



Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



Visiting Amsterdam and Friends

by Amaru & Suzanne, August 21st 2007

The reason we visited Amsterdam was thanks to Zilia and Pär, when we were planning the trip they told us that they were going there just a few days after the wedding together with Kira and Freddy and asked us if we wanted to tag along. Sure, why not!

As we mentioned in the last blog, Suz and I had to catch a flight at 7am so that meant a really early start to the day. On arrival in Schiphol we had to walk forever to get to the luggage pickup, it's a big airport. After a bit of confusion getting our luggage (they kept telling us to go to different carousels for collection) we eventually stepped out and grabbed the train into the city.

We managed to find the hostel Zilia had booked for all of us without any problems and dropped our bags there, it was still too early to check in and the booking was in the name of Pär anyway so we just left to wander around for an hour or two before they arrived.

First impression, well... there really are coffeeshops all over town, you notice it first by the smell, you look around and there it is, we also saw quite a few "red light windows" with the girls behind the glass door (and this was around 11am), all of this about 2 min away from our hostel.



We have arrived in Amsterdam
...a little tired but ready to go!



Cute little lanes
can be found everywhere

But don't get us wrong, the hostel was not in a bad area, it was not in the actual "Red Light District" either, this is just Amsterdam!

After a small toastie for breakfast (thanks for not feeding us SAS, not sure we'll fly with you again) we went back to the hostel, met up with the others, checked in and headed back out again.

It's difficult to try and plan anything when you are with such a big group, Suz and I are used to just the two of us. We now had to see what everyone wanted to see, and we thought why not do the "Heineken Experience", a bit of a tour that shows you how they make the beer and stuff... Normally I'm not a Heineken fan, but a tour with a few beers included still sounded ok to us.

To get there we decided to walk, that way we would get to see as much of the city as possible. We passed the main square, The Dam, walked over plenty of canals, thought about getting a canal tour later on and finally, we reached our destination.

The tour itself was quite fun, obviously it contains a lot of information and advertising about Heineken, but still... not bad. The highlight of the tour was where you got to stand on a moving platform with a movie screen in front of you. Then the movie started and you got to experience what it was like to be a bottle during the bottling process. Lots of fun!

Halfway through the tour there was a bar where we had a short beer stop. With the tour, three beers are included, you get three plastic coloured chips and one of them (a green one) could be used here.



Plenty of canal tours to choose from
In the end we skipped it



Amsterdam is a beautiful city
All these houses are lovely

Anyway, to cut a story short, we continued the tour and at the end got some more beers. Here we got some extra chips from two Brazilian girls that didn't need that many, add that to the fact that Pär had been given a few extra and you can understand that we were in for a treat =))

In the end we gave some of our chips away to four thirsty looking British guys that were really happy to see them....

On our way back to the city center it started raining so we quickly jumped on the first tram we saw, once on it we couldn't seem to find a place to pay so we kept our eyes open for ticket controllers. We made it though and got off at The Dam again.

That night we had Indian for dinner after walking for what seemed for ever to get there. Dinner was ok, nothing special about it but at this point we were getting quite tired, my eyes could barely stay open, I had to get back to the hostel to get my contacts out. So to stay awake I joined Zilia for a quick walk outside while she tried to get Theo to sleep.

After that was done we decided to do a walk through the famous "Red Light District". We walked into the area and the first thing you notice are the fact that there are sex shops all over the place. Soon enough we started seeing the girls behind the glass doors as well.

The first few windows we walked past were not occupied by pretty women, they were in fact quite large and unattractive, and we wondered if that was it.... but walk a few more alleys and really venture inside and you'll find the heart of the district.



The Bulldog Coffee Shop
Can be found all over the city



Here what's for sale
Inside you get a menu

Have some self esteem issues? Just walk through this area where all the pretty ladies wave at you as if you were the most attractive male on the planet.....funny!!

That night we crashed and slept all through the night. The next morning we had breakfast together and then said goodbye to them all, they were flying that morning to Barcelona while we were staying in The Netherlands for a few more days.

We were going to meet my friend Anders and his wife Danielle later on during the day, but since we had a few hours to kill we decided to do at least one museum in Amsterdam. We chose to do Anne Franks House.

Everyone knows the story about the Jewish family that were hidden during the Second World War and about Anne Frank, the little girl that kept a diary about her daily life in hiding. To walk in the actual hidden apartment and reading about them was quite moving. Only the father in the family survived the concentration camps and he later on published his daughters diary...

After the museum Suz and I caught a train down to Alphen aan den Rijn to meet up with Anders. We went to his house and just sat there catching up. We used to work together in Dublin, and had managed to catch up again in Thailand when I worked there (he was the one that got me the job at Poseidon since he knows the owner, Olof).



All of us shared a 6 bed
dorm room at a hostel

Later on Danielle, his wife, arrived and we all sat down together and had a very nice dinner.



