

Home away from home

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MARCO MUSSO, FOUNDER OF R&D STARTUP DELFTEK

Marco Musso began his career in Italy's industrial Turin region. Here, he studied at the local university of technology. Marco went on to found a high-tech company in electronic systems, which he expanded by establishing a Dutch branch in Delft.

YANMIN TAO, LECTURER IN CHINESE STUDIES

Yanmin Tao moved to Delft with her family in 1997, when her husband got a job at TU Delft. She started work in the university's IT department before resuming her position as a lecturer. After many happy years at TU Delft, Tao is now a lecturer in Chinese Studies in Nijmegen.

CORNELIUS WICKS, FOUNDER OF DRONE TECHNOLOGY STARTUP HEAD COMMUNICATIONS

When still a pilot in the US Air Force, Cornelius Wicks found a unique market opportunity: sending data from an airplane directly to a control centre and data point. As his wife was Dutch, he decided to emigrate to the Netherlands to develop an inspection drone and founded his company Head Communications in The Hague.

Living and working in Zuid-Holland: what's that like? Expats Yanmin Tao, Marco Musso and Cornelius Wicks share their experiences of the area. Each has different roots, each offers a unique view of Zuid-Holland.

How would you characterise Zuid-Holland?

Yanmin Tao: “Organised to a T. I can remember being awestruck by the neatly renovated buildings and well-kept nature when I just arrived.”

Marco Musso: “Progressive. Knowledge sharing is big here. Between universities and businesses, but also from business to business. Entrepreneurs share a progressive vision: if we work together and dare to share our knowledge, we will all be more successful in the long run. A great deal of money is invested in startups and new technology. I took my company to the Yes! Delft tech incubator, a programme that helps entrepreneurs turn their startups into successful businesses.”

Cornelius Wicks: “I developed an inspection drone in a comparable incubator, ESA-BIC. They offered advice on starting a company in the Netherlands and helped me meet lots of new people. I learned a lot there, like how to get subsidies and loans.”

What do you think of the work culture here?

Musso: “Companies here are open minded, not as worried about competition but focused on collaboration and progress. For knowledge-based businesses like ours, that's crucial. Tech companies are offered help in finding good employees. Everything has been thought of.”

Tao: “The work culture is a breath of fresh air for me. It's not about who you know, it's about what you can deliver. That's what counts, and that's how I like it. People here are open and direct and appreciate a hard-working attitude.”

Wicks: “I'd say that openness is very typical of the Netherlands. Dutch people are used to discussing their ideas and will never say that something's impossible straight away. They are always open to hearing your arguments. In general, that's great - although discussing everything can sometimes also slow down the process.”

Was meeting new people easy for you?

Wicks: “It was for me. I met at least fifty new people during my first two years here. On my street, at the WTC where I have my office, at the gym or in bars. It's not difficult to meet Dutch people, but you should learn to speak the language. If you know the language and you can watch Dutch TV, you will quickly learn how people here think and understand their jokes.”

Musso: “True. English can get you quite far, but you need to speak Dutch as well. A bit of an obstacle for many Italians, because it isn't the easiest language.”

Tao: “The most important thing you can do to integrate into society is have a job. Learning Dutch is a part of contributing to and adjusting to society. When I was still working at TU Delft, I tried to promote contact between Chinese expats and the local community. In the late 90s, Chinese students at TU Delft were primarily focused on their studies, but now they are also active in their local communities: each year they celebrate Chinese New Year together with the people of Delft.”

What do you like most about Zuid-Holland?

Tao: “I really enjoy how varied the Netherlands is, especially Zuid-Holland. You can find modern architecture here, like the new central station in Delft, but also outdoor recreation areas such as the Delftse Hout.”

Musso: “There are many highly educated people on the job market here. Not just because we are so close to TU Delft, but also because an office in a city like Delft can make a business very attractive for prospective employees. Delft is situated between two major, vibrant cities: The Hague and Rotterdam.”

Wicks: “Scheveningen is my favourite place, but the unique private automobile collection at the Louwman Museum is also well worth visiting. I can also recommend ‘King's day’: a sea of orange and typically Dutch ‘gezelligheid’ (‘cosy togetherness’). Very special.” ■