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Spring-Summer
2024



Thriving in the Netherlands

In this edition: Practical advice and smart tips about education and wellness to help you thrive in your new home... and more!

A photograph of two young girls with dark hair, wearing blue hoodies, looking at a tablet together outdoors. The girl on the right is holding a pink pen and pointing at the screen. The background is a blurred green field.

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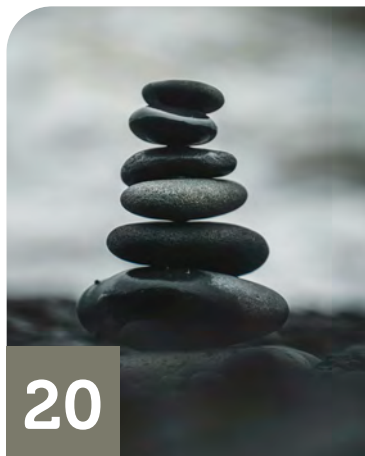
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Contents Images (clockwise) Taylor Flowe, Jeppe Hove Jensen, Yiran Ding, Dragos Gontariu, Adrie Mouthaan

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Ajay Kapur

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Nastaran Fadaei Heidari

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Katarina Gaborova & Thea Bailey

Katarina Gaborova is founder of K.G. Psychological Services in The Hague, Netherlands. She works as a registered NIP psychologist and a Certified Gottman Therapist (CGT) for couples. In her practice she uses an eclectic approach to therapy, combining CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy), Voice dialogue, EMDR (Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing), NLP (Neurolinguistic programming), BWRT (Brain working recursive therapy). She regularly delivers mental health training workshops related to topics like burnout, stress reduction, mindfulness, how to deal with change and others. She is the author of *VIVA: Tools for well-being* and *See Bee Tee*.

Thea Bailey is founder of The Amber House based in the UK. She is a Certified Gottman Therapist (CGT) for couples, a Gottman Certified Bringing Baby Home® Educator and is a practising couples and family therapist. She is a member of BICA (British Infertility Counselling Association) and supports individuals or couples who are about to start or are going through the process of IVF. She regularly delivers mental health training workshops and works with horses, offering equine assisted counselling for clients local to her.

Tasneem Hatimbhai

is originally from Bombay, India and now lives in Amsterdam with her Dutch husband and their two children. She has been a writer and editor for the past 20 plus years. To whet her creative spirit further, in 2012 she founded Amsterdam-based Mumbai Mills.com, a company that creates home accessories, lifestyle books and other products. Currently, she is editor-in-chief of *Amsterdam Mamas*, freelance editor and content creator for social media, websites and academic journals. Tasneem is also an ACCESS volunteer.

Giulia Quaresima

earned a Master's Degree in Modern Philology from Sapienza Università di Roma (Italy) in 2016 and currently works as a documentation manager in the aerospace sector. Giulia has been a contributor at ACCESS Magazine since 2019 and has lived in The Netherlands since 2018.

Bridget Kelleher

was trained as a nurse in Ireland. After moving to the Netherlands, she studied for a Master's in Health Economics, Policy and Law at Erasmus University, having previously attaining a Master's in Law in Ireland. While living in Leiden, Bridget volunteered with ACCESS and returned to nursing at an international clinic. Along with entrepreneur Robert Weij, she recently established *Healthy Expats* with a primary focus on women's health. In her free time, Bridget enjoys sports, music, reading, and yoga.

Healthy, Wise, and Well Informed

As an aging adult (I'll turn 61 this June) and having raised—and still raising—three of my five children in the Netherlands, I was happy to learn that this edition of ACCESS Magazine would be covering two topics which are both equally relevant to me.

Having lived in three different countries over the past 28 years, I've had a wide variety of educational and wellness-related experiences from being present at the births of my children—two caesarean, one hospital and two home births (see **Tasneem Hatimbhai's** Face2Face interviews on page 12)—and, as one might imagine, I've made my share of middle-of-the-night trips to the emergency rooms, outpatient treatments, physiotherapists, dentists, and one corrective eye operation.

Looking back at these 'adventures', it's easy to observe the differences from country to country. In Spain, for example, my children had annual visits to the paediatrician, while in the Netherlands they have only seen one a handful of times as babies and toddlers. During the two years I lived in England, I never had an occasion to see a doctor, but we received excellent pre- and post-natal care from a top-notch team at the midwifery-led unit of the Liverpool Women's Hospital. Likewise, in the Netherlands, my two youngest daughters were born at home where we were given superb care by midwives and their caregiving teams.

As far as education, all of my children attended public schools, both in Spain and in the Netherlands. While there were many options and excellent private schools, we chose public schools, feeling it was the right choice for our children. Oh, and I should probably mention I was a teacher for 26 years...

As you'll read in articles by **Bridget Kelleher** (page 33) and **Greg Shapiro** (who takes a more whimsical approach to the Dutch way of healthcare on page 39), a visit to the doctor's office in the Netherlands may be quite different than one is used to back home.



Richard Morris

Editor

editor@access-nl.org

We segue from healthcare to wellness with a pair of articles by **Ajay Kapur**, who has mindfulness in the classroom on his mind (page 20), and **Katarina Gaborova** and **Thea Bailey**, whose piece on burn-out (page 37) talks frankly and openly about a problem that is often misunderstood and infrequently discussed.

In this issue, you'll also find some helpful articles about education in the Netherlands from both experts in the field and educators as well as parents whose experiences and opinions are as insightful as they are helpful. **Bianca Pellet's** cover story (page 6) delves into the intricacies of the Dutch education system with a special emphasis on private international schools, catering specifically to

expatriate families who have recently relocated to the Netherlands. Psychologist **Stephanie Baumgarten-Kustner** delves into the intricate landscape of educational support for international children in the Netherlands (page 26), while **Nastaran Fadaei Heidari** muses about the advantages of art in the classroom (page 17).

In her piece on theatre in the Netherlands (page 35), **Giulia Quaresima** explores the burgeoning English-language theatre scene that caters to both locals and internationals while serving as a catalyst promoting the exchange of ideas and cultural awareness.

Finally, I recently had the chance to sit down over coffee with global education expert Dr. Caroline Ferguson to discuss her views on the challenges faced by international families in understanding and integrating into the Dutch education system (page 31).

So, as you can see, there's plenty of enlightened reading in these pages that will hopefully answer questions, inform, amuse and help you to thrive in the Netherlands. Happy (and healthy) reading!

A First-Time User's Guide to Dutch Education

BY BIANCA PELLET



PHOTO: CBC/US

So, you've just arrived in the Netherlands, kids in tow. Among the usual administrative, practical and emotional tasks, you also need to enrol your children in a school.

But how does one go about choosing a school with so many options? Do you immerse your kids fully in the Dutch education system, language and culture from day one? Do you choose a private international school, which sets its own fees, uniforms, and holidays, and follows a similar system to what you are used to? Or do you choose a subsidised international school, which combines the two? This article aims to help you navigate this decision-making process, with testimonies from teachers and international parents to help.

Dutch State Schools

There are many Dutch state schools available, especially in major cities, meaning you are almost guaranteed to be able to find one close to where you live. Nonetheless, it's worth checking with your local municipality regarding the process and applying as early as possible: for very young children, school application forms are sent out when they are two to three years old and allow parents at least ten options to express their preferences for local schools. Compulsory education in the Netherlands starts immediately after the child's fifth birthday (though many parents opt for their child to begin a year earlier) and spaces can fill fast. The younger your child, the more likely it is that they will be able to easily assimilate into Dutch culture quickly, including developing their fluency in Dutch.

One international couple, Sally Stoom and her Dutch husband (international school and state school teachers respectively), had

this concern when choosing a school for their three British-Dutch children: "We want our kids to grow up with a clear sense of national identity," she explains. "And you should think about how long you are staying for. If you are going to be here for more than five years, get into the Dutch primary system. Kids will really feel like they are part of the country and will pick up the language properly." However, she acknowledges that this advice might work better if your children are young. "Secondary school kids (age 12 and up) might be a different issue."

Even so, the Dutch state system can still provide for older children, facilitating a smooth educational transition for foreign families thanks to *taalklassen* (language classes) focusing on Dutch language acquisition in primary school. *Internationale*

schakelklas (also known as ISK) or an international transition class is a type of language class for 12-18-year-olds which enables them to follow academic courses simultaneously. These classes normally last two years. While it's tempting, from some cultural perspectives, to see an extra year or two as a "failure", this is not how the Dutch see it, as it's aimed at reducing children's stress and maximising their achievement later in their education. Many parents also like the play-based emphasis of Dutch early years education, as opposed to focusing on homework and competitiveness.

There are also a limited number of bilingual schools (TTO, or *tweetaligonderwijs*) in some areas of the Netherlands, which focus on delivering education in both Dutch and English. However, it's natural that places at these schools, too, are in high demand; it's worth visiting the school, perhaps even on multiple occasions, and getting to know the staff during these visits, especially the headteacher, to show your »



PHOTO: KENNY ELLASON

commitment and perhaps increase your chances of your child being admitted. It pays to note that TTO schools have been developed to complement the education of Dutch students and the final exams are administered in Dutch.

The TTO system might solve the problem experienced by many international parents who send their children into the Dutch system—the problem of the English classes being too easy and their kids ending up bored at the back of the room (or even correcting the teacher's mistakes). Some parents, though, like the idea of their children having one “easier” class that they don't have to focus on so much, especially in the more academic VWO system, as this takes the pressure off.

