



PHOTOS BY CLAUDIA CAPOS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

‘Black Nazareth’ gins up its spirited past

By Claudia Capos
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

SCHIEDAM, Netherlands — Leaden skies and spitting rain greet us as we step out of the railway station in Schiedam after taking an early morning southbound train from Amsterdam. For a fleeting moment, we wonder whether spending our final day of vacation in the Dutch city once known as “Black Nazareth” is such a great idea.

But it's too late to turn back. Besides, Doug and I have spent our two-week road trip through the Netherlands sampling different varieties of jenever and unearthing the secrets of this traditional Dutch spirit's production and popularity over the past five centuries. Our quest has led us to Schiedam, home of the National Jenever Museum and epicenter of Dutch jenever history. Our visit also coincides with the kickoff of the city's annual Jenever Festival, a two-day extravaganza of jenever tastings, traditional food, and live music held every June.

Bright yellow banners emblazoned with “Gin City” flutter from poles, and pots of red geraniums line the narrow canal leading into Schiedam's old town. Church spires and windmills loom above brick homes and houseboats boats. We pause at a flea market, where an affable vendor raises a make-believe glass, winks at us and quips, “Schiedam is jenever.” In the Grote Markt, an airy plaza encircled by outdoor restaurants and shops, we savor homemade appeltaart at De Beurs Café and ask proprietor Michael Boekholt for directions to the Nationaal Jenevermuseum Schiedam on Lange Haven Street. “Jenever is the soul of this city,” he tells us. “In the olden days, men used to stop after work for a kopstoot, which is jenever and beer. Now we are getting handcrafted jenever that is popular among hipsters.” Three porters in traditional



Dutch side-button shirts, loose-fitting pants, flat caps and neck scarves greet us in front of the imposing National Jenever Museum, which occupies the former De Gekroonde Brandersketel, a three-story, red-brick distillery nicknamed the “locomotive.” Centuries ago, husky Porters Guild workers unloaded grain brought by ship for the mills and loaded barrels of jenever for export — often drilling holes in the wood casks to sneak a sip. Ton Heuchemer, a strapping stoker-distiller in a leather apron, waves us into the dimly lit distilling room crammed with coal-fired pot stills and rows of oak casks.

“In its heyday, Schiedam had 400 branderij, or distilleries, in operation, and the thick belching smoke gave it the nickname Black Nazareth,” he says. “One million liters of jenever left the harbor every week.” At the time, the city's 20 grain windmills were the tallest in the Netherlands and reshaped Schiedam's cityscape. Today, visitors can tour the Museum Windmill De Nieuwe Palmboom to see millers working on the grinding floor and take a Whisper Boat canal ride past the city's harbors, warehouses, distilleries and mills.

During the jenever industry's Golden Age in the 19th

Festival-goers sample jenevers in a former church in Schiedam.

IF YOU GO . . .
Nationaal Jenevermuseum Schiedam, Lange Haven 74-76, 3111 CH Schiedam, Netherlands.
Phone: 011-31-10-246-9676. www.jenevermuseum.nl. Entry fees apply.
The 2017 Schiedam Jenever Festival is being held on June 10-11. www.jeneverfestival.nl. Entry fees apply.

century, merchant ships carried barrels of the highly prized spirit to far-off lands, where it was sipped with panache by aristocrats and served up to commoners in working-men's bars. The British dubbed it “Dutch Courage.” The French named it genievre. Others knew it as “Dutch gin.” But in the Netherlands, where the highly potent liquor is rumored to have been developed by a Dutch chemist and sold first as a medicine in the late 16th or early 17th century, it is still proudly called jenever.

Twice a month, Heuchemer uses a 300-year-old recipe to start production of Old Schie-

dam malt-wine jenever. At the rear of the distillery, he stokes the coal fire under a mammoth copper pot still where the mash of malted barley and rye goes through the first of three distillations to make moutwijn, or malt-wine. Aging the malt-wine in American bourbon casks for three years before blending in juniper-berry distillate preserves the jenever's caramel color and malty overtones. The museum's upper floors house vintage tools of the trade and Het Proeflokaal, a tasting room for sipping de kop, or head, off a brimming glass of oude (old) or jonge (new) jenever.

By mid-afternoon, the adjacent Havenkerk, a former Catholic church, is jammed with festival-goers eager to sample the signature jenevers and gins produced by major Dutch spirit distillers, such as Notaris, HoogHoudt, Bols, Nolet and Loopuyt. With the music blaring, we join the tasting fray and opt for ice-cold gin-and-tonics made with HoogHoudt triple-distilled jenever and flavored with cucumber curls and mint. We approach another vendor, who pours us stiff shots of korenwijn, a.k.a. “a liquid sandwich,” which is made with corn. Outside the museum, festival food stands entice us with Dutch favorites, such as stroopwafels, or syrup waffles, and broodjes, or sandwiches, filled with spicy shredded meat.

