Dear Travelling Friends,

We are delighted that Meredith Travel will be taking a group of 25 to The Netherlands and Belgium in 2019. Today they are separate, but for far longer they were joined as the Low Countries. It was the growing Protestantism of Holland and the resolute Catholicism of Belgium when they were both controlled by Spain, and a very long war, that finally separated them. However, during the Golden Age of the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries the Dutch and Flemish were one. It is this joint heritage that we will celebrate on our tour, April 22-May 4, 2019.

We have termed this the “Molto Bene” tour because not only will it be VERY GOOD, but we had an itinerary so full of things to see that there simply wasn’t time for the “Lux” portion of Benelux — Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg. Since “Lux” is the Meredith motto, we will, in fact be bringing the “Lux” with us.

The year 2019 marks the 350th anniversary of Rembrandt’s death so there will be extra attention paid to this brilliant painting master throughout the country. Mid-April is also when — we hope based on past history — that the tulips will be at their peak. We hope and believe our custom designed itinerary will delight you!

**Day 1: April 22 — Departure day** from the U.S. to Amsterdam’s Schiphol Airport.

**Day 2: April 23 — Arrival day. This is the first of a three-day stay in Amsterdam.** We start the afternoon with a tour of the Van Gogh Museum, one of our very favorites because of how beautifully the story of his life, art, and times is shared with museum-goers. Then it’s off to Amsterdam’s largest street market, The Albert Cuyp, where you can buy food, flowers, clothing, or simply enjoy looking. The day ends with a 4-course dinner prepared by an award-winning chef as we cruise moonlit Amsterdam’s sparkling canals.

**Day 3: April 24 — The Rijksmuseum is the pride of Holland. It has Rembrandts — many Rembrandts — but also ship models, china, lace, and furniture. It encapsulates Holland’s Golden Age. After this focused tour, a guided city walk with street food tastings will be palate pleasing. Following this orientation, the remainder of the afternoon is yours to explore further — or return to the Rijksmuseum. However, be sure to be back in time for our traditional Dutch dinner in the city center.

**Day 4: April 25 —** The morning will find us traveling to Arnhem to the National Open Air Folk Museum where aspects of Dutch life at different time periods can be actively explored in historic buildings moved to the site. After our return to Amsterdam we will visit a “secret” Catholic church housed on the top floor of what once was a private residence. In fact, for centuries its existence was not really a secret in Protestant Holland, an affirmation of the tolerance that is a hallmark of this country. Finally, our last official stop of the day is guaranteed to be an experience — the Heineken Experience to be specific — where exhibits, beer, and food tastings will introduce you to another tradition since 1873.

**Day 5: April 26 — Time to leave the city for the day as we travel northeast to Marken, Volemdam, and Edam.** These small coastal fishing villages are just as quaint and colorful as you would envision. We’ll visit a cheese factory (with samples!), cruise across Ussel Lake (with coffee and pastries on board!), watch a shoemaker make wooden shoes, and have guided tours through the charming streets where it might be possible to acquire a souvenir or two.

**Day 6: April 27 — Today we move slightly west of Amsterdam for a two-night stay in Haarlem.** A walking tour of this much smaller town will be followed by a visit to the Frans Hals Museum. Hals is an artist known for his often humorous portraits — quite a contrast to the rather solemn and meditative ones of Rembrandt. Haarlem also has canals and we will get to see how they compare to those of Amsterdam as we take another cruise.
Day 7: April 28 — The REAL reason we moved to Haarlem, other than for the quieter streets, is its proximity to quantities of tulips. Today will be devoted to those vibrant blooms that inspired Tulipomania during the Golden Age; entire fortunes were spent on one exotic bulb! No such financial commitment will be necessary for us as we first observe the world’s largest flower auction at RoyalFloraHolland in Aalsmeer, and then journey on for a relaxing stroll through the Keukenhof Gardens.

Day 8: April 29 — The next three nights will be spent in the splendid medieval city of Bruges, Belgium. On the way to Bruges it is mandatory to stop at The Hague, home of the World Court where we will tour the famous Court and Hall of the Knights. Next we will visit the Madurodam. This is Holland in miniature where famous places throughout the country are brought together in 1:25 scale. Finally, on to Bruges for a walking tour past perfectly preserved 800 year-old buildings.

Day 9: April 30 — Today’s excursion from Bruges takes us to Antwerp, an important port for the Dutch East India Company. After a walking tour we will see the Church of our Lady with paintings by Flemish painter extraordinaire and confidante of kings, Peter Paul Rubens. Afterwards, we will visit his house and gardens. Our final stop of the day in Antwerp is the only museum in the world that is a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Plantin-Moretus Museum. This family house was also a printing business and all of the materials and machinery from its founding in the 16th century were meticulously preserved by the family. The museum houses the world’s two oldest surviving printing presses.

Day 10: May 1 — This day-trip from Bruges to Ghent will begin with a walking tour of this extraordinarily lovely medieval city. The highlight of the walk will be viewing an early Northern Renaissance altarpiece by the Van Eyck brothers dating to 1432. Then it’s back through time to 1180 AD to tour the Gravensteen Castle.

Day 11: May 2 — Today we depart Bruges and Belgium for The Netherlands for our final two nights in the Amsterdam area. The first stop of the day will be Gouda, the town and region where 60% of Holland’s cheese is produced. We are scheduled to arrive in the morning when the weekly cheese market is held in the city square. Then we visit a farm, meet the cheesemakers, meet the cows, and taste their products. Additionally, today we will visit the UNESCO World Heritage site, Kinderdijk, with 19 windmills — also dating from the 1500s — that were used to control flooding in this exceptionally low-lying area. We will look outside, up close, and all around as we take a boat ride on the lake, then finally go inside the museum mill.

Day 12: May 3 — Our last day for touring will definitely not be the least as we take a day-trip to Delft, famous for its blue and white pottery inspired by the wares first brought overland from the Far East and then by ship by the Dutch East India Company. After a city tour, we will be guided through the Royal Dutch Delftware Porcelain Factory. There were 32 such potteries in the 18th century. Today there is only one. (Yes, they will ship. ☺). Expect a very special farewell dinner this evening.

Day 13: May 4 — Departure for the U.S.

We hope you are as enthusiastic about this custom itinerary as we are and will consider joining us for a Molto Bene experience. For more information or to reserve your space, contact Denise Parker (dpparker@meredith.edu or 919-760-8051).

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