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Ask Molly: being a newbie to the Netherlands and how to cope

AUGUST 31, 2013 BY [THE UNDERGROUND THE HAGUE](#)

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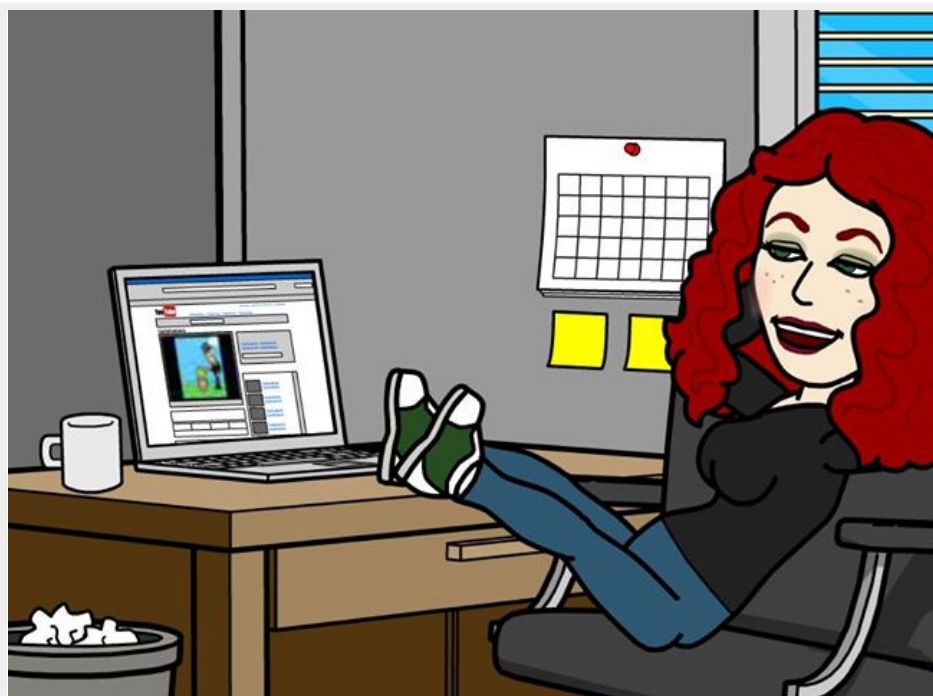
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I like to joke that there are only two things I'm very good at in life; baking chocolate chip cookies and telling people what to do. While many problems are solved by making and eating cookies, more can be solved by taking my advice.

This month it's all about being a newbie to the Netherlands and how to cope.

I've just moved to the Netherlands to study and I'm experiencing a lot of culture shock. How do I acclimate?

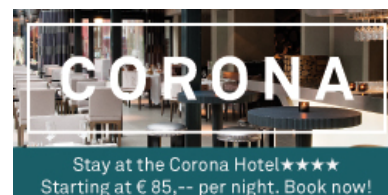
Moving abroad is always challenging and can be made worse by friction with the local culture. Whenever I move, I always try to locate places that sell my favorite things. Yes, Lucky Charms might cost €7 a box at Kelly's, but in a fit of homesickness, it can be worth it.

Then focus on the things you enjoy about the Netherlands. As an American, I'm not used to biking being such a pleasant (read: not deadly) experience. I discovered I really like to bike and now take a lot of bike trips. Also, stroopwafels are pretty awesome. Try out new foods, new beers, new music and embrace the things you enjoy.

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Finding common ground can also help. Do you play soccer (also known as football)? Join a local league. Enjoy taking photos? Find a photography group. You can still do all the things you enjoy, you just might have to pick up a few Dutch phrases to do it.

I've never lived outside the town I grew up in and now I'm here for university. There are so many people from different cultures. How do I interact with them?

You're not alone. Multicultural communication can be such a challenge that companies often hire experts to teach their employees how to talk to each other. Universities offer courses on the topic.

First, give people the benefit of the doubt. What might be considered rude in your culture, may not be in theirs. Patience and humor will go a long way to creating pleasant relationships.

Read up on inter and multicultural communication. There are lots and lots of resources out there on the subject. Your university might also offer workshops and might also be able to provide you with other material.

Finally, don't overthink it. The more you travel, the more you realize that people are more or less the same everywhere.

I don't know how to make friends with the Dutch. Any advice?

I hear the complaint that the Dutch aren't very friendly, that you can't be friends with them, etc. And certainly if you're working or studying in an international environment, meeting the locals can be a challenge. So you must go to where the natives are.

Join activities or clubs, which cater to internationals and the Dutch. Or just join Dutch groups. English is so widely spoken that it isn't hard to participate. Go to bars and cafes that don't cater to the international crowd.

If nothing else works, I suppose you could also try kidnapping.

Need advice?

Write to Molly at molly@theunderground.nl

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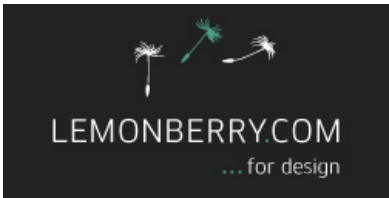
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