Another feature of the Dutch state system dividing international parents exists at secondary level, whereby students attend a VMBO (pre-vocational) school, HAVO (general secondary) school or VWO (pre-university) school. (Some bilingual options are available at the VWO level.) The decision as to which type of school the child attends is determined by the Cito test (Cito Eindtoets Basisonderwijs, or end of primary test), when the child is 11, alongside the recommendation of the group 8 (final year of primary school) teacher and consultation with the child and their parents. There is some possibility for movement between the different types of school (with orientation years available to enable this). This flexibility can be comforting and can make parents feel like their child's future is not

‘fixed for life’ at the age of 11. Others, however, feel that it's cruel to limit or label children in this way, while others still feel that it sets realistic expectations based on children's capabilities and interests, preparing them better for the future.

Should such a traditional track not align with your family's values, there are also state-affiliated religious schools and other schools falling into the *bijzonder onderwijs* (non-traditional) category, such as Montessori or Waldorf schools.

Private International Schools

Private international schools, meanwhile, are fully independent of the Dutch government, and as such, can set their own fees and holiday calendars, choose whether or not they want their students to wear uniforms, and can run any curriculum they choose. Such schools are usually British or American schools and frequently offer curricula that lead to a more specialised outcome than is allowed in Dutch state and Dutch subsidised international schools, such as A Levels, American High School Diplomas, or the International Baccalaureate (IB) certificates. Some expat parents feel most comfortable with this option as it most closely mirrors the system they grew up with; others feel that this offers a more structured or strict regime or enables their children to more easily return to study at university in the country the school is associated with. Others feel that the school will better support children with SEN (special educational needs) such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, or AD(H) D, including greater possibilities for one-on-one support.

In such schools, the focus is likely to be on education in English, and the development of multilingualism may prove secondary.

“Many parents find Dutch international schools’ open-mindedness regarding languages to be a very positive quality.”



PHOTO: CBC/US

Some might also find that this narrows children's options later on. As with anything, it really depends on your family's long-term goals.

This view is upheld by Ryosuke and Neil, whose two children have both attended such a school (their son has graduated, while their daughter is still there). "While other languages are on offer as part of the curriculum, if the children speak so many languages, it's just because their parents are expats from all over the world...their focus is more on students' final destination, as in how many students get into a university and where they are going to study."

This factor, admittedly, is certainly important for many parents regardless of the type of school they send their children to, but Ryosuke is full of praise about the informational meetings held by her children's school about applications to British, Dutch, American, Canadian and Irish universities, "which not all schools do". She is sure that the school will support her daughter well even if she chooses to apply to universities in a country with which the institution is less familiar. "In that sense, such schools are unique in that their alumni spread out across the world to study after they leave the school."

Neil acknowledges that it's difficult for children to integrate into Dutch society when they attend such schools, but feels the high quality of education offered by the school they chose, as well as the ability of their children to connect with one of their home cultures through the school, outweighs this. It's also possible for children to learn Dutch outside of school, such as by attending sports clubs, where they can also make Dutch friends.

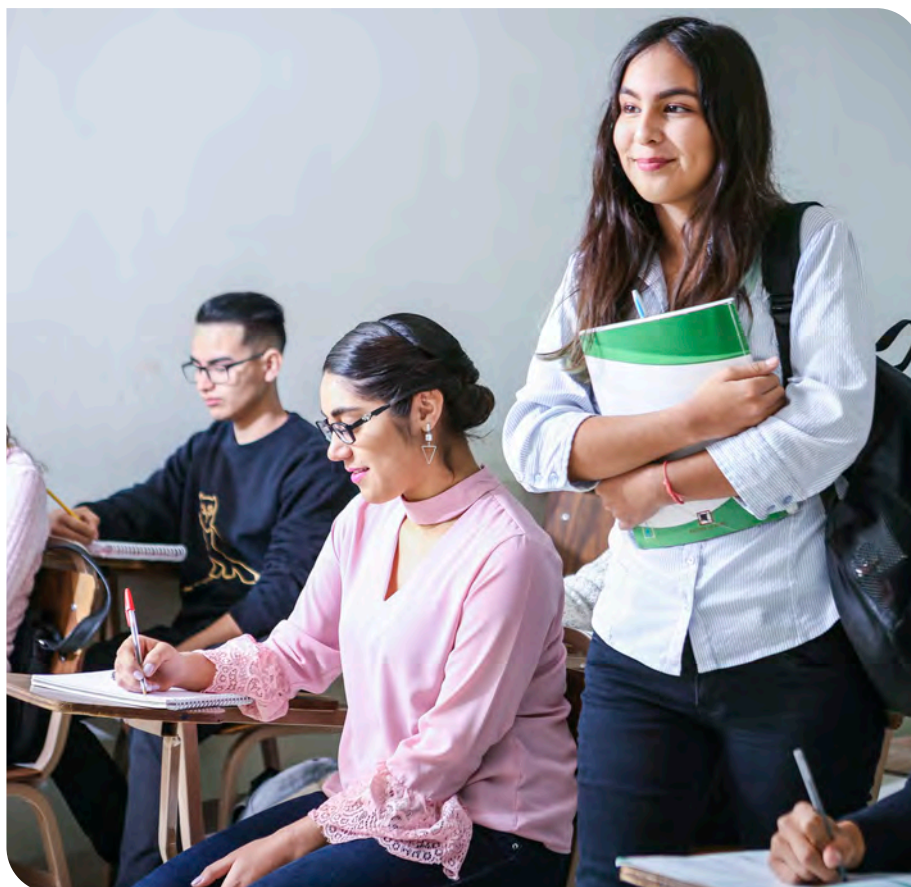


PHOTO: JAVIER TRUEBA

Dutch international schools

Dutch international schools have a foot in both camps as they have some independence in terms of the curriculum they provide, for instance, and are often English-dominant environments, while still offering a wide range of student mother tongue languages to a high level (C1-C2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages).

Since such schools are partially subsidised by the Dutch government (parents do pay fees, but they are considerably less than what private international schools charge), the government also imposes certain terms and conditions regarding aspects such as school holiday calendars, and what students must study.

One such condition might be in the form of the *leerplicht*, or compulsory education policy, which dictates schools' holiday calendars and term dates and ensures that all children attend school regularly. This is both a sticking point with many international parents and a policy whose importance and influence is not always well-understood by international families. Those coming from countries whose local or national governments offered a lot more flexibility in terms of, for instance, taking children out of school during term time, are often shocked to find the local attendance officer in the Netherlands phoning the house or even turning up for a home visit if parents take their children out of school early for holidays, or if they call in sick often. Attendance officers also step up »



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their presence at Schiphol Airport around the holiday periods. Parents are often surprised to find that these rules apply even when their children are attending Dutch international schools, as opposed to a local school.

While some parents express annoyance, frustration and concern at the possible consequence of having to lie to get their children out of school (particularly if they have to travel a long way internationally to see family, often on expensive plane tickets whose prices skyrocket during holidays), others see the positives. Liam, who works in a Dutch international school but whose children attend state schools, comes from a country whose schools were traditionally more relaxed about attendance. “Ultimately, it’s better to have the *leerplicht*...children don’t disappear at a moment’s notice for weeks on end, only for teachers to have to pick up the slack when it disrupts the whole class’ learning.”

But the school’s attendance policy is only one aspect to consider when deciding whether a Dutch international school is right for your child. “So many cultures!” one parent enthused. Such schools routinely play host to families from over 60 different countries, and so are very experienced at managing new international families’ educational transition to the Netherlands (and may offer other help too, to ease your arrival). “They do this well,” said one parent. “International students move about all the time.” Alongside this, parents praise the Dutch international schools’ ability to teach their children Dutch from scratch (although reports on its efficacy do vary), while offering many classes in English, with there being high levels of support available. The Dutch



PHOTO: ES DIGITAL

department for education (known as DUO) also validates all teachers’ qualifications, just as they do in state schools; many parents are likely to find this reassuring.

Many parents also find Dutch international schools’ open-mindedness regarding languages to be a very positive quality. Janine Perel, a French parent whose child attends a Dutch international school, said that the ability to choose the languages in which their child was educated aligned with their family’s European values, and that this ability to choose was a big draw. “Plus, our son has Dutch lessons in school alongside this, which really helps to build on the fact that he was born here in the Netherlands and attended Dutch day care, and so develops his cultural and linguistic identity on that side of things as well.”

So, what should you choose?

Ultimately, it is inevitable that new international families will encounter challenges as they settle their children into new schools, languages and cultures. However, all of the systems delineated above offer multiple benefits and deciding which set of benefits

best fits your child’s aspirations, needs and personality is a choice that only families themselves can make. Some problems and requirements, such as teacher shortages or class sizes, will exist wherever you go, so there’s no such thing as a ‘one size fits all’ ‘perfect’ country or ‘perfect’ school. Lizzie Kools-Bate of the international educational consultancy Bridge the Gap also emphasises the needs of the individual child. “No one knows them better than you,” she adds. Consider practical aspects, as you would at home; for instance, is the school close by and what cultural and linguistic elements exist. As Sally put it, “I want my kids to grow up with a firm sense of their identity and to belong to a country/culture. In the international environment there is a lot of detachment and confusion for third culture kids, and I want to avoid that.” The main thing, perhaps, is to do your research, just as you would at home, so that you can make an informed decision about the next steps on your children’s educational journey in their new host country. «

Visit www.access-nl.org for more about education in the Netherlands.

