-class facilities for indoor football, basketball, volleyball and handball. At the centre, you will also find squash courts and a well-equipped fitness centre. Outdoor facilities include football fields, a rugby pitch, hockey fields, a golf practicing course, beach volleyball courses and all-weather tennis courts. You can join a course, a student sports club, and/or use the facility for your own recreational sports. All in all you can take part in over 30 different sports, including tae bo, capoeira, fencing, fitness, running, squash, tennis, salsa dancing, street dance, and different kinds of ball sports—all at student rates. When you consider joining a course or sports club, please ask first if you need to know Dutch.

Shopping

There are a few "supermarkets", but on a much smaller scale than what you might be accustomed to in the U.S. There are specialty stores for cheaper shopping, such as the green grocers, and also markets on Wednesdays and Saturdays in the inner city. There is also an area of town behind the train station that has cheaper food stores. You will pack your own groceries, even in shopping centers, so you will want to bring your own shopping bag or purchase one for a small fee.

Store hours are usually 8:30 or 9:30 a.m. until 5 or 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays. Thursdays are late shopping evenings and stores are open until 9:00 p.m. Shops are closed on Sundays in Utrecht (except the first Sunday of a month) and often on Monday morning, although this is beginning to change. Restaurants and small 'snack bars' are usually open on Sundays. Supermarkets are open typically until 8:00 p.m.

Transportation

Public Transportation: The OV-chipkaart is the means of payment for the entire public transport system throughout the country (bus, train, tramway and subway). The card is the size of a bank card and contains an invisible chip. The OV-chipkaart can be loaded with credit in euros with which you can travel anywhere within The Netherlands. You can find more information about the OV-chipcard here: <https://www.ov-chipkaart.nl/home-1.htm>

You can also buy a single use/disposable OV-chipkaart at train stations.

Train: For national train transportation, see Netherlands Railways site www.ns.nl.

Bicycle: Most people travel by bike as it is convenient and cheap. A secondhand bike will cost between €25 and €70. If you are lucky, you can use it during your whole stay and sell it at the end. It is important to be aware that bike thefts are very common. You may wish to bring a Kryptonite lock (or U lock) from the United States, as they are more expensive in the Netherlands. If you choose to cycle, be aware of the laws that apply to bicyclists. Though you will see fewer bicyclists wearing helmets, Dutch law requires that your bike have a working light for night riding. Bring your helmet from home if you are planning on biking.

Health and Safety

Medical facilities are widely available and easily found; doctors usually have offices at their homes. Most visiting hours are from 8:00 to 9:00 am and 1:00 to 2:00 pm; double-check the hours before going. Doctors usually speak English and can prescribe medicine that you can get at local pharmacies. You can pay cash on the spot, get billed at home, or have it taken directly out of your Dutch bank account.

According to the U.S. State Department Travel Information on The Netherlands, "The Netherlands has a low crime rate." Crimes of property, however, do occur. Students should be particularly aware of keeping their bikes locked at all times. Violent crime is much less common in the Netherlands than in the U.S. Remember to take care of personal belongings in crowded surroundings such as buses during rush hour, markets, etc.

Communication

Telephone: When making calls, keep in mind time zone differences www.timeanddate.com/worldclock. To make an international call to the United States, dial the access code for the country from which you are calling plus the United States country code (always "1") followed by the appropriate U.S. area code and local number. To call internationally from the United States, dial "011", the country code, city access code (if necessary) and the phone number. Country and city codes can be found online www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/dialing.html.

For calling the United States, many students use Skype, FaceTime, or Google calling. Many Dutch students have cell phones, so you might want to consider purchasing an inexpensive cell phone with pre-paid cards to use during your stay in the Netherlands. You could also purchase a SIM card upon arrival and put it in your unlocked US smartphone (you will have a Dutch cell number). Alternatively, you could check with your US provider about an international plan for the duration of your time abroad.

E-mail: You will receive your own Utrecht University e-mail address. Please check this account often for messages from the International Office. An Internet connection will be available at your accommodation, and with only the costs of the telephone to pay (there are no subscription costs), you will have access to the Internet and all University services (e.g. the library). If you live in one of the student complexes, a high-speed connection to the University network will be available.

Most of the University's buildings have modern facilities and there are numerous computer rooms and study places for students' use. The majority of the degree programs offer free printing facilities and

each program has a specific library that can be accessed for books and new media. The modern university library annex at De Uithof offers 90 kilometers of books, newspapers, and approximately 800 study places with computer access.

Student Testimonials

The quotes below are comments from past participants; they reflect various students' experiences and are included to provide different perspectives. IAP does not endorse any specific view expressed in this section.

