

# You know you are back in Holland when

There are many idiosyncrasies that sum up Holland (the Netherlands) that many people miss when visiting. However, are never lost on a Dutch person coming home.



After a recent and brief visit, here are a few of my favourites:

You know you are back in Holland when:

- The plane land so far from the airport and you spend 15 minutes being ferried all the way to your gate
- You get off the plane and are met by Tulips, a Heineken café and flashes of bright orange – not necessarily in that order
- You through and outside of the airport with little hassle in all of 15 minutes
- Passport control says ‘welcome home’
- The first beeline you make is to the Friettent – Fries Café, and the first thing you order is Frietje Oorlog, War Fries, Fries with Sate sauce, mayonnaise and raw onion, with a Chocomel (chocolate milk)
- Even the bus stops at the airport are pretty
- The second pit stop is [G-star outlet](#), as serious there are no better jeans, and no better selection here or

price

- It's drizzling in a way that you can't call it rain, but it seems immune to umbrellas and you'll be wet and miserable either way
- The taxi drivers are all ruthless thieves which is why you take the train or bus which only cost a few euros
- The buses are all electric and modern
- You have to remember to swipe on and off all public transport
- You outside and get run over by a bike
- You stop outside and into dog poop, or in my case, my friends were warned via the apartment app there was poop on the doorstep – beware those without the app
- You are no longer the tallest person in the room – the Dutch are excessively tall
- Breakfast is sliced bread with an option of cheese or peanut butter – which is why you either take two slices or cut one in half, it's a tough choice
- When every coffee comes with a koekje (cookie)
- You hope that one food truck the 'Olliebollen Kraan', is still around (often only before Christmas), so you can still get a deep fried bit of delicious dough an 'Olliebolle'
- People are a wee bit bossy and speak their mind without needing to try and be nice about it
- The only stonners you see are foreigners
- You are sad to leave, but also know that a short visit sometimes can be long enough
- You know you'll be back to visit all the places you missed soon



The last visit was a short one, for an avid traveller as much as I like to visit my country and reminisce and see my favourite haunts. I'll be honest and prefer to visit new countries and experience new cultures.

But the beauty of living a literal hop, skip and jump of a short plane ride away, is that I can visit, even if just for a day.

I flew [Flybe.com](https://flybe.com) from London City to Amsterdam – which is a cheap and easy flight, both airports are easy to get in and out making a shorter trip hassle-free.

If you are planning a trip to Amsterdam be sure to check out my blog post [insider's guide which you can find here.](#)

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## Meeting Locals can Make a Foreign Country feel like

# Home

## The value of feeling at home

Home isn't always a place as much as a state of mind, one of comfort and belonging that can often come to us through the quality of the friends that we have there.

It's a sense of having someone to call and go out with for lunch, a drink or night out to the movies. A friend we can turn to for advice, which can be anything from a good hairdresser to issues with a local utility company.

Home is, knowing that when the brown stuff hits the fan that there is someone around who gives a damn. That's home, it goes beyond a comfortable house, job and furniture.

## Why that feeling is even more important abroad



When you're moving abroad as a newbie or veteran expat, there is the initial honeymoon period that wears off. Once the newness of a place wears off you are left with the reality of everyday life.

[Surviving your first year abroad](#) can be a challenge.

Everyday life, even when abroad can become a monotonous humdrum of work and chores. The only difference will be that you will be doing your shopping, washing and working out in a different language. Surrounded by unknown faces.

Once the novelty of a place wears off, we get homesick. But it's not for a place, but for the 'sense of belonging'.

If you've just arrived at a new city and have only been there a few weeks or months, you may not yet have met other people.

## **We know that admitting you want to make friends sounds, naff...**

In reality, most of the population are friends with the people they grew up with.

Which is why if you are not living in a big expat culture the idea of forcing yourself to go and make friends can be difficult. Even if you are in a city with a big expat culture, just meeting other foreigners is not a local experience.

While it's great to meet others having the same experience as you, it is good to meet locals too. They'll give you an honest perspective of living in your new country.



Queensday Amsterdam a mix of Argentine, Swedish, Dutch and Polish friends

## How do we go about meeting new people

Sure, for some people meeting people comes naturally. In your 20s you might just go out to a bar and clubbing and know everyone by the end of the night.

