Discovering Holland by sea

One last tug on the line and the 'klipper' Vriendschap is secured to the dock. In the distance, the Hoofdtoren chimes five times, calling the last 'tjalks' and 'klippers' back to port. The sails are down; the boat gently bobs next to the dock. Another safe voyage comes to an end. The skipper, Sjef, takes out a guitar and bellows out a sea chantey, the crew joining in. It's the turn of the century ... but which century is it?

This quayside scene could be six centuries old – or it could be only six days old. It could signify the end to a Golden Age adventure on the high seas, or just the close of a week away from the pressures of the office. Even in the year 2000, it's possible to relive an important part of Dutch history – sailing the country's many waters.

There are 450 traditional sailing ships operating in Dutch waters today, a number that pales next to the glories of shipping and fishBy Nanci Tangeman

ing throughout the past half millenium. There was a time, though, when only a handful of the ships survived.

In the 1970s, a few ship-loving idealists began to restore the traditional vessels, many of which had been half sunk or converted to storage areas or houseboats. It wasn't long before the captains were inviting paying

guests to sail with them, to help cover their operating and restoration costs.

Eventually, as the idea caught on, commercial companies, such as De Zeilvaart, began working with the owners, taking on the administration, marketing and logistics tasks, leaving the skippers and owners free to sail. What emerged was a vacation industry steeped in tradition.

Today tourists can book trips that range from a NLG 198 weekend jaunt around the IJs-

Tips for booking your adventure

High season is 15 April to 15 October. Most companies begin booking in September for the following summer, but last-minute bookings aren't impossible. Also keep in mind a New Year's trip or other holiday celebration.

You can discuss with the skipper how much sailing you want to do, versus touring on shore. Some boats include information about the ports and different activities, but these are not always in English. Plan ahead and pack a guide book to the area. Also, ask for advice when booking your trip.

All groups have different dynamics. A team of footballers won't want to anchor offshore for the night, but a family group or a group who wants to get to know each other will want to stick around and socialize onboard. Talk to your skipper and the charter companies about your preferences.

These trips are extremely popular with German tourists, so be prepared to participate in a multilingual trip. Brochures detail

which languages are spoken by the crews.

These are great family adventures! Some boats have higher bulwarks than others, so are more suited to small children. Children are required to wear life vests. It's possible to keep them comfortably inside for the trip, but plan quiet activities.

Although you can't book a non-smoking cruise, an alcohol-free cruise or an adults-only trip, the later you book the more you'll know about your shipmates. Smoking is often allowed only on deck.

A day trip is typically 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM. Companies hire the boats for team-building; other groups for weddings and reunions—so schedules are flexible.

Remember, good sailing means good winds. There is no underestimating the cold, but dressed warmly and against the wet, there really is no concern. Bring a hat or hood and a knit hair band to keep your ears warm. Gore-tex coats and rain gear are

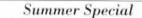
handy. On the other hand, for summer weather the shallow IJsselmeer and Markermeer heat up quickly for good swimming. Pack sunscreen!

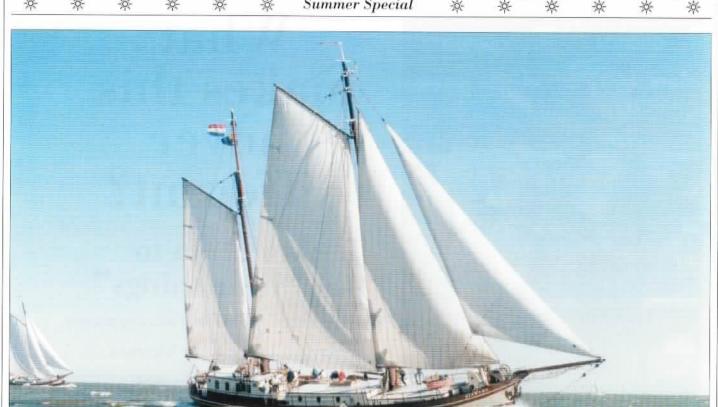
Bring ear plugs if you're a light sleeper. Remember, you're adjusting to others' vacations, too.

Keep in mind that sailing on a holiday weekend may mean that the shops in the port towns are closed.

Once the sails are up, there is plenty of free time to relax and talk, read, play games or soak up the sea air – wet or dry.

The vessels are all risk insured. The crew has a third party insurance towards the passengers. Passengers are advised to purchase their own travel insurance – including coverage for such thing as a force 7 Beaufort wind. (Don't be intimidated by the clauses; the sall companies are happy to explain.)





The Klipper Nirwana from De Zeilyaart

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selmeer and Markermeer to a two-week trip that extends to the northern waters of Norway for closer to NLG 1,443. There are day cruises for between 10 and 200 or more guests, and special boats reserved for young people aged 18 to 30. There are mid-week or weekend schedules, cruises specializing in handicapped travelers or senior citizens. There's even a trip where you can practice your yoga on deck.

What each of these trips provides, though, is a peek at Dutch history, as told by the skippers and crews who are keeping the old traditions alive.

The range of trips caters to every level of sailing expertise. Although more experienced sailors may charter a 'schokker' (Dutch flatbottomed boat) or a 'lemsteraak' (barge) without a crew, most travelers choose to go with a skipper and first mate.

A typical team is Sjef Roest, skipper of the Vriendschap from De Zeilvaart's fleet of 120 vessels. He is assisted by Klaus, the first mate, and a ship's cat named Maomao. Heike from Friesland helps out in the galley.

Roest has been sailing traditional ships for seven years and knows his way around, onshore and off. He's precise with his instructions to novice sailors, especially since there are often a mix of native Dutch, German and English speakers on board. Though he's quick to explain how the sails or instruments work, it isn't necessary for would-be sailors to understand the concepts. Orders are broken down to pulling a particular rope in a specific direction at a certain time.