A Matter of Choice

As we continue our Face2Face series, in this issue we've spoken with two parents, one who recently became a mother again and delivered in the hospital, and the other, a father who experienced not one, but two home births. The first decided to take the path more familiar to most internationals and the second took part in the more 'traditionally Dutch' home birth.

BY TASNEEM HATIMBHAI

Amira Auwal Abdullahi, ACCESS volunteer and mother of two: a girl born in Malaysia and a boy born in Amsterdam. Both children were born in hospital.

Why did you choose a hospital birth rather than home birth?

It's simple really as I am far more comfortable with the hospital and I was thinking in my head maybe if there is a complication, they can help me straightaway. In fact, I did have a problem with the placenta, so I was very glad that I was there! I understand that you can be helped at home and when needed taken to the hospital, but in the hospital, I was just wheeled into the operating theatre.

Talk about your experience with the prenatal system in the Netherlands, where you have a midwife instead of a gynaecologist?

Going to the midwife wasn't weird at all. In Malaysia it was the same process and it's similar to the one here; it was nice, very comfortable, and they are women. In Malaysia we didn't do a lot of scans but here we did three and the other tests conducted during pregnancy were done here as well. They were very careful. The prenatal screening for congenital disorders is not standard, though you can choose this option.

What kind of support did you have in the hospital during delivery?

While in the hospital, I had a team of two midwives and my kraam-



zorg (postnatal caregiver) who also came to the hospital, and my husband who was there all the time. After delivery, when there was a complication, my midwife immediately passed the baton on to the nurse, and the care team changed. I was sent home at noon the next day after delivery the previous night.

Postnatal care?

The postnatal care in hospital was for the baby, so the midwife came to check up on me. In fact, the kraamzorg also came to the hospital.

How have your friends chosen their birth experiences?

All my friends, who are all also internationals, have all had their babies in hospital.

If you had to do it again, would you still choose a hospital birth?

Absolutely. Especially after the way it went last time.

Your final take on hospital vs home?

Hospital.



Richard Morris, Editor of ACCESS Magazine and father of five children born in Spain, England and the Netherlands (two by caesarean delivery, one hospital and two home births).

What was the reason behind your children's home birth?

We thought the experience would be more relaxed and intimate as we both agreed that hospital settings were more stressful.

Were you and your wife aligned on the choice all along?

Definitely. Our first attempt at a home birth was in Liverpool. We had the birthing room all set up with dimmed lights, candles and soft music, but during labour, inhaled gas was used which caused my wife to get a stomach upset, and under those circumstances protocol dictated that the mother be transported to hospital. What was planned to be a short memorable night at home turned into a very long 28-hour labour and birth, though we were allowed to go home the next day.

For information about ACCESS' Childbirth Courses, please visit access-nl.org/childbirth-courses

We all hear about requirements for home birth like the 'SUPER high bed' - 80 cms. apparently – was it hard to organise? And what else?

While our bed wasn't super high, it was high enough to make everyone's job comfortable. And we were given a checklist and a box of supplies for the birth early on, so everything is very well organised.

What kind of support did you get, before, during and after home birth in The Netherlands?

The Dutch health system provides excellent care from beginning to end during the homebirth process. After the initial visit with the obstetrician gynaecologist, we chose a midwifery practice in our neighbourhood where we had regular visits, check-ups and consultations. The birthing team consisted of our midwife and an assistant. Our second home birth was delivered by a student trainee who was nearing the end of her training. We were very fortunate that both home births took less than one hour from the onset of labour to delivery.

If you had to do it again, would you still consider a home birth?

Absolutely! Both of our home births took place in the evening, so once the baby's arrived and the midwifery team finished their work, we all just went to sleep in our own beds. That was the best part of all.

What have your international friends done in terms of their birthing choices?

Most expats we know in the Netherlands have opted for hospital births.

You didn't change your mind last minute, but what if you did?

When we had to make the last-minute change of venue in England, we were transported to the hospital by ambulance, which was merely protocol and not due to any impending emergency or endangerment to mother and child. In the Netherlands, we live at equal distances between two state-of-the-art hospitals with paediatric ICUs, so there's never any worries or doubts when it comes to needing a last-minute change.

Advice for people choosing a home birth?

If your doctor gives you the option for a home birth, do it! In my opinion, hospitals are for sick people and there is nothing more natural, satisfying and safe than a home birth and welcoming your new baby into the world in their own home.

Your take on hospital vs home? The pros and cons as simply as possible?

Pros: You never have to take your slippers off and the coffee is better at home than in the hospital cafeteria! Cons: Waiting for the midwife to leave so you can go to sleep! «

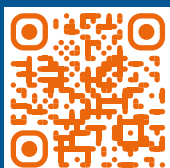
How ACCESS helps internationals move to and settle in the Netherlands



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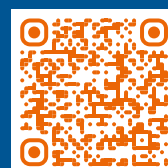
Our international teams are available in person, by phone, via Zoom or via email to respond to your questions and discuss relocation to the Netherlands. Our teams are in The Hague, Amsterdam, Amstelveen and Utrecht.

You can also volunteer to be on one of our teams. Check Information Sessions on our website for more details.



Trainers

Our trainers can provide you with a range of services: career development, child-birth preparation, cross-cultural understanding, higher education and career guidance for young adults, holistic health, language & communication, life transition, and much more



Since 1986, ACCESS has aided internationals relocating to the Netherlands. To manage this transition, we assist with answering your questions to make a new 'home' far from home. Our brief ACCESS overview details how we can help you – just after arrival and in the days, months and years to follow.

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● Courses

Childbirth and first aid courses in English (in several cities) support starting a family and solving first aid emergencies. Our trainers are often expatriates themselves and understand the challenges of giving birth far from 'home', while also knowing Dutch practices.



● Magazine

Hard and online copies of the ACCESS Magazine provide regular features helping internationals to learn about their new 'home' and familiarise themselves with the country, culture, food, travel, and ACCESS partners.



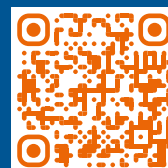
● Partners

Our trusted partners support us, and we in turn support them in a variety of ways. We encourage you to use the services provided by our partners. Do let them know you heard about them through us. See page 41.



● Volunteering

ACCESS could not function without its volunteers from more than 40 countries. You can volunteer on a helpdesk team in The Hague, Amsterdam, Amstelveen or Utrecht. We provide training so that you can support internationals in the same way as you have been supported. We also need volunteers on our social media team, magazine, and website, among other teams.



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Finding Art in Every Lesson

While I was at university, I realised how art helped me to relieve stress and relax. Whether it was colouring, knitting, or even learning a new language, creative activities became an important part of my everyday life as a student.

BY NASTARAN FADAEI
HEIDARI



PHOTO: ALICE DIETRICH

Did you know...
...art education in the United States was first introduced to public schooling in 1821 as a result of the need for architectural designers during the Industrial Revolution?

As an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, I have always emphasised art by including it in my lessons. I do all sorts of music, dance and arts and crafts fused with mathematics or science with my pre- and primary school students. However, I observe as children get older, art seems to lose its value in the traditional classroom, taking a back seat to the more academically orientated subjects.

This, however, does not have to be the case. Art can—and should—play a greater role in the school curriculum as art serves to nourish creativity, improve motor skills and help students learn better in a more constructive, hands-on way. It also serves, as I discovered first hand, as a calming respite while promoting stress relief and an overall feeling of wellness. By embedding art within the school curriculum, educators

can better encourage our students to use their senses in tandem with creativity as developing these skills enhance the learning experience. For example, in a biology lesson where students learn about cell division, they can draw the process and paint with brushes or fingers or even knitting to create a 3D version of the cells. Or perhaps, students can use their musical skills to write their own song on how cell division might sound as a musical composition. These creative means can give deeper meaning to students as merely learning by memorising pages of text can hardly be as impactful as adding creative elements to the learning while making memorable impressions along the way.

A primary school teacher employed by an international school in the Netherlands talks about her school's lack of emphasis

on art, the benefits of teaching art, and the most positive affects she has observed in students who learn and create art. “In our school, there is no emphasis on teaching art,” she says. “There is only a music teacher, and arts and crafts are done by classroom teachers. There is only one 45-minute lesson per week. One week the lessons are conducted by the music teacher and the other week by the classroom teacher.”

This seems to be the norm these days throughout the educational sphere as she went on to explain. “Not every teacher commits to conducting a full music lesson. Children from first to third grade have more time for art than fourth and fifth graders. Teachers have created a fun and attractive art curriculum; we plan school »

“[Art] can be effective in relieving children’s stress and promoting relaxation.”

trips based on art and discovery of the world. Also, teachers prepare a play at the end-of-year show though the school doesn’t take any initiatives for this matter. In art you can explore your creativity. It’s important to expose children to all kinds of art such as music, dance, drawing, etc. There might be children who aren’t interested in a particular form of art, and they need to be motivated even more. On the other hand, there are children who can express their true selves in art. Working with them is very rewarding. These children may struggle with other subjects such as math, literacy, and so on, but when it comes to art they flourish. When children complete their tasks they almost always ask for art, for instance drawing, as a way of relaxing and disconnecting. You get to see their happier side! It’s lovely to see how

much they enjoy art. It can be satisfying for children to see what they’re able to create. Some children may need a lot more guidance and instruction. Nonetheless, the outcome can be fulfilling for everyone.”