“We are the inventors of jenever,” says Peter Elderman, former director of the museum, as he leads us up to the church's choir loft for a panoramic view of the festivities. “The English came to fight in the European wars and saw what the Dutch soldiers had in their flasks. Our jenever is the mother of British gin.”

Over the centuries, jenever's boom-and-bust cycle was fueled by brisk international trade and foreign wars that eventually curtailed liquor exports and brought the Dutch economy to its knees. For a while, it seemed that Holland's favorite spirit would be relegated to the dusty shelves of history while its offshoot and successor, London-style gin, flourished.

Fortunately, jenever is enjoying a spirited revival in boutique distilleries, bars and restaurants around the Netherlands, and throughout Europe. Creative young distillers are hand-crafting new more-flavorful versions of jenever to attract a growing, and very enthusiastic, clientele. This renaissance also is spawning fairs and festivals, such those in Schiedam and Amsterdam, which celebrate jenever's storied past and lasting imprint on Dutch culture, and the spirits world.

Just as the supply of ice cubes runs out at the Schiedam Jenever Festival, we leave and wend our way back through the city to catch our return train. With an earthenware bottle of korenwijn and a package of Dutch pannekoeken mix tucked under our arms, we feel well-fortified for the ride back to Amsterdam.

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THE VIP LOUNGE | HANNAH CORNEAU

She savors local flavors

A recent trip to Northern California gave performer Hannah Corneau a “great appreciation for our earth,” and a desire to return to the Golden State — but not before going to Croatia, a must-see destination for the 27-year-old actress. She is also looking forward to “playing a tourist” while in Boston, performing in the touring production of the Tony Award-winning musical “Hedwig and the Angry Inch” (at the Shubert Theatre through June 11). Corneau plays Yitzhak, the husband of Hedwig, a transgender singer. “Playing a man is a very interesting experience — and very rewarding,” Corneau said of her role. She explained that the show is “really about the human experience. . . . It's about love, self-acceptance, exploring loss, and how you pick yourself up.” We caught up with Corneau, who is from Clifton Park, N.Y. (near Saratoga Springs), and now lives in Manhattan, to talk about all things travel.

Favorite vacation destination? Northern California. I just traveled up the Pacific Coast Highway, and it is the most beautiful land I have ever seen. Witnessing all that beauty gave me such a great appreciation for our earth.

Favorite food or drink while vacationing? I love seeking out a unique culinary experience.



Whether it's utilizing innovative techniques or perfecting traditional dishes, I'm curious to see what local chefs are creating.

Where would you like to travel to but haven't? I would love to explore Croatia. The combination of history, culture, and nature is extremely alluring to me.

One item you can't leave home without when traveling? An open mind. But if I can't fit that into my suitcase, then my Blundstone boots.

Aisle or window? Window. I love staring out of it and falling asleep against it.

Favorite childhood travel memory? I will never forget going to Colorado when I was younger. It is very special out there. I was so small next to those mountains and it felt great.

Guilty pleasure when traveling? No guilty pleasures. It's all fair game on vacation.

Best travel tip? Ask the locals where to go, eat, [and about] things to do. I love to immerse myself in the location and its culture as much as I can.
JULIET PENNINGTON

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TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER | CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

Downgraded on my flight home — where's my refund?

Last November, my flight from Tel Aviv to Newark was canceled because of a dispute between El Al Israel Airlines and its pilots. I was traveling with my father. Our direct flight — with an upgrade to economy class plus for two passengers, which cost \$300 — was canceled, and we were booked on a flight from Tel Aviv to Zurich and then from Zurich to New York.

An El Al representative promised me a refund for the upgrades. I also would like to be reimbursed for the taxi fare from JFK Airport to my residence and for my lost work time. We still have not received any word on the refund. It's been four months since our trip. Can you help me?

ANDREW WOLKSTEIN,
Ellicott City, Md.

El Al should have refunded your upgrade promptly, since it didn't provide the service for which you and your father paid. For most airlines, that process is automatic, but for whatever reason — it could have been the strike-related cancellation or a simple computer glitch — El Al kept your money.

Here's where your case gets a little unusual. You showed me a paper trail of correspondence between you and the airline, in which you re-

peatedly request a refund. Still, El Al kept your \$300.

Airlines shouldn't be charging you extra for a reasonable amount of legroom. But that's exactly what economy “plus” seating usually is — the same amount of legroom and amenities as it used to be back when air travel was a little more civilized. In a perfect world, you wouldn't have to pay an extra \$300 to be treated like a person; your airline would treat you like a person because it's the right thing to do.

I can think of one other reason your request might not have been granted: You asked for compensation for your cab ride home and for lost work time. Typically, airlines do not pay for either of those. You'd have to get something in writing from El Al before your flight agreeing to refund your ground transportation in order to make that work. And, unfortunately, I've never seen an airline cover lost work time.

You could have sent a brief, polite appeal to one of the El Al executive contacts. I list them on my consumer-advocacy website: elliott.org/company-contacts/el-al-airlines.

I contacted El Al on your behalf, and it refunded the \$300 upgrade fee.

Christopher Elliott can be reached at chris@elliott.org.



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