

Amsterdam Live Endoscopy Workshop 2010

I was fortunate to be invited to the Amsterdam Live Endoscopy Workshop, hosted by Professor Paul Fockens, held at the Hotel Okuda from the 13th to 15th of December 2010. From the previous workshops, this was billed to be a unique interactive 3 day experience of advanced endoscopic procedures, with a panel of international experts demonstrating their skills on a variety of interventions.

As we arrived at the Schipol International airport, on a sunny but freezing Sunday morning, a sense of anticipation and excitement prevailed through the group. We were taken to the Novotel Hotel, which was this modern high rise hotel on the outskirts of the city. The centrally heated lobby was a welcome reprieve from the subzero temperatures outside.

After settling in, a group of us discovered the efficient public transport system of the Dutch, as we boarded the punctual tram to explore the sights and sounds of this beautiful city.

I was amazed at the resilience of the Dutch, as entire families were out on bicycles oblivious to the freezing weather. As we disembarked at Grand central station, the bustling of people on bicycles riding along us, and walking on the cobble stone pavements along these amazing canals, welcomed me to this typical European city.

After some shopping, we were taken out to this amazing restaurant called "Waga-mama's", which specialised entirely on noodles. The Asian cuisine was excellent, as we all huddled together on these long wooden benches sampling different selections from the menu.

Amsterdam seems to be a huge melting pot of different cuisines, as we enjoyed a French bistro and an Argentinean Steakhouse on our next 2 nights.

It felt strange the following morning, that the sun only rose after 9am, as we enjoyed breakfast at the hotel, in complete darkness.

As we arrived at the Hotel Okuda, which was walking distance from our hotel, I was struck at the large Japanese influence on the Dutch. We were taken through this huge foyer themed with Japanese art and architecture, to the conference rooms.

The congress was over 2 days, and began with a video of Professor Fockens leaving the Amsterdam Medical Centre(AMC), riding throughout the city landmarks, with a white labcoat, on a typical bicycle, ringing his bell and finally riding into the conference room.

This was followed by Live crossings to the Amsterdam Medical Centre, where a variety of patients were presented, and experts shown performing a range of procedures, including ERCPs, upper and lower endoscopies, mucosal resections, submucosal dissections as well as small bowel enteroscopy.

This was interspersed with a series of lectures from the international panel of experts.

The live sessions were excellent, and the level of skill was impressive, as most of the cases were difficult, or had been referred to the AMC, after failed procedures were performed elsewhere.

I also found the lectures informative and very relevant, chosen to complement the procedures being performed.

The sight of snow gently falling on the canals outside the hotel windows, had everyone rushing for their cameras.

After the congress, we spent the remainder of the afternoon exploring the city and learning the various tram routes.

We were spoilt for choice, as the range of splendid museums, Jazz clubs, "coffee" shops, the famous Breweries and the vibrant Amsterdam nightlife, meant that just 3 nights were not enough to do justice to this beautiful Dutch city.

Upon boarding the KLM flight back to Johannesburg, I realised how fortunate I was to have experienced Amsterdam and this excellent workshop. The superb level of organisation and sheer beauty of the city, made the freezing weathery conditions, completely worth it. For this, I am extremely grateful to the Gastroenterology foundation of South Africa and Astra Zeneca.

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Snowing along the canals



Meeting at the foyer of the Okuda Hotel