

Dutch culture

Google defines culture as “the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society.” Four months into living in Amsterdam, I feel as if I can finally say that I have become well versed in Dutch culture. The emergence into the Dutch “way of life” has been an eye opening experience, especially as an American, and has opened the door to some interesting challenges.

I want to start out by saying that I think the Dutch people are some of the friendliest I have met so far in my world travels. People have been nothing but nice to me when I have asked for directions, needed help buying public transportation card, or when I needed notes from a lecture that I missed. There have also been instances where someone struck up a random conversation with me on the tram and given me a bag of chocolates they didn't want (they were so good). That being said, in my opinion, one of the biggest components of the Dutch culture is their kindness. Not just the average kindness everybody has within them, but a more pronounced kindness to people who are different from them. There have been some challenges for me with handling this kindness though. For example, I first didn't know how to react to somebody randomly talking to me on public transportation. At first I found it annoying, but now I love it. My way of life on New York City public transportation has always been one with no interaction with strangers and headphones in my ears, so I wasn't used to conversing with strangers that intensely. I also feel challenged by the guilt I have because I don't speak Dutch, but thankfully nobody I have run into gets annoyed when they have to speak English... at least not to my face.

Another element of the Dutch culture that I have noticed is people's simplicity. Not simple as in that's so boring and simple, but simple as in people don't seem to be as materialistic. In America, everything has the tendency to be “bigger and better,” or things need fifty-something versions of itself. For example, here it seems to be that the architecture of homes is simpler, meaning people's homes contain the main things that people need. I haven't seen any flat screen TVs, or huge mansions where there is too much unnecessary space.

Everyday streetwear is simpler as well. A lot of people dress very well with simple clothing, which gives everyone a very modest, professional aesthetic. I've also realized that there aren't fifty flavors of Oreos or Kit-Kats here, unlike in the U.S. where you can get so many different flavors of Oreos like ice cream sundae, birthday cake, inside out, mint to the point where it's just excessive. This has been challenging for my poor bank account due to the fact that I definitely dressed weird and unprofessionally when I came here, which led me to spending a lot of money on buying clothes.

A final different cultural aspect I have noticed with the Dutch is their blunt and “straight to the point” attitudes. Even though I was warned about this, I found people's blunt attitudes to be intimidating and rude at first. I have had a variety of funny moments ranging from a man yelling “Americans and Donald Trump suck!” at me after hearing my accent, to somebody cutting me in line because “they didn't feel like waiting,” to classmates straight up telling me I was doing an assignment wrong and it was horrible (that one hurt). This was a challenge for me because I am a very sensitive



Poffertjes in the making, a traditional Dutch treat

person, but the bluntness has grown on me since I think it's people preaching honesty, which is the best policy. I would much rather have someone tell me my assignment sucks so I can fix it and do well, rather than lie to my face and me get a bad grade. I also want to note that I really enjoy the



Keukenhof flower gardens

“straight to the point” e-mails I have received here. I feel like a lot of non-Dutch people I know, including myself, fluff up their e-mails and start them out with sentences like, “Hey! How was your weekend? I hope you are doing well, but by the way...” and continue to go on to ask for what they need. I have been told that this makes people who do this look fake. The Dutch on the other hand get straight to the point and will say something like, “Hi Kate I need your assignment by tomorrow bye!” I have been thoroughly

working on my e-mailing skills so I don't waste time with sentence fillers that make me seem fake and annoying.

Overall, the three main cultural aspects I mentioned seemed to be the strongest to me, but the Dutch have so many other components to their culture as well. They are extremely open-minded and non-judgemental...gay marriage! They are very socially just and egalitarian...they have free chairs and umbrellas at the beach, and great health care! They are very humble, especially when it comes to money and wealth...there seems to be less hierarchal social and economic class systems! And most importantly, the Dutch hold the trophy for the largest bike culture I have ever seen...nicer bike paths than highways! I think it's safe to say that I am really going to miss my bike and the Dutch way of life when I head back to New York in a month.

-Kate Jahnsen
Semester in Amsterdam Student Blogger