Journey To Amsterdam!

Twenty-seven Wayne County Community College District Study Abroad students spent a week in Amsterdam studying the arts, language, history and culture, and also smelling the fragrance of the tulips.

By David C. Buttry

The Kingdom of the Netherlands also known as Holland is tucked in the middle of Europe. Not only is it situated below sea level, it is also a country of countless canals and dikes and where bicycling is the most used method for transportation. However, this tiny country, the size of New Jersey, is rich in so many ways. It is a country where cheese, tomatoes and cucumbers are king and considered to be an appetizer before any meal.

While famous for its tulips, the Netherlands is also known for the liberalism that is respected throughout Europe. Most recently, 27 students from WCCCD spent a week in Amsterdam on a study abroad trip in partnership with Amsterdam University College. Their visit was well rewarded with lectures by Professor Jonathan Gill, a historian and professor of humanities. Professor Gill, author of “Harlem: The Four Hundred Year History from Dutch Village to Capital of Black America,” shared light on why the Dutch are fond of their open and liberal society and talked about the Dutch culture.

Not only did the students attend classes at Amsterdam University College; but they also took a boat tour on the canals and visited the Keukenhof Flower Fields to see the beauty of the tulips. The students also visited a Dutch wooden shoe factory to see how the “clogs” are made; a cheese factory, and toured The Hague; the seat of the Dutch government.

Each student took away a piece of the Dutch culture and embraced its tolerance to diversity. Jahura Hobby said the country gave her a window to the world. Although she is not cyclist at home in Michigan, she was able to try the bicycling culture when she and a group of friends rented a few to try them out. “We did exactly what the locals would do – ride a bike. So we rented bikes and this turned out to be one of the best decisions of the trip for me because I felt I really got to see what Amsterdam was all about,” she said. “When I am back home, I plan to dust off the bike in the basement and take it for a spin.”

Lorraine Reed was fascinated by the support the Dutch government gives to local artists and to students to encourage them to continue their studies. “I think their family system is great; at least from the lectures. Professor Gill shared with the class that a woman, who is a mother is entitled to a year off with pay and no loss of job after the delivery of the baby. She can take six months and the father can also take six months,” said Reed.

She continued, “Best of all, artists are supported by the government, and they receive subsidized housing and living costs. Can you imagine, children starting school at the age of four and receiving eight years of schooling and about 13 years of age they take a test to determine what type of education they will receive? It may be college or some type of trade
school. College tuition, according to Professor Gill, is $3,000 a year. College students are also paid; they receive free transportation, housing and food allowances. Education and arts are valued in the Netherlands.”

Tonia Gladney was in awe when it came to the food and the restaurants. In Amsterdam, there were many fast food restaurants here and there side-by-side with other ethnic restaurants – Thai, Chinese, etc. One thing that shocked me was the fact that, many if the restaurants did not cater to Dutch food. I wish that I would have been able to experience the taste of authentic Dutch food.”

Deborah Mathias, a nursing student was grateful for the trip. “I am about ready to enter in a career that I’ve been working so hard for. In this line of work, I will be encountering different cultures, and the visit to Amsterdam has allowed me to come across different customs outside of my normal perspective.”

While the trip was to a land that is below sea level, the students gained an understanding of the culture that raised their appreciation of that notion to new heights.

“I came back as a different person. I learned a lot from this trip and I could say that I am really grateful that I had the opportunity to go study abroad,” said Murmennah Quayoum.