Trintella Vriendenkring Fall Reunion, November 2019

Many members decided to already travel to Dordrecht on Friday night, to ensure a great start of the Fall Reunion 2019. Unfortunately, we could not join them. The members who did, visited Restaurant & Grand Cafe Willaerts and came home with enthusiastic stories about the beautiful location, lovely dinner and fun they had together.

That Saturday morning, Hotel Apollo in Papendrecht put together a tasteful breakfast, a fine start to the day! After breakfast, we can cross right into the next room, where Frans and Yvonne Slikkerveer are waiting for us with coffee and tea. Helms van der Vegte also welcomes us, walks us through the programme and distributes available tickets for the visit to the traffic centre Dordrecht. There were more takers than the 30 slots available for this trip, but taking over 30 participants would have inconvenienced the centre’s staff too much.

We take our own car to the parking lot of the office of the Koninklijke Van Twist, the importer of, among other things, the famous Perkins diesel engines. Arriving here, we see Yvonne happily flagging us down with a Trintella banner, and Frans holding open the parking lot’s gate. After parking our cars for free right in the centre, we cross the small distance to the tourist offices. Here, four guides are waiting for us to take us on a beautiful city walk. We are divided into four groups, are notified of the arrival of Sinterklaas and then we head into the city centre. Our guide gives us a premium tour and tells us lovely, sage stories about the buildings and their inhabitants.

Dordrecht is the oldest city in the province of Holland; count Willem I gave it it’s city privileges in 1220. As an island bordering both rivers Merwede and Maas, Dordrecht was able to profit from toll and trade, which was very lucrative thanks to the staple rights and resulted in riches for the city and its inhabitants. The downside to its location, however, was the fact that the city would flood if the waters would rise too high. We can still see signs of the floods here and there; a particularly memorable one is the Saint Elizabeth flood of 1421, which engulfed a vast area around Dordrecht and, as a result, formed the famous Dutch Biesbosch.

We come to the Visbrug, where a bronze statue of the brothers De Witt can be found. They were born in Dordrecht in the 17th century and have played an important political role. A little further we find the building of the meat guild, where a large golden ox marks the façade. We then turn left to city hall, built on top of the canal. Oh, pardon, the city does not have canals, but harbours that were named after the merchandise traded there. There are so many beautiful streets and alleyways and buildings with equally great stories that we simply cannot admire the entire city centre in two hours. A trip at a later moment would surely be worth our time.

The tour ends at the Groothoofdspoort, where we have a beautiful view over the location where the three rivers, Oude Maas, Noord and Beneden Merwede, cross.

The Brasserie Down Town is located nearby, and its kind staff spoils us with a delicious lunch.

After lunch thirty lucky participants travel to the traffic centre of Dordrecht; the other members can spend more of their time in the lovely city centre.

The gate has already been opened for us and we are welcomed inside the building by Rolph Hedriks. Rolph gives us a brief overview of the history and function of the centre. There are four major active traffic centres: the traffic centre of Dordrecht, the central reporting centre of the IJsselmeer area, and the traffic centres of Nijmegen and Schellingwoude.

Traffic leaders assist captains when sailing confusing areas; this is called Vessel Traffic Service (or VTS). The traffic leaders inform the captains via the marine radio about the conditions of the fairways and volume of traffic. The traffic centres use radar and AIS to localise the ships.

During accidents or calamities, the traffic leaders step in as coordinator of the emergency assistance, keeping direct contact with the harbour authorities, police, fire brigade and other involved parties.

After this introduction, the group is split in two. One group goes to learn more about the Rijkswaterstaat’s activities through an accurate film. The other group joins Rolph in visiting the beating heart of the traffic centre, where all movements of ships can be closely monitored by using computer screens and seats directly facing the water. It was a fascinating trip and we are very grateful for Rolph’s expert guidance.

We gather at the bar at the Apollo hotel for drinks before the General Member Meeting begins. Contrary to such meetings with other associations, ours is well managed and fun. We agree to a small raise in our contribution to €35, -. Peter van der Waa and Loet Geldhoff are nominated for Honorary Membership, thanks to their many years of commitment to the association. This, too, is unanimously accepted and acclaimed. Rightly so, Frans and Yvonne are thanked for their hard work and this beautiful weekend in Dordrecht.

In the meantime, the dinner buffet has been readied for us. After a lovely but tiring day in Dordrecht and in the company of splendid table companions, we enjoy the delicious food and afterglow with great stories. The evening flies by and after one final drink at the bar, we go to bed with many memories of this marvellous day.

After enjoying the breakfast buffet on Sunday morning, our ways part. The both of us, and some other members, return to the city centre of Dordrecht to revel in its beauty again.

After visiting Dordrecht in 2015, king Willem Alexander spoke the famous words: ‘The closer you are to Dordrecht, the more fun it gets.’

We now understand why.