

## **Emma Lindsay, United Kingdom ('03)**

### **Arriving in the Netherlands**

The Netherlands' international airport is Schiphol, which is situated about 10km southwest of Amsterdam. Trains to The Hague run twice an hour and take 30 minutes. For European flights, there is also Rotterdam airport, which is closer to The Hague but less well connected than Schiphol.

I moved to The Hague from Geneva in late August. Given my many belongings, driving was by far the best option. Having traveled through Switzerland, France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and The Netherlands, I can confirm that highway connections to the surrounding parts of Europe are extensive.

Once in the Netherlands, the Court arranges identification cards for clerks from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The cards allow access to Schengen Agreement areas without a visa. EU passport holders do not need them, although we are issued with them, but they allow those from elsewhere to travel freely in Europe, which is very useful given the cheap flights and train tickets to various destinations close enough to make a weekend trip worthwhile.

It is important to arrange health insurance. NYU does offer it to clerks as part of the benefits package, but the plan seems far more suited to those living and working in the US. Of the NYU clerks I know (past and present), none has taken it. Personally, I have a policy with an English insurance company. Several other clerks have policies with STA.

### **Living in The Hague**

Once safely in The Hague, finding somewhere to live is the top priority, unless you have made arrangements beforehand. Several of this year's clerks rented the apartments of our predecessors, which seems to me to be the quickest and easiest way of securing accommodation. It is also something that can be organized in advance and from abroad. Otherwise, I would not recommend trying to find a place before you arrive in The Hague, as I think it is important to be able to see in person the apartment and the area in which it is located. I found that Dutch estate agents often had a very different idea to me of what was desirable, e.g. living on or close to the beach – lovely on a good day in summer but not for several winter months, when the North Sea pounds the shore and the icy wind stirs up sandstorms.

I was lucky enough to be able to stay with a friend for a week or so when I arrived. That seems to be about the average time it takes to find an apartment that you are happy with. Mine was on the ICTY list, which is definitely worth getting hold of if you have any contacts there (if not, the current clerks will almost certainly be able to get it for you). I rent privately so did not have to pay the agent's commission (one month's rent), and my utilities (water, gas, electricity – even cable television) are included in my monthly rent. My one-bedroom apartment is in the city centre (Centrum – Archipel is another area I

would recommend considering). It is fully furnished. I should probably mention here that in The Hague “semi-furnished” generally means that carpets and light fittings are provided. This is very different to how it is understood where I am from and worth watching out for unless you are prepared to invest in a fridge, washing machine, bed, etc. Some people do take unfurnished places and make a pilgrimage to Ikea to get the basics. Alternatively, it is sometimes possible to buy someone else’s furniture, e.g. if you take over the previously unfurnished apartment in which they have been living and for which they bought furniture.

When it comes to getting around, The Netherlands is very easy to travel in. Almost everyone has a bike. It is a really good way to get around as dedicated cycle paths link most places in the Netherlands and the terrain is incredibly flat. One thing to remember is that no matter what the value of your bike (there are lots of cheap second-hand ones available), make sure you lock it up securely to an immovable object; most locals and in-the-know ex-pats seem to use two locks, which are generally worth more than the bike itself. For longer distances and for those without bikes, trams and buses in The Hague are excellent, as is the national rail network. For less than 50 euros, it is possible to buy a card that entitles you and anyone traveling with you to a 40% discount on the price of train tickets. Get one of these.

All the clerks open a Dutch bank account, as you need one to get a contract for the internet and to pay phone bills by direct debit. Most people at the Court bank with ABN Amro because the nearest branch is just around the corner from the Peace Palace. One thing worth noting is that checks are not used in The Netherlands so it takes an awfully long time for banks to process foreign checks. By far and away the best thing to do to get money into your account is to have the monthly stipend from NYU automatically transferred to a US bank account and then send it to your Dutch account by international money transfer. While on the subject of finances, I should add that I have found the cost of living in The Hague to be less than many other European cities and there is certainly a lot less to spend your money on than in New York. However, the weakening of the dollar against the euro has hit many of this year’s clerks hard.

As regards food, the Dutch are rightly proud of their cheese, which has far more variety than the plasticky Gouda and Edam that are generally exported. Milk is surprisingly popular and consumed in vast quantities by adults and children alike. Traditional main course Dutch fare gets a bit heavy and meaty, but thanks to the sizeable Indonesian, Chinese, Surinamese, Turkish and Italian communities there are plenty of alternatives. Vegetarians are not terribly well catered for, but most restaurants will have at least one meat-free dish. Beer is the staple drink, served with a head of froth so big that it would be utterly unacceptable in an English pub. Tipping is not compulsory in the Netherlands, but rounding up the bill is always appreciated in taxis, restaurants and pubs with table or pavement service.

The locals are friendly and speak excellent English. It is perfectly possible to get by with no Dutch at all, as I do. Culturally, there is a lively contrast between pragmatic liberalism and the stiffness of a culture founded on Calvinist principles.

## **Clerking at the Court**

I assist President Shi (China) and Judge Kooijmans (The Netherlands) with various aspects of the judicial process. Four of this year's clerks work for two judges; the remaining six work for one. We work in both English and French – the official languages of the Court. It is definitely an advantage to have a good knowledge of French; I have found that listening and reading skills are more important than speaking and writing.

Clerkship duties include:

- Legal research on various issues in Public International Law raised by cases brought before the Court;
- Drafting of memoranda of law and briefing notes;
- Analysis of written and oral pleadings and the jurisprudence of the Court;
- Preparation of case files;
- Attendance at hearings and oral argument;
- Assistance with speeches and background research for law review articles relating to the International Court of Justice.

Nearly three months into my nine-month term, I feel that I have already gained an immense insight into the peaceful settlement of international disputes. I am certain that the opportunity to view the international justice system from the inside at the beginning of my career will prove invaluable.

Among the clerkship's benefits, I would include refining analytical, research, writing, organizational and interpersonal skills; exposure to a breadth of substantive and procedural public international law; engaging in a strong, supportive mentoring relationship with judges; and gaining a unique perspective on how international judges think and the way the International Court of Justice operates.