

At the end of their AFS exchange in the Netherlands, we asked some recent AFSers from the USA to answer two questions:

- ❑ What elements of your host culture, compared to US culture, did you find most difficult to adjust to in the areas of family, school and/or social life?
- ❑ Please note any advice you would like to share with AFSers destined for your host country.

Here are some of their responses:

It takes time for Dutch people to warm up to you, don't get discouraged. It's not that they don't like you they just need time but once they really get to know you they are very loyal friends and family

**Crystal, Year, 2010**

Take it with an open mind. The Dutch mean well, even if they come across a rude or indifferent. Try to do and see as much as possible, don't let yourself turn into a wallflower. Try and study the language. It can be boring but remember that studying helps so much. I wish I had worked harder at it. Also join a group in the community and do things you normally wouldn't.

**Elise, Year, 2010**

Language was very difficult, but in the country I went most everyone was nearly fluent in English which made it easier but I always felt a barrier because of it. Start learning Dutch before you go!

**Anna, Year, 2009**

School was very different. The Dutch school system is set up differently and the expectations are lower because colleges do not look at you high school grades. This wasn't that hard to get used to, yet it was always a noticeable difference in terms of how much my classmates studied. Social life was so different in the Netherlands because we could go out to bars and discos! This was not hard to get used to because it was so fun and different. What was difficult was the fact that I lived in a small town (coming from a big US city) and the social life in town was different. People know almost all the other teenagers in town and I didn't know anyone. It was hard to break into that. Always take an invitation from people to go out. Always speak as much Dutch as you can, even if you know it's wrong. Ask as many questions about the language as possible in order to pound those cray grammar rules into your head.

**Anika, Year, 2009**

Don't quit halfway through even if you think you should. Almost everyone who does regrets it.

**Zachary, Year, 2007**

It is important for students to note that they must be very careful in dealing with their host family and friends --when in doubt, ask for permission! Take every opportunity that arises. Love your bike. Stay positive. And send things home a few months ahead of time, because your luggage WILL be overweight!

**Elizabeth, Year, 2007**

The country itself is natural and lovely. Whether your experience in the Netherlands is positive or negative, you will return home having accomplished things within yourself which you may have never expected. The language was very hard to adjust to, however within a month or so, I could understand little bits. I also found that many Dutch teens had a peculiar perception of Americans as arrogant and redundant people which I felt I had to prove otherwise.

**Colleen, Year, 2007**

They have a totally different attitude about life, and are much tidier and conserved when it comes to family life. They also are very conservative with their money. I found it a little difficult adjusting to riding a bike 14 miles to school and 14 miles back every day, but I finally got used to it.

**Jeffrey, Year, 2005**

In Dutch social circles loyalty is far more important than in America. Dutch circles of friends are more closed to outsiders than in America not because they are less friendly, but because they more often choose to become closer better friends with fewer people, often spending time outside of school almost exclusively with a group of 5 to 15 people. When you arrive in The Netherlands many if not most of the groups in your class at school will be open

Country Flag

## Country Quotes: The Netherlands

and inviting to you, but this is just a window of opportunity. In the beginning of my exchange I was invited to spend time with many groups and I got to know as many people as I could in this time. I chose however to go out with the same interesting bunch of people almost every weekend and I couldn't have made better choices. Eventually I passed out of the rock star phase and I wasn't terribly interesting to every Dutch student anymore, I had however by this time been included into a circle of friends and all 9 of them are some of the closest friends I have in the world.

**Isaac, Year, 2005**

Be open-minded, Share your feelings, be prepared to have fun; always be optimistic; do not waste any time being home sick.

**O'Neil, Summer, 2005**

I found it hard to adjust to the completely different style of family life I was placed into. I was raised in a family full of very independent, busy people, which I think is a pretty common attribute in American families. In contrast, I was placed into a family that always ate together, played together, and went to bed together. That was quite a shock.

**Sadie, Year, 2004**

The Dutch generally eat much, much better than Americans. My family wasn't too inclined to waste, so they ate most or all of what they made. They are much more global than Americans--they know more about American politics than I did. And, they all speak English well.

**David, Summer, 2004**

Don't sacrifice your values for the sake of "trying something new". Be compassionate and keep a cool head. Letting frustration get to you never improves the situation.

**Thomas, Year, 2004**

Be open minded and don't take any of it for granted! It feels like it'll be a million years at first before you're back home again but once it's over I absolutely promise you that you will be marveling at how fast the time flew by. The first few months will drag a bit, the last few months will seem like a few days in retrospect - live it up while you still can! The language was tough at first but I expected things to be different so it's hard to say "Oh yeah that one thing or those few things were so difficult." It was all interesting and new.

**Lillian, Year, 2004**

Be open. Try not to be scared to speak the language.

**Kyle, Summer, 2004**

Don't bring travelers' cheques, and if possible, open an Netherlands bank account so as to avoid high ATM withdrawal charges. Each case is individual according to the family, but my host family was very tight knit and accustomed to doing things together.

**Anagha, Summer, 2004**

People just did a lot less. Here I'm very active as are all of my friends; [in the Netherlands] a lot of the time they just watched T.V. Just get involved as much as possible in the local community. Try a sport or activity you never have. Just get out there and meet people.

**Spencer, Year, 2003**

Sometimes it seemed like my host family didn't care about me or didn't care what I did, and it took me a while to figure out that was not the case. In the Netherlands, when you reach the age of 17 or 18, you are given much more freedom than children younger than you. My host family was just allowing me the freedom to do what I liked; it wasn't that they didn't care about me.

**Jean, Year, 2003**

Try to get around as much as you can; train rides are awesome. Do not be intimidated by your school or your class, be friendly and try to join their groups for school projects. Join a club or two or get involved in something because you will be spending a lot of time with yourself no matter what, and it may be nice to get out of the house a bit with a group that is excited to have you.

**Jenna, Year, 2003**

Learn the language! If you don't learn to speak their language you will never fully understand their culture or the way they think. When you begin to function in a new language it also opens your eyes to better understand how you think and how your own culture is shaped by the language that you think in.

**Jean, Year, 2003**

The Netherlands is a great country. Granted, the people can be cold and the weather wet, but before you're halfway through you'll never want to leave. Dutch peoples' social lives revolve much more around their families than in America and they also have much fewer close friends.

**Eulalia, Year, 2002**