

green spaces. It is quiet, peaceful, safe and friendly," says Mega.

Rijswijk

And don't forget Rijswijk, home of the European Patent Office as well as one of Shell's offices. Here, according to British Lisa Hall, the centre of the old town still retains a very Dutch atmosphere.

"The Saturday market and other local events remind me of the strong community spirit here. It is very friendly. I meet people when I am walking my dog and out with my son too. I have found many people here prefer to communicate in Dutch. I even take yoga in Dutch and am glad I have been taking lessons," she says.

Delft

The town of Delft is well connected to The Hague, yet has its own identity, partly because of its university and its connections to art. It was the choice of Italian Barbara Reale because of its medieval charm. "I love the way the buildings reflect in the canals at twilight, the sound of

the old church bell and spotting the horse-drawn tram," she says.

It is clearly a lively place with plenty of culture and night-life. Barbara particularly enjoys the Lumen filmhuis. "Many expats love to dance here and there is Scottish country dancing available here as well as an active dance school called Wesseling, that offers everything from salsa to street dancing," she says.

The Delftians expat club, which has almost 200 members since it began two years ago, meets at 8pm every other Thursday in de Ruif and has a busy calendar of events. There is also an English church service every Sunday at noon in the Oude Kerk.

Will you choose medieval charm, open space, schools, shops or tram routes? The fact that such choice is available means that it is no surprise to me to learn that the Netherlands is constantly voted one of the best places in the world to live.

Business basics: *How to start your business in the Netherlands*

by Suzy Ogé
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Do you have a great business idea but are not sure where to start? You are not alone. Starting a business is an enormous challenge. In a foreign country, navigating the maze of bureaucracy, cutting through the red tape and understanding the business climate can be even more daunting. All things considered, the Netherlands is an attractive country in which to register your business and the government does try to stimulate new business. Here are three things to keep in mind as you start:

First of all, it is important to assess the feasibility of starting or relocating your business in the Netherlands. Identify your target market and research the competition as well as any products or services that could be used as substitutes by your target market. If your business will focus on a global market but rely on local labour or infrastructure, find out how you can best meet your business needs and at what cost. The West Holland Foreign Investment Agency is one of the resources available to assist foreign companies exploring opportunities in the region. As well, the WBII (www.wbii.nl) in The Hague offers advice and services for starters in English.

The next step is to get professional advice regarding the legal formation of your business. Consult a tax advisor to determine the most appropriate structure for your individual circumstances. If you are establishing a sole proprietor-

ship (eenmanszaak) you can easily handle the obligatory registration yourself at the Chamber of Commerce (Kamer van Koophandel, or KVK). The tax issues of your business are best handled by a local professional, especially if you do not speak Dutch, as the tax office (Belastingdienst) is unwilling to assist over the phone in other languages.

The third tip for starting a successful business in the Netherlands is to build a professional network. Seek out like-minded individuals through both social and professional networking opportunities. A few places to start are THIN (The Hague International Network) and AMCHAM (American Chamber of Commerce). Don't be afraid to attend events that are held in Dutch as well, such as those held by the MKB and KVK. Even when you can't entirely understand the content, you always have the opportunity to meet people and connect to the local business community. It is not only who you know, but who knows you and what you do that will determine your success.

Starting and running a business in a foreign country can be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of a lifetime. So keep these tips in mind and don't be intimidated to pursue a new business opportunity. The Hague could be just the right place and just the right time for you.

*"It is not only who you know,
but who knows you"*