

Interview with Duygu Kıyak

Internship with Lexence in Amsterdam

31 July – 8 Oct 2005

On the 14th of December 2005, I met with Duygu to ask her about her experiences in the Netherlands. Duygu is now a 3rd year Law student at Galatasaray University in Istanbul and did a 2 months internship at a Law Office in Amsterdam last summer.

Why did you decide to do an internship in the Netherlands?

I had a lot of Dutch friends here in Istanbul and I liked them very much so I thought that the Netherlands would be a nice country to get some international working experience in order to broaden my view and to increase my ability to work in an international environment. Also since English is very commonly spoken in the Netherlands, I thought that it would be a good chance for me to improve my English in the legal field.

How did you first feel when you came to the Netherlands? Did you know any people living there before you went?

The company I worked at was located in Amsterdam and I didn't know anyone there. I did know some people in Leiden en Groningen, but not in Amsterdam.

During the second month of my stay however, a friend came from Turkey to do her exchange in the Netherlands.

When I first arrived I had no place to stay. I stayed in hotels and hostels. Then by chance a colleague's girlfriend decided to rent out her apartment in the Java Island district. So I decided to take it.

Can you tell a bit about what you did within the Law office? And whether or not you faced any difficulties?

One of my tasks was to compare Turkish corporate law to Dutch corporate law. Since I only found one book about Dutch corporate law that was written in English, it was quite difficult for me to do find information on this issue. To solve this problem we decided that I would focus on the Turkish corporate law and that another Dutch intern would do research on Dutch corporate law.

I also did some research on lease agreements in France, the UK and Belgium, because some of the lawyers had to write an article about this topic.

Sometimes I had the feeling however that I couldn't do too much because of the differences in law that exist between different countries. Another thing that made my work a bit more difficult is that although everyone in the company knew English, they would still speak Dutch amongst each other.

How about your life outside work?

At first it was a bit boring for me since I didn't know any place and I didn't have any friends. Afterwards it was a lot better because my friends came over and my friend who did her exchange in Holland had a lot of friends there. We would go to exchange reunions and there were a lot of foreigners there. So that's how I finally got to know people.

I found that Dutch people are more distant as compared to Turkish people. For example; in Turkey if people see that you are a foreigner and you don't have any friends, they will invite you to parties and introduce you to their friends. In Holland however everyone is very individualistic and everyone takes care of themselves. So for me it was very hard to socialize with other people even though I am a social person.

Did you find any other general differences related to culture or habits?

Yes. I also think that Dutch people are quite strict ... in every sense. To give a small example; in Holland a bus would not stop if there is no bus stop, even if you run behind the bus. And in stores, around closing time, it happened to me that the employees would just tell me that they are going to close and that you should get out. That was very strange for me.

Also Dutch people can be stubborn at times. I found it impossible to change someone's view once he had made up his mind.

And also I felt that people are rather stress-free as compared to Turkish people. Maybe this is because they have a better life style with longer vacations, and because less people are living in a small space.

Do you see yourself working and/or living in the Netherlands in the future?

I don't think so. Well ... I might, I like the place. But every time I go out of Turkey, I want to come back. I like living in Istanbul. But for a short period of time, maybe for one or two years, I could work abroad. And then I might choose the Netherlands again because it is a safe place and people are friendly.

Interview by Yasmin Youssef