Handling Money Abroad

Some past students have experienced difficulty in opening a bank account. While one branch of a particular bank might deny you an account, the next one may let you open one.

I used my credit card, although not everyone accepts them. An ATM card is a must.

If you are there for a year, open a bank account. Traveler's checks were not useful.

I arrived with 200 euros in cash, which was more than enough to get started.

Using credit cards gives the best exchange rate. Opening a bank account is convenient for food shopping, paying rent, etc.

Do not bring travelers checks. ABN-AMRO does not except them nor do many other banks.

Easiest way to get money is through your check card. Foreign ATMs do not have a service fee, so you will only get charged by your bank at home. There is also no conversion fee charged by either bank.

Packing

Pack light because you'll buy stuff there, and bring some nice clothes.

Make sure to bring a backpack and a good guide book- and pack light!

I wish that I had brought miniature toiletries for traveling.

Take a laptop over if you have it along with a security cable. I got an adaptor/converter before going and everything worked fine.

If you have a laptop, bring it. Computer labs are few and far between and it can be a hassle to type papers. Make sure you bring a computer lock (a long wire that hooks to the back of all new laptops). Make sure to look up the hours of the labs, most are closed on weekends.

Our travel Bible was Lonely Planet's *Europe on a Shoestring*.

The Academic Program

You only take 2 classes per block. There are two blocks in a semester, so you take 3 to 4 classes total in a semester. It was nice to only have two classes at a time because it allowed me to travel and have a social life.

Ask a lot of questions and leave enough time to study. It takes time to understand how other cultures work.

There was less busy work and more reading.

Find the library. Little work gets done in an international flat.

The library becomes quite busy so finding a place in the academic buildings is a nice quiet change.

Ask the teachers what they want in a paper. Most professors just want the answer, not a 5 paragraph essay.

Take the course "Dutch Present Day Society" as it provides a lot of information on Dutch culture and is very interesting!

Student Life

Do every activity made available. I did everything even when I was the only person and I met more people than I can remember.

Be as open to everybody as you can, both while in Utrecht and traveling.

The best way to meet other students was through the Erasmus Student Network's parties and various get togethers.

ESN is an essential part of one's time in Utrecht since it is the main way one makes friends and does social activities. Students should be aware of what a terrific opportunity ESN is so they have the chance to get involved as soon as they arrive.

Get an ESN mentor because it makes it a lot easier to get from the airport to where you need to go. Also the activities they put together allow you to meet other internationals.

Meet as many international people as possible but stray at times from the group of international students and meet the locals.

It can be difficult to meet and befriend the Dutch. It can be made easier by attending activities, talking to people in your housing and classes, and getting involved with clubs and sports.

I spent most of my free time traveling with new friends. Doing new things with new people is exciting and fun!

Try to limit socializing with Americans. Most students tend to hang out with other Americans; this defeats the purpose of studying abroad. Expand your horizons!

Do as much as possible! Join every activity that you hear about!

Don't just make friends with just Americans—don't be a stereotype!!

Get used to smelling smoke in every bar and restaurant. Students go out around 10-11 pm till early morning. Most bars close at 2 am, but some discos and a few bars go till 5 or 6 on weekends. Gay people should be very comfortable and safe.

It is common to have friends over for tea and coffee in the afternoon or cook dinner for house mates or invite friends over then.

Don't call anyone around 6—it's dinnertime and considered rude.

The Dutch are stranger-friendly, helpful, most speak at least some English, German, and French, have very liberal politics and open minds for the most part. Any Dutch conservative is an American Democrat. They are, though, Dutch -- very tall, blond and straight hair, blue eyed, generally. I am 5'6" and felt short.

Transportation

Everyone rides bikes, so you will definitely want to get one. Shop around to find the best deal as there are lots of places to purchase used bikes. If you are planning to stay for the full year, make sure you buy a good enough used bike to last the entire year.

Trains are the way to go. Bring a guidebook but be prepared for some inconsistencies.

Safety

Don't be stupid: watch your purse and wallet.

Just be aware of what is going on around you. Don't ride your bike through the parks after dark and alone. Be careful with ATMs and the people behind you. If you can't understand Dutch then you won't understand the catcalls, but ignore them anyway.

Communication

There are cheap cell phones available. Go to Lombok (Turkish area) for the best phone cards.

Bring your own cell phone if unlocked because you can buy a SIM card in Holland for cheap and stick it into your phone. A cell phone is very convenient to have. An incoming call from anywhere does not cost any money, so your family and friends can call you if they want.

It is nice to have programs such as Skype, Google calling, and messaging to connect with people back home.