

Post



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Amsterdam and Keukenhof - May 4, 2022

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Today we wake up early. We're off to Keukenhof to see tulips. It's 40 degrees now but will be sunny later, so we layer. Since we have a big day ahead of us we plan to eat a hearty breakfast (any excuse for more food).

The dining room is fancy and the breakfast buffet is impressive. Breakfast isn't included with our room, but we go anyway. They have eggs that are well scrambled, hot, and perfectly seasoned. The bacon looks like bacon and is crisp. This isn't your normal hotel breakfast chef! Also on offer are different small packages of something... butter? cheese? We look it up and it is flavors of spreadable gouda cheese product. Yum! (?) We grab a few and some rye crisp (giraffe food) crackers for later and we're on our way.

Our planned route to Keukenhof is long, varied, and not cheap, but hopefully we'll see more of the Netherlands. The early steps are typical for what we do in Amsterdam: walk to the tram, and take the tram to the central station. From there we go *through* the station to the other side and board a free ferry waiting there. We ride the ferry (a three minute ride) to the other side, aka "North Amsterdam". Commuters and revelers constantly traverse the IJ (pronounced 'eye') to get to work, or home, or to revel.

Once in North Amsterdam we climb aboard a bus (masked, as required). The bus drives us out of Amsterdam, on roads and freeways. Given how many people get around on bikes and public transportation they don't need as many cars, or roads, as we do in the USA. Amsterdam's the biggest city and Schiphol (which we drove past) is a huge, busy airport, but the freeways didn't have that many lanes or vehicles, it's amazing. There are lots of the new, big style of windmills to generate power and a few fields of tulips. At Lisse we leave the bus and board a canal boat. At our bench seating and tables a nice 'not young' lady takes our order and brings back water, beers, wine and snacks. These were extra but most everyone splurges.

As we cruise along it is obvious that the surface of the water is many meters above the land on either side of the canal. This is the Dutch miracle. They have the engineering knowhow (and desire) to build such canals, resulting in a way to move water from where they don't want it to the sea, and in the process they get land and navigable waterways. In heavy rains when there's too much water, they can re-flood many of these polders to hold the water til they can again push it to the sea. Amazing.

We hear about someone who came up with a plan to drain a huge expanse of land here in North Holland. It would only take six huge windmills and a few years. It would be great (if it all works). It did, and the land was made usable. Halfway through the project powered pumps (diesel?) came into fashion and made the exercise faster and more assured. That land includes where Schiphol is now, which means that this huge airport of Amsterdam's is four meters (more than 13 feet) *below* sea level. Yikes!

We continue on, sipping on our drinks, nibbling our snacks. We listen to the history of this amazing place. We see small sailboats for training young dutch. They have names like Titanic, Disaster, Catastrophe, and Shipwreck. We imagine the instructors having fun radioing each other saying "Titanic is sinking, again". Alongside the canal it's understandably flat and thus great for bicycles (since there aren't a lot of hills). We see quite a few bikes, though we're in the middle of nowhere.

We also see where cars need to get across to islands made by these canals. Apparently they didn't want to build a bridge, so they have a ferry. Two, in fact. They're constantly racing back and forth between the two edges of the canal, traveling about 30' with each crossing. It takes about a minute. Each of the two ferries can transport up to four cars. When other boats, like ours, come along there needs to be coordination, but hey, this is Holland, they've got it down.

Eventually we get to our next stop, er, transfer point. We're going to see a working windmill. We disembark and hurry across the bike path, staying out of the way of the occasional fancy biker (on their expensive bikes sporting 'Tour de France'-looking clothes), as well as mom-and-pop out for an afternoon ride or on the way back from the grocery store. Bikes are a way of life here.

The mill is enormous but can be turned to face the best wind. The four blades can have no cloth covering or be fully covered or anything in-between, whatever is appropriate to the wind speed. This is not a mill for grinding flour but rather to move water from many meters below up into the canal on which we were just floating. The mill is covered from head to toe in thatch. It's expertly installed and looks like it's been there for a while and will be there for a good while longer. We're allowed in to see the workings from the inside. It's all great wooden cogs and gears. How this was able to increase the usable land in Holland by many 100s of square miles is unbelievable. What ingenuity!

After the windmill we're back on another bus. We all stand and before long we're at Keukenhof. The rest of the day we look at (and take pictures of) flowers. They're all planted (outside). Inside the numerous buildings they are staged. They're in pots. They're cut. They're arranged. There are flowers and plants. It's crazy. Outside they're planted in all manner of rows and undulating ribbons. They're all together, one color/type. They're all mixed up. 79 acres and 7 million bulbs. We walk and walk and walk, and we have lunch. And we walk some more.

Eventually we've seen enough tulips. We find our way back to the pickup point for the bus back to Amsterdam. There are dozens of people similarly flowered-out. For all of us it's "mission accomplished".

We have a yummy, eclectic dinner at a trendy food hall. It's a big hipster gathering spot, but they tolerate us oldsters. The food hall owners try to get us to observe a minute of silence for the Dutch day of remembrance with limited success. Eventually overfed and overstimulated from so many flowers we head back to our hotel to sleep.

Photos









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