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Dutch Waterways

Suggested Reading and Viewing List from Trip Scholar Dr. Peter van Lidth de Jeude

BOOKS (Nonfiction):

***Why the Dutch are Different: A Journey into the Hidden Heart of the Netherlands* by Ben Coates**

A combination of Dutch history, a study of Dutch culture, and a deep dive into the psyche of its inhabitants, this book is a great first stop in learning more about the Netherlands and its inhabitants. From discussing the vital importance of the color orange to the ubiquity of cheese and beer, Coates takes the reader on an engaging journey into what makes the Netherlands tick.

***India and the Netherlands* by Venu Rajamony**

This coffee table book is an accessible entry into exploring some of the colonial past of the Netherlands. While Rajamony, a former Indian ambassador to the Netherlands, doesn't shy away from the disturbing and unsavory elements of the colonial relationship between the two countries, it also includes some of the more entertaining, engaging, and even charming moments in this shared past. An easy read for those who don't want to delve quite as deep as some of the other texts included here.

***Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global Work* by Timothy Brook**

For those who want a deeper look at the interplay between the Netherlands and the larger world, Brook provides a fascinating lens by looking at the paintings of Johannes Vermeer and showing how the world depicted in those paintings tells the story of an increasingly global world. While this concept works better in some chapters than others, it nevertheless is an engaging and fascinating book about the intersection of art, culture, and commerce, while showing that globalization is not just a concept of the past century.

***The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* by Simon Schama**

Easily the best work by famous historian Simon Schama, this work pairs well with *Vermeer's Hat* to look at material culture in the Netherlands more closely from the perspective of those living in the Netherlands. Through the study of possessions, Schama is able to show how the Dutch were able to use their unprecedented wealth to fashion a shared identity and what that carefully constructed identity can tell us about the Dutch to this day.

***The Bookshop of the World* by Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen**

While there are countless books on Dutch art, this study of the book trade in the Netherlands during the Golden Age is a fantastic complement and shows how the rise in literacy (and literature) was a key contributor to the rise in Dutch wealth and the emergence of a shared Dutch identity.

***The Diary of Anne Frank* by Anne Frank**

This book likely needs no introduction, but it remains one of the most powerful sources exploring life under Nazi occupation for Jewish families. There is a reason this book has remained in constant circulation and is one of the most commonly used texts to explain the horrors of persecution and antisemitism to readers young and old alike. If you have never read this is a must-read and even for those familiar, a re-read remains well worth the time.

***Culture Smart! Belgium: The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture* by Bernadett Varga**

A useful counterpart to Coates' *Why the Dutch are Different* for Belgium. While this veers a little closer to a travel guide than Coates' more eclectic and engaging journey through the Dutch mindset, readers will find great insight into everything from politics to social cultures.

***Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1980* by Guy Vanthemsche**

An academic but accessible look at the relationship between Belgium and the Congo. Unlike the slightly more popular (and sensationalist) *King Leopold's Ghost* by Adam Hochschild (which is also worth recommending), Vanthemsche really focuses on how Belgium's relationship with the Congo impacted the colonial metropole and helped shape a lot of Belgian history. As with all books on colonial history, but particularly the colonial history of the Congo, this can be a difficult and emotional read, but those willing to grapple with this troubled history will learn tremendous amounts about Belgium, Europe, and the modern world and its roots.

***The Legacy of Nazi Occupation* by Pieter Lagrou**

Easily the densest and most academic recommendation on this list, Lagrou looks at the challenges the Belgians faced in the aftermath of the Nazi occupations in trying to recover their sense of national identity. Unlike in other European countries, divisions between Flemish and Walloon elements in society and their differing levels of cooperation with the Nazi occupiers re-aggravated historical rifts which can still be felt to this day. An excellent read for those wanting to make sense of both Belgium's past and present, as well as those hoping to explore how the legacy of war often extends well beyond the end of the fighting.

***Dear Departed: A Memoir* by Marguerite Yourcenar**

Yourcenar was the first woman elected to the Academie Francaise and in the autobiography she turns the same skill and insight she brought to her novels and essays to the story of her early life growing up in an upper bourgeois family in Belgium before the outbreak of World War I. A gripping, vivid, and powerful account, this is an excellent read for those wanting to experience what Belgium was like at the turn of the 20th Century.

BOOKS (Fiction):

***The Thousand Autumns of Jakob de Zoet* by David Mitchell**

A brilliant read about a young Dutch clerk on Dejima, a trading post between the Dutch and the Japanese, Mitchell paints an amazing picture of the time and place, illustrating a gloomy, cold world and the increasing alienation and homesickness of its main character. For those who want to think more about what it must have been like for Europeans to live

halfway around the world from their homes as strangers in strange lands – or for those just wanting to read an outstanding book – this is a top recommendation.

