

On the 6th July our group met bright and early to travel to Dover and then over to Dunkirk. Thanks to our prompt start and our intrepid driver we caught an earlier ferry and arrived at The Hague and our hotel by 7.30pm. We enjoyed a welcome meal together.

On our first day in The Hague, which is very attractive, we had an opportunity to appreciate the architecture on our morning walk to the Mauritshuis, known as the "Royal Gallery of Paintings". We had two superb guides who clearly loved the Mauritshuis and the wonderful paintings. We saw in relative peace and quiet, Vermeer's, "Girl with a Pearl Earring" and many other delights.

In the afternoon we went to the Panorama Mesdag, a cylindrical painting over 14 metres high and 120 metres in circumference. Those bare facts do nothing to convey the sheer delight of this experience, we were led along a dark corridor, up a spiral staircase and into the centre of Scheveningen village with a vista of the sea, the dunes and village all around us. It was of course an optical illusion but a very impressive one indeed.

The next day was Amsterdam and the famous Rijksmuseum, what a contrast to the Mauritshuis! Many more people and large school groups all jostled for space round the masterpieces, including "The Night Watch" by Rembrandt. After our guided tour we could remain in the museum, go to the Van Gogh Museum or relax on a canal cruise.

Each day showed us new delights, and our final full day was no exception. In the morning we went to The Royal Palace of Het Loo which was built in 1685 and used until 1962. Beautifully furnished it brought to life the lives of the Royals who had used it as their country residence. We had individual audio guides which were useful, but even so I am not sure how many of us truly got to grips with the number of Williams and Marys who kept cropping up! The gardens were laid out with great skill, with circular, curving designs and water features. Then it was on to the Kroller-Muller Museum, this museum is situated in the centre of a large National Park and contains a private collection of paintings including Mondrian and Picasso. The sculpture garden was fascinating, and quite imaginative.

That evening we had a good time together at Humphrey's Restaurant before another early start and the journey back to Welwyn Garden City.