

Report# 2
Preparation Before Arrival
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Three months before I left Taiwan, the life was a bit crazy because all the visa, packing and housing issues in the Netherlands. For your better understanding, I am listing a few details for your reference. This information will not only be useful in the Netherlands, but also your study at other countries.

Visa Issues - The visa issues are one of the simple issues, you just have to make sure you follow up OIP office's structure how to provide documents for your visa application. One note I would like to make about **study visa of the Netherlands, it is very expensive, it costs EUR 600** (applied in 2011, rate might be increased in the future).

Packing - I personally love fashion which means I cannot stand to wear the same clothes all the time. Thus, I actually shipped 2 big boxes of clothes weighed 25kg and 30kg from Taiwan to the Netherlands. If your exchange is only 1 semester, you may reduce the numbers down to 1 box. My case is I am studying in Europe for 1 year, and I am trying not to spend too much money on shopping while I am here. How to ship your boxes? Depend on your school choice, luckily that **Taiwan post office does provide OCEAN SHIPMENT to the Netherlands; the cost is very reasonable, NT\$ 900 for 30 kg ocean shipment.** But please keep in mind that "ocean shipment" takes 2 months to arrive; you shall always start packing your stuff at least 3 months before your departure. If you haven't found the housing that time, you can always send your package to the international office at your exchange school. However, I would like to give you a warning that **SHIPPING FROM EUROPE BACK TO TAIWAN IS VERY EXPENSIVE!** For example, it costs EUR 100 for 30kg stuff AIR-SHIP in the Netherlands. (This is the cheapest one you can find in the Netherlands. AP Shipping Express T: 020-447 12 60I: www.apshippingexpress.com E: info@apshippingexpress.com)

If your study is in USA, PLEASE DO NOT SHIP ANYTHING. Because everything is cheaper in USA and choices are various, all you need is 2 suitcases.

What shall you pack into your ocean shipment boxes?

1. Instant Noodles - I am very flexible when it comes to food, but sometimes you do miss the home food.
2. Gloves - If you are doing exchange study during FALL semester, please make sure you ship gloves which would make your hands warm. Of course, they sell here but the price is not cheap. Coming for fall semester, please make sure you at least pack 1 waterproof gloves. It gets really cold in the winter.
3. Shoes - Especially running shoes and boots (for girls), shoes are extremely expensive and ugly in Europe. You can find cheap shoes like EUR 25-45 but the quality is not good. A pair of leather boots will still cost you at least EUR 150 even it's 50% off already; thus, **I strongly recommend you to ship your shoes if you are coming to Europe**. Personal experience, I shipped 2 pairs of boots, 2 black high heels for meeting propose, 2 pairs of running shoes (because I love running), 1 pairs of sandals, 2 pairs of flip flops. For flip flops, you can find cheap ones here, but I personally like one particular brand, so I shipped them over.
4. Fashion - If you are arriving in January for spring semester, you will find many good sales for WINTER CLOTHES. Especially in the Netherlands, they have big sales starting from middle December until early February. I got 2 pairs of Zara jeans at EUR 7 per pair. If you love fashion like I do, be careful on the types of clothes you pack. Otherwise, you will have to do a lot of shopping after you arrive in the Netherlands. Because Dutch girls do not really dress up when they go out, their fashion is more about jeans. **The popular styles in Asia like high heels, short skirts and dresses are not really something Dutch girls do. A Dutch girl told me that showing too much leg skin (wear short dress / skirt) is not their style.**
5. Medicine - Even you are requested to buy student insurance in Europe, going to doctor is not convenience. Make sure you pack some medicine that you usually use when you get a cold.
6. Winter Coat - Make sure you pack a very nice and warm winter coat if you are arriving in January for spring study. The weather in the Netherlands can be crazy sometimes.

7. Contact lenses and cleaner - It is very expensive in the Netherlands. Try to ship 2-3 bottles of contact cleaner if you wear contact lenses a lot. Also, please make sure you bring a few pairs of contact lenses.

8. Glasses - If you wear glasses and will study in Europe for more than 1 semester, it is better to take 2 pairs of glasses to come because it is very expensive to get lenses and glasses. My friend paid for EUR 350 for a new pair of glasses in Italy.

9. Values - When you have your boxes ready at post office in Taiwan, you have to fill out the value of your stuff. **Please try to write down NO MORE THAN EUR 50, otherwise, you might get tax charged when your boxes arrive in the Netherlands. Also, sending your boxes to your exchange school is a good solution for avoiding tax charge.**

10. Housing issues - Most of students would choose **INTERNATIONAL HOUSING** because it is faster and easier; but please remember it **is usually MORE EXPENSIVE than your own hunting**. But I also would like to remind you that finding a good house on your own needs a bit LUCK! For myself, I used a few websites to find housing in Rotterdam. I even paid for becoming a member on some of housing website, but they all failed. Luckily, I found an amazing place through a FREE website called "www.housinganywhere.com"; the house is traditional Dutch style and costs me EUR 425 / per month with everything included. Compared to other students living at international housing, they have no roommates, small kitchen, simple room condition and high cost EUR 550 / per month, I am very lucky to be accepted by my landlord. Tips, **do try to find your own house early; at least 2-3 months in advance**. Also, **make sure you have a good interaction with your landlord. My landlord told me the main reason he decided to accept my application because I always sound like nice and sincere on my e-mails.**

Ok, the above points will be useful for your preparation. My next report will tell you a bit more about the life in the Netherlands.