



We were not surprised to see 'oranje' bunting and banners strung across the streets, as the Euro 24 football tournament was in full swing. We discussed the football with our charming young waiters back at the hotel, who spoke English almost as fluently as us.

Exploring the gently rolling countryside, we stumbled across Radio Kootwijk, a former long-range radio transmitter station from the 1920s, designed in art deco style. Here we were overtaken by a peloton of friendly road cyclists. We could see why they'd be out here instead of mixing with motor traffic. Smooth concrete, tarmac and compacted gravel paths snaked through beech woodland, with sunlight illuminating the leaves, birds flitting between the trees, and seas of bright foxgloves. This landscape gave way to expansive heathland, featuring heather, bracken, silver birch trees and skylarks singing.

"It's fascinating how nobody gave me a second glance there," Dad said. "Everyone seems to be equal no matter how you cycle or what your bike looks like. There were trikes, recumbent bicycles, side-by-sides, handcycles, wheelchair motor attachments, bakfiets (cargo bikes) and upright tricycles."

Woodland wandering

De Bilt, outside Utrecht, was our next stop. Our first ride from there was into the city, the country's fourth largest. Utrecht is a lively and popular place for young people. The university's pride cycle path, celebrating unity and diversity, is the longest rainbow bike path in the world. Considering how many cyclists and pedestrians were using this path when we were there, it was very easy and safe to negotiate. We followed canals and bike routes all the way through to the Dom Tower, the tallest church tower in the Netherlands.

The cycle path crossed the former US airfield at Soesterberg and continued into the forest nearby. We were struck by how easy it was to access green space, even →



Top: Martin overlooking the Biesbosch wetlands, near Dordrecht
Above: Martin and Sam (on a hire bike) in the forest outside Utrecht

with other cycling and walking routes.

Urban exploring

Our next hotel was outside the small city of Apeldoorn, next to the Veluwe, a large area of forest and heathland. It had a distinctly 'country club' vibe, with horses and hire bikes. An e-bike was less than £25 a day.

Next morning we followed a canal into the heart of the city, riding along a beautiful bike track teeming with other cyclists. In the city, we rode along quiet streets where cars not bikes were considered the 'guest' (auto-de-gast roads). We also used low-speed roads that were one way for motor traffic and two way for cyclists. It was fantastic.

Elsewhere, tarmac cycle paths threaded behind busier streets and around the edges of recreational fields. These efficient routes were often shortcuts, demonstrating to the undecided commuter that it would not just be healthier and cheaper to travel by bike but faster, too.



Fact file Fiets first

Distance: We cycled 625km (390 miles).

Route: From Nijmegen in the east, then north to Apeldoorn. Heading south-east, we stayed near Utrecht, in Dordrecht and in Middelburg on the island of Zeeland.

Conditions: The weather was cool for June with occasional damp days. Cycle routes were well surfaced and signposted, and on quiet roads when not segregated.

Bikes used: Martin – 2014 Hase Lepus with a Sparticle front-wheel motor and two batteries. Sam – Cube Reaction Pro hardtail and sometimes a hired e-bike.

Maps/guides: We downloaded the (English) app from fietsknoop.nl and used that.

I'm glad we had...

The car, e-trike and wheelchair to make it happen.

Next time we would... Explore more. Our next trip will include Limburg and Maastricht.

Further info: bicycledutch.wordpress.com, the Bicycle Dutch blog and YouTube channel. And valk.com for Van der Valk hotels.

Video: Watch the highlights of our trip at youtube.com/on-3-wheels