

Arrival and First Impressions

These are snippets of things I thought about while I was on-the-go in and around Amsterdam:



I sat on my still and very delayed flight from Munich to Amsterdam, sending out panic-filled emails and frantically explaining my situation to the reluctant man sitting next to me. The air buzzed with languages I did not understand, and my untrained ear strained to hear the difference between Dutch and German.

I urgently fast-walked back to my apartment; jet lag had affected both my sleep timetable and my poop timetable. It had been a week and a half, and I was still trying to figure Amsterdam out. Coming from a place like India where people are indirect, talk a lot, there is a hierarchical structure in academic and work settings and cars drive on the left side of the road, there were obvious differences that stuck out to me. However, since I have lived by the water my entire life, the canals, the rain, the architecture and the fact that 'z' is pronounced 'zedd' and not 'zee' made me feel oddly at home. Despite these differences and similarities, Amsterdam is like no other place I have ever been to. I immediately fell in love with the accepting culture, the art around every city corner, the rich history presented so well in the museums and just how much the Dutch love their bikes.

I stepped into the tram and very carefully scanned my OV chip card. I then found a spot against the walls of the tram from where I could stand without falling on my face, and people watch without looking like I was people watching. I had only one thought in my brain: do not forget to swipe out; I did NOT want to be charged 4 euros again. I wondered if, at some point of living here, this would become instinctive. This part of adapting to the small, seemingly unimportant details of a place is my favorite part of discovering a new city. The way the pedestrians walk on the road, the way the taps turn slightly differently, the way the doors are heavier, and the stairs are smaller than what you are used to, the way you can only see the top of your head on the high mirrors, how fries are served with mayonnaise and not ketchup... The tram stopped and the first three letters of the name of the station matched the first three letters on my navigation system. I triumphantly made a beeline to the door and hopped out, feeling extremely satisfied and my brain still occupied with all the minute observations only to realize as the doors shut tight that I had forgotten to swipe out. Again.

As told to us in the several pub quizzes and informative presentations, I, still in the tourist-resident limbo, learnt that Holland and the Netherlands are two different things. I also learnt that Amsterdam has people from around 180 nationalities. This brought up interesting questions about 'diversity' as I sat on a bus from Makkum to Amsterdam, blasting Bollywood music on my headphones and thinking about how I could scream in Hindi and not one of the 100 people around me would understand what I just said.

