

*Student Exchange Programme
in the Netherlands*

**Your Guide to the Country
2025-2026**





IPSF Student Exchange Programme Information Booklet
"Student Exchange Programme in the Netherlands: Your Guide to the Country"

Made with love by the SEP Working Group 2025-2026

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Foreword

Dear student,

As a young professional, you constantly stand at a crossroads of decisions. There are endless possibilities for shaping your journey, and in every direction, opportunities to develop yourself are abundant. While all these choices can feel daunting, sometimes the best advice is to let go and go with the flow.

The Netherlands is a showcase of going with the flow, as it is shaped, both geologically and culturally, by water. As villages were established along the banks of the many rivers that flow through our country, we learned to adapt to the challenges they posed. We built dams, bridges, and dykes to make the land more habitable, and we found ways not just to live, but to flourish. In a constant dance to control the waters and maintain balance, the Netherlands stays in motion. This balance echoes the way we, as future pharmacists, develop new treatments to cure diseases and keep them at bay, while continuously adapting to new challenges as they arise.

As you now stand at this crossroads, considering the Student Exchange Programme, you might choose to let go and let the current carry you abroad to a country with a rich history and landscapes that have stories to tell. We hope these stories inspire you to adapt and grow, just as they have inspired us. Meet new people, discover a new culture, and explore pharmacy practices different from your own. Travel at your own pace and immerse yourself in all the beauty the country has to offer. And one day, as you sit by a creek, river, or the sea back home, we hope it carries you back to this small country and its waters, and the memories you made there.

Welkom in Nederland!

On behalf of the SEP Working Group,

Marlon Geraerts

Commissioner of Foreign Affairs of the K.N.P.S.V.
IPSF Student Exchange Officer - The Netherlands



About the K.N.P.S.V.



The **Koninklijke Nederlandse Pharmaceutische Studenten Vereniging** (translated as the Royal Dutch Pharmaceutical Students' Association, K.N.P.S.V.) is the national study association in the Netherlands representing the interests of all (bio-)pharmaceutical students. The association was founded on 22 May 1903 in the city of Leiden as the *Algemene Nederlandse Pharmaceutische Studenten Vereniging* (A.N.P.S.V.). In 2003, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary, the Royal designation was awarded to the association, after which the association changed its name to K.N.P.S.V. As of today, we represent over 3900 students from the four universities in the Netherlands that offer a (bio-)pharmaceutical programme.

Mission of the K.N.P.S.V.

The main objective of the K.N.P.S.V. is to represent the interests of all Dutch students in Pharmacy and (Bio-)Pharmaceutical Sciences. The K.N.P.S.V. contributes to this through three key focus areas:

- The K.N.P.S.V. forms the link between the students and the professional world
- A focus on international involvement and representation
- Fraternisation of pharmacy and (bio-)pharmaceutical sciences students in the Netherlands

The K.N.P.S.V. organises activities for its members and maintains contacts with professional associations, wholesalers, industry and foreign students. Through membership of IPSF and EPSA, the K.N.P.S.V. offers its members multiple international opportunities. Annual activities include the Pharmaceutical Hockey Tournament, the Policy Activity, the International Lecture, the Twinnet exchange, the Dutch Patient Counselling Event and the national K.N.P.S.V. Congress during Ascension weekend. There are also activities organised every other year, namely the Professions Day and the Day of the Pharmaceutical Industry. Lastly, the K.N.P.S.V. has its own quarterly association magazine, the "Folia Pharmaceutica".



About the Netherlands

The Netherlands is a small country in Europe, with a very famous capital, Amsterdam! It is the largest city in the country and acts as an economic hub with the biggest airport: Schiphol (for more information, see Travelling). Of course, there are a lot more cities in our beautiful country, such as Den Haag (The Hague), where the International Court of Justice is located, and where the Dutch government is seated, and Utrecht, which has some beautiful canals just like Amsterdam.

We do have to talk about one misconception. Although the Netherlands are known as "Holland" around the world, Southern and Northern Holland are actually two of the twelve provinces of the Netherlands. Admittedly, since our official website for tourism is www.holland.com, we are not helping much to restore this misconception.

There is something interesting about the Netherlands and our water connection. The Netherlands is known for the way we handle water; this is essential as most of the Netherlands would flood without our water engineering. Even more special, almost the entire province of Flevoland was created by the Dutch by reclaiming the land from the sea. Furthermore, Rotterdam even contains the biggest harbour in Europe!

