Hi again!

I am back to talk to you guys a little bit about cross-cultural adjustment and what you can all expect ahead of living in a whole new culture!

First, I should mention that my experience with cultural adjustment is probably a little different than yours will be. Although I have lived in the United States for ten years, I was actually born and raised in Poland. Therefore, coming here, I was not quite as scared of “culture shock” and how well I would adjust to European life. After all, living in Europe was not really all that new to me.

That being said, though, the Netherlands is still a very different place from any other that I have lived in before, and it has still taken some adjustments to get used to life here!

For me, the hardest part has probably been a big shift in transportation. Back in the United States, I drive pretty much everywhere, as the distances between home, school, and grocery stores are much larger, and the public transportation is quite different from that of Europe. Therefore, getting used to taking the metro or tram here, and especially to biking essentially all over Amsterdam has been a challenge! (Mostly for my calves, but hey, at least I am getting fit.)

Furthermore, I have noticed many little mannerisms that are very different here than back home. In the United States, it is a very commonly expected habit to smile at strangers on the street and say “Hi” or “How are you?” to nearly everyone you pass by. However, here, actions like these are reserved for people you know. Smiling politely at a stranger biking by will likely get you some weird looks (I am speaking from personal experience).

There are also little things that I have had to get used to which I did not expect beforehand. For example, in Amsterdam, there are no big supermarkets where you can buy everything you need in one place (looking at you, Target!). Here, when I run errands, I frequently have to go to several stores at once – Hema for stationary, Etos for toiletries, and Albert Heijn for groceries. While I have gotten used to this by now, at the beginning, it seemed very inconvenient to me – especially when I needed a whole bunch of things and only had the time to go to one store.

Despite some small inconveniences like these, I have also noticed many more positive cultural differences. For example, relationships between student and teacher are quite different in the Netherlands. I have gotten very used to calling my professors by their first names and having personal conversations over coffee during class breaks. This more informal school attitude has been a very nice change, as it has allowed for me to not only feel less pressure in the academic environment, but also to form better relationships with my teachers. Additionally, I have noticed that the Netherlands has a very balanced culture – especially considering the balance between work and play. While at the appropriate times it is expected to be serious, formal, and hardworking, there is also a great emphasis on fun, conviviality, and enjoyment of life. This has made the cross-cultural adjustment very smooth and a lot less stressful than one might expect!

Although moving to Amsterdam has been a big cultural change, even for someone that has experience living in Europe, I can assure you that it is very doable and very much worth it! Ahead of your own time abroad, I suggest ditching the idea of “culture shock” and focusing instead on
“culture surprise.” While you will surely come across many changes here, I can promise that every new experience will be positive in one way or another, as it will encourage you to keep learning and living in an amazing, new culture! There is nothing to worry about – I pinky swear.

Until next time,

Julia :)

P.S. Here is another huge cross-cultural adjustment you will come across here – fries with mayonnaise – and let me tell you, it is not as hard to get used to them as you might think…Also, views like this one of the canals make every little cultural adjustment worth it!