

Homosexuality: Legal. Some recognition of same-sex partnerships. No laws against discrimination. Although the Swiss tend to be culturally conservative, there is nevertheless no real harassment or intimidation of gays and lesbians.

Abortion: Legal without restriction as to reason.

Crime: Very low. Pickpocketing may occur near public transit and on trains.

Real Estate: Legal residents with a Permit C have few restrictions on their ability to buy property. Other foreign nationals are restricted to holiday homes or designated investment properties and must receive approval from the local canton (district). Mortgages are available to residents usually with a 20%–40% down payment. Interest rates are below 5%. In some cases, property may not be resold for five years.

Life Expectancy: 80

The Netherlands (Holland)

Holland has been the undisputed liberal wet dream government and the ultimate nanny state. Free health, over-the-counter cannabis available everywhere, gay marriage, a sanctioned red light district and every ecology-friendly ordinance you can think of. Rent per square foot in Amsterdam is as expensive as anywhere you'll find in Europe. If you have some kind of independent hustle going and don't need a work permit, the authorities don't make it too hard for you to stay. And if somehow you've managed to plant your feet here for a few years, the social entitlements can begin to accrue.

Sam Coleman

Amsterdam, Netherlands

When I came to Amsterdam, I had just cashed out of a big web concern. I was a writer and editor and together with five other writers and editors who formed a collective, and a big web company wanted to buy up local content providers in cities all over the world and said, "can we buy you?" We never had more than \$10 up to that point. So I made out with just under six figures.

First I partied and wrote a novel and then settled down in Holland in 2000. I arrived on Queens Day. An amazing fun time. The whole city was juiced up on E, and I thought, "Wow, what a fun time." Even after the party ended, it still had something. I needed a place to hang because I was spread out—stuff

was in Dublin and Budapest and Paris. So to consolidate my life, I settled in Amsterdam.

I found an apartment really quickly, an attic, and I worked out a deal with the owner that I would convert it into an apartment over the course of six months. So I had cheap rent. I was still traveling so I needed a place to store my stuff as much as I needed an apartment, and this was more than a storage space but less than an apartment and I oversaw his workmen getting the place ready. And then he gave me cheap rent for a year after that.

I do see Americans here but not as many as I saw in Budapest and Prague. It's expensive and it's not as cowboy over here. You have to be legitimate. There's a recession in Europe and even in Holland, so it's tough to get a job. It's very difficult to fire someone so people are reluctant to hire. I don't know anybody who's getting structured work. And almost no Americans can get it, because now in order to offer someone a job, they have to advertise it to the whole E.U. looking for a candidate before they can give it to an outsider, and they have to demonstrate that to the labor commission. Most labor commissions used to treat it as a formality, but so many immigration departments are getting tougher.

You really have to have your own gig. Having said that, there are many people who have found their specialties. My specialty is English language media and I've done quite well here. I'm a full-time editor with Heineken here launching a consumer magazine called, *The World of Heineken*. I have other friends who've started papers and are doing okay. There are at least five magazines in English in Holland. They don't pay a lot but it does show you that there is a market. And since more and more companies do business in English, there is room for copywriters and things like that. So you can find something, maybe. Some web companies need to have sites in English so they'll hire. I have a friend who got a job as an animator. He didn't know too much but they needed someone who could speak English, so they trained him.

There is a kind of expat cycle here. A lot of people who came here in the last few years were single young guys who were programmers. So what do they do the first year? They just smoke and smoke and smoke and party. It's like being set free in the candy shop. It is a party city and it is fun. And you smoke pot or hash and hang out in the coffeeshops and it's like, "Wow, I've never done

this.” I don’t know anyone who was single and under 35 who didn’t succumb to that. Even outside that demographic, they still went.

I’ve never seen a city suck in people and destroy them like Amsterdam. I’ve seen people come here and start smoking in coffeeshops and partying and before they know it, they’ve fucked up their lives. It’s a whole cycle that you start getting paranoid and weird and you start smoking more to escape your problems and that doesn’t help you get a job or a life any easier. You start not dealing with your mail and before you know it, you’ve lost your house and you’re forced out. I’ve seen it happen over and over. Even though it’s so laid-back, you have to work really hard to keep it all together.

But most people do start getting tired of that and become very Dutchified about it. The Dutch kind of look down on drugs. What they’ve done is create a system where you can go for it and you’re going to get tired of it and then you’re going to be a normal person, but better give you the hair of the dog than have it so you’re always teased by it. After a while, you start to look for other kicks, like, “There’s got to be something more than this.” And most people who have been here for a while will stop smoking.