As we get a little older, we might have to force ourselves to go out and make an effort. We may need to put it on our to-do list, and heavens forbid even have an action plan of steps that we need to take.

Be prepared that it may even take longer than expected.

## Let's be really honest and even brutal

It's a perk and the downside of getting older, but honesty comes with that as does wisdom. Fact: you don't have to like everyone you met.



It is ok, after having a coffee with someone you've met, to not meet up with them again.

Let's put in the extra effort and meeting people that we get on with fabulously, and soon skyrocket to the top of people that we want to spend time with.

Even if we have to force ourselves to get up and out to meet these people, on numerous occasions, for weeks or months in a row.

While meeting friends in pubs and bars, can be the easy route, however, these can be here today gone tomorrow type of friends. There are many other opportunities to meet locals in a new city.



## How and where to meet locals

Here are a few ways that we can meet new people abroad with similar interests and find common ground that is a good starting point on the road to friendship.

1. One way is finding work abroad, through an [interesting job assignment](#). Work is always a great way to meet colleagues and clients.
2. Stay somewhere unique and local
  - Homestay e.g. Bed & Breakfasts, [Airbnb](#). Or you can

[host fellow travellers via Airbnb and](#) earn some travel money without at the same time.

- Get Free Accommodation by doing a work exchange via [Workaway](#) or [Helpx](#), [Woofers](#).
- House-sitting. Recommended sites are [Mindahome](#), and [housesittersuk](#), you may want to look up a local version.
- [Couchsurfing](#) is more than just finding a couch to sleep on, they also have meetups and is a great place to also meet locals.

3. Attend a language exchange, if you've moved somewhere new where they speak a different language this is a great way for you to practice the language. Then to return the favour by helping someone else learn your language. Find an exchange through [conversation exchange](#) or [language exchange](#).
4. Volunteer, at a smaller local non-for-profit. The more local the organisation the better as it will not only benefit the community more, there is also less likely to be a cost involved. You will also have more opportunity to meet others in the local community.
5. Learn something new. Do a workshop in anything that tickles your fancy or that you're curious about forever. Whether it's [learning local cooking](#) in Thailand, a [natural dying and weaving course in Laos](#).
6. Go to Community events, programs or talks – given by local libraries or community centres.
7. Join a local walking /bike clubs.
8. Visit local markets and spend some time talking to the stall holders and creatives – they love a conversation and if you take the time you'll find their full of stories, insights, and tips.
9. Share a passion or mutual interest and then find a shop/studio where you can discuss and learn more. Be it Music, Gardening, Art, Books, Sport etc. etc. The list is endless.
10. Find and join a local community garden



11. Sign up and join [Meetup](#), [Internations](#), [Toastmasters](#) who all hold gatherings for people on a particular subject or in a particular city.



Friends all go and visit another friend abroad

## What do we need to do next

Meeting new people can be awkward, in the beginning, it will feel akin to dating. It's rare to just ask someone you've just met for a coffee. Back home we rarely do that, or it's a polite thing to say, but not followed up on.

Yet, when we are somewhere new we need to ride out the discomfort and go out for those coffees, lunches or accept invitations to other events that we'll be invited too.

We need to keep in mind that:

*Strangers are just friends that we haven't met yet*

What may sound like a dull night out could potentially be that one night that we click with someone who shares our vibe. There is nothing like meeting kindred spirits, and getting to

know new people – once the awkwardness has passed.



Nothing beats a real conversation

## Feeling at home and becoming a local

On top of making actionable plans, also dare yourself to attempt small conversations with people everywhere. You'll find that Locals love discussing their country and advising you. Be kind and let them.

You'll learn more from the gentleman on the park bench, or the lady in the bakery than you'll pick up in a lifetime of books.

It's the people we meet, their stories that touch our lives, they welcome us and help to transform a foreign shore into a place that we can call home.