"Most people who come on board don't know how to sail," says Roest. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. "Sometimes it's those who know too much who get into trouble," Each ship has its own story. Le Boheme owned by De Zeilvaart was one of the fastest ships on the Rhine when it was built in 1876, designed to race against the current with its cargo. The Zuiderzee is the Netherlands' only original two-masted schooner still under sail. The ship has made two trips to Brazil during its 91-year life, but paid its dues hauling rocks between Germany and Scandinavia.

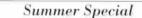
Roest's Vriendschap is typical of what travelers can expect when they book a trip. The klipper was launched in 1905 and carried cargo until 1983, first under sail and later with an engine. It spent most of its life hauling coal and other supplies between Antwerp and Rotterdam. In 1985 the ship was refitted and totally renovated to a passenger vessel. Nowadays the Vriendschap is kitted out with

two and three-berth cabins, each with a sink and cold running water. There are two showers and two toilets for guests to share, as well as a roomy dining area and kitchen. A fourstar ship, it can accommodate 20 guests.

"Most groups rent the whole ship with their friends, but there is a growing number of singles and couples booking and joining in on other trips," explains Sandra Niesten of De Zeilvaart, the largest operator of traditional ships in Holland. "If you have more than ten people, you can book your own ship."

Many groups, be they friends, club or family members, do their own cooking or eat at quayside restaurants, although a wide range of catering services are available for corporate day cruises and cooks can be hired for the longer trips. It's much like renting a holiday house without having to plan daily excursions for sight seeing. On the ship, the sights come to you.

As one captain put it, "There's a little bit of adventure in it, but you don't have to worry that you won't survive. You'll be a little sea sick at most." But even a bout of sea sick-





Klippers and tjalks have flat bottoms

ness is rare on the calm waters and stable boats.

You really don't have to worry about the safety of the ships. All the commercially marketed vessels meet a high level of standards and are checked regularly per requirements. Skippers of De Zeilvaart and other major operators have a recognized skipper's certificate for a sailing vessel. There is safety equipment on board. You can relax and spend your time planning where you want to sail.

In search of the Zuiderzee

Trying to trace the history of Dutch seafaring isn't easy. You won't even find the Zuiderzee on your maps today. In 1932, the Afsluitdijk was constructed, separating the Waddenzee from the newly formed IJsselmeer and turning the latter into a freshwater lake.

You'll have to look beyond your map to find the real Zuiderzee – to the creaking masts of the klippers and tjalks, or to the Golden Age buildings in Hoorn and Enkhuizen and Sneek and Bolsward.

Keeping in mind that you're always at the mercy of the winds and weather, you can choose a trip or design an itinerary to fit your interests. One of the best ways to immerse yourself in history is by visiting the Zuiderzee Museum in Enkhuizen. In keeping with the age of your ship, walk through 130 buildings dating from the turn of the last century, where craftsmen, fishermen and farmers

demonstrate their skills dating back to last decades of the Zuiderzee, 1880 – 1932.

In Hoorn, which gave its name to Cape Horn at the southern tip of South America, you'll see a mighty trading city, one of the six founding members of the United East India Company. Many of its historical buildings are still intact. Monnickendam boasts meticulously restored 17" century houses and the green cottages of Marken recall the centuries when it was an isolated fishing village before being connected to the mainland by a causeway in the 1950s.

Sailing back to nature

If the IJsselmeer and Markermeer are the places to search out history, the Waddenzee is the place to explore nature. Its extensive salt meadows and mud flats, with an incredible diversity of birds—seagulls, terns, eider ducks, oyster-catchers, curlew, avocet, spoonbills and even a few flamingos—provide round-the-clock scenery. Visitors may even view a seal or two when the mud flats dry out and the animals move in for a sun bath. There are also island-hopping excursions to the Friesian Sea, the largest connected nature reserve in Europe.

There are several opportunities to soak up Dutch history, without sailing on the open waters. Sailing the canals, gliding through the fields, high enough to look over dikes and reeds, but at a slow enough pace to enjoy the historical farmhouses, old towns, antique sluices and bridges is a scenic alter-

native. Windmill spotting has never been this

A trip through Friesland takes you by Sneek and Bolsward, once seaports on the Zuiderzee and now inland. At Heeg and Gaastmeer eel barges would sail to London until the 1940s. What better way to visit the cheese market at Alkmaar or to explore the North Sea Canal, built in 1876?

Whether you opt for a day, a weekend or an even longer trip, traditional vessels are a unique way to discover an important part of Dutch history. They're a great way to delve into the culture of your adopted home — as well as a wonderful change for entertaining houseguests in the busy summer season.

For more information about sailing in Holland

De Zeilvaart, Enkhuizen tel: 0228 - 31 24 24 info@zeilvaart.com www.zeilvaart.com

Zeilvloot Lemmer-Stavoren, Stavoren,

tel: 0514 - 68 18 18 www.zeilvloot.nl

Flying Sailer Zeilcharters, Marken tel: 0299 - 60 20 53 flying.sailer@tip.nl

Rederij voor de Wind, Weesp tel: 0294 - 41 25 57

Channel Cruises Holland, Watergang

(also bike and barge tours) tel: 020 - 436 35 74 channelcruises@multiweb.nl www.channelcruises.nl

Zeilvloot Muiden, Watergang tel: 020 - 436 0028 zellvootmuiden@channelcruises.nl

For a quick, one-day taste of the seas, you can purchase a Rail Idee package called The Historic Triangle or 'Historische Driehoek' that includes train fare from Amsterdam to Enkhuizen; a boat to Medemblik; a steam train to Hoorn and train fare back to Amsterdam. Fares are NLG 53.50 per person. For more information, tel: 0229 - 21 48 62.