In another recent conversation with a licensed psychologist who conducts workshops for families about children’s upbringing, she was keen to express her opinions about art in the classroom. “Since art is a tool for children to express themselves, it can be a good way to show thoughts, feelings, desires, and ultimately helps children’s emotional discharge. So, it can be effective in relieving children’s stress and promoting relaxation.”

Aiden, a fifteen-year-old middle school student, talked about how relaxing art is for

him. “Art makes me calm and focused, especially drawing. If it is in the form of a project which I am confident to finish on-time, I feel calm. Last year, I had a school project which was about art, history, and Dutch. For this project, I had to visit historic places, write about them, and draw historic figures. This combination helped learn better by connecting the dots between these three subjects and it was more fun than other abstract projects which I am expected to do in school.”

Finally, by integrating art into the classroom environment, we are helping students of all ages present talents visually that they may not be able to express verbally as creating art increases the abilities to solve problems, improve motor skills, creativity, literacy, communication and understanding. Therefore, it can be concluded that students who do art in school will be more capable, better adjusted and happier than their peers whose school curriculum places less emphasis on promoting creativity through the arts. «

Top ten list of benefits highlighting the importance of art in education:

- 1 Increasing creativity
- 2 Improving academic performance
- 3 Improving motor skills
- 4 Improving self-confidence
- 5 Aiding in visual learning
- 6 Helping to make better decisions
- 7 Perseverance
- 8 Increased focus
- 9 Strengthening teamwork skills
- 10 Increasing accountability
- 11 **BONUS: It’s FUN!**

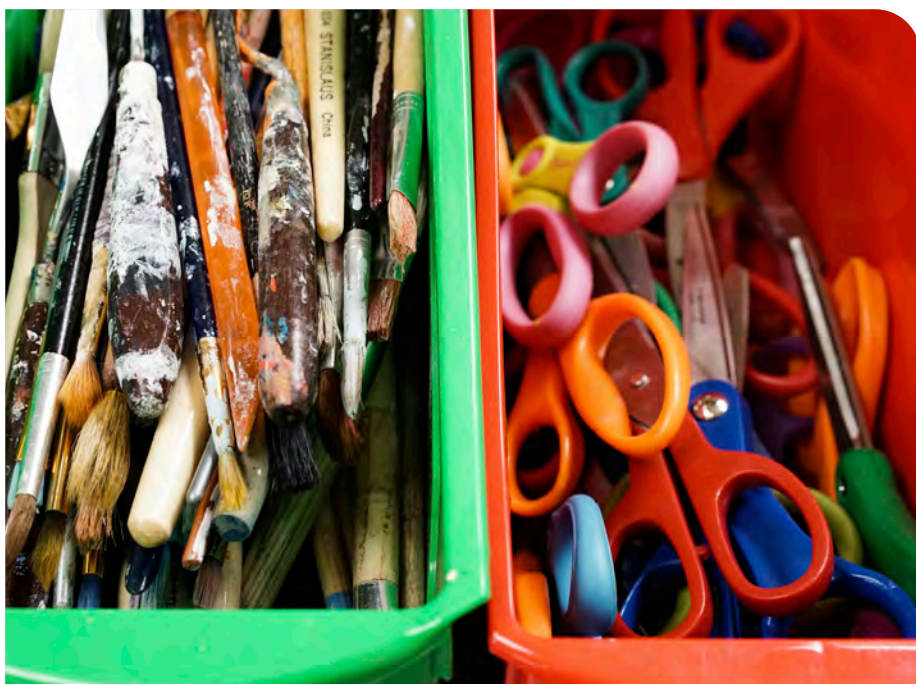


PHOTO: LAURA RIVERA

Supporting Students' Sensory Needs at The British School in The Netherlands



We are all sensory beings. We process the world through our senses, and everyone is unique in how they experience it every day.

Most people are familiar with the senses—sight, touch, hearing, taste, and smell—but we are also learning more about other senses in education and how they impact wellbeing.

Some children are sensory-seeking. For example, the child who loves to spin around and around or swing faster and faster is seeking vestibular stimulation. We all know the children (and adults!) who won't eat certain types of food, who get car sick, or who find bright lights or noises upsetting; they are showing signs of being overwhelmed by their senses.

School environments can be busy places—alive with activity. As part of the wellbeing curriculum at The British School, children are taught different tech-

niques to be aware of how they are feeling and equipped with tools and strategies to navigate them.

The BSN has sensory rooms in its junior schools, calm corners in their classrooms and student leader groups who are focused on wellbeing. Children are taught how to self-regulate with different breathing techniques or soothing strategies.

Recently, a Sensory Room was created at Junior School Leidschenveen campus to provide additional support to students who need it. For this, the school was awarded the Global Inclusion Award from the International Forums of Inclusion Practitioners (IFIP).

Children who are focused on processing all the sensory information their brains are receiving cannot concentrate fully on their learning. They may be feeling hungry, they may find the noise of the classroom too much, or they may feel like they need to move and can't sit in their chairs comfortably.

Children at The British School can use the Sensory Room with a member of staff for a sensory break, a reset moment, which allows them to feel more settled, calm, and ready to learn. The Sensory Room has been a fantastic addition to the BSN's inclusive school environment.

"The health and wellbeing of all of our students is a vital part of what we do at The BSN. Put simply, unless children feel happy and safe, they cannot learn. We are seeing the benefits of having the Sensory Room with our learners. By supporting children's sensory needs and creating sensory spaces, we can enable students to access, and engage with, the curriculum."

— Rebecca Van Homan, Sensory Room Initiator & AEN Teacher <<



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Mindfulness in Education

It is said that the older we get, the wiser we get. In retrospect, we realise how much we know now, and how life could have been more effortless with the knowledge and experience we have gained.

BY AJAY KAPUR

Personally, this insight came when I discovered a way to find serenity amongst chaos. In today's fast-paced world, stress seems to be omnipresent, from demanding work schedules and busy personal life, to learning to adapt to a new culture. Midway through my life, I have learned how to use meditation as a powerful tool for stress management and mental clarity. How I wish I would have learned this technique when I was at school!



PHOTO: ANTHONY TRAN

Many students deal with wellbeing issues (reasons why for Gen Z, wellbeing is even more relevant). In my role as a lecturer, I see the current generation of young people and students (especially Gen Z) facing a unique set of challenges to their wellbeing.

Mental Health

At the forefront of these concerns is mental health. Students in general are experiencing unprecedented levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. The pressures of academic performance, coupled with the complexities of social media and a rapidly changing world, have created a perfect storm for mental health challenges. According to the mental wellbeing monitor by the RIVM (Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment), nearly 40% of Dutch persons between 12 and 25 reported feeling overwhelming anxiety in the past year. There are some reasons why Gen Z is specifically affected. While social media has undoubtedly connected this specific cohort in ways previous generations could only imagine, it also comes with a dark side. The constant comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), and the growing frequency of cyberbullying prevalent on social media platforms can take a significant toll on mental wellbeing. Studies have linked excessive social media use to feelings of loneliness, inadequacy, and depression among college students.

Another pressing issue facing Gen Z students is financial strain. With the rising cost of tuition, housing, and textbooks, many students find themselves saddled with crushing debt before they even graduate and become a generation that does not automatically have a better economic outlook than their parents. The financial burden can exacerbate stress and anxiety, leading to decreased academic performance and compromised wellbeing.

Identity and Belonging

In addition to external stressors, Gen Z students are also grappling with internal struggles related to identity and belonging. The quest to find one's place in a diverse and rapidly evolving society can be daunting, particularly for students from marginalised or underrepresented backgrounds. Issues of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and cultural heritage often intersect, adding layers of complexity to the college experience.

How could mindfulness help?

Amidst these challenges, the importance of support systems cannot be overstated. Colleges and universities are increasingly recognising the need to prioritise student wellbeing and are imple-



“In recent years, mindfulness programs have been gaining traction in Dutch schools.”

menting initiatives to support mental health and wellness. From counselling services and peer support groups to mindfulness workshops and stress-reduction programs, institutions are striving to create environments where students feel valued, supported, and empowered to thrive.

Dealing with stress through meditation

At its core, meditation is the art of quieting the mind and focusing inward. It encompasses a variety of techniques that promote relaxation, mindfulness, and heightened awareness. From mindfulness meditation to transcendental meditation, there are numerous approaches, each offering its own unique benefits. However, the underlying principle remains the same: to cultivate a state of inner peace and tranquility.

Beyond its spiritual roots, meditation has garnered significant attention from scientists and researchers who have uncovered its profound impact on the brain and body. Studies have shown that regular meditation can reduce stress hormones, lower blood pres-

sure, and improve overall well-being. Moreover, neuroimaging studies have revealed structural changes in the brain associated with meditation, including increased grey matter density in areas related to emotion regulation and self-awareness.

How mindfulness is applied in education in the Netherlands

In recent years, mindfulness programs have been gaining traction in Dutch schools at all levels, with educators recognising the profound impact of these practices on student well-being and academic performance.

