



Clockwise: Monument to Czar Peter of Russia in Zaandam, Netherlands; Chocolate Advertisement on building in Bern, Switzerland; Canada Week at Tourism Office in Bern Switzerland

MELCHERS TRAVELS

By Phil Melchers

Over these past few months, I've come to realize a strange thing about the Dutch language. It can sound like English without sounding familiar. Often while wandering the streets, I'll hear something recognizable only to be cut-off by the Dutch "g," a guttural sound represented phonetically by "kh." For example, the Dutch word for good morning, goedemorgen, seems similar when spelled but when pronounced, khoo-d-mor-khen, is quite different. If I was a smart traveler, I would have come to the Netherlands already versed in basic Dutch. Unfortunately I'm not and so over these past few months I've had to learn to adapt to a world which speaks a language other than my own.

Though English is widely present in Amsterdam, it should not always be expected. A claim of knowing English is not a claim of having fluency, so when traveling I've found it effective to slow down during conversation. As a naturally quick speaker, I've had many questions returned with, "I'm sorry, I don't understand," or more cheekily, an imitating response of, "bluebe bluebe blue?" The trick is to be polite, while also speaking simply and clearly. I've found it important to note that Dutch people don't have to speak English, they do so as a favour, a kindness; I consider it a welcoming act.

Unfortunately, not all information required comes from asking. Sometimes it's required that I read. To combat this issue I've developed a mixture of speculation and trial by fire. A strategy that is more awkward than it is effective. For example, while at the gym I saw two saunas, both of which were unmarked. Between each door was a set of instructions that I couldn't understand. Being given a 50/50 chance I chose the forward sauna. After a few minutes two women walked in and disrobed. Immediately I become embarrassed, apologizing profusely as I re-wrapped my towel. To my surprise they started to laugh before informing me that the saunas were unisex. This was my most embarrassing experience to date, but sometimes the quickest lessons are the harshest.

In currently living in the Netherlands, my most prominent qualms with language may be with the Dutch. Though Dutch is not the only language I've encountered. For example, in having visited Switzerland, I've also been exposed to German, Italian and French, which I do have some understanding of. Luckily, my saving grace has always been in the ability to make friends with those who speak other languages, a more effective strategy than the previously mentioned educated guesswork. Though I am far from home, a foreigner, who struggles to speak any tongue other than

his own, I've found that my survivability has always been dependent of the benevolence of these friends. Differences in language will always be a struggle, yet I recognize too, that in each language there is something new to be discovered. It is another chance to learn, to experience another piece of my own adventure. [LH](#)

EDITOR'S NOTE: Phil Melchers is one of our freelance writers, and has written for Living Here since our inaugural publication in Nov 2013. Phil lives in Lyn, On and has decided as a twenty something young man to do what some of us wish we could have done; take a year out of our lives and explore the world. In this case he is in Europe where he hopes to work, travel and connect with his family's roots in The Netherlands. In our March/April issue Phil started off his journey and gave us some of his initial impressions of his trip. We will continue to have Phil write about his experiences through his eyes in upcoming issues throughout 2015. To read about Phil's first experience go to our website www.livingherebrockville.weebly.com and find our March/April 2015 issue.