



# Holiday in Holland

## Chartering in the Netherlands

**Tempted by historic fishing towns, the cosmopolitan capital Amsterdam and some interesting navigation, [Richard Johnstone-Bryden](#) flew to Holland to spend a week cruising the southern inland waterways**

**T**hink 'Holland' and images of canals, wide waterways, windmills and clogs immediately spring to mind. So what better way to explore the country's historic fishing towns and cosmopolitan capital than by charter boat?

In 2007 Holland was added to the European cruising destinations offered by the Portsmouth-based hire fleet operator Connoisseur. Hirers can either explore the northern lakelands from the firm's base at Sneek, or take the capital cruise from Strand Horst. Me, my wife Aline and our friends Karine and Seb, thought it would

be fun to experience the variety offered by the capital cruise.

Although we were on holiday, experience from previous trips like this told us that it was good to get a head start on the first day, so we were keen to get as close to Amsterdam as possible the first night. According to the base manager it would all depend on our ability to pass through the Nijkersluis lock before it closed at 1800. Fortunately things seemed to be going in our favour because the combination of our early arrival and a swift turnaround of

boats at the base meant we were underway by 1600 on the broad collection of waterways known as the Randmeren.



Richard Johnstone-Bryden is more usually found sailing on his home waters of the Norfolk Broads

The clearly-marked channel runs through a rural landscape consisting of reed banks and woodland, interspersed by small secluded sandy beaches.

Before long the Nijkersluis gates loomed into view as we prepared for our maiden lock transit. The lock was almost full, so as Aline and Seb passed the lines around the bollards the gates were swiftly closed behind us.

In general, the majority of Dutch people speak very good English – but it can prove a little unnerving for non Dutch-speaking visitors when lock keepers issue their instructions over the PA system in their native language. In practice, though, it created no problems.

Once clear of the lock we checked the chart to determine our options





The race is on as pleasure craft head out of and towards the Nijkersluis lock



**ABOVE** Crew members Karine and Seb



**RIGHT** The busy Nijkersluis lock provided our maiden lock transit

for the night. From the height of the sun it looked as though we'd have a couple of daylight hours to reach the town of Almere Haven.

In Holland the moorings consist of either marinas or public moorings. Marina charges are quite reasonable with an average cost of just €1-€1.50 (70p-£1) per metre, to enjoy the full range of facilities including showers, and toilets (water and electricity sometimes cost extra). While public

moorings are free, they generally do not have any amenities such as shore power or water. On reaching the leading mark for Almere Haven we sailed up a short channel straight into the crowded public basin.

Having decided that the last available berth was far too small we motored round to the neighbouring marina where we were allocated a stern-to mooring. As I gently manoeuvred *Elegance*, our 13.1m

(43ft) *Elegance*-Class cruiser, astern between the two mooring poles with only inches to spare, I was thankful for the bow thruster.

By the next morning the tranquil conditions had given way to strengthening winds and heavy showers. As we left the shelter of Almere Haven *Elegance* was hit by a strong crosswind, but her 62hp Nanni diesel still had plenty of power to keep us on course. Like



any stretch of open water, the area between Almere Haven and Amsterdam can become quite rough, so we had to take things easy as we negotiated the short, steep waves of the IJmeer. Despite the poor weather the channel was busy, with plenty of yachts and motor cruisers out for the day. Things improved as soon as we entered the main channel for Amsterdam, because we could finally sail into the prevailing conditions – although we had to keep a good lookout for the speedy commercial barges that approached.

**Entering Amsterdam port**

To cater for the volume of vessels entering Amsterdam’s port, there are three locks at Oranjesluizen, so the sight of the lock gates closing as we approached signalled only a minor delay. A few moments later, the gates of the neighbouring lock opened to release the next convoy of boats. With no other craft in sight we were able to claim pole position and make our way to the end of the lock to wait until we were released into the port of Amsterdam. As the gates opened we caught our first glimpse of the city’s waterfront, which looked quite industrial. Even though the charts clearly show that there are public moorings in Amsterdam, we were advised by the base manager to only moor up in a marina while visiting the city, due to local crime risk. Sixhaven Marina is the most conveniently located of the city’s facilities, because there is a nearby foot ferry providing a regular, direct service to Central Station – free!



At 13.1m (43ft) *Elegance* is a large boat to accommodate within a crowded marina. Sixhaven Marina is essentially run on a ‘first come first served’ basis. The harbour master does his very best to accommodate boats as they arrive and literally fills up the marina until there is no room left to swing a cat. The consequence of this approach is that at busy times it may not be possible to leave the marina for sightseeing until the afternoon, to allow for the daily departure of boats followed by the subsequent scramble to secure a berth for the night. Each morning during our time in Sixhaven it was so busy that all boats berthed astern of those wanting to leave had to come out of the marina to enable the departing yachtsmen to sail

**Sixhaven Marina is very convenient for the centre of Amsterdam**



**Cigars from the famous House of Hajenius**

away. This, coupled with the relatively early closing times of the city’s attractions, severely hindered our sightseeing programme. Equally, it is impossible to plan on being able to leave the marina early in the morning for the next stage of a cruise unless you are moored by the entrance, because nothing happens before 1000. Therefore, those wanting to see more of Amsterdam at the height of the summer might be better advised to sail to Weesp and use the frequent rail service to the city which takes 10 minutes.

