

Review - A full day bike ride in the country.

I think only China has more bicycles than the Netherlands. There are always thousands of them parked at the train stations.

Their system of bicycle trails is amazing, so one rarely has to ride on a street with cars and buses. Rather than rent bicycles for use in Leiden, we decided to hire Edmond Van Putte to lead us on a day-long bike ride into the countryside east of his home in Weesp.

Edmond met us at the Leiden Centraal station and accompanied us to Weesp. We rented bicycles near the Weesp train station and he led us to his nearby home, where he picked up his bicycle and our lunch.

We rode through the outskirts of Weesp and on through fields and pastures, the land, like a good portion of the land in this country, below sea level. The lowest elevations, too wet for crops, are maintained as pastures for cows, resulting in the Netherlands' being a major exporter of butter and cheese. The higher elevations, still below sea level, are suited to growing crops. We didn't see flower fields because they are located to the west in the sandy soils near the North Sea.

When we came to the River Vecht, we had to ride up to get to the water level. The rivers in the below-sea-level areas must be maintained within dikes to keep them from flooding the reclaimed areas.

As we looked out into the distant lakes, we could see the traditional sailing ships that use Muiden as their home port. Muiden, at the mouth of the River Vecht, is a small, fortified town with an attractive harbour. Nearby is the Muider slot, a well-preserved medieval castle.

We rode on to Naarden, one of the best-preserved fortified towns in Europe. The star-shaped fortifications are massive.



Riding through nature

Our trip changed focus as we rode along the Naardermeer, a protected nature preserve. The bike path passed through forests, and as we gained elevation and got above sea level we entered an area of heather. Edmond pointed out mounds that were actually Bronze Age burial sites.

We stopped for tea and ginger cake at a teahouse in Graveland. It was nice to get off the bikes — we were getting a little tired — but the scenery was so fascinating that we didn't want to stop riding.

Refreshed by our rest, we followed Edmond through an area of lakes with crystal-clear water, coming upon a beach area that was accessible only by bicycle or boat.

We rode along the River Vecht again as we returned to Weesp. After stopping for photographs in front of two large windmills, we returned our bikes to the train station. We were tired, but the effort was well worthwhile.

We had seen so many different things in one day, getting a different perspective of the Netherlands.

Edmond purchased train tickets for us and put us on a direct train back to Leiden. It was a wonderful day!

Paul and Bill Kemp - Austin, Texas
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Countryside bike tour guided by Edmond : www.guideholland.com

This review is part of an article Bill Kemp wrote for International Travel Magazine (www.intltravelnews.com) about stay and travels in Holland, that included a private guided walk in the old centre of Leiden.

Name of article : "Leiden - a wonderful base for a tour of southern Holland".