Statistics on the Netherlands



- **Population:** 18.4 million
- **Capital:** Amsterdam
- **Language:** Dutch
- **Currency:** Euro (€)
- **Number of bikes:** 23-24 million
- **Number of pharmacies:** 1.928
- **Area:** 41.865 km²



The Culture

The Netherlands is a melting pot of a lot of different people. One thing that can stand out is that the Dutch can be quite direct, but this is not meant to be unkind; this stems mostly from our efficiency and punctuality. Speaking of this punctuality, the Dutch are quite rigid with their times. If you meet at 10 a.m., it is considered rude to be late, even though this is normal in other cultures. However, this does not mean that the Dutch do not know how to party. If you like the colour orange, you should see the Netherlands on King's Day (the end of April). It is a national holiday that takes place in every city and small village; you have flea markets, music, food and people laughing all over!



Of course, an important part of every country is their food. Now we have some Dutch delicacies, both savoury and sweet, so take your pick: Krokot, stamppot, poffertjes, appeltaart, bitterballen, split pea soup, rookworst, stroopwafels, many potato dishes, herring, hagelstag, and of course Gouda cheese. If you don't have time to try them all, we suggest the bitterballen, stroopwafels, and poffertjes (a kind of mini pancakes)!

Besides the food, the Netherlands also has a connection to art, as some famous painters are from the Netherlands, like Rembrandt van Rijn, Jan Steen, Vincent van Gogh, and Judith Leyster. Some of you might also know Gerrit Rietveld, a famous Dutch architect known for his Red-Blue chair.



The Language

The Dutch language is a Germanic language, and it is closely related to German and English. Some useful phrases are:

- Hello, how are you → Hallo, hoe gaat het?
- Thank you → Dankuwel (formal) or Dankjewel
- See you later → Tot ziens

Like most languages, we have some sayings that are really weird when you translate them literally. Some examples are:

- Now the monkey comes out of the sleeve → Similar to the English expression “to let the cat out of the bag”; the moment that a hidden motive or the truth behind something is revealed. In the past, street artists would often perform tricks by hiding a monkey in their coats. At the end of the performance, the monkey would “come out of the sleeve” and reveal the trick!
- As if an angel is peeing on your tongue → someone really enjoys their meal (this is an old one, though, not a lot of people use this anymore)
- When the cat is away from home, the mice dance on the table → When the boss is away, people can do whatever they want.
- Carrying water to the sea → Of course, we cannot forget the saying about our beloved water. This saying means that you are putting in time and energy into something useless; there is enough water in the sea already.



Duolingo

Really want to put your language skills to the test? Try learning some Dutch through a learning app like Duolingo! After a few weeks, you'll pick up some Dutch words in no time. *Leuk toch?*



The Dutch Healthcare System

Like many other countries, the Netherlands has a well-structured healthcare system, divided into three tiers: primary, secondary and tertiary care. When a person falls ill, the first point of contact is generally a general practitioner (GP). The GP examines the patient, provides a diagnosis, and either starts treatment or refers the patient to secondary care, which is most often a specialist in a hospital. If the condition requires complex or experimental procedures, such as advanced radiology or organ transplantation, the patient is referred to tertiary care. Most of these procedures are covered by basic health insurance, which is mandatory for all residents of the Netherlands.

At all three levels, pharmacists play an essential role in the healthcare system by ensuring patients receive the necessary medicines. In the Netherlands, pharmacists can roughly be divided into four categories: community pharmacists, outpatient pharmacists, hospital pharmacists and industrial pharmacists. Each group has a distinct place in the healthcare system.

Community pharmacists represent the largest group and dispense most medicines used for both short-term conditions and chronic diseases. Hospital pharmacists are responsible for all intramural medications, which often include sterile preparations, and they also closely monitor serum drug levels to optimise treatment outcomes. Outpatient pharmacists are the bridge between hospital and home care, dispensing both high-cost medicines that can be safely administered at home and medications for those discharged from inpatient care. Lastly, industrial pharmacists play a key role in the production and quality assurance of large-scale preparations of medicines, which will later be dispensed by the other three.

While the Dutch healthcare system is more complex than can be showcased in this summary, it is important to note how the pharmacist is interwoven in this network. In conclusion, the Dutch healthcare system relies on close collaboration between its various care levels, with pharmacists playing a vital part in maintaining the safety, quality, and continuity of medication use.



Highlights across the Country



Martinitoren

In Groningen's city centre, you can find the Martinitoren. This tower stands on the 'Grote Markt', the main square in Groningen.

Scheveningen

Especially during the increasingly hot summers, the beaches of the Netherlands offer some much needed refreshment. Scheveningen in The Hague is one of the hotspots during this time of year.