One shining example of mindfulness in the Dutch education system can be found in Amsterdam, where several schools have embraced mindfulness as a core component of their curriculum. Since 2011, primary school Pieter Jelles Troelstraschool has mindful moments, grounding students (and staff) in the present moment before diving into their lessons. Throughout the day, teachers incorporate short mindfulness exercises to help students manage stress, regulate emotions, and enhance focus. »



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Schools help us, and we help them. They are communities of staff, parents and children. Together, a large part of the international community. Join us?



PHOTO: SHANE ROUNCE

Montessori College in Nijmegen was one of the first secondary schools to incorporate mindfulness into its program. Students can participate in awareness classes of 45 minutes. This provides students with valuable tools for self-care and stress management, empowering them to navigate the demands of adolescence with resilience and compassion.

In higher education, there are many institutions that offer extra-curricular mindfulness activities for students as classes or organise wellbeing weeks for students. Over a decade ago I introduced mindfulness training at Hotelschool The Hague at the request of students to help them deal with stress. Today, mindfulness is part of the curriculum in the MBA program. As part of the leadership course, students are taught about how mindfulness is applied in the hospitality business and how it can personally benefit the leaders of the future.

Looking towards a mindful future

As mindfulness continues to gain momentum in the Dutch education system, the future looks bright for students across the Netherlands. By equipping young minds with the tools of mindful-

ness, educators are not only fostering academic success but also nurturing the holistic development of the next generation. With mindfulness as their compass, students in the Netherlands are poised to navigate the complexities of the 21st century with clarity, compassion, and resilience. «

Practical Tips for Incorporating Meditation into Daily Life:

Incorporating meditation into your daily routine doesn't require hours of practice or specialised equipment. Even just a few minutes a day can yield noticeable benefits. Here are some practical tips for getting started:

- 1 Choose a quiet space: Find a quiet, comfortable space where you can sit or lie down without distractions. This could be a corner of your home or a peaceful outdoor setting.
- 2 Set aside time: Carve out a few minutes each day dedicated solely to meditation. Whether it's first thing in the morning or before bed, consistency is key.
- 3 Start with the breath: Begin by focusing on your breath. Notice the sensation of each inhale and exhale, allowing your mind to gently let go of any racing thoughts.
- 4 Practice mindfulness: As thoughts arise, acknowledge them without judgment and gently return your focus to the present moment. Mindfulness meditation is about observing thoughts and sensations without getting caught up in them.
- 5 Experiment with different techniques: Explore different meditation techniques to find what resonates with you. Whether it's guided meditation, mantra repetition, or body scan meditation, there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Look for podcasts, local classes you can attend or one of numerous books and websites to find what you need.
- 6 Be patient and persistent: Like any skill, meditation takes time and practice to master. Be patient with yourself and approach your practice with an open mind.

Buzzword Busting: Decoding Financial Jargon

BY BLACK
SWAN
CAPITAL

The more uncertainty there is in global financial markets, it seems the more voices there are using complicated jargon, often leading to confusion.

The problem with jargon is that it tends to put people off obtaining information. It's hard to understand your options when everything appears to be in code. In this article we address key financial terms and how they are used when people are talking about the financial markets. Here are some of the more common terms and market-speak:

Stocks/shares/equities/actions – All different ways of saying a small portion of a big company that you can buy or sell on a stock exchange. If you invest in this asset class, you are most often holding 'shares', or a small slice of a company. A public company is one that has its shares on a stock exchange, where shares are traded. You may also hold shares in a private company. This is where the company is not publicly (listed) on a stock exchange. A share is a piece of ownership.



Markets – Where assets are traded. The 'stock markets' are reported in the news and regular reports as an increase or decrease in their index (see below).

Index – Refers to stocks on a stock exchange. For example, the CAC40 is a selection of 40 companies traded on the French stock exchange that broadly represent the French economy. The S&P500 represents the five-hundred biggest companies in the USA by market capitalisation.

Bonds/debt instruments/fixed interest – A government bond is where you lend money to the government and they promise to pay you a set rate of return every month or year, and at the end of the set period of time, you will receive your initial investment back. A corporate bond is the same format but lending to a corporation.

Commodities – Physical materials that can be traded, either because they can be used by consumers (like coffee or cotton), used by industry (like iron and coal) or used to store value, like gold.

Funds/collectives – You can buy and sell units in funds at a price often called a unit price or share price. There are many types of funds, with different combinations of assets within them, including shares, bonds and other asset types.

ETFs – 'Exchange Traded Funds' hold a range of assets like a fund but are traded on a stock exchange like a share. There are specific ETFs for different parts of the financial markets and very broad ones known as index or tracker funds.

Index funds/ passive funds – Also called index trackers, these are set up to follow the performance of a particular stock market index or sector without active decision-making. They may be in the form of a fund or an ETF. «

Reach out to us at Black Swan Capital at info@blackswancapital.eu and we will be happy to see how we can help. Or visit our website at www.blackswancapital.eu



PHOTO: SCOTT GRAHAM

Knowing Where to Turn for Help

Even the most seasoned expatriate parent takes a deep breath, crosses their fingers, spits on the ground three times and burns sage when it comes to children who require 'extra support' at school.

BY STEPHANIE BAUMGARTEN-KUSTNER

In the Netherlands, on the one hand, we have private international schools. These schools are entirely funded by the parents or businesses. Examples of private international schools are The British School in the Netherlands, The American School of The Hague, Nord Anglia School Rotterdam, Lycée Français Vincent van Gogh and so forth.

How much and what kind of support private international schools in the Netherlands offer is based on guidelines by the accreditation body of each given school. For example, the American School of The Hague is accredited



PHOTO: SEBASTIAN PANDELACHE

by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges therefore adheres to the organisation's guidelines regarding support.

On the other hand, we have subsidised international Dutch schools. These schools, while offering international programmes, are funded by both the Dutch government and parental contributions. Examples here are The International Schools of The Hague or Delft or Haarlem, Elckerlyc International School or the European School of The Hague. These schools' accreditation is by the Dutch Ministry of Education and often also by the international programmes they follow. This means they must adhere to the codes and guidelines of the Dutch Ministry of Education and whatever international association they belong to.

So, what's the difference between public and private when it comes to support for children with additional needs?

For our purposes, the difference lies in what a school is required to offer in terms of support according to Dutch law. In August 2013, the Dutch government passed the inclusive education (*passend onderwijs*) law. All public Dutch schools, international or not, fall under this law. It's rather long and complicated and I highly recommend reading the actual law for clarity. However, here is a brief summary of the inclusive education law in the Netherlands:

- All children go to a school that suits their needs
- The preference is for children to attend regular schools if they are able to do so
- If kids need extra help at school, schools provide customised support based on the child's needs as much as they can
- If a child needs more extra help than can



PHOTO: NATHAN DUMLAO

be provided within a regular school, there are special schools available

- Regular schools have to help parents with placement in appropriate schools to ensure children can learn according to their needs and not miss out on school for too long.

These rights suggest that it is up to the schools to offer customised individual support for each child's needs and if this is not possible to find an appropriate educational placement for the child based on what the child can do, not what the child cannot do. All schools are expected to offer basic support for all of their students. This basic support generally includes common problems children might have at school such as dyslexia. Having said that, it is up to each school to decide what they consider to be basic support.

And here is where things can get kind of fuzzy...

Some schools offer extra assistance to students within their basic support. For example, a special class for pupils with behavioural disorders or training in social skills such as *Rock and Water training* (aimed at resilience, (anti-) bullying and dealing with conflict). These schools often work

together with external youth care institutions to provide this extra support.

While schools in the Netherlands are expected to offer quite a bit of individual support for students with extra needs, schools always have a support partner to help them. All Dutch schools (including international Dutch schools) fall under a local partnership (*saamenwerkingsverband*)—a sort of umbrella organisation which organises support and help for the schools in the area. This support can be anything from offering expertise for highly gifted children to organising special education schools for children with physical or mental challenges. These partnerships are also available to the schools in their area for help and advice if a school is having difficulty meeting a given child's needs within the school itself. These partnerships are organised by location (The Hague, Amsterdam, Utrecht, Maastricht, etc.), and there is a division between primary and secondary. If you are looking for the partnership your child's school falls under, search '*saamenwerkingsverband*', the name of the school, and 'PO' (primary) or 'VO' (secondary).

Sometimes children require more than what the school can offer through basic support. In these cases, intensive support (*diepte-*»

ondersteuning) can be offered. This could be placement at a special education school which can better meet the child's needs. There are a number of different types of special education schools in the Netherlands for children with various challenges such as serious auditory problems, physical problems, and/or children with behavioural or mental health issues. Placement in special education in the Netherlands is a process which includes cooperation and permission of the parents. Generally, parents, teachers, and a representative of the partnership sit down and look at what the child's strengths and challenges are, what has already been done by the school to meet these needs and what the child further needs in order to access education and together they come to an agreement.

For international students, this becomes a bit more complicated as currently there is only a single school which can accommodate children requiring intensive support in English in the Netherlands. So, moving to a special education school in the Netherlands almost always means doing this in Dutch.

To help parents pick a school which will meet their child's needs, Dutch law requires all public schools to create a school support profile (*schoolondersteuningsplan* or SOP). This profile states what basic and extra support the school can and cannot offer its students. It also states what goals the school has for the future. This is a very helpful document for parents of children with additional needs to see if the school can actually support the needs of their child. If, for example, the school building has multiple levels and there is no elevator in the building, this school would state in their SOP that they cannot support students

in wheelchairs. But what if your child is refused admission to school based on his/her extra needs or their problems with supporting your child at school?

