

Post



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# Den Haag/King's Day - April 27, 2022

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Today's our first full day in Holland. We had a good night's sleep (after an iffy one on the plane). Breakfast is included in our room rate so we take advantage of it. Breads, cheeses, fruit, granola, yogurt. Yum. And lots of coffee. Today is King's Day, a national celebration. We're headed to Den Haag, one of the two seats of government for the Netherlands.

Once outside we see all of the preparations for King's Day. Tables have been set up by the local government and people have spread out their equivalent of a garage sale, at least for people who don't have garages, let alone cars. We forgo all of that and head straight to the train station. It's cool, but we're layered and it'll be warming up (a bit) as the day goes on. We have reloadable payment cards that allow us to ride the trains/buses/trams. Over time we learn that if we have at least 20 euros on a card it'll let us on the train.

The train is again clean, comfortable, new, and well maintained. The ride is quiet and smooth and the scenery is interesting. Lots of green. Lots of water. On the train itself the people mostly are wearing the Dutch color (orange) and many have the flag of the Netherlands (Red, White, and Blue stripes) painted on their cheeks. There is definitely a festive air.

In Den Haag we head out into the brisk, slightly breezy air. GPS tentatively guides us towards the Escher museum. The tall buildings tend to block the signal, but we make it to the square with the museum. It doesn't open for another hour so we'll just wander. Canals are ubiquitous here. Not for show but for boat traffic and routing the water out to the sea. We walk under a road on an underpass. There's a canal beside us also going under the road. We realize that if there were not a wall between us and the water it would be about up to our knees. Yikes.

We're in Den Haag. Amsterdam is the capital of the country but Den Haag is the center of the national government. Go figure. Den Haag has been the seat of the government for a long time, but Amsterdam felt slighted and so the capital was moved there. Something for everyone.

Our friends, Liz and Mike, track down an ATM and get some cash. Many places we eat or shop at have trouble with the US credit cards. We find a very large plant sale going on in the big park in front of the Escher museum. The plants are all in as good a shape as you could wish. The Dutch are amazing at their ability to grow things: flowers, vegetables, pot. The variety of plants on offer is amazing and they're arranged with true marketing flair. One sign shows an old telephone handset and a chalkboard on which is written "Your husband just called, you may buy whatever you like!" We enquire and learn that this is an annual event, happening only once each year, and we just happen to be here for it! The smallest plants are begonia plugs. The soil cubes they're growing in are about the size of a sugar cube and the container is a small clear plastic shot glass. We decline to take one offered as we're not home.

We walk around the cute neighborhoods with lots of trendy shops, bars and restaurants. It's apparent that they had a big party here the previous evening for King's Night. We see them breaking down a stage, which we later learn is just one of four big stages where they had bands the previous night.

The museum opens and a dozen or so people wait to get in. We're first in line and pay our 20 euros. We're given a plastic token for the lockers downstairs. They're for our coats, if we wish, and our backpacks (not optional).

In the exhibit we repeatedly exclaim "Ooooooh, that's one of my favorites!" We think that until we see the next one and say the same thing. We read about his life and the laborious, long technique it took to make these unique masterpieces, which make them all even more amazing. The museum used to be a palace where the queen, king, princess, etc. lived. It shows. There are also many big portraits by Worhol in the hallways and stairwells, including many of the royal family. Exhilarated and back on the street we head for the tram to the coast. We'll be meeting a childhood friend of Liz's for lunch. He's an American trombone player from New York who couldn't find enough work in the US and so moved to Europe. He's been in the Netherlands for many decades and is now a formal citizen. He plays in the orchestra for the Circus Theater in Den Haag where the Disney production of Aladdin is going on. The piece is orchestrated for 32 instruments. Here they don't have such luxury and so have to make it work with eight.

Lunch is at Catch by Simonis. It's very good. Liz and Mike treat. We have salmon and flounder and the like. We have two bottles of wine. We hear stories of Liz's childhood including one where David and Liz played a game with one of them on a bike, riding around and the other playing the toll-keeper. With each circuit completed each eats one of the orange flavored aspirins they had from a new bottle from the house. When the game was done, and the bottle was empty, the kids didn't look or feel well. Off to the hospital. All was well that ended well.

At three o'clock Scott and Karen take off to meet a colleague of Scott's with whom he shared an office for many years in Paris. They, too, haven't seen each other in many decades. Twenty two years, to be exact. We board the bus and sit. It's a fifteen minute ride to the bar where we've agreed to meet. At the next stop a bearded man in a big wool coat and scarf boards. Scott says "Thomas Span!" It was our friend taking the bus to meet us. We sit and talk and eventually get to, and into, the bar.

We order beers and get caught up. Eventually we order bitten ballen, which is a deep-fried croquet filled with meat and gravy, at least in theory. We didn't see any meat. You dip it in mustard and it's so hot it frequently burns the skin off the roof of your mouth. Such a sales pitch! Thankfully we were spared that pain. After a while our friends Mike and Liz arrive and we sit and talk about the craziness of the US and Holland and the world. Later we head outside, take a picture, and say our good-byes. Thomas suggests a different tram back to Delft, which takes us through interesting residential and business areas, albeit at a slower pace than the train to Den Haag.

Back in Delft it's warm and sunny and there are people everywhere, coming home from celebrating, or spilling out of the bars, celebrating. We hear music going on a barge and head that direction. They're playing John Denver's "Take Me Home, Country Road." People are joining in the chorus. They're not Americans but rather just the Dutch who like American music.

We wander from musical group to musical group. People are selling goods and junk from their houses, and food and beverages (alcoholic). The older people are staying away. The younger people are enjoying the good weather and the chance to get drunk and listen to loud music in public. There's a bit of litter everywhere. Some restaurants planned to be closed and are. Some didn't plan to be closed and are. Some are open and doing a land office business. This is their Black Friday.

We find an Italian place and have beer, wine, salad and pizzas. It's so busy it takes forever for the pizzas to arrive. They were so happy with their pizza dough and bragged about how it was a secret recipe. We didn't see it. We thought that their secret was that they didn't use any salt. They should. We eventually head back to our rooms as the buzz in the city slowly winds down. It's (well past) time for bed and tomorrow is another day (albeit not King's Day).

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