

Post



Scott Farnsworth

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Gouda/Delft - April 28, 2022

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We rise around seven but could have slept longer. Still not used to the time change, maybe. We have breakfast at the big spread at our hotel, though we're more controlled in our eating than before. We pack and head out. This time with no mis-starts and no regrets for stuff left that we later wished for. It's 37 degrees when we awake and maybe 45 when we head out. But it's sunny, which is a good sign.

We head to the train station by way of the big square where the biggest outdoor concert was going on last night. Now the square is again occupied, but this time by a more normal outdoor market. There's fish, meat, nuts, fresh and dried fruit, clothing, toys, shoes, and accessories for vacuum cleaners, cell phones and bikes. Who needs stores? There's fabric and so much other stuff on offer. The girls can't say no to some gorgeous strawberries. We sample them later in the day and each is perfectly red, ripe, sweet and delicious. The girls also buy some small stoopwafle cookies. They're available everywhere and apparently it's not just the tourists (mostly from Europe) who eat them.

Eventually we pull ourselves away and head to the station for our train to Gouda ("How-duh"). Yesterday Karen discovered a re-loadable train card on the ground and picked it up. There's no way to know if it has any value without a kiosk. Train rides are five or seven or more euros each, depending on distance, so we quickly run down the value on our cards. We've been refilling them daily, as we do today. While doing that we check the value of the card Karen found. 26 Euros. Not bad!

Yesterday we went to Den Haag, and today, we're headed to Gouda. We go through (and change trains in) Den Haag. It's a bright, sunny day. Cool, but comfortable. We walk the short distance to the main square and are soon in the throws of the cheese market. It's quite crowded. These are tourists! They seem to be from all over, with lots of Dutch and Europeans. The market seems to be all for show without much actual selling and buying of the big wheels of gouda. The tourists (and we) madly photograph the theatrics.

Karen read an English language description of what is going on, translated from Dutch. It speaks of the young men who "throw up" the cheese to the horse drawn wagons. The visual we have of the young men throwing up cheese is unsettling. The truth is more tame. There are (supposedly) cheese sellers and buyers. They're dressed in traditional costume including wooden clogs on their feet and scarves around their neck secured with a very small wooden shoe. The manufacturer offers the cheese at a proposed price and extends his hand (they're all men). And the buyer (also a man, similarly dressed) slaps the hand away to say "no thanks, too expensive". The buyer and seller throw out possible prices, each time getting his hand slapped. Eventually an agreeable price is reached and a firm handshake seals the deal.

Gouda samples are handed out by young ladies in traditional costume and headdress. There are demonstrations of how the gouda is made. There are big stoopwaffle cheese sandwiches being made. Paper thin waffles are made, split in half, filled with a thin slice of gouda, and grilled in a flat panini machine. We have two and they are yummy. In another booth they're selling mini pancakes. The cooking tool has small divots each the size of a very small pancake. The matrix of divots can handle 400 cakes at once. A funnel full of batter is held over each divot briefly while an upside down wooden spoon is lifted to release the perfect amount of batter. We sample some of those (with cinnamon and Nutella). Yummy, too.

We wander through the city a bit further, inspecting this outdoor market. The produce is all so pretty and perfect! The market, like the square and the city, is not that big. After our tastes we realize it's getting to be lunch time. We pick a spot and head that direction, way across town (maybe a five minute walk). Somehow we manage to stay out of the way of the bicycles.

Lunch is yet another delicious affair in a cavernous old vehicle repair facility next to a Best Western. It's well reviewed and rightly so. We're intrigued by the bathrooms where women (should they choose) can wash their hands on the men's side and vice versa (it's a reach, but doable). It also means that the women can see the back side of the guys at the urinals. This is all in theory, we don't try it out.

We have a long leisurely lunch, intrigued by a big group at a long table. They have oldsters there and younger folk. They're dressed up and are having champagne and fancy food. Someone makes a speech as others film on their smartphones. We ask our waiter if someone's having a birthday or is getting married. He thinks someone's having a baby but we see no evidence of that.

On the way back to the train station we find a camping store where Mike and Liz buy a hat, a daypack, and a shirt. Continuing to the station Karen edges up behind a very tall young man walking ahead of her. Karen knows she's 5' 3" and is pretty sure the young Dutchman ahead of her is over 6' 8". The girls titter quietly in the background.

Dinner will be at a French restaurant, Mes Amis at 7:30pm. Until then... wine and strawberries on the patio in the slowly setting sun. It cools down quickly and our full bottle of French Chablis quickly becomes an empty bottle. It's just us on the patio, even though there's room for twenty or thirty. There are metal stairs leading up to even higher perches, also with chairs and undoubtedly even better views. Being Dutch, the stairs leading up to the higher levels are almost ladders. In the warmer summertime the place is probably teeming with boisterous tourists.

We can see the church and hear the bells every fifteen, or so minutes. Mike and Liz inform us the bell ringing goes on around the clock. Thankfully we have to take their word for it.

The walk to the French restaurant takes us through the main Platz again and city workers clean up and take down the market stalls as well as the stage and other facilities from the past couple of days' celebration of King's day and night. The restaurant isn't far and we check in and are taken up some stairs to our table.

The restaurant is very small and even so is totally empty. It remains so throughout the evening. We have French Onion Soup, Artichoke Tart, Snails, Duck Confit, and Braised Lamb Shank. It's pretty good, but we're thinking that in France it will be more authentic. The "French" wine was good, but being from Transylvania was both a price performer and a new flavor profile from the French wines we've had in the past. A molten chocolate cake with ice cream and complementary glasses of sherry cap off the meal. Time for bed. Tomorrow we will relocate to Den Bosch.

Photos







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