

Trip to Holland May 2024

There cannot be many hotels where you can experience a morning flypast of storks on sentry duty, while enjoying a wonderful breakfast, but luckily for us we had just that hotel. The Avifauna, in the green heartland of Holland, has an extensive bird and small mammal park which proved a great attraction for the nineteen members of Wymondham U3 A who were on the 5-day outing to Holland.

We were joined at Hull by five other travellers all eager to see the tulips at Keukenhof Gardens. After a very smooth crossing we landed in Rotterdam and went straight to find the bulbs. Perhaps the best flush of young flowers in the surrounding fields were over, however, there were so many beautiful displays to be seen, not just tulips but azaleas too. The Gardens are lovely and set with so many benches and eating places that the visit is comfortable. The displays inside the pavilions were still magnificent. Some of us ventured on to the boat ride on the surrounding canals, probably more exciting for the variety of wild birds spotted than the bulb fields themselves. Although, we learnt about the need for deadheading at this time of year to maximise the bulbs' potential, it was still strange to see rows of stalks inhabited by so many families of fluffy goslings.

Our second expedition was to the Zaanland museum and village. This place had something for everyone: the industrial history of rice and sugar production; the beautiful costumes and jewellery of the ladies of Zaan; the paintings of Monet in his early years and the chocolate and biscuit production of Verkade, with their signature tins and packaging. Outside the wide area was full of windmills, shops and working models of past ways of life. The cheese farm proved very popular with fourteen different samples to try- anyone else find coconut or lavender cheese to be amazing? Of course the shops were full of clogs and wooden tulips, but the small stalls had interesting foods; I tried Bitterballs, a savoury snack, for lunch.

The evening cruise around the Green Heartland reminded many of us of the Norfolk broads , houses lining the canal, people watching us sail by as we watched them relaxing. When Marion was asked to take the wheel, resplendent in the Captain's cap and coat, it seemed a little unfair for John and Alan to start a panic search for the life jackets!

Our last day gave us all time to visit our feathered neighbours in the bird park. I have never had the pleasure of ostriches living under my window before.

We could see the storks nesting and appreciate their incredible wing spans.

This bird park developed from the feather farms of the hat industry- I hope the Lori hang on to their lovely feathers these days.

We spent the last hours in the Hague on our way home, perhaps not enough time to appreciate all that was there but a taste of city life.

Marked with Vivienne's magic touch, the weather was warm and dry. The food was excellent and the company jolly. Thanks to John for his unfailing patience and clear instructions -we all wished it were a longer trip.