

Amsterdam...Art...

and on down the Aristocratic Vecht



After a 20 year gap since our last visit, soaking up the atmosphere, the city remains as timeless as ever. Boats travel the same canals as 400 years ago, the gables houses look much the same as in the 1700's, narrow to minimize the taxes paid according to width. I have always loved art- especially that of the Dutch Golden Age of the 1600's-the Rembrandts, Vermeer's, Franz Hals, Jan Steen's paintings with light of such amazing clarity, somber portraits, minute detail, they seem to leap out of the frame. So I very much enjoyed visiting both national art trove, the Rijksmuseum (newly-renovated with a fabulous glass atrium) housing Rembrandt's "Night Watch". And spent a wonderful afternoon at the stunning, modern Van Gogh Museum with the largest collection of the master's works in the world, and exhibits telling the vivid story of his life. Modern museums are so dynamic and alive now with all kinds of interactive activities. A fantastic way to learn. And, yes, who forgot her camera???



Another marvel of the city were the luxurious washroom facilities of the new Amsterdam Marina, where in the highrise building housing, not only showers, but also two private bathroom with designer bathtubs where at the press of a button the whole glass wall became transparent offering a panoramic view over the harbor. Fascinating, I played with it for ages! So you could lay in the tub and enjoy the view for miles. You had to get in the tub first, of course, or those for miles around would also enjoy the view of you!

Our first guests on board Otter, Hanne & Per, joined us in Amsterdam on Whitsun weekend and after a long but interesting day, tramping the atmospheric streets along the Prinsengracht and Herengracht, we introduced them to Otter. The day after, we set off for the Vecht - perhaps the most beautiful stretch of river the country. Here between Maarssen and Loenen, the banks are lined with huge country estates and lavish villas, their elaborate gardens fronting the river. They were built in the 17th & 18th centuries by wealthy Amsterdammers who wanted to escape the noise and stench of the city. They are, no doubt, still status symbols today. It's an idyllic and fascinating stretch to cruise along, stopping off at tiny, picture-perfect villages for lunch or one of the excellent cold, malty, dark beers.



We started in pouring rain (of which, it must be said, there has been much this summer!) but ended in sunshine. It was perfect really. You couldn't ask for more.



Utrecht is a lovely, old city. Founded by the Romans in AD47, it has been a prosperous bishopric and university town for centuries and has a medieval centre with masses of atmosphere laid out around the canals, the Domtoren (Cathedral) and many quite eccentric museums. It's also quite funky and artsy with lots of fascinating boutiques and good cafes. The approach to it under low bridges and through narrow tunnels was both tricky and fascinating as the canals are split-level with old warehouses from the 13th century lining the lower level, today filled with outdoor cafes. In the photos it looks deserted, but the centre was, in fact, filled with life. Shoppers can nip down and have a drink or snack at water level. It was a good spot to end our tour together.

Hanne & Per, it was a pleasure to sail with you! Great crew and good company! We'll hope for a return visit somewhere along a new stretch next year.