Nationaal Park Drentsche Aa

If you like to walk or bike in nature, this might be for you. The special thing about this area is the presence of 'Hunebedden'.

Volendam

Volendam is a small fishing village known for its characteristic houses. Many people enjoy the traditional clothing and the authentic vibe. Don't forget to get yourself some seafood.



Van Gogh Museum

The name of this museum might give away its most featured artist. With many of his masterpieces on display, there is an artwork to admire everywhere you look, in particular, the "Sunflowers".





Artis

Artis is a zoo in the middle of the city of Amsterdam. The zoo itself is great, but they also have a separate experience called Artis Micropia, where you can learn about microbes' role in life.

Domtoren & Hoog Catharijne

Utrecht is a beautiful city with a lot of canals, but one of the main staples is the Domtoren. If you like shopping, you are in luck; Hoog Catharijne is one of the largest malls in the Netherlands.



Maastricht

If you are closer to the south of the Netherlands, Maastricht is fun to visit! The city has a historical centre with a Basilica and a lot of cafes. Especially a highlight during Christmas time!

More tips? Check this out



Student Exchange Programme in the Netherlands

Got you interested in exploring all our country has to offer? Consider doing your SEP internship here! In the Netherlands, we offer individual internships, mostly in community pharmacy. Internships in other sectors, such as research and hospital pharmacy, are also offered, but are subject to availability and generally more limited. Placements are offered from June to September based on host site availability. On average, six placements can be offered annually. Accommodation is preferably offered by the pharmacist or at a student's home (either a sublet or room sharing). If these options aren't available, we are willing to help with looking at other options, such as Airbnb or a hostel. The student will not have to pay for staying at a host family. In other cases, the student will have to pay for accommodation. The costs for accommodation depend on where the student is placed. All students are required to demonstrate B2-level proficiency in both written and spoken English for optimal communication during the internship. For students from some countries, a visa might be mandatory to enter the country. If you reside outside of the European Union, please contact the Student Exchange Officer of the Netherlands so that they can inform you of the requirements.

Application process

Any student interested in the Student Exchange Programme needs to contact their local Student Exchange Officer (SEO) and sign up for the SEP database. After a profile is accepted by the home Member Organisation (MO), the applicant can work on and submit their application form. Here, K.N.P.S.V., the Netherlands, can be put in the top three preferred countries. We request that, next to submitting the application form, all applicants send in a short, two-minute motivational video. Here, applicants are encouraged to express why they want to do an internship in the Netherlands. The SEP Working Group will rank all received applications based on a standardised selection form until March 15th. Any applications received after this date will still be reviewed, but will be considered only after all applications submitted by the deadline have been assessed.

Once the applications have been assessed, the Student Exchange Officer will start matching pharmacists and students. If a match has been established, both the student and SEO of the home MO will be approached as soon as possible. Students can expect to hear more around April. Students will receive an official invitation letter, and the preparations (and fun) can begin!



Summary of SEP in the Netherlands

- **Number of placements:** Approx. 6 placements
- **Areas available:** Community, Hospital, Research*
- **Duration:** Two weeks - two months
- **Available months:** June - September
- **Language requirements:** B2-level proficiency in English
- **Visa requirements:** Check with SEO if you reside outside of the European Union
- **Soft deadline:** March 15st, 2026

*Subject to availability

Social Programme - SEP Days

During your SEP internship, you're not only encouraged to explore the work field, but also to enjoy the vibes of our cities and get to know Dutch student life. We offer a sneak peek into this life through the SEP days, a day where we invite all SEP students currently in the country to enjoy a programme in one of our bigger cities, and Dutch students are more than welcome to join the fun!

Although the programme changes year by year, one of our most recent days involved lunch at a Dutch pancake restaurant and a scavenger hunt through the city of Utrecht. SEP students receive a message about the programme a few weeks before their arrival. Costs for the programme are covered by the K.N.P.S.V., and the student only pays for travel costs.

WhatsApp Messenger



In the Netherlands, most people use WhatsApp as their main messenger app. To keep you up to date on the SEP day and get you in touch with your host site, we would like to ask you to use WhatsApp.



Getting Here

By plane

Most international travellers arrive in the Netherlands by plane. The main airport is clearly Amsterdam Schiphol, which connects the country with destinations all around the world and is located in the west of the Netherlands. Schiphol Airport also has a train station where trains from all parts of the country arrive and depart. Be mindful not to take a taxi from the airport to your final destination, even if this is relatively close to the airport. Taxis around the airport charge outrageous prices for their service.