Resources:

- [www.couchsurfing.com](http://www.couchsurfing.com)
- [www.airbnb.com](http://www.airbnb.com)
- [www.workaway.info](http://www.workaway.info)
- [www.helpx.net/](http://www.helpx.net/)

- [www.volunteersouthamerica.net/](http://www.volunteersouthamerica.net/)
- [www.truetravellers.org/](http://www.truetravellers.org/)
- [www.freevolunteering.net/](http://www.freevolunteering.net/)
- [www.withlocals.com/](http://www.withlocals.com/)
- [www.toastmasters.org/](http://www.toastmasters.org/)
- [www.internations.org/](http://www.internations.org/)
- [www.meetup.com/](http://www.meetup.com/)
- [www.conversationexchange.com/](http://www.conversationexchange.com/)



Another goodbye – see you soon party...

Big gratitude for the two additional photos by:

Camels by [Kawtar CHERKAOUI](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Girls in the sunset by [Marion Michele](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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# The Reality of Moving and Living in Argentina

## Why move to Argentina?

Why would you want to move to and live in Argentina? Was the response I got, when I told friends I was moving to Argentina, together with a raised eyebrow and quizzical expression.

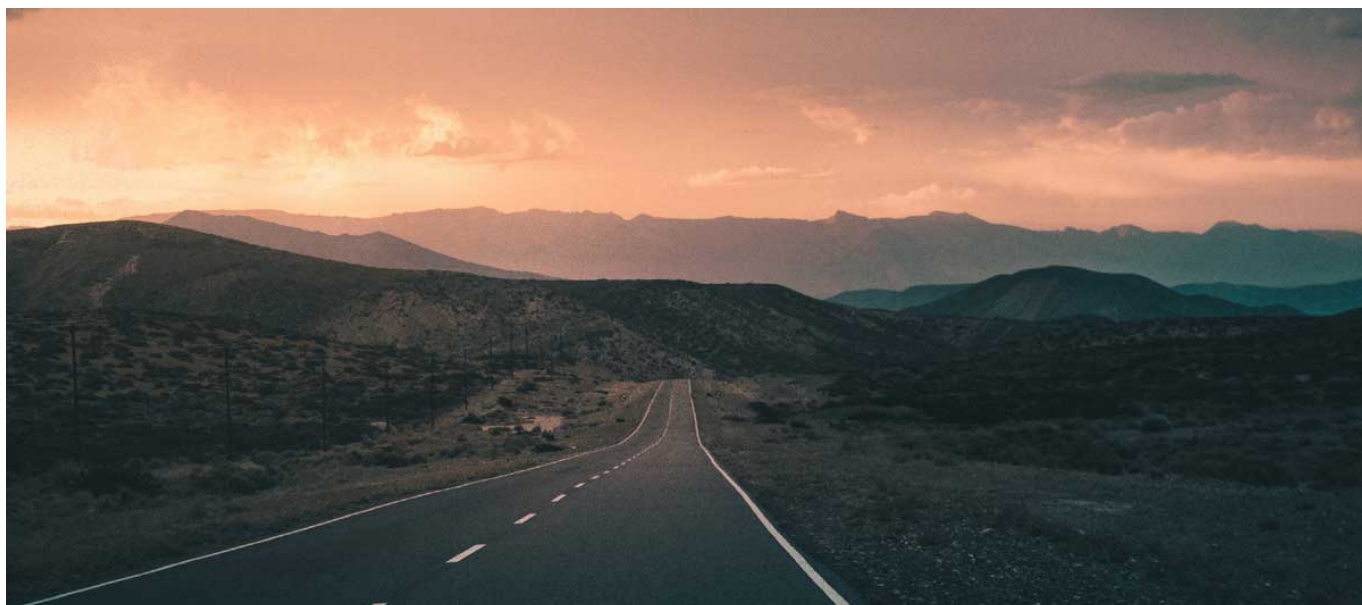
Ironically, I was moving because people kept asking me “Why don’t you move to Argentina? You’d love it.”

At the time I was living in Amsterdam, restless and tired. Tired of the endless rain, excessive tourism and cramped spaces. I wanted to live in a city with flavour. Who doesn’t want a life with flavour?

What can I say, Argentina has flavour. Every body at the time in the Netherlands was talking about it. Two friends own a house there. The future king of the Netherlands just married an Argentine, other four friends had just come back from their trip to this magical wonderland.

All these conversations inspired me [to buy a book on Argentina](#), and I was hooked and enchanted within the first few pages.





