

## Amsterdam – April 2012

Our Amsterdam Gathering offered a rich and interesting programme to each of our participants. Starting on Monday, 23rd April, we got to know each other at the welcome dinner at the friendly Artemis Hotel, where we stayed during the rest of the week.

On Tuesday we started the discovery of Amsterdam with a canal cruise, then walking through the streets and alleys of this exciting city. The evening was spent in various lively little groups, who went to the Nederlandse Dans Theater and/or tried an adventurous meal. The second day was a full day tour through the North-Holland countryside, with a dreamlike blue sky, an amazing number of windmills in Zaanse Schans, an old Dutch village dating from the 17th century. We visited a clogs company and bought some of the more or less original souvenirs of the place. We visited Edam with its attractive canals crossed by narrow wooden bridges.

At Marken we experienced a dramatic change of weather, but nevertheless enjoyed the main street at the seaside and the local pubs. Later a very special dinner in town took place in the city, an Indonesian rijsttafel. Various group members joined Marieken on a tour through the Red Light District. On Thursday we all enjoyed a day tour to Delft, where we visited one of the Delftware porcelain manufactures, getting to know the production process. A visit to Madurodam, the renovated miniature village showing the Netherlands' most famous architecture, was most entertaining.

On the way back to Amsterdam we stopped at The Hague, with its royal residence, the Parliament buildings, the embassy quarter and the Peace Palace. In the evening a group went on a walk through Haarlem, admiring some of its Almshouses and enjoying a typically Dutch pub meal.

One of the highlights of the gathering certainly was our tour to Alkmaar and its folkloristic cheese market on the last day. This was followed by a visit to Keukenhof. What a surprise: apart from tulip fields and wonderful tulip beds there was an orchid exhibition and a Japanese garden as well. Our farewell dinner took place in a traditional Dutch restaurant, 'Haesje Claes', in the old city centre of Amsterdam.

In addition to the 22 participating 5W ladies and the five 5W members of the organizing team, three other members joined us on that night". We came from all over the world, from the USA, NZ, Australia, England, Scotland, Switzerland, Germany, France, Finland and Belgium. From my point of view, the gathering was most rewarding - good international contacts, fine sights, excellent organisation - many thanks to all the organisers and all the participants.

*Susanna, Switzerland*

