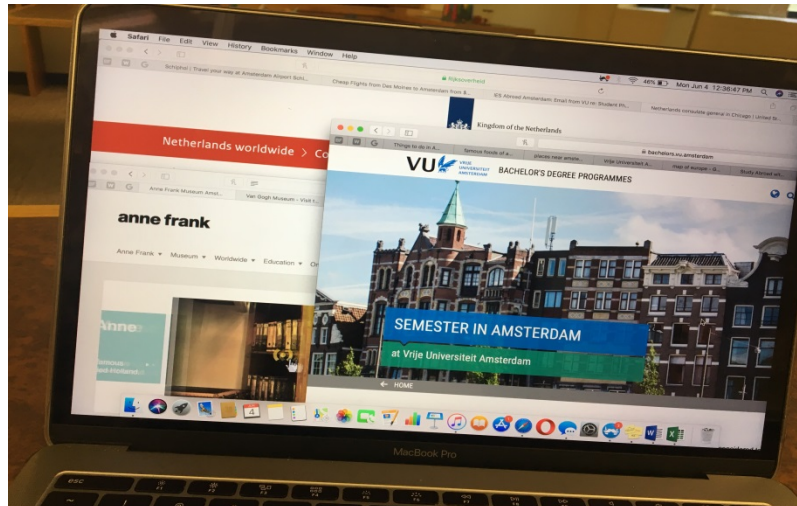


Pre-departure



As I looked around the potluck dinner party and listened to the chitter-chatter of my friends, thinking about my study abroad program at Amsterdam, I found myself engulfed in a delicious mix of emotions: apprehension, nostalgia, fear, excitement . . . The rush of finals week had finally ended, and summer had officially begun. Even though I had already been working on preparing documents and doing the necessary paperwork for studying abroad, between the hugs and the goodbyes, the reality of it hit me. I am an international student from Mumbai, India, studying at Grinnell College, in the United States. This was my first big move from one side of the globe to the other and has truly been a wonderful experience. When I received my acceptance into the Semester in Amsterdam program I was thrilled and bursting to begin my journey back across the ocean.

Preparing to live in another country is both exciting and intimidating, and I don't think I can ever feel fully prepared until I actually get there. It has mostly involved sitting behind the laptop screen for tens of hours with hundreds of tabs open: "best places to visit in Amsterdam," "famous tourist attractions," "average temperature during fall." But I have to admit that I spent most of this time behind the screen staring at pictures of food that I know I will soon be able to eat (!). I have also been following accounts on social media which give me a glimpse of life in Amsterdam. These random snippets of videos and posts have made me realize the differences in everyday living habits and cultural norms (and some nuanced similarities) between what I have grown up with in India, experienced as a student in America, and heard about in Amsterdam. In order to make sure I enjoy this cultural shift to the truest sense, I am eager to start learning Dutch and plan to continue studying it when I get to Amsterdam. I also am really looking forward to studying in a bigger classroom setting in a huge university; I have only ever studied in small, twenty-people classrooms.

While I am excited to stuff myself with these scrumptious experiences, I am also apprehensive. Living and moving to a big city, of which I only know about virtually, is a big and a scary decision to make. I have been living in one place for two years now and have already discovered who and what I am when I am here. Leaving behind my comfort zone, being away from my family and friends who have become family, as well as other familiar faces is exhilarating. The little girl in me is giddy with excitement yet nervous about something as simple as being able to make friends. I know that there will definitely be a shift in culture, and it might or might not be an easy adjustment, but it will still take time.

However, despite having this conflicting mess of emotions, I look forward to turning Amsterdam into home and making memories; I believe and am excited to discover that Amsterdam and all the different flavours it has to offer will be just like a fulfilling potluck.