The first point of contact is always the school itself and should start with the classroom teacher which parents often forget. If this does not solve the issue, the next step is the team leader or support team and/or school director. If you are unable to reach a solution within the school itself, you can contact the partnership representative the school falls under. Often there are possibilities for support from the partnership which teachers and even school directors are unaware of. This generally involves organising a meeting between parents, teacher and the consultant from the partnership (often referred to as a multidisciplinary consultation or MDO) which can be

very helpful in identifying where things are going awry and is very solution focused. Of course, at times parents and schools, even when supported by the local partnership, may still have different ideas about what is necessary for a given child. If parents are unable to find a solution together with the school and the partnership, parents can request the help of an education (care) consultant free of charge. These consultants are active throughout the country. Also remember all schools have both internal and external confidentiality policies and a complaints procedure.

All of these internal and external laws, programmes, contact people and institutions are designed to ensure that all students receive the most optimal education and support at school based on their talents and challenges. «

"The first point of contact is always the school itself and should start with the classroom teacher..."



PHOTO: NATHAN ANDERSON

Divorce in the Netherlands: Dutch Law and Spousal Maintenance

BY LISE-MILOU LAGERWERF

If you are living (temporarily) in the Netherlands and separate from your partner, you can usually file for divorce in the Netherlands. In case of divorce, there are several topics that need to be settled. These include agreements regarding children, division of assets and pension, and the possibility of spousal support.

Not every country has the same concept of partner alimony. In Scandinavian countries for example, partner alimony isn't commonplace. However, if you divorce in the Netherlands and both parties live in the Netherlands, one party may have to pay partner alimony. In that case, partner maintenance works as follows.

In principle, if the person entitled to partner alimony lives in the Netherlands, Dutch law applies to partner alimony. The idea behind partner maintenance is that when you were together, wealth was shared; the income you earned and the money you spent together was joint. After divorce, Dutch law stipulates that both partners be allowed to enjoy the same wealth by paying/receiving spousal support. This applies even if the couple's country of origin does not have spousal support or uses a different partner alimony system.

The aforementioned rule about Dutch law applying to spousal support is subject to a number of exceptions. It is important to mention that if, after the divorce, the alimony recipient decides to move back to, for example, the country of origin, from that moment onwards, Dutch law will no longer apply to spousal support, but the law of the country to which the recipient is moving.



PHOTO: ENGİN AKYURT

Partner alimony under Dutch law is calculated as follows: First, the marriage-related need is determined by the amount of income when the couple was together or how money was spent together. Next, the income the alimony recipient currently has or is deemed capable of having (earning capacity) is deducted from this need. Suppose the marriage-related need is € 3,000 per month and the alimony recipient has their own income of € 1,200 per month. An additional need of

€1,800 net per month remains. It is then considered to what extent the alimony payer is able to meet the additional need (financial capacity). If the alimony payer has a financial capacity of €1,000 net per month, then the spousal support is €1,000 per month. If the alimony payer has a financial capacity of €2,000 net per month, then the amount of contribution is capped at the additional need of €1,800 per month. In short, the lowest amount that follows from the above calculation is the amount of spousal support to be determined.

Finally, an income comparison is carried out, looking at whether the maintenance recipient (after receiving the contribution) does not have more income than the maintenance recipient. If that is the case, the amount of alimony is set lower so that both parties have the same amount to spend each month. In short, even if you are not familiar with the concept of spousal maintenance, this is something you will need to consider if you divorce in the Netherlands. «



Do you need advice about spousal maintenance? GMW has specialised divorce lawyers who will be pleased to assist you. If you have any further questions or would like to make an appointment, please feel free to contact us. 070 361 50 48 - www.gmw.nl/en



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The Teacher Who Teaches Teachers

BY RICHARD MORRIS

ACCESS Magazine's Editor sat down recently with international education expert Caroline Ferguson to discuss some of the things international families can expect when relocating to the Netherlands.



PHOTO: RICHARD MORRIS

MORRIS: What are some of the primary challenges families typically encounter when trying to understand and integrate into the Dutch education system?

FERGUSON: Mainly, it's the preparedness of schools to deal with students from different places, cultures, curriculum, educational and knowledge traditions. There has been a push to internationalise Dutch schools to make them more welcoming to globally mobile families, though it hasn't been across the board. In terms of international schools, one major challenge is the cost for expatriate families and the fact that sometimes these schools are oversubscribed, so getting places for all of a family's children can be a real challenge. It also pays to consider the future direction of the family, what happens after the current assignment or this period of time in the Netherlands; is this going to be long term or merely a two-year stint then off to the next place?

MORRIS: Talk about one example of a specific cultural or procedural difference in the Dutch education system that often poses difficulties for international students and their families?

FERGUSON: Obviously one major issue is language, especially if families are thinking about sending children to local schools, they have to be proficient in Dutch to understand what's going on. On the other hand, it's easy to say that children are like sponges and they'll integrate because that's what they're wired to do, but it can be incredibly difficult to acquire language, especially academic language; so, that's a specific challenge not to be taken lightly. Children's lives are created through language, so when we dislocate them from their social language, life is being made extremely difficult for them. The takeaway here is that if a family plans on being in the Netherlands long term, they need a strategy allowing their children to integrate into the school system. Alternatively, following an international school curriculum will lessen the challenges imposed upon non-Dutch speaking children.

MORRIS: How do you assess the unique needs of international students and their families, and what strategies do you employ to address these needs effectively within the educational context?

FERGUSON: What is needed is a broad approach to appreciate the cultural diversity of students and not to equate culture with nation[ality] because there is a lot of hybridity of culture in international student populations. In other words, just because you carry a »

Directorate-General for
Education, Youth, Sport
and Culture, Brussels



PHOTO: EDISON MCCULLEN

Did you know...
...in 2022, almost 84% of persons aged 20-24 years in the EU had completed at least an upper secondary level of education?

passport from one country doesn't necessarily mean a student will embody all of the cultural stereotypes from that place. These are globally mobile young people, otherwise known as "third culture kids", and we've seen how their cultural identities are created in the space in between and not always in the places but through interaction with people in different places. It's understanding that complexity of culture which is an important strategy to approaching ways of making space for children to bring their full cultural selves into schools and into the classroom while understanding the complexities of their identities. As far as other strategies, it's important for teachers to understand and differentiate the needs of students by tailoring the education to the specific needs of the learner.

MORRIS: In your experience, what is one key factor that contributes to the successful integration of international students into the Dutch education system?

FERGUSON: It all goes back to the professional development of staff in Dutch schools, which I have had the opportunity of facilitating, especially in places where schools are more likely to see students coming from other countries. I've observed that teachers who were working in schools with more migrant students—that's to say students who were coming to stay rather than transitory ones—already have quite a lot of knowledge about this, while teachers in more middle-class places can sometimes be lacking in this area of professional development. The challenge is we know that it is essential to invest in teacher development, but we also understand that teachers have so little time and the question is how do we stack another thing on teachers' shoulders?

MORRIS: Finally, could you share any best practices in supporting international families as they navigate the Dutch education system and work towards successful integration?

FERGUSON: You can tell when a school has invested in professional development of their staff. It's when schools invest in their teachers to expand their understanding of culture and language, and not in simplistic ways like how people in certain countries communicate in this way or the other, but viewing culture as a dynamic and constantly constructing awareness of that. So, when schools invest in the professional development of teachers, they expand their understanding of culture and the ways people use language and the ways you can use multiple languages in the classroom. This concept, called *translanguaging*, is where teachers use technology in really innovative ways to encourage children to use their home languages in the classroom to build on what they already know, making their language and culture rich resources rather than a disadvantage. «

Caroline Ferguson earned her Ph.D. in Education at the University of Tasmania (Australia) and is a teacher, education academic, and consultant with experience working in K-12 schools in Australia, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Dr. Ferguson is a lecturer in education with experience in the university sector in Europe. She has created curricula and taught in international teacher education programmes, delivering professional development to seasoned educators.

Healthcare in the Netherlands: An Expatriate's Perspective



PHOTO: PINA MESSINA

Living in a new country, expatriates often feel vulnerable when trying to navigate and access the Dutch healthcare system. But why is that?

BY BRIDGET KELLEHER

I trained in healthcare in my home country, Ireland, and previously worked abroad in Australia. That experience was different as I was younger and the language barrier was not an issue. But the Dutch system originally left me feeling vulnerable and exposed. There were a number of factors which influenced my vulnerability: cultural differences, language barrier, administrative processes and the often misunderstood *eigen risico* (an insurance coverage term that literally translates as “own risk,” which in English mostly defines “deductible”), expectation (Irish healthcare approach) vs reality (the Dutch way), adaptation period (when do you get used to the system) and the perception of entitlement (why can’t I get an antibiotic?).

The aim of this article is to assist newcomers in understanding the healthcare system and, more importantly, how to manage their expectations. No healthcare system is perfect, but the Dutch system works well when you know how to use it. »

How does the system work?

The Dutch healthcare system is based on three levels of care: Primary (huisarts or general practitioner), Secondary (ziekenhuis, hospital) and Tertiary (teaching hospital); this article will focus on the first two.