***Girl with a Pearl Earring* by Tracy Chevalier**

A fictional account written from the perspective of a young Dutch woman who works as a maid for painter Johannes Vermeer and eventually becomes the model for his famous painting. It's an entertaining and easy read and was also adapted into a film (which is also worth recommending).

***The Secret Diary of Hendrik Groen, 83 ¼ Years Old* by Peter de Smet**

A slightly odd but very charming book about an elderly Dutch man whose romance with a fellow nursing home resident inspires him to seize the day and go on excursions and adventures with his fellow residents. In addition to being a fun read, it's also a surprisingly insightful look into the lives of the elderly in the Netherlands.

***The Devil and the Dark Water* by Stuart Turton**

A personal favorite, Turton's novel depicts a series of murders on a Dutch East India trading ship on its way to Amsterdam. Caught on board are Samuel Pipps and his bodyguard Arent Hayes, who are clearly Turton's homage to Holmes and Watson. The book masterfully blends a murder mystery, the supernatural, and horror elements and will keep the reader guessing – and turning pages – until the mystery is finally unraveled.

***The Sorrow of Belgium* by Hugo Claus**

A fascinating coming of age story about a young boy growing up in the 1930s and 1940s in Belgium. While the writing can be a bit episodic and not all of the picaresque detours land successfully, the novel nevertheless does a fantastic job of illustrating and humanizing what it was like to live in Belgium at a difficult time both between the two world wars and under Nazi occupation.

***Niccolò Rising* by Dorothy Dunnett**

A fun, fast-paced novel set in 15th Century Bruges, Dunnett's book tracks the rise of a young dyer's apprentice as he rises to control his own mercantile empire. Beyond just being a gripping, engaging tale with memorable characters, this novel also does a nice job in depicting a world where commerce and traders were rapidly becoming a major force in society, ushering in the capitalist world we are all familiar with today.

MOVIES:

***Soldier of Orange* (1977)**

One of two recommendations by famed Dutch director Paul Verhoeven, whose Dutch films differ tremendously from the hyper-violent satires he directed during his time in Hollywood. This film, set in the Netherlands during Nazi occupation, explores the different experiences of the occupation by a group of Dutch students.

***A Bridge Too Far* (1977)**

A film directed by famed director Richard Attenborough from a script by legendary screenwriter William Goldman and featuring a stellar cast, this is the first of two movies depicting frequently forgotten battles set at the end of World War II with the goal of liberating the Netherlands. This one focuses on the ill-fated Operation Market Garden.

***Black Book* (2006)**

The second film by Verhoeven, who bookended his Hollywood career with two very different explorations of the Nazi occupied Netherlands. This film centers on a young Jewish woman who becomes a spy for the Dutch resistance.

***In Bruges* (2008)**

Another personal favorite, this dark, incredibly violent, but also funny and deeply moving film about two hitmen waiting for orders in the Belgian city of Bruges features exceptional performances by a stellar cast and is well worth a watch for those who can stomach the intense flashes of violence that punctuate the entire film.

***JCVD* (2008)**

A bizarre but delightful movie that focuses on famous Belgian martial artist Jean Claude Van Damme (playing himself) who is caught up in a real-life bank robbery. What follows is both an engaging and entertaining drama that looks at the difference between cinema and reality as well as a surprisingly introspective meditation on the fleeting nature of fame.

***The Adventures of Tintin* (2011)**

No list of books and movies about Belgium would be complete without at least one appearance by famed Belgian comic book hero Tintin. Perhaps the most accessible entry into Herges' famous creation is this animated film directed by Steven Spielberg and produced by Peter Jackson, which combines Spielberg's cinematic mastery and the captivating adventures of the comics into a beautiful and fun movie that draws positive comparisons to Indiana Jones.

***De Oost* (2020)**

A challenging and flawed movie, but also a fascinating look at a piece of history often overlooked, *De Oost* is the tale of a Dutch soldier tasked with putting down the push for independence that would grow into the Indonesian National Revolution of 1946. Often compared (frequently unfavorably) to *Apocalypse Now*, this movie is still well worth the time for those wishing to learn more about this understudied time.

***The Forgotten Battle* (2020)**

The second of two war movies depicting battles and events not commonly explored in U.S. cinema, this looks at the events around the Battle of the Scheldt in 1944 during the liberation of the Netherlands from Nazi occupation.