

The Hague, The Netherlands 2014 - 2021

Rhiannon Phillips-Bianco Married with 16 year-old twins

I lived in The Netherlands for seven years, having moved there with my Italian family from Rome. Our daughters were nine at the time and we couldn't have chosen a better place to bring them up at a time they were gaining independence. The Hague is a small and manageable city that has many lovely parks and is close to the sea. As with all Dutch cities, it has an incredible web of beautifully maintained cycle paths that link everywhere safely. As a result, children as young as seven can be seen cycling to school or after-school activities by themselves.

Bureaucracy, Language and Health Care

We were fortunate to have a relocation agent who sorted out everything for us when we arrived. However, anything we needed to do ourselves after that was pretty straightforward and everyone in governmental offices spoke a high level of English. The population of The Hague is 50% international so, although the natives appreciate it if you speak their language, it is very easy to get by without learning it. Medical insurance is compulsory in The Netherlands – a basic package costing about 200 euros a month for a family of four – and medical care is efficient. People have been known to complain that GPs will only ever prescribe paracetamol and then send you home; but a follow-up visit will ensure more thorough care!

Schools

There are many international schools in The Hague to cater for the large international population. The British School in the Netherlands has four campuses, two primary and two secondary and is an exceptional place to work and send your children. Teaching wages are high and the first five years of your stay include an 85% reduction on school fees (this is worth checking as the government has moved the goalposts recently). Students are from over 80 countries, creating an extremely diverse and inspiring school community.

Cost of Living

The cost of living is fairly high in The Hague. Costs such as health insurance, an extra annual tax for sea defences, and the significant expense of eating out, all add up. Public transport is not cheap but then you can overcome that by choosing to cycle everywhere, as the Dutchies generally do! Accommodation can be expensive too and it has recently become difficult to find affordable housing both to rent and to buy. Our relocation agent found our property for us so it is worth asking if similar help would be available to you too.

Personal Reflection

Having lived in Italy for 11 years before moving to The Hague, living there felt like taking a step closer to home. Quaint towns with a church and pavement cafes, felt a little English; I was grateful to live in a place where it was so easy to speak English; and, of course, the climate was far more familiar. I loved living there and would move back without hesitation.

However, younger members of staff who didn't have children, frequently remarked that they would have preferred to live in the more lively, entertaining and chaotic Amsterdam. I understood their

perspective but with Amsterdam being only half-an-hour by train, I was happy to keep its hustle and bustle at arm's length and enjoy the tranquillity of where we lived.