

## Letters from Amsterdam - Brenda Olivier

I landed at Schipol on the morning of the 1st September 2004 bright eyed and bushy tailed hardly being able to contain the excitement of being in a new country. I breezed through baggage collection and customs bracing myself for the cold weather awaiting me. To my surprise the weather was quite pleasant, I made this remark to the person from the lab who came to collect me, they smiled and responded "just wait it will get worse." It did! Yes, to answer the most frequently asked question, the weather is colder than what any good old South African is used to and the space is limited but Amsterdam is a great place to be!

To answer the second most frequently asked question - yes it is possible to understand Dutch if you speak Afrikaans and the same goes for the reverse. At numerous occasions I have had requests to speak Afrikaans, or as they refer to it over there as "Zuid Afrikaans", followed by delighted bursts of laughter and the acknowledgement that about 80% of what I had just said was indeed understandable.

Over the past five months I have settled in nicely and established my daily routine of cycling to work and back like most other Dutch Citizens. At first it seemed a bit strange, all the traffic seemed to be coming from the wrong direction and I kept wanting to climb into the drivers seat, thinking it was the passenger's side. Luckily the process of adaptation in a foreign country is a quick one.

On the work front, the research currently being conducted at the Free University of Amsterdam in the field of gastroenterology is of exceptionally high standard and quality. I am honored to have had the opportunity to experience it and learn from the best. Everyone whom I have come in contact with during my stay have been friendly, helpful and more than accommodating. I was welcomed into the laboratory with open arms and have enjoyed every moment since my arrival. I would strongly recommend the experience to anyone in the field who is considering going over!

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