Primary care can be notoriously difficult to navigate, so let's delve a little deeper. From the outset, it should be noted, that although not mandatory, it is recommended you are registered with a GP. The rationale for this is because the GP manages all your medical complaints, prescriptions, and referrals. In other words, the GP is the gatekeeper of your care. When you contact the practice to make an appointment, a specially trained assistant will triage your care, needs and make the appropriate appointment. During that appointment, the doctor only has ten minutes, meaning they can only assess one complaint per visit. For this reason, you need to be your own health advocate.

In the Netherlands, a common approach to treating minor illnesses or common colds is the "wait and see approach" or "take a paracetamol and call me in the morning". The GP often performs a pin prick blood test known as a CRP to monitor infection levels.

This helps them decide if an antibiotic or a more comprehensive blood test is required. It pays to note that GPs do not regularly prescribe antibiotics, so again, you must be your own advocate by ensuring the blood sample is collected and ring the practice for the results, as often the practice may be too busy to ring you with the results. It should be noted that in some practices the assistant is trained to provide

"In the Netherlands, a common approach to treating minor illnesses or common colds, is the "wait and see approach."

the results but if there is anything unusual, the doctor will discuss it with the patient directly.

The GP aims to treat the patient in the community and only when they can no longer provide the necessary care, they will refer you to the hospital. This is why it is not typical to have a referral letter made to the hospital, and with a population of almost 18 million people, access to hospitals is well controlled. As expatriates, we find this tricky to comprehend. However, when a referral letter is necessary, the system works quite efficiently. Recently an acquaintance visited her GP, had an issue and was referred for a consultation with the specialist. Within a week, she had her doctor and specialist appointments and a surgical procedure completed. Depending on the issue, the typical waiting time for hospital appointments is 12 weeks or more.

It pays to note that not every fever or pain occurs from 9-5, Monday to Friday, so if you are sick after office hours or at weekends or holidays, every region in the Netherlands has an out-of-hours service or huisartsenpost. After 5 p.m., you can contact the regional number for help.

The secondary line of care is the hospital (ziekenhuis) and access to hospitals is tightly controlled by the general practitioner. If you have an accident, you can contact the emergency number 112. But it is not common

practice for someone to visit the emergency room (ER) without a referral letter (*verwijs brief*) or being brought to the hospital by ambulance. In some countries it is normal to go directly to the ER, but in the Netherlands, the huisartsenpost is the preferred first step.

When new to a hospital, patients need to complete an intake appointment, allowing the hospital to gather previous medical information. Sometimes this appointment is completed by the specific department you are referred to. You are then provided with a patient number and access to a patient portal, where your file is kept.

The hospital specialists (doctors) send reports to the GP as soon as your care is complete. The letter includes history, reason for treatment, type of treatment and any other information that is deemed necessary. More notably at hospitals, as in many countries, there are specialists for many different areas, for example, gynaecologist, internist, endocrinologist, etc.

Finally, it should be mentioned that all health centres and hospitals abide by the EU regulations for privacy. But if you are moving from one country to another, it is wise to always bring your medical records abroad. If you deregister from a Dutch practice, they can make a medical file for you to bring to another country, which includes the notes from the hospital. If, however, you are changing your primary care provider, then the practice can send your medical notes directly to your new practice. «

Did you know...
The Netherlands is the only country that has been in the top three ranking in every Euro health consumer index published since 2005?

Enriching Cultural Exchange through Theatre

BY GIULIA QUARESIMA



PHOTO: STET

The Netherlands, with its rich artistic heritage and cosmopolitan cities, has emerged as a vibrant hub for English-language theatre productions. This flourishing scene not only serves the diverse expatriate population but also enriches the cultural tapestry of the nation, promoting inclusivity and connectivity among locals and foreigners alike.

Empowering Expatriates and Enriching Dutch Culture

For internationals living in the Netherlands, English-language theatre serves as a vital link to their cultural roots and a source of comfort in a new country. Productions performed in their native language provide a sense of familiarity and belonging, helping expatriates navigate the challenges of adaptation and integration.

Moreover, English-language theatre offers internationals a platform to express themselves creatively and connect with like-minded individuals. Participating in theatre productions allows for the forming of meaningful connections, building friendships, and establishing a sense of community in their adopted country. »

Spotlight | Enriching Cultural Exchange through Theatre

Beyond satisfying internationals, English-language theatre plays a crucial role in enriching Dutch culture by exposing local audiences to foreign productions. By attending English-language performances, Dutch audiences can delight in the many linguistic, cultural, and artistic traditions, broadening their perspectives and fostering cultural exchange.

Furthermore, English-language theatre challenges traditional notions of national identity and encourages Dutch audiences to embrace diversity and inclusivity. By engaging with stories and themes from around the world, Dutch audiences develop a deeper understanding of global issues and cultivate empathy and tolerance towards people of different backgrounds.

Venues and Companies

The English-language theatre landscape in the Netherlands is diverse and dynamic, offering a plethora of options for theatre enthusiasts. Alongside established institutions like Internationaal Theater Amsterdam (ITA) and the Queen's English Theatre Company, smaller companies like the Orange Theatre Company and STET have carved out their niche, providing unique and compelling experiences for audiences.

STET has been active in promoting cultural exchange through theatre since 2006. By showcasing productions from around the world, STET exposes audiences in The Hague to a diverse range of perspectives and artistic styles, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

English-language theatre in the Netherlands serves as a vehicle for cultural exchange, bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds and fostering mutual understanding and appreciation. English-language theatre plays a vital role in promoting social cohesion and building bridges across linguistic and cultural divides. It also serves as bridge for the young international community to their cultural roots, a 'learning through doing' which reinforces a student's confidence in using a second language.

As the vibrant theatre scene continues to evolve, it will definitely remain a cornerstone of cultural diversity and artistic innovation in the Netherlands. «

Stichting The English Theatre STET is a long-standing ACCESS Partner.

From ITA's Manifesto

ITA is also a major talent centre focusing on education, development and collaboration. The new theatre will speak with one voice to the city, the country, funds, sponsors and, of course, its audiences. In short, a theatre venue that speaks clearly to the city and its residents. ITA Academy is the centre of the theatre tradition in the Netherlands. Students can follow workshops at the ITA Academy. Each year, we put on special performances with young people. Amateurs can follow master classes, or play in one of our theatres. We challenge students to find the artist mindset in themselves and turn it on. Guided by inspiring artists and art teachers, we explore society, your own role in it and what 'the other' means in it. This is how we help build a generation of young people who, through having the space and curiosity, want to and are able to shape their future according to their own insights and creative solutions.

From STET's Manifesto

Our theatre company continues to provide high-quality inclusive professional English language theatre in the Netherlands. We present international and national emerging theatre makers that create independent work from around the World and create an environment of learning both artistically as well as politically. STET Spotlight Talks promotes a platform that generates interactive debate and discussion opportunities to create a long-lasting effect for each theatrical experience we provide. We use English surtitles for those performances that use another language and provide English spoken workshops and after show talks. STET aims to become a place for connections, inspiration, gathering experiences in a unique and stimulating environment among audiences, artists and communities. With STET NO LIMITS we program shows from disability-led companies and every show that we program will be accessible to everyone, thus creating a precedent for the future of accessibility in the performing arts. STET EDUCATION offers workshops, masterclasses and performances to our audiences, professionals and schools all over the Netherlands.

A Perspective on Overcoming Burnout

Working in a high-pressure environment for an extended period can significantly affect our mental and emotional well-being, not just for ourselves but also for those close to us, including our romantic partners.

BY KATARINA GABOROVA AND THEA BAILEY

One of more recent cases involved Alan (note that names and employment details have been changed), who works as part of an extremely busy team in a critical care unit for the UK's National Health Service. It became common within his work team for most members to work at least two extra hours each day—outside of their paid roles—to keep up with administrative tasks. He has been experiencing depression and anxiety and came into therapy to understand himself better and the root causes of some of his anxious thoughts. He had also recently been diagnosed with ADHD, and by his own admission, tended to create a busy life with many plates spinning at the same time. With his wife's support, he started making significant progress in the therapy sessions.

Then, one day in the session, he stated, "I feel like I have suddenly taken lots of steps backwards. Yesterday, I was driving to work and just burst out crying for no reason. It felt like a vice crushing my chest and even though I pulled myself together before I walked into the unit, as soon as I was on

my own I was so anxious and overwhelmed that I left the department to find somewhere quiet and cried some more."

Alan's experience serves as an important reminder of how chronic stress can manifest unexpectedly. Even when it may appear that we are making progress, if certain triggers or our responses to them do not change, we may relapse. Stress can be also perceived on a continuous scale while some experience chronic stress, which if unaddressed may eventually lead to burnout. Burnout is also linked to feelings of anxiety, overwhelm, and/or even depression. Application of different management strategies, the right support, and re-creation of a better work life balance are a few protective factors.

As research indicates, burnout can stem from various work-related stressors, such as a lack of resources, low sense of control, and poor relationships with colleagues, along »



PHOTO: ALEXEI MARIDASHVILI



PHOTO: CHRISTIAN ERFURT

"If left unchecked, burnout can escalate, impacting mental health, physical well-being, and relationships."

with overwhelming workloads. Additionally, factors like imbalanced work-life dynamics, family responsibilities, and caregiving duties can contribute to burnout if individuals don't have time to recharge and engage in activities they enjoy. If left unchecked, burnout can escalate, impacting mental health, physical well-being, and relationships.

