



Water in the leading role

Whether you look at the Netherlands from an historic, economic or touristic perspective, water always seems to play an important role. And if the past, present and future of the country are closely linked to water, why not connect the element with a business meeting?

That water is of vital importance to man, is corroborated by the fact that the first settlements in the Netherlands were situated near important water locations like rivers and estuaries. Where at first, we just had to cope with the whims of this element, we later on

succeeded more and more in curbing it and to employ it for our economic gain. Archeological findings have proved that at the time of the Iron Age there already was a flourishing inland navigation, which shipped, among other products, salt from the German mountains to be marketed in these regions. Our ancestors also made a living from the various types of fish from the sea, and this industry only intensified in the course of the centuries. In villages like Volendam, Marken, Urk and Veere the gathered riches from those days are still evident in the many monuments you can admire there. In the seventeenth century, the Netherlands were even the most powerful seafaring nation of Europe thanks to explorers like Jan Huygen van Linschoten, Hendrik Abel Tasman and Oliver van Noort, the VOC (United East India Company) and the WIC (West India Company), and capable admirals like Michiel de Ruyter and Cornelis Tromp. The monuments in cities

like Zwolle, Zutphen, Bolsward, Kampen and Stavoren remind us of the flourishing-period of the so-called Hanze cities, whereas the many canal buildings in large cities like Amsterdam and Middelburg are remainders from the prosperous VOC period. It is with good reason that in the Netherlands, several museums dedicated to shipping have been established. To name one example: at the Batavia wharf in the city of Lelystad the interested visitor can admire the Batavia vessel, a reconstruction of a VOC ship from 1628, as well as the construction of the 'De Zeven Provinciën', admiral Michiel de Ruyter's flagship from 1665.

The Dutch economy still partly depends on the water. Among other ways, the import and export of products is done by sea, and the port of Rotterdam is the largest and most important container port and transshipment port of Europe. Because of their advanced expertise, Dutch dredging companies were also involved in major projects like the construction of the port of Jubail, the raising by spouting sand up of Chek Lap Kok for Hong Kong International Airport, and the realization of the famous Palm islands in Dubai. The Netherlands are also forerunner in the field of offshore activities with multinational Shell and two windmill parks in the North Sea.

Battle against the water

The first dikes in our country stem from the period that the Romans planted their banners in our soil. In the course of the

centuries, our ancestors have been continuing to experiment with new techniques for dikes and polders in order to curb the capricious waters. One of the highlights in this battle was the damming of the Zuiderzee, which was initiated in 1920. In this enormous project, this large body of water was split up, by, among other elements, the Afsluitdijk, into the smaller IJsselmeer and a part that was added to the Waddenzee. In phases, polders were drained as well. The present province of Flevoland consists of the IJsselmeer polders Noordoost polder, Oostelijk Flevoland and Zuidelijk Flevoland which were drained between 1936 and 1968. Apart from the construction of dikes, the filling up of canals (Damrak and Rokin in Amsterdam) and the draining of polders to curb the waters, the Dutch have also wanted to use this element to make areas inaccessible, and thus, keep the enemy at bay. In 1672 the then 'Republiek der Zeven Verenigde Nederlanden' was attacked by France, England and the city-states of Munster and Cologne. A water line was constructed by which the land from the village of Muiden via Woerden and Goerijpverwellesluis to Gorinchem was inundated by a shallow body of water. The enemies' armies could not cross this water line until, in 1672, the water froze at Woerden. Later, the 'Hollandse Waterlinie' was reinforced with forts, batteries and other defence structures. From 1815 onwards, a completely new line of defence was established with the city of Utrecht as central point. This line runs from the island of Pampus in the Zuiderzee to the Biesbosch area and comprises the five fortified cities of Muiden, Weesp, Gorinchem and



Scheepvaartmuseum Amsterdam (photo Eddo Hartman)



Woudrichem. A number of structures, from the old as well as the new water line, can still be visited, like Fort Ronduit, Fort Wierickerschans, Fort Pampus and Fort bij Vechten.

