

Summer Cruises to the Netherlands Part 1: Zeeland and Standing Mast route to Amsterdam

Holland is in some ways a paradise for sailors, with plenty of sheltered and semi-sheltered waters, plus lots of friendly - and by UK standards cheap - harbours and marinas.

Unfortunately, it can be VERY crowded in July and August! Both on the water and especially going through the locks and in the harbours (June or September can be better months if you don't like crowds).

And most Dutch people speak fluent English!

Holland is divided into three separate sailing areas: in the south Zeeland and in the north the IJsselmeer and the Waddenzee. These areas have very different features.

The Zeeland Delta has the most sheltered waters; the IJsselmeer is a vast freshwater tideless "lake" while the Waddenzee is a beautiful area of mud flats, sandbanks and fast flowing channels with countless water birds.

This first of two articles, covers the Zeeland Delta and the inland standing mast route as far as Amsterdam and is directed at those with 3 or 4 weeks time, who like sailing in manageable hops and who like to spend some time sightseeing.



Starting point

Holland is easy to reach from UK; even for husband & wife crews restricted to daytime sailing if departing from Ramsgate or Dover and sailing via one of the Belgian harbours.

Oostende is a good choice or Blankenberge – but watch out here at low water springs for depth in the entrance channel, especially in early in the year before the annual dredging! (If in doubt you can phone the harbour master to check before departing ☎ 0032-59321669).

From either of these harbours it is pleasant cruise of approx 5 respectively 3 hours to **Vlissingen** on the Westerschelde. The best harbour to chose is the old fishing harbour, now renovated with all mod. cons., where you lie in the middle of the town. There is plenty to see and do here.

The Zeeland Delta

De Zeeland delta includes the following waters:

- Westerschelde (industrial and not ideal for pleasure craft);
- Veerse meer (a small, narrow salt lake, ideal for Westerly's with small children)
- Oosterschelde (one of the prettiest sailing areas in Europe some claim);
- Grevelingen meer (a large salt water lake, fully adapted for the watersport);
- Haringvliet (a wide river with several tourist attractions).

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For the Zeeland waters you need the Dutch **chart 1805**. This is obtainable in most watersport shops for about NLG 35 (and from the ANWB).

Westerschelde

All you should see of this is Vlissingen (Flushing)!

Veerse meer

After passing the locks, just up river from the harbour, you are in the 'canal through Walcheren'.

Halfway along this canal lies **Middelburg**. A lovely town that you certainly should visit.

If you spend the night here, the club house of the local sailing club The Arne is recommended for a good and not expensive meal.

Continuing further you come via another lock into the Veerse meer at the small town of **Veere** (an alternative stopover to Middleburg, or for just a midday break). On the Veerse meer are many small islands where one can moor up. At its east end is the Zandkreek lock leading to the tidal Oosterschelde.

Oosterschelde

A very beautiful area; the places most worth visiting are **Zierikzee** and **Bergen op Zoom**.

Zierikzee is a very old, touristic little town, but the marina falls down very badly on sanitary facilities.

Bergen op Zoom is totally different, a real shopping town.

If you are looking for somewhere quieter **Tholen**, **Wemeldingen** and **Colijnsplaat** can be recommended.

If you have small children, you should visit **Goes**. You have to pass a lock and after the third bridge is on port a small harbour The Werf, where there may be room to tie up. If not, there is the Roompot marina near the storm tide barrier. This has a subtropical swimming pool and several other attractions.

The Grevelingenmeer

Via the Grevelingen lock one comes into the largest salt water lake in Europe. A true Mekka for the water sport. Crystal clear water, many islands, sandy beaches and harbours. To moor at one of the islands you need to buy a week ticket at about NLG 20 (obtainable at most of the harbours).

An exceptional marina with extensive facilities is Port Zélande (even a children crèche). It is reminiscent of St Tropez – and can be just as crowded.

Haringvliet

Leaving by the same lock, one continues to the Krammer locks and via the Zoommeer further to the Volkerak locks and the Haringvliet.

On starboard lies the picturesque little town of **Willemstad**, worth a visit.

(Opposite in the harbour of Numansdorp you might see a Fulmar 32 Zee Otter, belonging to the co-writer of this article). If anyone is on board, say hello and have a beer.

Other small towns worth visiting in this area are **Middelharnis** and **Hellevoetsluis**.

