

## 020327 Chocolate Jimmies On Toast

Greetings! I returned from the Netherlands on Tuesday morning after spending four days there with my friends Micah and Thomas (unfortunately, Michele was not able to join us.) The visit was really nice and we were able to see a lot of the country by bicycle. The Netherlands is the most populated country in the EU with over 15 million people living in 13,255 sq km, or 5117 sq miles (according to Let's Go Europe 2002.) Riding our bikes through the country, we never really saw a distinct end to one town and the beginning of another. Rather, there are definite city and town centers, but the outskirts of the towns sort of bleed into each other with farms or well cared for parks in between. For example, the kilometers between the major cities of Amsterdam and Haarlem were just industrial parks or housing developments and the only indication that we had left the outskirts of one city and were entering another were the signs long the bike route. But, the towns, cities and houses themselves are beautiful.

The cities and towns have the traditional European buildings of brick with narrow streets and pedestrian malls. People live in either apartments in the cities, condominium looking houses in the outskirts of the cities that are all connected together, or in free standing houses further from the towns. All of the homes are immaculately cared for as are the gardens. Even the tiny gardens out front of houses in the towns would be adorned by perfectly shaped shrubbery and flowers. Houses with more room such as those that bordered canals would have gazebos, patios and perfect lawns. The Dutch have a zeal for careful urban planning and so the cities are well laid out and the architecture mostly conservative, but always nice and interesting. We did see the occasional daring architecture with sweeping glass entranceways or oddly shaped houses, but even these could be interesting and otherwise homey.

The Dutch themselves were very warm and friendly. The people were such a change from the coolness that the Danes can have. For example, Micah has been trying to call a friend of his in Denmark for over a month. Every time he called, Micah would ask for Marie and the man would tell Micah that she was not there. Finally, Micah asked if he was dialing the correct number and the man told him that he was not. However, I called a wrong number in Holland and the woman I spoke with was very friendly and after a brief conversation wished me a good day. We would meet people as we traveled who were helpful with our travel plans and it was easy to strike up conversations with random people. I spent a while chatting with the ushers at the concert hall about the design of the hall and listening to their opinions. The conversations were all easy since the Dutch are all fluent in English. Part of the Dutch mentality which has been described as looking down on themselves is that "not many people speak Dutch, so we must all speak English". However, Dutch is close to Danish, English and French and so we could get by just fine for example when ordering from menus in restaurants.

The food in the Netherlands was definitely something to write home about. Lets start with breakfast. A traditional Dutch favorite is bread or toast with butter and chocolate jimmies (sprinkles for those of you not living in Massachusetts) on top. Chocolate for breakfast, how can you go wrong? We all tried the curious delight and loved it. Fruit

flavored jimmies were also available, but the chocolate ones were far better. Our other breakfast foods included bread with cheese and meat, bread with jam or chocolate spread, orange juice and coffee.

During our bike ride, we stopped at a market in Haarlem and purchased these “cookies” that were amazing. They involved two flat, soft waffles about 4 inches in diameter with something like caramel spread between them. These were made in front of us at the stand and were incredibly good.

For dinner, a traditional food is a pancake with either a sweet filling or filled with vegetables or meat. The pancakes themselves are large (12 inches in diameter) and fluffy. The filling is placed in the middle and the pancake is folded over. We had dinner one night in a traditional Dutch restaurant and I had a pancake with curry chicken and vegetables which was delicious. Some of the sweet fillings include apples or other fruits and syrup and sugar can be poured on top of the pancake.

Also to be found are the pizza and Turkish restaurants that can be found all over Europe. Plus each town will have at least one Chinese restaurant. Especially in Amsterdam, there is either a huge Chinese population, or the Dutch can not get enough Chinese food. Also Indonesian restaurants are everywhere since Indonesia was a Dutch colony at one time.

I think that I ate more chocolate and butter on this trip than the whole two months prior. Actually, since moving to Europe, I have struggled to resist bakeries or chocolates whereas in the US it was not an issue. It must be my Dutch genes that were excited to be home, or my Mahn genes which my father once explained lead to always being able to find all of the Mahn relatives around the dessert table in the dining room at my grandmother’s dinner parties. But, when you are biking over 40 km a day, you need a little more energy . . .

I really love the Netherlands. Its people, the beautiful towns and cities, and the food would make it difficult to resist if I ever had the opportunity to live in the Netherlands.

My friend Monica is currently here in Copenhagen on a visit, so I will have to tell more about our trip in the next email. As always, I will start at the beginning of the trip with the city where we spent our first night, Amsterdam.

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