

# Talking turkey can be done in any language

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"What kind of turkey?" the butcher at the *pouliere*, the Dutch version of a poultry shop, inquired.

"Uh, there are different kinds? Just a regular ol' turkey," I said, miffed that there existed an entire avian world of which I clearly knew nothing.

"What size?" he fired back.

"Size? I don't know - 5 pounds? I mean, 2 kilos? Four? Just give me what you got."

I realized I'd always relied on my mom to pick out the [Thanksgiving](#) bird, and I didn't have a clue what to buy for a party of 10. I also deduced this was no normal turkey-purchasing mission.

The whole scenario played out in my head: My butcher friend would go out into his yard, find a turkey that met my specs, chop off the head and pluck him - all so my American friends and I could celebrate Thanksgiving away from home. And all for the bargain price of 40 euros.

It was 2005, and my best friend, Megan, and I were living in the Netherlands, in the mid-size town of Utrecht, just outside Amsterdam. While living abroad, I found there are some things Americans tend to take for granted, patriotic holidays like Thanksgiving being one of them - and there was no way I was going to sacrifice my favorite indulgences simply because I opted to move to Europe. Instead, we chose to cook up our own little Turkey Day right there in Holland - which we'd soon realize was no easy feat.

We began a month in advance, a smart move seeing as the preparations took that long. We had planned a two-hour trip north to the closest military base to stock up on American products, until we met a Canadian who informed us that his nation's Thanksgiving is similar to ours and that he found much of his meal at the expat goods store in town.

Sure enough, after visiting every local Dutch supermarket to no avail, we located our canned pumpkin, lining the shelves at the expatriate store in mass quantity. Piecrust and pie tins, however, turned out to be deemed non-essentials. "Improvise" was the theme of this particular Thanksgiving, so we settled for no-bake pumpkin cheesecake instead. Gradually, we found

everything else we needed: ingredients for green bean casserole; sweet potatoes; and even Jell-O salad (which in Holland they call "jelly pudding").

The day before our fete, we retrieved the hard-earned poultry, only to learn that a turkey - even a puny 10-pounder - was not going to fit in the available mini-fridge. Improvise. Our classmate (now my husband, Scott) said he had a full-sized kitchen. We loaded the turkey into Megan's backpack and biked the burdensome bird some 8 kilometers (about 5 miles) to Scott's flat. All the while, we received odd looks from our European classmates, who didn't exactly "get" Thanksgiving (even after my dramatic reading of the Pilgrims-and-Indians story).

Megan and I only had two hot plates in our poorly stocked attic apartment, so preparing dishes in advance was unfeasible. So, the next task was transporting our half-baked feast to Khari's house - by 30-minute bus ride with two connections to make. Arms full of uncooked casseroles and jelly pudding platters, we boarded the bus and ran into Scott, a baked turkey in his lap.

Khari's kitchen lived up to expectations - the only notable exception being that it had, well, no oven. Improvise. We prepared the remaining dishes on stovetop, aside from the stuffing, which we shoved into the mini-toaster oven. The bread and apple pie were impossible enterprises, so we dispatched dinner in search of the freshest baked goods in Utrecht.

When the time came, we had a Thanksgiving spread that would make Tyler Florence proud, given the limitations of our resources - and the things we take for granted at home.

There were 10 of us: Four Americans, one Norwegian, two Swedes, one Brit and one Finn, and the remaining seat was filled by a quirky Mexican man who made "art" from wine bottles and pictures of scantily clad women - and who somehow found his way onto our guest list.

Keeping with tradition, we went around the table revealing what we were thankful for. Earlier that week, I had received an e-mail from a friend back home saying she felt sorry I wouldn't be spending Thanksgiving with family and friends. My family was a metaphorical million miles away, but I looked around the table at all my new acquaintances from different parts of the globe and wondered how she figured I'd be without friends.

The Jell-O might have been a bit soupy and the apple pie store-bought, but minor details aside, Thanksgiving was a success - and a little more international than when we started - and it came together in a foreign land.

That's something to be thankful for in itself.

Kristin Luna last wrote for travel on Halloween destinations. E-mail comments to [travel@sfchronicle.com](mailto:travel@sfchronicle.com).

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