



Introducing "Otter"...

Terherne, Holland, April 2015.

We went looking for a small "peniche" but convincing the captain on 100 year old rusty hulls and old engines was never really on the cards. Endless work projects and bottomless money pits. Not for our three months cruising per year. And then, in Terherne, in the far north of Holland, we found a boat that felt like home from the first step aboard. She is small but has everything we need and she can go anywhere- into the smallest canals. We especially love the cockpit and the way the doors open out completely. She's cosy, she's sturdy and we decided to name her "Otter" a creature of the rivers & canals we'll be cruising through in Europe for otters are playful creatures, curious and tough.



While working on the boat, we stayed for a week in Grou at the wonderfully-named “Hotel Oostergoo”, owned , of course, by the Oost’s! We shop in Sneek (pronounced “snake”). They had a lovely market there to open the watersport season and the whole town came out to show their crafts, and homemade food.

Strangely enough, spareribs appear to be almost the national dish and come in hearty portions with 3 types of vegetables, fries, roast potatoes and dips for 15 euros- enough for two meals- doggy bags are provided with a smile! Our Friday tradition has become “kibling” for lunch- crispy morsels of fresh deep-fried fish served with remoulade. So good!



We take small excursions by car into the countryside coming across many curiosities by accident like the beautifully-preserved windmill below. From 1782, it is one of the only mills to “mill” both water and grain in Europe and is now rented out for holiday accommodation. A volunteer from the foundation gave me a tour inside. While we were admiring the mill, Tucker was admiring the muddy moat around it and, being a true spaniel, leapt in as soon as our backs were turned emerging triumphant and filthy-a happy spaniel.....





One of the quaintest villages was Hindeloopen- a cloistered fishing village amid the farms, sheltered from the IJsselmeer by a surrounding dyke enclosing the tiny cottages, small canals, wooden drawbridges and picture-perfect gardens (all competing with their neighbours, no doubt). The old lifeboat still stands on the launching rail. In the churchyard are 8 WWII war graves of Australia, Canadian and British airmen, one of them with one of the loveliest epitaphs "In the mosaic of victory, here lies a precious piece." In Franeker, (where "Otter" was built) a woolspinner built the world's oldest working planetarium in his dining room in 1774. Beat that.



Harlingen has over 500 preserved gables in the Register of National Monuments and was a lively trading and whaling centre in the 16-1800's. Today many lovely old ships line the quays and, like many towns here in Holland, a very pleasant pedestrian area with shops and cafes runs alongside the canals. A nice place to wander. From here the ferries leave for the offshore islands. And we wait for things to warm up a bit. This will be a different kind of cruising- more gentle but with many fascinating stops. It has the Tucker stamp-of- approval already so that's all right then.