



Friesland / Fryslân

Terherne, Holland - April 2015.



Spring has arrived in this little corner of Friesland (or Fryslân)- at least judging by the blossoming trees, wayside daffodils and tulips, jet black colts, fields full of lambs and colts and herons along the canals. The landscape here is flatter than flat, yet strangely appealing with interesting skies. Masts and barges can be seen lazily floating along the fields! It grows on you. Much of it is reclaimed land, dotted with wealthy farms raising the large black& white Friesland dairy herds and beautiful black horses. Peculiarly, each farm has a large plastic cow standing outside. Large herds of top-of-the-range BMW's are also common. They have their own flag and own language, taught in the schools and which 75% of the population actively speak. Town and street names are signposted in both (Sneek/Snits). They still wear the old wooden clogs for working and sometimes in town. The local smithy keeps his goat and miniature pony tethered in front of his home on the canal beside the marina. Several of the marina staff here have actually never left Friesland which seems remarkable but they cannot understand why you would when everything is here.

The tiny local church is used only for weddings now- where the bridal pair sail up to the entrance via a tiny canal welcomed by guests standing waiting on the bank. Inside the old wooden pews have been replaced by plush white sofas arranged in a circle around the walls amid huge white flower arrangements where, presumably, guests can lounge in comfort during the ceremony. Then it's into the garden in front of the cemetery where tables, chairs and canopies are tastefully decorated for the reception.

This, too, is the area of the "Elfstedentocht" or "Great Dutch Race" – the Eleven Cities Tour- a 200 km. skating race only held 15 times since 1909 – when it's cold enough to freeze the canals- but a national event followed with passion by the whole nation. When the thermometer starts dropping, 48 hours notice is given, armies of volunteers gear up and thousands of competitors get ready. It must be completed in under 20 hrs. The record is 6 hrs. 47 mins. A tiny pair of wooden skates decorate our cabin.



Unseasonably cold winds are keeping temperatures low (-3C at night!) and us in our berth. We are grateful for our diesel central heating! Exploring by car and aiming to leave 06 May!