The other kick is travel. Amsterdam is a great location. You can hit Paris in a few hours. You can be up in London in a heartbeat. You can pop over to Barcelona in three hours. Airfares now are so cheap. Travel becomes a big thing. I’ve spent weekends clubbing in London, see some gigs and visit friends, and come back.

An apartment will realistically cost you around €700 for a normal one-bedroom flat. Today, I pay about €900 for a flat above a shop that’s about 1100 square feet.

You can also find the Anti-Kraak, which is another mythical Amsterdam accommodation story. The Anti-Kraak means you’re basically living there to stop a flat from being squatted. A property agency will contract you for extremely cheap rent to put you into a place where the property owner doesn’t have a plan yet for leasing it but want to prevent squatters from moving in. I’ve done it. You can pay like €150 with your utilities. It’s really great. You have to sign up with a company, but you have to have a residency permit, so it’s a bit of a Catch-22 because you’re not getting a residency permit without a flat. So you have to have a residence first, get your residency permit, then search for an anti-kraak. If you’re lucky to get one, it’s a great way to live here.

A typical meal will cost you €15 for a main course, and add wine and everything else and a meal is like \$30 or so. Even your cheap ethnic foods will cost you eight to 10. It's a shame because it used to be very cheap before the EUR, but not any more. But if you eat in, and you buy your food in the markets, there is a way to live cheap in Amsterdam.

If you're a citizen, you can go to the clinic or doctor. But you don't have any social security right off the bat. If you set up your own business, like I did, you have to get your own insurance which costs me around €150 a month, the same as in the States. That covers everything, medical, dental and all.

Jobs are so limited, you're almost better off not being a citizen. They're almost always better off contracting you as a business entity, then hiring you. As I like to say, there is a lot of work here, but almost no jobs.

Socially, this is one of the easiest places in Europe. When I moved into my neighborhood, I had been in a situation where there was a lack of community. Communism had destroyed the community structure in Eastern Europe where I lived before. Here it's so vibrant. People will get to know their neighbors and I met so many great people so quickly. I really had a great social structure and they help you. All these people became fantastic friends so quickly.

When you're moving abroad, one of the things you need is for people to help you. You just can't do it alone. Getting an apartment, figuring shit out, and getting jobs and opportunities. People can help you and recommend you. "I know a photographer" or "This guy's a graphic designer. You should call him." So much works with word of mouth.

Dutch culture is very low-key. They like to say, "Don't shout and jump about." There is a lot of anti-Americanism right now, particularly in Holland. Holland is a lot like America and it actually makes them more resentful, because they feel like we really fucked them over. Just show some respect here. That's the way they like it.

The Netherlands

Government: Parliamentary Democracy under a Constitutional Monarch

Population: 16.3 million.

Currency: Euro (EUR)

Language: Dutch

Religious Groups: Roman Catholic (31%), Protestant (21%), Muslim (4.4%), unaffiliated (43.6%)

Ethnic Groups: Dutch (83%), other [including Turks, Moroccans, Antilleans, Surinamese and Indonesians] (17%)

Cost of living compared to U.S.: Steep



Moving There

Temporary or permanent visas consult: www.netherlands-embassy.org

Living There

Climate: temperate; marine; cool summers and mild winters

Infrastructure: Developed

Internet: Ranks third in the world, with 19.8% of the population being broadband subscribers.

Healthcare: Dutch healthcare is generally good with all modern medical options available.

Working There: Some opportunities in factory production lines, casual harvesting between April and October, camping, au pairs.

Taxes: Corporate: 29.6%; personal: 0–52%; VAT: 19%

Cannabis: Drug laws in the Netherlands are based on a system of “*gedogen*”—tolerance, or as it’s called here, “harm reduction.” The law does specify possession as an offense, but the law is not enforced, and criminal action is never pursued in cases of personal use of soft drugs.

Homosexuality: Legal gay marriage and civil unions, laws against discrimination.

Abortion: Legal.

Women’s issues: Very few problems for women in Holland.

Crime: Petty theft common, however violent crime extremely rare.

Real Estate: Foreigners can buy property in Holland. Mortgages are generally available with 15–20% down payment. Interest payments on mortgages are tax deductible if the property is used as the primary residence. Legal transfer costs should amount to a tax of 6% of the property’s market value or purchase price. Annual property tax varies by region. Individuals pay no capital gains tax on real estate transactions.

Life Expectancy: 79