World wonder

In spite of these measures, the Dutch history mentions a number of major disasters caused by flooding. In 1570, for instance, the Dutch and Flemish coast was ravaged by the so-called All Saints flood in which 20,000 people were killed. The best known disaster is the Watersnoodramp of 1953 when, because of a combination of a storm surge, a spring tide and a heavy north-west storm, the dikes in the Delta region collapsed and 1,836 people and tens of thousands of animals were drowned. In the years following this disaster, the Deltaplan was executed to shorten the Dutch coastline by some 700 kilometers by the construction of closed and openable dams between the islands of the provinces of Zuid-Holland and Zeeland. The Oosterscheldekering and the Maeslantkering are of such high technological level that the American Society of Civil Engineers has proclaimed these one of the seven modern wonders of the world. At Deltapark Neeltje Jans visitors can learn more about the Watersnoodramp and the Deltawerken. Thanks to the quest for solutions, the Netherlands are leaders in the field of water management, with king Willem-Alexander as its champion. But the flooding of the Maas river in 1993, the evacuation

of the inhabitants of the Rivierengebied in 1995 and the All Saints flood of 2006 have shown that the work on the Dutch dikes is never finished.

Roaring waves

These days, many tourists as well as the Dutch themselves, like to spend their free time near water. Areas like the Wadden islands, the Beemster polder, the Kinderdijk and Schokland are included in the UNESCO World Heritage list, as are the Amsterdam canals. And with more than 4,400 kilometers of navigable rivers, canals and lakes, the Dutch like to board ship (or boat) to sail these waters and then moor their vessels at one of the beautiful regions and locations bordering these waters. From 19 to 23 August this year, we can once again enjoy Sail Amsterdam, an international event during which the so-called tall ships and marine heritage will be sailing the Amsterdam waterways and canals. For ages, water, seas and rivers have also been among the favorite subjects of art painters. In the seventeenth century marine pieces and seaviews were genres a painter could specialize in. Pieter Brueghel the Elder, Jacob van Ruisdael and Salomon van Ruysdael, amongst other artists, have produced paintings in this genre. In the nineteenth century, the painters made good use of the inspiration they got from these famous predecessors. The representatives of the Dutch Romanticism like Louis Meijer and Mauritz de Haas as well

as the members of the so-called Haagse School like Hendrik Willem Mesdag were known for their tranquil seaviews and marine pieces with roaring waves and 'dancing' vessels.

Sustainable initiatives

For ages, water has been a standard element in the Netherlands, but in view of the increasing drought, we are becoming more and more aware of the great value of drinking-water. In the Netherlands alone, we use 1.5 million liters of water per person per year – without even opening the tap. 95% of all that water is hidden in everyday products like a cup of coffee (130 liters) or a cotton T-shirt (2,700 liters). Therefore it is imperative to reduce our water footprint, in addition to the already familiar CO2 footprint. Within the MICE industry a number of initiatives is already being developed to make meetings and events more sustainable. Country estate Zonheuvel in Doorn, for instance, uses rain-water in the grey water circuit to flush the toilets. To this end, the rainwater is collected and filtered en stored underground. Remarkable is the shower coach: an hourglass to make guests aware of the length of their shower session. If, for instance, the average shower session can be reduced from 8.5 minutes to 4 minutes, no less than 45 liters of warm water can be saved per session, which boils down to 315 liters per week. Hotel and Congress center Kontakt der Kontinenten in Soesterberg contributes to the battle against the water issue by donating a sum of money to Stichting FairWater for every

bottle of chilled and purified house water served at this location. This organization (the Stichting) replaces broken water-pumps in African villages with durable BluePumps from the Netherlands. When these BluePumps are installed they donate, at the same time, water bottles to the users of these durable pumps via the BlueBottle project.

The Fokker Terminal in the city of The Hague has determined the average water use per visitor by means of a survey conducted by the Water Footprint Network and the TU (Technical University) Twente. This 'water footprint' comprises all the clean drinking-water needed in the production chain of food and drinks, plus the water use for cleaning and toilet use at this location. By means of a collaboration project with Made Blue, the Fokker Terminal will be the first Dutch event location to make available in developing countries, for every liter of used drinking-water, the same quantity of clean water. This is done by means of donations to clean drinking-water projects like desalination machines and water pumps, but also via information and education. It is estimated that in 2015 the Fokker terminal wil make available some 9.6 million liters of water.

Whether your preferences are for the historic, artistic, technical, touristic or sustainable aspects of water, for every point of view there are various interesting locations where you can learn more about these specific subjects. ■