## Most Magical Place in the world

What is not to like about the idea of spending time in the 'Paris' of Latin America. A nation of polo playing horse fanatics and real-life gauchos (local cowboys).

A country where soccer is the religion and BBQ is the national cuisine. A country whose history is weaved so densely and dramatically you could carve it with a knife.

The country has the wild expansive plains of La Pampa, the mountains and lakes of Patagonia, the deserts up in Santa Fe [and Salta](#). As well as the uber magical city of Buenos Aires. If it could bring tears to the eyes of Evita and millions that hear the song, it may be worth checking out.

Within weeks a trip and dry run, was booked. Could, would or should I live there.



## Is Argentina worth moving to?

Doing a dry run, whenever you are planning a move abroad is recommended.

When you spend time in a country for a trial run it's definitely not a holiday. It's a working vacation.

You'll spend your time researching the best areas to live. The quality of life versus the costs of living (rent/groceries), salaries, safety and the political climate.

It's a great opportunity to make time to meet with locals as well as expats living there so you get real stories of the everyday challenges from both sides.

Of course, also enjoy what the country offers from polo games, top restaurants and hotel pool, deciding where to live also means checking out the perks.





## Researching the Move to Argentina

Luckily, researching Buenos Aires was easy; it is an exceptionally large city, so sources of information are also available in English, such as [BA times](#) a local online newspaper.

There are also plenty of opportunities to meet locals and expats at places like [Gibraltar the English pub](#) in San Telmo, at embassies, [expat](#) or [internations](#) events.

Argentina has its own active online [expat forum baexpat.com](#) where you can delve deeper into the types of challenges you may encounter. Along with relevant solutions, or meet like-minded individuals.

***TIP:** keep a healthy perspective on forums, ignore the trolls. Take it with a healthy sense of detachment, and it'll become a helpful resource.*

Originally, I planned an 8-week dry run, which I extended 4 times. And ended up there for an incredible 6 months.

While there, I really wanted to get an idea of what it would

be like to work in a city with 3 million inhabitants. So, I spent some of my time volunteering at [BABS](#) (British Aged Care in Buenos Aires).

It was here I had the opportunity to meet people who'd lived in Argentina for over 80 years. And trust me when I say, there is nothing like listening to first-hand stories of a countries history.

On my second day in Buenos Aires, I stumbled upon and fell in love with Puerto Madero. A small island, next to the city and is secured by the naval police. The suburb is a refuge from the hustle and bustle, it is quiet, spacious and safe.



It was also here that English built the warehouses on the harbour in the early 1900's, while they were building the railroads. These recently renovated warehouses add a timeless charm and are home to some of the cities best restaurants, shops and cafes.

San Telmo markets are still within walking distance, and the rest of the city is also just a hop, skip and a jump away.

# Final conclusion, after 6 months dry run?

Honestly, when I first arrived in Buenos Aires, I was shocked at the populous state of what seemed a dirty city. However, it won me over hour by hour, day by day. By my 3rd week, I was looking into potential job opportunities and any which way that I could stay long-term.

I stayed until my savings ran dry, and I had no options but to go home.

After 6 months, I left Argentina, heartbroken, devastated and determined to return.



## Can you, easily move to Argentina?

How you migrate to a country depends largely on the country. In Argentina, you have a few options to choose from:

1. Get company/ employer to sponsor you



2. Set up a company
3. Marry and Argentine

My plan was to go with the first option. So, I meet with anyone I could via contacts, friends, LinkedIn, peers in my industry.

Including the Ambassador, at my countries embassy, and went to lunches that were put on by the local Dutch and English Chamber of Commerce.

Many countries will have an embassy or a local chamber of commerce who assist with cross-border trade advice and networking.

With a fully booked agenda, there was only one objective and that was to find work. While I didn't get a job, I did meet great people and got a wealth of advice and insight on the business landscape.

## Legally moving to Argentina



Being that my best option would be to find a company to sponsor me, the reality is that this is easier said than done. Despite my meetings, lunches and endless cups of coffee, I didn't manage to find a sponsor in Argentina.

Language can be a real challenge when attempting to move to a country. If you are not fluent; it'll be hard to put you to work or compete with local job seekers.

