

Dutch Culture



It is very hard to sum up a vibrant and dynamic culture like the Dutch culture in just a few words; especially not when I have only had glimpses of it through exposure in this limited time-period. But I am still going to try. These are my observations:

The first thing I heard about the Dutch people when I came here was the 'Dutch honesty'. I heard that the Dutch are blunt and direct. And in my few months here, I have come to learn that this is the truth. There have been so many instances where people have not been afraid of calling someone out or expressing what they think, even if it makes someone else uncomfortable. At first, I was a little afraid about fitting in with this part of the culture, but over time I have grown to like and appreciate it. But despite this un-afraid-ness to confront, I get the feeling the people here live and let live. I have not heard anyone snicker, or comment about someone else, they go about their days minding their own business. And I have grown to love this part of the culture which is open-minded and non-judgmental.

Another thing I have noticed is that the Dutch are very helpful. The first time I went grocery shopping in Amsterdam, I had no idea what I was doing, everything was in Dutch and my Wi-Fi wasn't working so I couldn't translate. That is when a random person also shopping there came up to a very lost-looking me and helped me buy what I needed. This small incident opened me up to the place and made me feel welcomed and accepted into this city.

Further, the people here are very social. People, strangers and friends alike, are always ready to stop and have a quick chat. When I walk past bars and restaurants, on any day, they are always filled with crowds of people, just relaxing and talking to one-another. I have also noticed that people don't use their phones here as much. For example, when I am on the train, people either talk to each other or just listen to music. But people are rarely scrolling through some random social media site. Which I find surprising and wish to be able to do some day.

But anyway, this brings me to my next observation. The usual environment here is pretty laid back and relaxed. Being on time is not considered a very big deal, trains frequently run a few minutes late, if you go to a café or a restaurant, you can be there for hours and they don't try to kick you out (speaking of cafes, my only complaint is that while the coffee is amazing, the sizes are too small!)... 24-7 libraries with students cramming till all hours also isn't a thing here. There is a refreshing breeze of people being motivated, but without the fast-paced buzz of sometimes unnecessary competitiveness.



A big part of a place's culture is their food. Since I am vegetarian, I have not been able to eat much of the Dutch food except the desserts: which are AMAZING! From poffertjes to stroopwafels to oliebollen... and of course, I have to give a special mention to the Dutch Belgian fries-with-mayonnaise. Apart from this, the grocery stores here always have organic food and the pre-made food aisle stalked with salads. Between that and the cycling, the Dutch are very healthy people.

The Dutch language is a very singy-songy language with many harsh words, which sounds different across the Netherlands. A language-related observation I made is that almost everyone here speaks English and Dutch, and the bilingualism of this place makes me very happy and feel at home.

Here is an interesting conversation I had with someone who is Dutch: I asked them if they planned on living, working and studying in the Netherlands their entire life, why did they learn English? And why did everyone, irrespective of who they are also know English? He said that yes, English was a way to be able to talk with the rest of the world. But he also said the reason why he did it is to consume art. Since there are such few people who speak Dutch, there are fewer Dutch songs and movies. I have never heard of a better reason to learn more languages.



And finally, while I do acknowledge the fact that all the 'isms' aren't that prevalent here, Dutch culture is not without its faults. Traditions like 'Zwarte Piet' catch me by surprise as something that is accepted and cherished in a progressive culture like such. The presence is islamophobia is also present in Dutch society and politics. And although it is not seen because Netherlands has a progressive façade, this is something which I wish more people acknowledged, so it can be changed.

I also want to recognize the fact that Amsterdam is different from the rest of Netherlands. This might not be 'Dutch' culture, I would prefer to call this 'Amsterdam' culture.