

How to keep in touch while studying abroad in the Netherlands

A comprehensive guide to saving money on broadband deals and mobile phone costs while you're studying abroad.

Researched and compiled by Ofcom accredited broadband, TV and phone comparison site www.cable.co.uk

The Netherlands is great for internet access and mobile coverage. You've plenty of options, high average download speeds and extensive 4G coverage to play with – so here's what you need to know about going Dutch.

Broadband providers in the Netherlands

There are fourteen leading broadband providers to choose from in the Netherlands, with speeds starting at around 1.5Mbps and going up to 100Mbps. Special mention, however, goes to OnsBrabantNet, which offers fibre broadband up to 500Mbps – five times faster than its nearest competitors.

The catch is that the provider is only available in the south-east of the country: great if you're staying near the French border, but not so much if you find yourself north of Eindhoven.

Mobile providers in the Netherlands

The leading mobile network in the Netherlands is KPN, with around 7.6m customers. Following closely behind are two familiar faces for UK mobile users: Vodafone and T-Mobile, which boast around 5.2m and 4.5m subscribers respectively.

4G coverage is most extensive around The Hague, Amsterdam, Utrecht and Rotterdam, but outside of these hotspots you'll still find widespread 3G and 2G, so you're unlikely to be without a mobile signal for long.

Getting a broadband or phone contract in the Netherlands

You'll find it easier to get credit in the Netherlands once you get a bank account. To do so, you'll need your passport, a Burgerservicenummer (BSN) tax number and proof of address. If you're employed while in the Netherlands, you should also provide evidence of your income, like an employment contract or payslip.

International roaming: what you need to know

Thanks to an EU ruling, using your mobile phone within the European Union should cost exactly the same as doing so at home in the near future. Previously, international roaming fees saw travelers running up large mobile bills while overseas.

Until that happens, it's worthwhile seeing what deals your UK provider can offer. You might find that their roaming charges are reasonable already, or that you can cut costs even further by purchasing an international bolt-on package for your phone – but whatever the case, you should explore your options before traveling if you want to save money overseas.

Consumer rights in the Netherlands

In a similar vein to the UK's Distance Selling Regulations, the Netherlands has a seven-day cooling off period known (bedenktijd), which means if you've purchased something over the phone or online, you can return it without charge within a week.

Beyond this, you'll find broader EU-wide consumer protection in the country that shields you from misleading sales information, hidden costs and poor service. You can take any complaints that you have about products or services to the Dutch Foundation for Consumer Complaints Boards (De Geschillencommissie).

Net-neutral Netherlands

The Netherlands is only the second country in the world (after Chile) to make net neutrality a law. The legislation guarantees that governments and internet service providers treat all data on the internet equally and that consumers aren't discriminated against because of their choice of ISP, platform, or sites visited.

There are concerns that, in countries without net neutrality legislation, ISPs could limit the sites that consumers can access – meaning some pages on the internet could be exclusively available to a particular ISP's customer base.

Local information

Although the terms Wi-Fi, 2G, 3G and 4G are the same in the Netherlands as at home, there are some country-specific acronyms, phrases and numbers that could help you while you're away.

00 44: If you need to dial the UK from the Netherlands, dial 00 44 followed by the rest of the number minus the first zero (dial 00 44 113 243 1751 to call the University of Leeds, for example)

Breedband: Broadband

Glasvezel breedband: Fibre broadband

Koopovereenkomst: A verbal or written commitment to purchase

Mobiele telefoon: Mobile phone

Supersnel internet: Superfast internet

Manage your data

Here are some simple steps to make sure you don't run up unexpected data bills overseas.

Wi-Fi

Browse or download using a Wi-Fi connection when you can. This way you won't use your own data allowance.

Stop auto-downloads...

Email on your phone may be set to automatically download messages or check for new ones – turn this feature off to save data.

...or stop data use entirely

By turning off data roaming on your tablet or mobile, you can be sure your device won't connect to an overseas network.

Get a bundle

Your UK mobile provider probably offers international data bundles. Find out what you can get for your money.

Download files before flying

Try to anticipate the apps or files you'll need on your tablet or mobile and download them before you leave.

Know what it's costing you

Currency exchange rates can fluctuate during any journey and it's important that you know what you are spending. Use a reputable currency exchange service to check the latest rates. Popular exchange rate services include Oanda, Reuters, XE.

Useful Links

Reuters: <http://www.reuters.com/finance/currencies>

XE: <http://www.xe.com>

Oanda: <http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

Cable.co.uk is a provider of impartial information to increase public awareness in matters of broadband, TV, landline and mobile.