

# Visit Texel for springtime sunshine



What better way to throw off the harsh Dutch winter than to seek out the sunniest spot in the Netherlands, and one of the warmest welcomes.

BY CATHY LEUNG

Of the five Wadden Sea Islands spanning the coastlines of Noord Holland, Friesland and Groningen, the biggest, Texel, is also the most accessible and versatile. With a regular car ferry from Den Helder, just over an hour's drive or direct train from Amsterdam, you could be on this island haven enjoying a creamy *Texels Tripel* (one of the local beers), in less than two hours.

## On Texel

On a land mass 15 miles long and 5 miles wide there's room enough for large nature areas, a significant farming culture and seven small villages. In an area roughly the same size as the capital, there are less than 14,000 inhabitants - not including the sheep. Den Burg, the biggest of the villages, is both charming and vibrant, boasting plenty of interesting local shops and even a cute little cinema.

The island is renowned for its bird-watching opportunities, and although I haven't taken up this hobby, it's fascinating to discover that the island is a vital stop-off point for migrating birds from across the world. This place is essentially the equivalent of Schipol airport for our feathered friends, and like

PHOTO: VVV TEXEL

many of us expats, they might well stay a while to rest and forage for local delicacies before they set off on their next adventure or their journey home.

De Slufter is the only area in the Netherlands where the sea is left to do its thing. Here it is allowed to flood the dunes; every six hours it makes its way inland, unrestricted by dykes and dams. It's a reminder of the sea's persistence - the sea that the Dutch have been fighting with for so long. The area is enchanting, a wide and open space where you can meander past pockets of water and sand dunes on the way to the sea mouth. This living, breathing, fresh and tidal place is a complete contrast with Holland's more typical waterways; the murky canals.

### Where to stay

The island is well-developed for tourism, campers especially are spoiled for choice, as are families seeking a holiday rental - the Dutch are keen on their self-catering holidays. For couples seeking a romantic break, however, Texel Design Suites ([www.texelsuites.com](http://www.texelsuites.com)) in the harbour village of Oudeschild are perfect; finished to the standards of a fine boutique hotel. Arriving on the last ferry over, we weren't too late to snuggle up on the comfy sofa with a woolen blanket, a DVD and a bottle of good red wine. Come Friday morning and it was time to watch the fishing boats returning home for the weekend whilst we made our breakfast from the well-stocked kitchen.

A stay at De Krim ([www.krim.nl](http://www.krim.nl)), near De Cocksdorp at the northern tip, is a good bet for families. It's a well-designed holiday park with indoor and outdoor swimming pools, playgrounds and organised activities. Make use of their inhouse bicycle rental and ride over to see De Slufter - it's an easy 20-minute cycle, the sand dunes are even nearer.

### Texel produce

In spring, especially in April, the countryside becomes a teeming hotspot for bouncing baby lambs. The Texel breed of lamb has been exported and bred all over the world but the original is still



PHOTO: VVV TEXEL

Did you know... there are more sheep than people living on Texel?



PHOTO: VVV TEXEL

renowned for its special saltiness. Between Mother's Day and Father's Day is the time to try the local grown asperges (white asparagus). Since farmers introduced it relatively recently, Texel is now recognised as one of the best sources of asperges in the country. Too early for spring lamb on our visit, I tried out an intriguing offering from a Den Burg *eetcafé*: lamb bouillion with lamb salami. The clear soup was rich in flavour and the crumbly salami was tasty but more like tiny meatballs.

### Wadden Sea life

In search of some local sealife we boarded a boat in Oudeschild. Shrimp cutters take tourists fishing for *garnalen* (shrimp) - combined with some seal-spot- »

### Info

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(Texel Tourist Office)  
Emmalaan 66,  
1791 AV Den Burg  
Tel: 0222 314741  
[info@texel.net](mailto:info@texel.net)  
[www.texel.net](http://www.texel.net)

Ferry from Den Helder  
[www.teso.nl](http://www.teso.nl)



PHOTO: VVV TEXEL



## “A land bank off the coast of Texel provides an ideal resting place for grey seals”

ting for good measure. A land bank off the coast of Texel provides an ideal resting place for grey seals, and when the tide is low, they bask in the sun for all to see (research shows that out of all of the Netherlands, Texel has the most hours of sunshine per year). The seal population is growing due to greater numbers of fish in the area, in turn following a conscious effort to reduce pollution.

