

MIT Monday: land of the free, home of the brave Oct 22, 2018



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We are proud to announce our brand new blog initiative together with Ph.D. student Bert Lenaerts called MIT Monday. So what is it all about?

LAND OF OPPORTUNITIES

November 12th, 2017. An email pops up. Ideas and plans finally turn into reality: next fall, I am going to Boston.

Who am I? My name is Bert and I am a second year Ph.D. student within the [Environmental Economics](#) research group at the Faculty of Business Economics from Hasselt University. This fall, I will travel to the U.S.A. to work in the laboratories of the prestigious Massachusetts Institute for Technology, better known as MIT. I am deeply honored that I have been invited for an external research stay. Up until now, I could not even imagine in my wildest dreams how working at MIT would look like....



So how will life be in the US of Trump? Is it as bad as is often claimed on the news? Are my friends and family right to question my sanity in going there? Is there any truth to these stories? My scientific curiosity

got the better of me and now I will be able to experience it all first hand. And don't worry, I will tell you all about it in my next blogs.

THE LURE OF FLYING

What will I be investigating during my research stay? Good question. It has everything to do with the manner of transportation that I will use to get there: airplanes. More specifically, I am interested in aviation and the airline industry around it and will be working in the [Laboratory for Aviation and the Environment](#). Air transportation has become increasingly popular in recent decades. Since 1980, prices have halved while the number of passengers increased tenfold, resulting in flying becoming more accessible. That's not only nice for people looking for a holiday abroad, also businesses might benefit. That is why the governments in both the US and Europe have and still are subsidizing (small) airports. But just how much do airports add to economic growth? What is their value? And how can we quantify this? These are precisely the questions I hope to answer in my research.

However, flying that cheap comes at a cost. If all the airlines were combined into one country, it would rank in the top 10 emitters. Me coming to the US and going back home by plane will emit as much greenhouse gasses as heating up my apartment for the entire research stay. To make matters even worse, the number of air passengers will double in the next two decades while emissions from airlines are not even in the Paris agreement. Apart from studying the economic impact of aviation, my future research will therefore also focus on the environmental footprint of the airline industry as well. But more on that in a later post.

Last but not least, going abroad also means meeting new people, experiencing different cultures, and representing your own country as well. I am looking forward to sharing all of this with you in the coming months. Welcome to MIT Monday!