

Arrival and first impressions

Hello all! A month after my first blog entry and I am finally all settled in Amsterdam! I can't believe how quickly time has passed. There has been so much to do that I have lost track of the days and just realized it's about to be September.

Since the moment my plane landed I have done an array of things from eating a lot of food to meeting new people, attending events, and exploring the area around the Uilenstede campus and the city. The first person I met was Ilin, a Semester in Amsterdam International Officer, who was so bright and cheery at 7:30 in the morning (I don't know how). He led other students and I to our short taxi ride to Uilenstede from Schiphol Airport. The ride was interesting because I was so tired due to the time difference that it was hard for me to stay awake. I accidentally sprayed deodorant on my hair instead of hairspray, that's how tired I was. Then I met Kelly, another Semester in Amsterdam International Officer, who was also very bright and cheery and led us to our rooms. The rest of the day consisted of meeting the other students and rearranging my room to make it feel a bit more like home.

The rest of the week was packed with activities hosted by Kelly and Ilin for the Semester in Amsterdam students. We had a neighborhood walking tour, a snack-filled welcome picnic at the Museumplein, a tour of the Heineken brewery, and a day trip to the Netherland's largest theme park: Efteling. The walking tour was so helpful since I had no idea where I was going, and the picnic was the best because it had all of the essentials: beer, cheese, and other typical Dutch snacks. The Heineken brewery was fun as well since it was very interactive, and Efteling was my favorite thanks to the cheap and delicious theme park food (hot dogs, ice cream, and some sort of fried dough ball covered in powdered sugar) as well as really fun rides.



Welcome picnic

There were also a lot of activities conducted by ESN (International Student Organization) which were great ways to socialize with both semester students and exchange students. Fun fact:



Visiting the Heineken brewery

Semester in Amsterdam students are not the same as exchange students! The Semester in Amsterdam program is designed for students from universities that don't have an exchange partnership with VU Amsterdam, such as my school, as well as students who aren't eligible to participate in their school's exchange partnership and students who aren't currently enrolled in university but want to take courses at VU

Amsterdam to develop academically or professionally. So the program is a diverse mix of students of different ages, nationalities, and education levels. The thing that stuck out the most to me at these welcome events was how approachable and kind everyone was. Students were saying hello to each other, people would go out of their way to talk to other people, and everybody was genuinely trying to get to know one another. No matter where I was, in the elevator, at Il Caffè, or visiting the floor kitchens, people would say hello and strike up a conversation. This friendliness has made the transition of moving somewhere new on my own a lot easier and I thank everyone for that.

Aside from the organized events, I have done many other things since I've been here. I've travelled around the city exploring different bars and restaurants, most notably a bar called Waterkant, and a Mexican restaurant called Los Pilonos which I highly suggest. I went to Zandvoort aan Zee which is a beach that supplies chairs and umbrellas to the public for free (amazing), and swam in the North Sea. Also, I have had one too many hamburgers since they taste so much better here than in the U.S. Within the first week I also survived my first trips to the Jumbo supermarket even though I had no idea what some items were, to the Ikea which is so big I got lost in the showroom section, and on the tram/metro which can be scary if you forget to check in or out since you can get stuck behind the gates that let you out of the station. The last thing on my to-do list is to purchase a bike, which is intimidating because everyone seems like a professional bike rider here and I don't want to embarrass myself. Besides that I feel well adjusted and ready to start classes.

Overall, Amsterdam's first impression has been a great one. It has surpassed my expectations and has thankfully reinforced my decision to study here for a semester. I cannot wait for the many more foods, beers, and experiences to come.

-Kate Jahnsen
Semester in Amsterdam Student Blogger



Word of Welcome selfie during the Arrival and Introduction program