On our trip even though at hide tide, we saw a solitary seal swimming along quite happily in the distance. The shrimps and various other creatures from the fish nets, we got to see up close and personal. The crew guide spread out the catch in all its resplendent hues of grey and gave an animated description of the pickings. Whilst we nipped into the onboard bar to warm up with a cheeky *juttertje* (a herby Texel spirit), the *garnalen* were cooked up and ready to eat. I have never been that keen on tiny, brown shrimps but fresh from the sea and more of a dirty peach in colour, they were sweet and juicy. We all got to take

a big bag home to have with our *borrel* (5pm drinks) and I finished all of ours: pulling the tiny bits of meat away from the shells is a strangely compulsive activity.

### Ecomare

Currently undergoing refurbishment, Ecomare is still worth a visit, especially if you would like to say hello to the *zeehonden* (seals) and learn more about the Texel environment. The centre has lots of interactive nature and wildlife displays, and it is only outside at the back that you are conscious of the building work in progress - the seals are to have more spacious and stimulating pools come the summer. We were still able to peek at the newly found seals through the windows to the quarantine room (tiny Wenny had been found that very morning), whilst in an outside pool, Tonny was particularly happy to make our acquaintance whilst he waited to be released back into the sea. Ecomare is also the visitor centre for exploring the 70 hectares of The National Park Dunes of Texel and, amongst other things, provides GPS-guided walks in case all that wide open space is overwhelming.

### Traditions and history

With no forest, and thus poor wood supply on the island until 1898, the farmers developed *tuinwallen* (turf walls) as a way of fencing property and fields. In typically Dutch, neat rows, in time they become

## Things to do

**Shrimp cutter**  
[www.garnalenvissen.nl](http://www.garnalenvissen.nl)  
(Dutch website only)

**Ecomare**  
[www.ecomare.nl](http://www.ecomare.nl)

**Maritiem & Jutters Museum**  
[www.texelsmaritiem.nl](http://www.texelsmaritiem.nl)  
(Dutch website only)

alive with characteristic plants and flowers. The turf walls are particularly prevalent in the oldest part of Texel, known as De Hoge Berg (the High Mountain); an amusing title, given that is in reality merely a slightly raised area in the centre of the island.

On the lookout for washed up timber to build with and other finds to supplement their income, poor islanders became intrepid beachcombers (*jutters*). Not one but two museums celebrate this tradition and display a wonderful collection of finds, from ornate VOC measuring weights to a painted toy made of coconut shells.

Tourism is the main industry and I think you can tell. We got a noticeably warmer welcome and better service throughout our stay on Texel than we get on a weekly basis in the bars and cafes of Amsterdam. There is much information in English, but where there is not, the tourist office in Den Burg will happily provide assistance, arranging tours and accomodation.

### Lasting impressions

We arrived at night and immediately noticed the stars - it was a clear evening and the constellations were there to greet us in all their glory. Indeed, throughout our stay, the open skies provided a welcome contrast with the narrow streets of our home amongst the sardine-packed houses of Amsterdam. The countryside in daylight is also very different from the plain, green fields of mainland Holland; the various grasses and undulating terrain providing greater texture. Perhaps due to more light, the landscapes bring to mind the feeling of a watercolour as opposed to an oil painting.

At the beach near Den Hoorn, we strolled along in time to watch the sun go down, settling down to watch the final effects in the *gezellige* Paal 9 beach cafe ([www.paalg.nl](http://www.paalg.nl)), with the comfort of a log fire and sheepskin throws. Close to the ferry terminal, it was the perfect place to chill out before the crossing back to the mainland. «



PHOTO: VVV TEXEL

## Events in spring

### 25 April 2011, 9 am, Lammetjeswandeltocht

Walk amongst the meadows to see the thousands of newborn lambs. 5, 10, 15, 25 and 40km routes. €3 per person. [www.hetgoudenboltje.nl](http://www.hetgoudenboltje.nl) (Dutch website only)

### 30 April, Meierblis

Every year the locals celebrate Meierblis, grabbing everything they can burn to set up bonfires in the various villages. The tradition symbolises the end of winter and the beginning of a new season, and a new start.

### 7 May

Nature market in the forest with an evening theatre show.