

*Theme:*

## The Netherlands – a History Dominated by the Sea

*Main Focal Points:*

- the sea as enemy through the ages – defences
  - old sea defences (Hondsbossche Zeewering) and new – the “Delta Works” completed between 1958 and 1997
- the sea as friend – land reclamation; sea trade
  - land reclamation in the 17<sup>th</sup> C.: Beemster, De Rijkpolder
  - Flevoland: a new province entirely reclaimed since the 1960-s
  - port of Rotterdam
- historic perspective
  - Dordrecht
  - Veere, Middelburg
  - Broek in Waterland, Enkhuizen
  - the windmills of the Kinderdijk

*Other Activities – choice of:*

- Afsluitdijk – Friesland
- Amsterdam Historic Museum
- Seascapes in Museums
- canal tour
- Zaanse Schans

*Accommodation*

Rotterdam – hotel t.b.d

There is a good selection of 5, 4 and 3 star Hotels available in Rotterdam. Many are in the centre of town close to the harbour, with impressive views – as for example the Hotel New York in the former Head Office of the Holland-America Line. It should not be difficult for your operations department to select a suitable venue.

*Travel from/to UK*

British Airways: return flights from London Heathrow or Gatwick.

KLM fly direct from 19 UK airports – so more choice of UK departure locations can be offered – e.g. London, Birmingham and/or Manchester, Glasgow and/or Edinburgh.

## Sample Itinerary:

### **Day One:**

- travel from UK
- transfer to Hotel in Rotterdam
- tour through Rotterdam Harbour and/or tour to the windmills of Kinderdijk

### **Day Two:**

- tour to view massive sea defences built since 1953 – the “Delta Works”
- ‘Neeltje Jans’ visitor centre with exhibits and films about “Delta Works”
- visit ancient trading + fishing town of Veere in the South West of the Netherlands
- visit Middelburg – picturesque capital of the Province of Zeeland

### **Day Three:**

- tour to 17<sup>th</sup> C. land reclamation: Beemsterpolder, Rijk, Graft
- visit picturesque Enkhuizen
- cross via dam in former sea to newly reclaimed Province of Flevoland
- visit former islands of Urk and Schokland
- visit new Flevoland capital Lelystad – with “Nieuw Land Museum”

### **Day Four:**

- visit to Dordrecht – ancient river port and trading centre – cradle of the Dutch Reformation – inspiration to painters
- visit Museum Simon Van Gijn in Dordrecht – impressive collection in private residence
- return flight to UK

## *Port of Rotterdam - Windmills at Kinderdijk*

As a taster for the theme of this tour, the Port of Rotterdam is an impressive example of concentrated marine trading. Based on its favourable position at the mouth of the Rhine river as well as on the North Sea, this was the largest port in the world until 2004 (when Shanghai overtook it). Its history as a port is relatively recent – as the rest of this tour will bear out, with visits to older trading ports in the Netherlands.



## *Windmills at Kinderdijk – nr. Rotterdam*



While the image of this row of windmills may appear to have become an iconic tourism cliché, this shouldn't disguise the fact that these mills for 200 years performed a life-saving function of keeping the surrounding land dry.



## *Delta Works – ‘Neeltje Jans’ Visitors Centre*



Without dykes, dams and similar sea defences, the area in blue above – 2/3 of the Netherlands – would regularly be flooded by sea or river water.

In 1953, a high Spring Tide and a Southwesterly storm together created an onslaught which could not be withstood by the dykes in the South West of the country, which were not well maintained. A large part of the provinces of Zeeland and South Holland was flooded (areas in green on map below), nearly 1,800 people died, and 72,000 people were displaced.



This disaster gave new impetus finally to invest in a more comprehensive sea defence plan – which created an extra burden on the country as it was still rebuilding after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.







Located on an artificial island in one of the arms in the Schelde river, the 'Neeltje Jans' Visitors Centre tells the story of the 40-year effort to complete the improved sea defences - through audio, video and interactive displays. Travelling to the Centre will give travellers a first-hand experience of the many dams and sluices which were built – and which now add to the security of the country.

## *Veere, Middelburg*

For a complete contrast, we continue into Zeeland to visit its capital city, Middelburg, stopping at the old trading port of Veere on the way. This is a step back into history, as Veere in the 15<sup>th</sup> C. secured the right to be the major transit point into the Netherlands and Flanders of Scottish wool exports. Even today, one can see the picturesque “Scottish Houses” on the town’s major canal.



In the days of the Dutch East India Company, Middelburg as the representative for Zeeland was the second most influential in the Company (after Amsterdam).

It has long been a fortified town –as is still visible today. However, during the struggle to liberate the Netherlands at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, Middelburg and its remarkable Medieval buildings sustained heavy damage. Also, in order to drive the Germans out of their position threatening the mouth of the Schelde, the Allies bombed a nearby dyke so that the surrounding countryside flooded – and remained under water for months.

The medieval Town Hall and other significant buildings have now been beautifully restored.



### *Reclaiming land in the 17<sup>th</sup> C. – Beemster (nr. Amsterdam)*

Today we move from defence against the sea, to making use of the sea through reclamation.

In 1607 it was decided to attempt pumping the water out of a large lake which had formed in the swampy area North of Amsterdam. 47 Windmills (alas now all gone) were constructed around its perimeter, and in 1612 the Beemster “polder” was dry. Its very fertile land was parceled up in rectangular plots, and the farmers soon could afford to build impressive farm houses.



Staying with the historic theme, we stop by the little town of De Graft, which lost link to the open sea as a result of the creation of the Beemster polder.

We then visit another “casualty of progress”: the old trading port of Enkhuizen, whose approaches were too shallow for larger vessels and which lost its connection with the North Sea altogether when a dam was built upstream from it in 1932.





## *Reclaiming land in the 20<sup>th</sup> C. – Flevoland*

Taking the Houtribdam right across the IJsselmeer (formerly an extension of the North Sea), we move from land reclamation in the 17<sup>th</sup> C. to the even more extensive and much more recent reclamations of the last 40 years: the new “polders” of Flevoland. Perfectly straight roads and fields immediately indicate that this is man-made territory. Most of this land was only reclaimed in the 1950-s and '60-s – and is on average 5 m. below sea level.

The wide open spaces invite windfarms along the dykes, whereas the soil is suitable for cultivating bulb flowers, among other crops.



The Nieuw Land Museum in Lelystad will tell the story of the creation of this newest province of the Netherlands.

## *Dordrecht*



Dordrecht, a major trading port towards the mouth of the Meuse and Rhine rivers, has long played a big part in the affairs of Holland – i.e. the county of that name, by which non-Dutch people often refer to the Netherlands.

During the country's struggle for independence from the Habsburg emperors and kings, the first Free Assembly of Burghers took place in Dordrecht in 1572. In 1618-19, a Synod of the newly-formed Dutch Reformed Church was held in Dordrecht, which decided to commission a Bible translation into Dutch. The language of this so-called 'Statenbijbel', completed by 1637, has had an enormous influence on the construction and vocabulary of the present-day Dutch language.



The open skies and interesting scenes of Dordrecht and its surroundings, on the confluence of several major rivers, have attracted many painters over the centuries – including Jan van Goyen (see above), Ferdinand Bol, and more recently Ary Scheffer. The characteristic spire of the main church is unchanged today.



To complete our visit, we see how a well-to-do trader lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> C. in the charming Museum Simon van Gijn, on one of Dordrecht's lovely canals.