There are the less-busy airports Rotterdam/The Hague and Eindhoven (in the south). These airports are primarily connected to European destinations, with flights offered by relatively affordable airlines. Groningen and Maastricht also have airports, but traffic is minimal. Depending on the placement of the internship, the Belgian airports in Antwerp and Liège, as well as the German airports in Weeze and Düsseldorf, might be closer to the placement and plane tickets might be cheaper to these destinations.

By train

If you're coming from another European country, taking the train to the Netherlands is an eco-friendly option. International trains connect major Dutch cities with Antwerp, Brussels, London, Lille, Paris, Düsseldorf, Cologne, Frankfurt, Hanover, and Berlin. Night trains ride to destinations in Germany, Czechia, Austria, and Switzerland. Trains stop at Amsterdam, Rotterdam, or Utrecht, where you can easily transfer to a domestic train to reach your final destination.

Dutch trains are generally punctual and easy to navigate. You can plan your trip and check timetables on the NS website or in the NS app (for international routes, use the NS international app), which also shows platform information and delays in real time. Trains usually run frequently, but they can be busy during rush hours (around 7-9 a.m. and 4-6 p.m.), so try to travel outside those times if possible.





By long-distance bus

Travelling to the Netherlands by long-distance bus is often the most budget-friendly option, especially if you're coming from an Eastern European country. Companies like FlixBus, BlaBlaBus, Eurolines, Ecolines, and RegioJet (Student Agency) offer direct connections between many major European cities and Dutch destinations, including Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, and Groningen. Most buses arrive at or near the main train stations, making it easy to continue your journey by local train, bus, or tram.

By car

Coming to the Netherlands by car can be a flexible and convenient option, especially if you're travelling with a group or carrying a lot of luggage. The country is well-connected by highways (A-roads) both within the country and to Belgium and Germany. The major cities are easily accessible via the motorway network. The use of taxis in the Netherlands, even through ridesharing, is not recommended, however. This option is very expensive in the Netherlands, and must only be utilised if you have no other options or have many people to share the bill with.

Tips for travelling by car:

- Parking in city centres can be expensive and limited, so check for nearby parking garages or park-and-ride (P+R) locations.
- Make sure you have a valid driver's license and your car documents in order. An International Driving Permit (IDP) may be recommended.
- Be aware of Dutch traffic rules, like speed limits, roundabouts, and priority roads. The Netherlands has strict enforcement, especially for speeding.
- Tolls are rare on Dutch highways, but some bridges or tunnels may charge a fee.

By boat

This is a travel option only if you're coming from the United Kingdom. There are two ferry routes: from Harwich (UK) to Hook of Holland (Hoek van Holland), operated by Stena Line, and from Newcastle to IJmuiden (near Amsterdam), operated by DFDS Seaways.



Practical Matters and Tips

Money

When you first arrive in the Netherlands, it's good to have a basic idea of how money and payments work. The country uses the euro (€), and most places prefer card payments over cash. In fact, many shops, cafés, and even some supermarkets are now cashless, meaning you can only pay by card. If you do need to withdraw cash, however, this can be done at ATMs, often labelled "Geldmaat". Keep in mind that ATMs may charge a small fee for international cards, and most only dispense €50 and €20 notes.

The most common payment method is with a debit card ("pinpas"). International cards like Visa or MasterCard work in many places, but not everywhere, especially in smaller stores. Contactless payments by phone or smartwatch are possible, too. Consider carrying a backup card in case an international card is rejected.

Staying connected: getting an (e)SIM

Staying connected in the Netherlands is easy, and getting a local SIM card is one of the first things most international students do after arriving. Dutch mobile networks are reliable, fast, and offer good coverage across the whole country, even in smaller towns.

You can buy prepaid SIM cards at airports, supermarkets, phone shops, or electronics stores like MediaMarkt. Mobile provider shops (e.g., KPN, VodafoneZiggo, T-Mobile/Odido, Lebara, or Lycamobile) are found in most city centres. Prepaid SIMs are usually available without registration, though for longer stays (>2 months) it's often better to get a monthly subscription.

Tips for mobile use:

- For short stays, prepaid plans are the easiest option. You can top them up online or at supermarkets.
- Free Wi-Fi is available in many cafés, libraries, and university buildings so that you can save on data. Most of these even go through Eduroam!