Like many other countries, for a company to sponsor a foreigner can be a costly process. One that includes fees, lawyers and paperwork. Companies will hire you if you have specific expertise.

Or you can also try to get a job for an international company in your own country and apply to be relocated abroad.

## **Good Luck comes in Many Forms**

Flying back to the Netherlands with a tissue in one hand and hope in the other. Expecting that it would be a near impossible task to find a company in the Netherlands to sponsor me to work in Argentina.

As luck would have it, a company that I knew just happened to be opening shop in Argentina. And within weeks, I had a job and was planning my move, as well as that of the company.

Friends I'd met, helped advise me on an appropriate salary, as the company would be giving me a local contract instead of an international one.

In a country like Argentina, excessive inflation rates need to be taken into account. Eventually, with the contract signed, everything else was put in motion. The real business of moving could begin.



## Finally, Moving to Argentina

It was my 8th international move, so as ever practice makes perfect. My flat in Amsterdam was easily rented out via [expatica.com](https://www.expatica.com).

The bureaucracy in Argentina like most Latin countries is phenomenal; the amount of paperwork and documentation required was second to none.

I am eternally grateful that the company's local lawyers assisted me with my working visa and the importation of my goods. This is one move that I would not have wanted to do on my own.

As with anywhere, signing up for the utilities was not fun at all. This was when a good friend gave me advice that served me throughout my time in Argentina and beyond:

*'When dealing with an issue: don't start a fight or get angry. NEVER back down or accept no for an answer'.*





Great strategy to put into practice everytime I was told no. Whether it was for a bank account or electricity connection. I just planted myself down, and let them know I'd be there until we resolved it.

It is incredible how many miracles happen when you have all parties working on a solution.

After the move and a chaotic dance of organizational mayhem. The paperwork was done and I had a new office, a new apartment and a new life. I could finally start living the 'vida loca'.

## **Living the Dream in Buenos Aires**

Buenos Aires isn't a walk in the park, although there are some great parks to walk in. The government is both crazy and corrupt, inflation is off the scale and life can feel like a bit of a roller coaster. Depending on the day, time and place.

The city is busy, polluted and in the last few years, the economic challenges have resulted in an ever-increasing crime rate. You need to live with both feet on the ground and be aware of how you walk and travel in town.

Despite all of this, it is one of the most incredible cities

to live in. Whatever you feel like doing, you can. Whether it's tango at 2 am or front row seats at the [Polo in November](#), or catching the boat to Colonia for the day.

There is a suburb for every mood, be it shopping in Palermo, dinner in China town, after work cocktails in Recoleta. Bike riding around Puerto Madero or a visit the famous Sunday markets in San Telmo.



In the words of the worlds greatest writer who is Argentine:

[You know you are back in Holland when Click To Tweet](#)

It was all of this that made me love every minute of my crazy, wild, temperate and magical time there.

Yes, dreams can also end between a crazy government and the need for change, so I did eventually leave Argentina. Yet in retrospect, I wouldn't change a thing.

Just like the song, 'Don't cry for me Argentina', the truth is I never really left. The magic of the country lives on in my heart and lovingly etched in my memory.



# Resources :

## [BA Expats](#)

Online English paper [BA times](#)

Volunteer opportunities via [GoAbroad](#) or local [South American website](#)

[List of foreign Embassies in Argentina](#)

[Walrus books](#) English Bookshop

English Pub: [Gibraltar](#)

Meet locals and practice your Spanish via [Conversation Exchange](#) or [Toastmasters](#)

Further reading, see why November is the ideal time to visit and what to do while [there check out this post.](#)

My top reading list for before, during or instead of [your visit here.](#)



A few photos are my own, the others are shared with much gratitude to these other wonderful photographers:

[Eduardo Sánchez](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[Sasha • Stories](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[Nacho Rochon](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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# Surviving your first year Abroad

You don't want to just be surviving your first year abroad, you want to fulfill your dreams and create memories that last a lifetime!

A move abroad is a serious life change, a huge upheaval. Endless planning, packing, organizing, shipping all to take your life from one location to the next. Yes it is as exhilarating, and challenging.

To make it happen, you put any nagging doubts and doomsday friends aside to get on with all you need to do, one step at a time.