Red curtains... just a small preview of whats to come

The next morning Anders, Suz and I were heading into Leiden, a small university town just 10min away. While getting ready at their place and walking down the stairs (it's a typical Dutch house with lots of small, narrow, winding stairs) Suz slipped and took the last few steps with her bum. Both Anders and I rushed to her aid and we were fearing that it would be something serious. Luckily she landed on her bum cheek so no bones were hurt. That is not to say that she wasn't in pain, but after a few jumps here and there she got herself together...

She was fine to walk so we made it to the train station and went into Leiden. The first thing we saw when we got out of the train station was a typical Dutch Herring stall... and I just had to try it. It's a piece of pickled raw herring which you put some raw onion on, grab it by the tail and then just eat it.

Even though Suz was almost having a fit I still ate it and didn't think much of it... it tasted mostly of onion to be honest. She still didn't want to kiss me afterwards and forced me to chew on some chewing gum =))

During the rest of that day we kept walking around the city, seeing windmills, more canals and trying out some more Dutch specialties. Another one of them is "Kroketten", a cheesy, meaty, saucy and deepfried kind of a snack.... quite tasty!

We finished up the day by having some "Poffertjes", tiny typical Dutch pancakes with powder sugar and butter, the kind that you will find all over the world labeled as "Dutch Pancakes", very Yummy!!



Freddy and Pär playing around just to see peoples reactions



Dam Square where we choose to sit down

That night we all sat together for another great dinner with some wine. We later saw some of their photos of their wedding and their Tuscany trip. But since we all had to get up early the next morning we had an early night.

The next morning after first saying goodbye to Anders, Danielle took us to the bus station where we caught the bus to the airport and boarded our flight to Venice.

Amsterdam is a great city with lots to do, we only spent two days there so we didn't manage to see all that it offers, and it's also difficult to see much with a big group.... but we sure had a lot of fun. And we know that we will be back at some point in the future.

And Anders and Danielle, thanks again for having us, it was great catching up... and like we said, if you are ever in our neck of the woods, just let us know!



Warming up with a few beers before the food arrived



This is how happy Pär is for having found the Heineken brewery





We got some rain so a poncho was needed for the trolley



Freddy was given a HUGE Jameson Bottle that he wanted to keep



Pär and his poncho, what else to expect from one purchased here



The Red Light District I managed to snap a photo



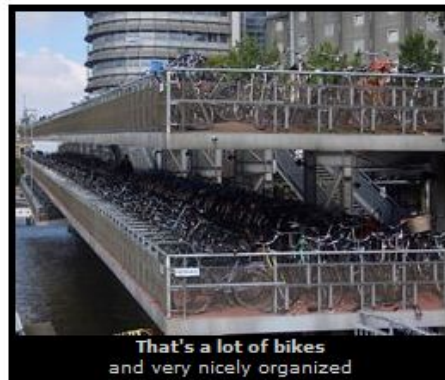
Canals and more canals That's Amsterdam for you



The only museum that we visited And it was quite interesting



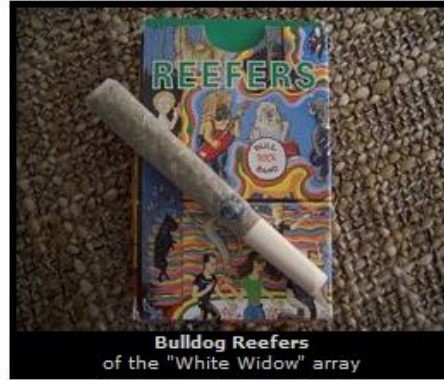
Quite a queue outside Anne Franks House



That's a lot of bikes and very nicely organized



Many many cheeses
The Netherlands in a nut shell



Bulldog Reefers
of the "White Widow" array



Suz and I
On our way to Leiden



Anders on a train
at Alphen aan den Rijn



Dutch Herring
Let's try it



Just hold it by the tail
and then just eat it!



You can find these places all
over the place



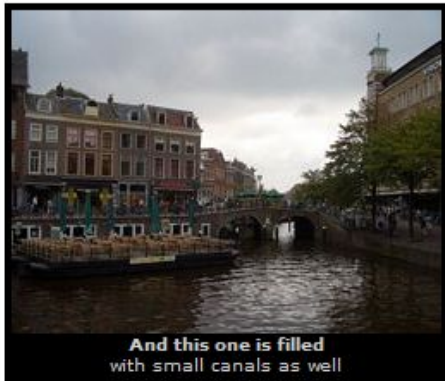
A windmill, can't leave the
country without seeing one



They have Coffee Shops
here in Leiden as well



Leiden is a cute
little university town



And this one is filled
with small canals as well



Suz and Anders
During one of our small breaks



Anders and I
dig into some "kroketten"



And that's how you
transport 7 kids around



A huge church in Leiden
But very sparsely decorated



Another windmill
We are in the Netherlands after all



Suz and I
and the windmill



"Poffertjes"
Tiny Dutch pancakes



Suz and I dig in
Yum!



We just missed the train
Now we wait for another 30min



Anders and his wife Danielle
Thanks for letting us stay at your place!



Suz's bum after her accident
...she gets one for each country

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