

Snapshots of a city: Leiden through the eyes of an IIAS Fellow

This is a city built on wool and words: the old Brill publishing house still stands grand on Oude Rijn.

'There's no aristocracy in the Netherlands' some say, although the façades of the canal houses suggest a different story – their step gables rising up in Golden Age glory.



Graves bear witness to long histories of colonialism: Born in Paramaribo, Died in Leiden. A statue to the Pilgrim Fathers commemorates the beginning of their bloody journey – sailing forth from just south of the illustrious Rapenburg.



Stories of entanglement are everywhere: There's something of Cordoba in Morsport,ⁱ a touch of Ottoman on the Stadhuis clocktower.ⁱⁱ

Staircases can be impossibly steep and the supermarkets are full of pre-sliced cheese. If chocolate sprinkles aren't your thing,ⁱⁱⁱ there's a variety of *stroopwafels*^{iv} to please every palate.

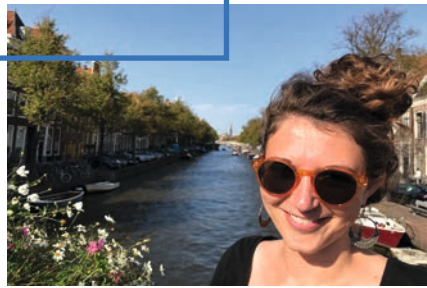
Living rooms are street-side and curtain-less, architectural legacies of a Calvinist ethic: 'We have nothing to hide'.

The poetry of Lorca, Adonis and Langston Hughes adorn the walls. The Lipsius Building, an homage to 90s brutalism, divides opinion – as do the modernist turrets of the University Library.

The Burcht rises to a proud 9 metres above sea level. A beer can easily be 9%.

The frat boys ooze entitlement, waltzing through the city in packs, or lazing around in makeshift swimming pools, perfectly placed for preening in front of ageing student mansions.

Their house parties certainly produce ambivalent relations with sleeping neighbours, but I've never heard a woman being catcalled on Leiden's streets.



Above: Author Zoë Goodman

Saturday market before Covid would heave with customers, jostling for cabbages, houmous and deep-fried fish. Some shops have closed in the midst of the pandemic, but Het Klaverblad has been open since 1769 – Marion's customers queue for coffee and a dose of her charm.

Black Lives Matter posters hang in windows, but people of colour are few and far between; it can be hard to decipher where anyone working class might live.

The ravioli at Bocconi will soothe any a lost soul, as will the jackfruit at Toko Bunga Mas. Pilgrimages to Saravanaa Bhavan are a must for those with a desire for *dosa*.^v

The vintage shops will produce holes in your wallet, and the shop assistants won't hesitate to tell you exactly what they think: 'That dress is not for you'.

Streets can feel deserted on a Saturday night, until you find the square in front of Café de Uyl – perfect for a *biertje*,^{vi} under the stained glass of Hooglandse Kerk.

The loquacious locals at Jantje will enfold you easily into their drunken chat, while the cows peer down if you get to De Bonte Koe.

Saint Peter's red keys are hard to lose, and that winter wind lays bare the logic of windmills.

Willows weep gently at the shores of the Singel, and the evening light twinkles through the plane trees at Plantsoen.

7pm at the canal is the hour of flight: a pandemonium of parrots sweeps across the sky taunting you with freedom. The ducks and coots glide along with paddleboards and kayaks – a boat is the ultimate summer accessory.

The many pathways of Polderpark Cronesteyn are good for getting lost in – a trail might lead to the forest of wild garlic, or in the direction of the odd lone saxophonist.

16th century rebellions produce wild annual parties – although October 3rd of this year, will be a very different story...^{vii} even if there's still barely a face mask in sight.

The bridges bloom with hanging baskets, laden with petunias, fuchsia and white. Pavements are for parking bikes – pedestrians are an afterthought in this two-wheeled town.

IIAS Fellowship possibilities and requirements



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The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, the Netherlands, invites outstanding researchers to apply for an IIAS fellowship to work on a relevant piece of research in the social sciences and humanities.



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When applying for an IIAS Fellowship, you have the option of simultaneously submitting an application for an additional two months of research at the Collège d'études mondiales of the Fondation Maison des sciences de l'homme (CEM-FMSH), in Paris, France, immediately after your stay in Leiden.

The next application deadline is 1 March 2021.



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Information and application forms: www.iias.asia/fellowships



Seagulls encircle the canal-side cafés, ever-ready to steal a *bitterbal*^{viii} or a delicate slither of herring.

The younger seagulls sulk on street corners like nonchalant adolescents, bored with the mundanity of their parents demands.

An albino peacock rules the roost at Leidse Hout, an old heron sits majestic on his regular streetlight perch.

And at a little-known 'castle' along Hogewoerd,^{ix} rests a balcony just made for plotting, cloud-spotting and pleasure.



Zoë Goodman is an urban anthropologist, and fond of ethnographic poems as a means of capturing city life. When not strolling through the streets of Leiden, her research focuses on the Kenyan port city of Mombasa. She explores the way Muslims of South Asian descent (Muslim Kenyan Asians) have shaped urbanity and piety at the Kenyan coast, and how these are in turn being affected by pervasive security discourses. Zoë is a Research Fellow at IIAS and a Research Associate in the Anthropology department at SOAS, University of London. www.iias.asia/profile/zoe-goodman

Notes

- i Morsport is Leiden's western gate.
- ii Stadhuis refers to the Leiden City Hall.
- iii Known as *hagelslag* in Dutch, chocolate sprinkles are commonly eaten on bread for breakfast or as a snack.
- iv *Stroopwafels* are wafer cookies with a caramel filling.
- v A *dosa* resembles a large crepe, and is made from fermented rice and dhal batter. The dish has origins in South India and is eaten with curries and chutneys.
- vi *Biertje* is a small beer.
- vii The city-wide festival on 3 October celebrates the end of the Spanish siege of Leiden in 1572.
- viii *Bitterballen* (pl.) are ball-shaped snacks, filled with beef and a creamy roux that is then battered and deep-fried.
- ix IIAS Fellows often live in a building along this street.