**Emporium of cigars**

In between our daily adventures in the marina we managed to visit the Van Gogh Museum and hitch a ride on one of Lovers’ passenger boats for a canal cruise – the best way to see more of the city in a short time. We also discovered the House of Hajenius. With its grand chandeliers, marble counters and shelves packed with the finest cigars, the emporium is a throwback to an era when visiting a shop was as much about the experience as the products that could be bought. Even non-smokers will be intrigued by their museum and range of associated paraphernalia.

Even though we could have spent more time in Amsterdam, I decided to take advantage of a window in the weather for our voyage back across the IJmeer. With three full



Tour boats are a great way of seeing Amsterdam if you’re in a hurry

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days left I decided that we should press on up the river of Strand Horst for the historic fortified fishing port of Elburg. The clear skies and strong sunshine were the perfect combination for our day-long passage. By the time we passed Strand Horst in the afternoon it looked as though we could still reach Elburg before sunset.

### Crossing carriageways

The channel narrowed after the village of Harderwijk, at which point we sailed over a water bridge that crossed a dual carriageway – a strange experience to say the least! Afterwards the channel opened out into a vast expanse of water. The navigable channel snaked its way round past the huge overhead electricity pylons and small uninhabited islands covered with trees. According to the chart the islands had public moorings which would have been a wonderful place to stop for lunch or an aperitif, but there was no marked route between the channel and the island – with no depth sounder it was unwise to succumb to the temptation.

As we sailed up the channel to the main quay at Elburg, bathed in the light of the setting sun, I thought our luck had run out. All the moorings were taken and even the private marinas seemed full. Fortunately, the local harbour master had seen our plight and hopped on his bike to find us a berth. A few minutes later he appeared on the opposite bank and hailed us with his whistle to moor alongside. Our time in Elburg proved to be the perfect antidote to Amsterdam. There was no morning

performance of ‘musical berths’ and the pace of life was positively genteel – apart from the night of our arrival when the cobbled streets were full of local people enjoying a mid-week music festival. The line of traditional sail-powered work-boats moored by the town’s fortified gatehouse testified to Elburg’s heritage as a fishing port, inspiring us to buy some locally produced smoked mackerel and eels. At the other end of the town we stocked up on provisions in the main supermarket. Like the ones we had used in Amsterdam, the store in Elburg did not accept either credit or debit cards, so you need to carry enough euros or use the in-store cash machine to withdraw money. Even when you do find an establishment that will accept your payment card, you must also have

**Pace of life on the Dutch inland waterways proved restful**



**Rows of varnished old fishing boats at historic Elburg**

some form of official identity, such as a passport.

On our final morning in Elburg I discovered a delightful footpath that runs along the moat, going past the cathedral and some surviving sections of the medieval town wall. However, it was soon time for us to reluctantly leave and begin the passage back towards the base, despite strong winds.

### Lasting impressions

For me, a boating holiday draws to a close the moment you tie up at the base, so I always try to find somewhere else to spend the first and final nights, extending the sense of escape for as long as possible. This trip was no exception and Connoisseur’s manager recommended spending our final night in the town of Zeewolde, which is just 20 minutes away from Strand Horst. Like Almere Haven, Zeewolde is a modern town located within the Flevoland province. It is quiet, full of facilities and very safe,

yet somewhat devoid of character. The sun made a welcome reappearance, though, enabling us to enjoy dinner alfresco.

These waterways are not entirely suitable for novice sailors, especially the section from Almere Haven to Amsterdam, which can become relatively rough in poor weather and has the additional hazard of commercial shipping. That said, providing one member of your party has some previous boating experience and you take all of the appropriate precautions, cruising these waters can be a wonderful adventure.

■ **WIN a holiday on southern France’s inland waterways – see page 15**

## Useful information

### COST

To charter a boat for a seven-day cruise in Holland on an eight-berth Elegance cruiser costs from £1,210 in low season to £2,075 in July and August. For details contact Connoisseur, The Port House, Port Solent, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO6 4TH  
Tel: 02392 224252, Website: [www.leboat.co.uk](http://www.leboat.co.uk)

### TRAVEL GUIDES

*Amsterdam Top 25 sights & experiences*, AA Publishing, £6.99  
*Amsterdam*, Lonely Planet, £11.99

*Holland*, DK Eyewitness, £16.99

*The Rough Guide to The Netherlands*, Rough Guides, £12.99

*Frommer’s Amsterdam day by day*, Wiley, £7.99  
*Rough Guide Directions – Amsterdam*, Rough Guides, £6.99

### CHARTS AND PILOTS

ANWB Series Charts E, G and I (£11 each via [www.imray.com](http://www.imray.com))  
*Inland Waterways of the Netherlands*, L Busby and D Broad, Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson, £29.50