Now it's over, you're in your new country, living the dream. Or are you?

## There will be times when it's not all rosy



With the big move behind us – we may think the worst is over. We get lost in the excitement of living the dream. In the first phase of the move you are likely to see nothing but a world of endless possibilities.

Don't get me wrong, it still can be.

But, I also need to break it to you, that this lovely honeymoon phase wears off.

Which can leave you with a brutal reality, that the routine of life isn't that much different abroad then it was at home. One day, you'll realize that you still get up to go to work, you shop and you have a routine. It looks and feels exactly like our old life. Only worse as someone has removed the age old comforts, favorite haunts, and friends. They may have also changed the channel are all now speaking a new language – that you are not learning as fast enough for conversations past 'hello how are you?'.

It can also be at this vulnerable moment that those nagging doubts we parked before the move come back to haunt us....

Did you make the right decision?

Will this ever feel like home?

And the biggest fear, did you fail your dream or did your dream fail you...

All you may need a coffee and friendly ear, someone to share your doubts and challenges with. A friend to go to the movies with. Or a savvy local to ask for a dentist recommendation.

Whatever you do, don't start tottering on the brink either of moving forward – or going back. See it as an opportunity.

## Time to take control and make it 'Home'



If you have lived abroad you may recognize the moment.

It's a wake up call and realization that living abroad is not all cocktails with mini umbrellas on a beach. It's part of the move, and part of being a nomad. When the old life starts to fade away, it's time to replace it with a fulfilling new life.

Up until this point, all your focus has been on work, a place to live, setting up the internet and a hundred other mind-



numbing tasks. So much so that you haven't had the chance to establish a social life.

What you need is a plan of action.

## **Planning and creating a new home abroad:**

To help to motivate yourself make a list on why you moved, and what you love about living where you do. Stick this list some prominent like the fridge. Then make the effort to do those things you enjoy that attracted you to this adventure in the first place.

If you moved for nature, go out and spend time in it. If you are in Argentina and love the tango, then learn it. Whatever it is – put it on your list and into your agenda!

In all honesty, every place has its pros and cons. What we need to do is recognise them and make sure we are balancing them out. We can do this by focusing on the positives, rather than the negatives.

The very best thing that you can do to get you through these moments of doubt is to make **'friends'**. Someone you can grab a coffee with, who can share or add to your perspective. It's always the people you meet, that'll make a foreign country feel like home.

## **Now Let's get out there and meet people**



We all know finding good friends isn't easy, we all know they are valuable and rare. Yet, the world is a pretty big and there are a lot of great places to meet people, with a bit of EFFORT.

The best way to meet like-minded people is through something that you love, common interests. What are your hobbies, are there courses and workshops that you can attend?

A [language exchange](#), is helpful in that it helps to improve your language skills and meet new people. Your exchange partner will also speak your language and is likely to have or plan to travel. A word of caution: be selective of who you choose to meet up with. [Remember the objective – meeting like-minded others', there are those that use the language exchange for an inroad to dating foreigners... and hence may have other objectives....]

It's handy to meet a few established foreigners and locals, which is where international groups such as [internations](#), or [Expatica](#) (Europe) or [Expatriot](#) work a treat as most have local gatherings. You can also find local events through [meetups](#) or a local version of the site.

Getting onto the mailing list of your own embassy in your new country is also worth while, they'll invite you to holiday celebrations and they may also have a chapter of commerce, who will get together for meetings or lunches. Which is a great place for business networking.

If you are shy, force yourself to event – you are not likely to be the only shy person there. It's going to take Effort – you are going to need to go beyond comfort zones. I assure you

it will be worth it.

*There are no strangers here, only friends you haven't met yet. Walter Butler Yeats*

You'll meet a valuable people at each outing, and a few of these will grow into valuable friendships.

You will find before you know it, you'll have a social life, new hobbies and language skills. You will be going to the movies or hanging out with friends.

Someone will have recommended the perfect doctor, dentist and hairdresser after all word of mouth among peers are the best recommendations.

Now, instead of feeling homesick and full of doubt, you'll feel settled and at home.

The dream you had of living in a new country has become a reality. You can kick back and enjoy the experience and dare we say it, start planning the next move...