Useful Applications



NS App
Train Information



Albert Heijn
Supermarket



9292
Travel planner



Buienradar
Weather



Thuisbezorgd
Food delivery



Grocery Shopping

Getting groceries in the Netherlands is easy, with plenty of options available for students on a budget. Most cities have a mix of supermarkets, local markets, and speciality stores. The big supermarket chains are Albert Heijn (AH), Jumbo, Plus, Lidl, Aldi and SPAR. Albert Heijn is the most common and has a wide selection of international products, including vegetarian and vegan options. Lidl and Aldi are generally cheaper, but they offer a smaller range of items. Most supermarkets are open every day, though opening hours can be shorter on Sundays. Please note that some grocery stores, like the AH, only take debit cards.

Many cities have weekly markets, where you can buy fresh fruits, vegetables, cheese, and fish at reasonable prices. Markets are also a great way to try local Dutch products. For international ingredients, look for Turkish, Surinamese, or Asian shops, which are common in larger cities.

Tips for saving money:

- Use apps from supermarket companies to get discounts and special offers.
- Check the “huismerk” (store brand) products. They’re usually cheaper but almost as good as branded ones.
- If you shop in the evening, some supermarkets (AH, Jumbo, Lidl) discount products close to their expiration, such as bread, cheese, and ready meals.

Insurance and access to healthcare or medication

When coming to the Netherlands for SEP, it is recommended that you take travel insurance or check if your healthcare insurance covers costs made abroad. For any labour done at the host site, the pharmacist or researcher is responsible for any liabilities and is insured for this, as this is mandatory in the Netherlands. If, during your stay, you require any urgent help, call 112 to come into contact with the police, fire department or healthcare providers. If your issues are less urgent with regard to health care, make sure to come into contact with the pharmacist/researcher. Most likely, they will refer you to a general practitioner or the out-of-hours GP (*huisartsenpost*). This is not free of charge, hence travel insurance is highly recommended.

When you use prescription medicine, it is highly recommended to bring a large enough supply with you to the Netherlands. For some medications, like ADHD medications or strong painkillers, you need a certificate to take these with you. Check with the host SEO if you use any medications, if this applies to you. Also, bring a prescription with you to the Netherlands from your doctor, should you ever run out of your medicines. You can come to any pharmacy to pick up your prescription and pay upfront. For any over-the-counter medications, you can visit a drugstore like the Etos or Kruidvat, as they offer the same products as pharmacies for cheaper.



Mobility - Public Transport and OV-chipkaart

OV-chipkaart

In the Netherlands, all forms of public transport can be accessed through the use of the OV-chipkaart. These cards can be purchased at every train station or grocery store. These cards can be charged with money at the train ticket machine or at a terminal with the OV-chipkaart logo. Remember to always check in and out with the same OV-chipkaart. More recently, check-in terminals also accept debit cards and credit cards, which offer an alternative if you don't travel often during your stay. This is still quite new, however, and perhaps not fully integrated throughout the country.

Trains

Trains are the fastest way to travel between cities. The national railway company, Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS), connects nearly every part of the country. The companies Arriva and Keolis cover other parts. Use your OV-chipkaart to check in or buy a ticket online. Google Maps is typically less reliable for finding the right platform/timetable than 9292 or the NS app. **Important:** For the OV-chipkaart, your balance needs to be €20 to access the platform!

Metros, trams, buses, ferries

Within cities and towns, public transport is mainly covered by metro, tram, and bus lines. You can use your OV-chipkaart for all of them or buy single tickets via the 9292 app. Timetables are very accurate, and most stops have digital displays showing when the next bus or tram will arrive. Use the 9292 app to get the most accurate travel advice. Google Maps is typically less reliable for this.

Cycling: the Dutch way of life

In the Netherlands, the bicycle isn't just for fun - it's a way of life! Most students use bikes as their primary form of transport. Every city has dedicated bike lanes, and it's often the fastest way to get around. You can rent one from services like Swapfiets, which offers bikes with repairs included. Always lock your bike with two locks, as bike theft is common, especially in larger cities.



Checklist

- Read through the SEP Booklet on the Netherlands
- Made an account on the SEP database and contacted home SEO
- Sent in the application form, transferred the SEP fee and signed Waiver of Liability
- Recorded the motivational video and sent it to sepwerkgroep@knpsv.nl
- After official invitation, started looking for accommodation
- Checked visa requirements and medication regulations
- Set agreements with host site on working hours and practical matters
- Took out travel insurance, if not already done so
- Packed luggage for the travel, including medicines and passport
- Downloaded the useful apps
- All ready for the journey, *veel plezier!*

Any questions? Contact us!

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Urgent help needed?
(police, medical, fire brigade) |

Call 112 (Free of charge)



