

Livin' the American life in Boston

Hey everyone! My first American experience was being stuck at US border patrol, which, to put it lightly, isn't very recommendable. So the first tip, make sure that you don't get into a global US visa system shutdown, and that you don't have to go to Brussels to get your visa the day before your flight :) After this small setback, the US started to amaze me more and more. Everything from the movies is true! This country is the country of big, bigger, biggest, extreme, and.. it's just like, you know, like totally a-ma-zing! Walking around in downtown Boston makes even an "extremely tall" guy (according to American standards...) feel small. Biking on the big roads among the (big) cars can be quite exciting sometimes, though I still felt way less scared to die than when biking in Utrecht during rush hour.



Boston city skyline with the river Charles

I went to the US to perform an 8-month internship in the lab of Angela Koehler at the Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research at MIT. My project involved developing and characterizing two potential c-Myc inhibitors. c-Myc is a protein of which the activity is deregulated in different ways in a lot of cancers. Finding an inhibitor for c-Myc is a very challenging job, yet given the high prevalence of deregulations in this single protein it would be a very valuable tool and potential lead compound for new cancer therapies. Although I didn't have enough time to finish my project in the end, I did get nice results and was getting close to publication and it is now being continued by other lab members. The publication made it quite busy from time to time, but enjoying the fun and "gezelligheid" in the lab is what also made it super nice: they even had a weekly "vrijdagmiddag-borrel"! It took me a while to get in, but I definitely don't regret spending the effort. The people of our research group were not only among the best researchers in the world, and I definitely noticed from the very beginning that the level of science at MIT is very high, but above that we had a lot of fun, jokes, sports, and drinks together.

There are some other remarkable things about Boston for a Dutch person. When I arrived in summer, it was extremely sunny and 30-35°C almost every day, yet in winter... I have experienced snowstorms way worse than I ever had in my life and temperatures far below zero: my record was -26°C, with a wind-chill that made it feel like -42°C, something I could not even imagine before. Another thing you notice everywhere in Boston is the amount of internationals. MIT, Harvard, Boston University, and many other colleges, universities (54 in total!), and institutes attract people from literally all over the world. There is even a substantial Dutch community: I lived in a big, 150-year old, wooden house, with nine Dutchies (and a 70ish-year old American lady, to make it even more random). And this was awesome, because we were all young Master's students, busy with getting the most out of our time here: organizing a house party for 200 people, running and exercising together at 6:30 am, trips to New York, Montreal, National Parks, salsa parties, movie nights, sailing, and a looooot of parties, were some of the things to do next to our internships. I would recommend everyone going abroad, already because it provides plenty of interesting research opportunities, but don't forget to always get the most out of it: combine awesome research with awesome activities!



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It's a party in the USA!