Because of burnout's complexity, one needs to understand someone's specific factors that put them at risk. As well as applying a combination of interventions supporting a person individually—as well as within their

work team and organisation—it's a good starting point to increase awareness and target prevention rather than wait until a person develops more progressed symptoms to apply intervention. Anyone can start making small steps by applying self-care, including healthy diet, exercise, and cultivating positive cognitive habits. It is also crucial to employ strategies for promoting mindfulness and mutual support among co-workers as well as organisational changes to enhance mental health support for all employees, ultimately leading to improved health, creativity, and productivity.

While many of us pride ourselves on our ability to multitask, research suggests that focusing on one task at a time may be more effective for our cognitive health. This is best facilitated by taking regular breaks at a maximum of every 90 minutes in between meetings or tasks while practising 20 minutes of relaxation to help manage and lessen the accumulation of stress, which makes our brain more effective for the next task.

In our work as couples' therapists, we frequently witness how burnout affects individuals and their romantic relationships. Burnout can leave one partner emotionally and physically drained, making it challenging to engage in activities or maintain positive interactions. Depersonalisation, one of burnout dimensions, can lead to negative perceptions and increased irritability. Poor communication and withdrawal from the relationship are common issues reported by partners, creating tension and distance.

It's crucial for couples to address burnout collaboratively by managing stress, prioritising self-care, and seeking professional support if needed. By understanding and addressing the underlying causes of burnout together, couples can strengthen their relationship, fostering a deeper connection and a more fulfilling life together.

If you would like to know more about burnout, couples' support, or attend one of our workshops, please visit our website www.relationshiphouse.co.uk.

To seek a therapist's support in the Netherlands, check the [ACCESS counselling network](#) for a therapist in your area. «

Tolerance, Pain, Paracetamol, and other Marvels of Modern Medicine

BY GREG SHAPIRO

The Netherlands has earned a reputation as the drug capital of Europe, with its well-known tolerance of soft drugs. But if it's really the *Drug Capital*, one might assume drugs could be procured from the Dutch health care system which, most bizarrely, is virtually impossible. When it comes to medicine, Dutch culture celebrates its pain tolerance.

My family in the U.S. will check in on me now and again, making sure I'm safe and sound: "Is there decent health care? Do they have doctors over there?" And I tell them seeing a doctor here is not a problem; the problem is getting the doctor to do something about why I've come to see them in the first place.

Most countries have doctors who swear some version of the Hippocratic oath which states *primum non nocere*, or "first do no harm". In Dutch, there seems to be a different oath: "Go home, get some rest and take two paracetamol."

To this day, I have never managed to get a Dutch doctor to prescribe antibiotics. Although once we came close with our daughter when she was three years old. She had an ear infection. Our doctor told us, "I could prescribe antibiotics, but there is a worldwide crisis of antibiotic-resistant microbes, and we all must do our part to use less. So, why don't you go home and let your daughter rest?"

We protested, "No one is getting any rest! We need some medicine." We were recommended some over-the-counter cream and at that point we decided to try an alternative ... a homeopathic doctor.

The homeopathic doctor started out with another commonly-heard Dutch doctor phrase: "What do you think is the problem?" Like it's a medical quiz. "We think our daughter has an ear infection." The doctor said, "You are right." I half-expected to win a prize.

Then came the next question: "And what would you like me to do?" I've heard this question more than once from Dutch doctors. Then, the game-winning question: "And what do you think I should do?" Not the best way to inspire confidence, not in my mind anyway.

I offered my expert advice: "How about prescribing some medicine?"

The doctor quickly determined the root of the problem: an outer ear infection on her right side and an inner ear infection on the left side. We were given two prescriptions. Both had magically illegible scribbles, and we looked on in awe as the woman at the pharmacy actually seemed to understand what they meant. But we were taken aback when she gave us the medicine: chamomile oil and *zuurdruppels* (literally translated as *sour vinegar drops*), which are triamcinolone acetonide drops used to suppress inflam- »



PHOTO: ADRIE MOUTHAAN

mation. We thought this might be a mistake. But no, the woman explained that the oil was for the outer ear infection and the drops were for the inner ear. At home, we wrestled our poor child into position and administered the chamomile oil first and then in with the cotton ball. Next, we flipped her over and squeezed the sour vinegar drops into the other ear.

It was then that it occurred to my wife that we were literally mixing oil and vinegar in our daughter's head. And while her condition didn't improve much anytime soon, when she sneezed, salad dressing sprayed about the room!

In my book, *How to Be Dutch: The QUIZ*, I've included the following question:

Multiple choice: If you ask your doctor for a local anaesthetic during an operation, what response can you expect?

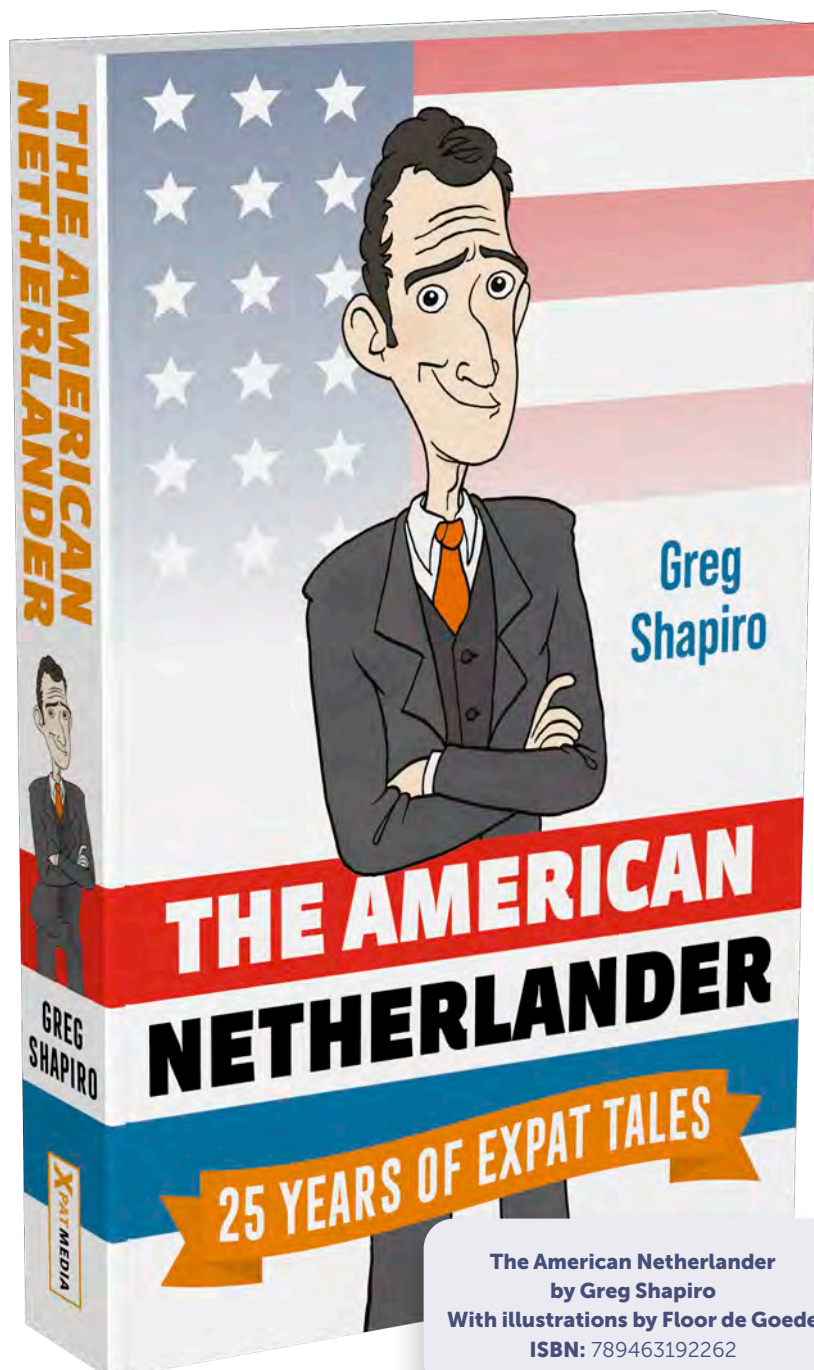
- A. Don't worry, the pain will be quick.
- B. I won't lie, this is going to hurt.
- C. Pain is part of life.

Answer... ALL OF THE ABOVE!

"To this day, I have never managed to get a Dutch doctor to prescribe antibiotics."

In other countries, you may encounter the phrase "This might hurt a bit," and it might hurt—a bit. Dutch health care professionals are Dutch direct. They don't sugar-coat it. You will hear, "This is going to hurt." And oh, it hurts.

Finally, in the U.S., you can't get through a supermarket check-out line without being offered three different kinds of ibuprofen. In the Netherlands, if you try to buy ibuprofen, you're interrogated: "Are you aware what you're purchasing? Are you familiar with the workings of this drug? Have you considered the potential effects?" Yes. The effects of painkillers, after all, are to kill pain. But at the Dutch pharmacy, they look at you like you might be an addict...or a member of a drug cartel! «



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by Greg Shapiro
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Cover Story



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