The standing mast route

From here it is possible to follow the so called "standing mast" inland route all the way to Amsterdam and the IJsselmeer (and beyond). It involves passing several locks and about 30 bridges. If you intend doing this and are a member of the AA or RYA, you can obtain from the Dutch ANWB a free guide to bridge opening times etc. Quote your membership number.

The address is:

Summer Cruises to the Netherlands Part 2: The IJsselmeer and Waddenzee

For those with plenty of time, this could be a continuation of a cruise starting in Zeeland and coming up through the canals to Amsterdam (see Six Haven).

For others, it probably means a 20 –30 hour North Sea crossing from the English East Coast to IJmuiden (100 miles from Lowestoft, 120 miles from Harwich)

Arriving at **IJmuiden**, (watch out for turbulence in strong winds, with the tide swirling around the massive breakwaters) one can "recover" if necessary in the new luxury **Sea Port Marina**, with all mod cons. (rather expensive by Dutch standards but good value for money).

You hardly need a chart for the 4 hours or so to Amsterdam along the North Sea canal, but there is one published by the ANWB (the "Dutch AA"). After passing the locks at IJmuiden (allow a good hour, could be more) you follow the canal to **Amsterdam**.

The **Six Haven** (in the centre and almost opposite the main railway station) is ideal for exploring Amsterdam.

After you have "done" Amsterdam, on via the Oranje locks into the **southern IJsselmeer**.

Recommended harbours to visit include:

Marken is a quaint village to visit for a few hours, but don't stay overnight.

Volendam is not recommended unless you like noise and mass tourism; maybe OK for a short visit.

Edam is pleasant (either the sailing club just inside the entrance or better continue into the town to save long walks later).

Hoorn, a must, tie up in the old "gemeente" fishing harbour rather than the marinas either side). This is a busy small town, with lots of quaint old buildings etc and good shopping possibilities.

Then via the Krabbergat locks (at busy weekends the wait here can run into several hours!!) to **Enkhuizen** and into the **northern IJsselmeer**.

The old "gemeente" harbour north of the locks can be crowded (rafting up to 10 deep is not unusual) and the marina half a mile further north is quieter. The **Zuiderzee Museum**, showing fishing village life as it used to be, next to the marina is worth visiting.

At busy weekends, the locks at **Lelystad** are a good alternative - and never busy. Don't stop here though but go on a few miles to **Urk**, an old fishing village (originally an island in the Zuiderzee) with plenty of opportunities to try smoked eel or salted ("new") herring. On Sundays Urk is VERY quiet !

Medemblik is a favourite spots, with a choice of either rafting up to starboard in the old harbour or if not too late, on through the bridge to the small marina to starboard (my choice). The Peckelharing marina (port side as you enter the old harbour is too far from the town to recommend).

Lemmer is a possibility, but with west winds difficult to sail away from.

Stavoren is not so special and the attractive village **Hinderloopen** is a better proposition - either the gemeente harbour if you are in time to get a good spot or otherwise the large modern marina to port.

Depending on inclination and the time available, one can either do a circular cruise around the IJsselmeer back to Amsterdam, stopping at the harbours missed so far; alternatively one can continue to the **Waddenzee** via the locks at Kornwerderzand or Den Oever.

The islands of Terschelling and especially Vlieland are very attractive – but unbelievably busy in July! (Vlieland harbour can get so full that a red flag closes it!). No cars on Vlieland, hire cycles for two or three pounds and cycle round the island stopping half way at the Post House for lunch (filled pancakes a speciality).

Then continue to **Texel** (alternatively go directly to Texel), not so nice as Vlieland or Terschelling but less busy.

One could then **leave from Texel for England**, timing it so that the current sweeps you out into the North Sea.

Or to avoid a long trip, **return via IJmuiden** (Scheveningen is very crowded with poor facilities). And if heading for the Dover, on to **Vlissingen** and then one of the **Belgian harbours**.

Possibilities enough in a cruise to the Netherlands to satisfy those with unlimited time (to do not only the IJsselmeer and the Waddenzee but also include Zeeland).

And with only 2 to 4 weeks available, choose between Zeeland one year and the IJsselmeer / Waddenzee another time.

PS: You should remember to set your vhf radios to low power while on Dutch inland waters!

Recomended charts for the IJsselmeer and Waddenzee

Hydrografische Kaart 1810 IJsselmeer.

Hydrografische Kaart 1811 Waddenzee West, edition 1999 (don't trust earlier editions because of shifting channels and sandbanks!)

The Dutch language ANWB **Almanak** is great for information - but you need to be able to read Dutch.