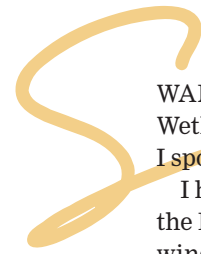


Holland in Bloom

Rows of tulips
add a flare of color
to Windmill Island
Gardens in Holland,
Michigan.



EACH MAY, THOUSANDS OF TULIP LOVERS DESCEND UPON THIS MICHIGAN TOWN. **MARLA MILLER** DISCOVERS THERE'S MORE TO HOLLAND THAN SPRING FLOWERS.



SWANS FLOATED IN THE POND TO MY RIGHT. Wetlands filled my view to the left. Off in the distance, I spotted the iconic windmill.

I had come to Holland, Michigan, on a mission to find the De Zwaan windmill—the only authentic Dutch windmill operating in the United States.

“It’s really now the heart of our community,” says Matt Helmus, development manager for Windmill Island Gardens. “When people come to a city named Holland, they ask, ‘Where is the Dutch stuff?’ The windmill is the place people usually get sent.”



DUTCH HERITAGE is celebrated in Holland, from the tulips brought by settlers (far left) to dancing at the Tulip Time Festival.



To enter Windmill Island Gardens, visitors cross a Dutch-style bridge that spans the Macatawa River.

BRIDGE: MIGUEL/GETTY IMAGES; TULIP AND DANCERS: HOLLAND AREA VISITORS BUREAU

The windmill is just one aspect of Holland’s charm. Part college town, part tourist town, part nature lovers playground, Holland is a culturally diverse city with a European flavor and a small-town feel.

Built around Lake Macatawa on the shores of Lake Michigan, Holland is celebrating its 175th anniversary this year. Venture there and discover unique agricultural, industrial and recreational areas anchored by a vibrant downtown shopping district.

“You don’t need a passport to get here, but it feels like a world away,” Matt says.

TULIP TIME

Visitors and gardeners flock to Holland every May for the Tulip Time Festival, when an estimated 5 million tulips bloom across the city. It’s a sight to see, bringing

hope and joy and color after a long, cold winter. Dutch dancers, parades, walking tours, concerts, gallery exhibits and community events round out the festival. This year’s Tulip Time Festival will be held May 7-15.

In early May, more than 150,000 tulips bloom throughout Windmill Island Gardens, a municipal park honoring the city’s Dutch heritage and a top attraction during the festival. The 36-acre park is home to the iconic De Zwaan (the swan) windmill, brought over from the Netherlands in 1964; the Four Columns street organ, a gift from the city of Amsterdam to the city of Holland; and an antique Dutch carousel featuring handcrafted wooden horses.

The windmill rises 125 feet into the air, and the impact of its size grows as you approach the sturdy brick base. Once

“YOU DON’T NEED A PASSPORT TO GET HERE, BUT IT FEELS LIKE A WORLD AWAY.” —Matt Helmus



STROLLING
through the paths of Windmill Islands Garden feels like being in the Netherlands.

inside, visitors get a glimpse of Dutch history and a rural way of life. The mill grinds flour (available for sale) from a soft white winter wheat grown by West Michigan farmers.

I enjoyed the self-guided tour, carefully inspecting original pieces and parts of the mill as well as the wind-powered pulley that hoists bags of wheat through an open elevator shaft. The fourth floor, known as the milling floor, showcases original wood timbers—fir beams that were hand-planed and imported from Norway. You can see the windmill's blades up close on the gallery deck and take in the manicured tulip fields, dikes, gardens and canals.

The park, which charges admission from mid-April to early October, also features replica Dutch village storefronts, costumed guides, a greenhouse, a gazebo,

a Little Netherlands Village display, walking paths, community gardens and a gift shop.

DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

Rows of colorful klompen wooden shoes caught my attention as I peered through a window of Dutch Village Downtown (a storefront of Nelis' Dutch Village, another Dutch-themed park across town). Inside, I discovered souvenirs galore.

The store showcases Dutch food and candy, hosts cheese tastings and sells a wide assortment of Delft Blue pottery. It's fun to peruse the Tulip Time- and Holland-themed gifts or to request wood-burned or personalized artwork on wooden shoes and bowls. Co-owner Joseph Nelis notes, "You can put your child's or grandchild's name on the shoes with the date, so it's a nice souvenir."

JIM WEST/LAMY STOCK PHOTO

COLORFUL KLOMPEN WOODEN SHOES CAUGHT MY ATTENTION.



DOWNTOWN
mixes historic and hip, with its shops, restaurants (left) and Dutch gifts (above). Below: Dutch dancers

Dutch Village Downtown even has a large pair of wooden shoes you can stand in for a photo op. Of course, I had to do it.

Besides Holland's Dutch connection, this community has something to offer outdoor enthusiasts, foodies and shoppers. The city takes pride in its Eighth Street shopping district, lined with well-kept historic storefronts and 4.9 miles of heated sidewalks and streets. Here, you'll find an outdoor fireplace, public art, local cafes, boutique clothing stores and, of course, tulips.

In between coffee at Lemonjello's, fudge at Kilwins Chocolates and chili at New Holland Brewing Co.'s Eighth Street brewpub, I took a few hours to explore the downtown area.

Other specialty shops include GarenHuis Yarn Studio, Holland Bowl Mill (with handmade wooden bowls and



Holland & Beyond



HISTORY LESSON

Learn more about the city's culture, art and history at the downtown **Holland Museum**. Catch a glimpse of working-class family life at Settlers House or tour the home of Holland's first mayor, Isaac Cappon. hollandmuseum.org



CARNIVAL: LUMIGRAPHICS/GETTY IMAGES; KAYAKERS: JAMES SCHAEIDIG/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; MUSEUM AND INN: HOLLAND AREA VISITORS BUREAU



FOR NATURE LOVERS

Walkers and birders can explore several nature preserves right in the city. **Van Raalte Farm Park** features picnic areas, trails and an 1872 farmhouse built by the son of Holland's founder. The DeGraaf Nature Center has an 18-acre nature preserve that's free to explore. North of town, you can hike or watch for birds in **Pigeon Creek Park** or at Hemlock Crossing in West Olive. holland.org



BED AND BREAKFASTS

For quaint lodging, consider Holland's **Centennial Inn** (left) or The Kingsley House Bed and Breakfast Inn in Fennville. In Saugatuck, a good option is The Hotel Saugatuck. North of Holland, the Pigeon Creek Inn overlooks the 35-acre wooded Pigeon Creek Trails. holland.org/stay

MEET IN THE MIDWAY

Tulip Time Festival 2022 kicks off the evening of May 6 with a carnival at the Holland Civic Center Place. Ride the Ferris wheel, enjoy live music and savor festival foods. Other Tulip Time activities include walking tours, an artisan market, quilt show and more. tuliptime.com



BIG RED LIGHTHOUSE stands sentinel over the shore of Lake Michigan.

utensils), Fustini's Oils and Vinegars, local art galleries and several women's clothing stores—all making Holland a popular shopping destination.

A trip downtown isn't complete without a stop at Holland Farmers Market at the Eighth Street Marketplace. The market features local vendors selling a variety of flowers, produce and food products from mid-May to November.

ESCAPE TO NATURE

The sand shifted under my feet as I walked out to get a closer look at Big Red lighthouse. A local favorite, Big Red sits on the south side of the Holland Channel across from Holland State Park.

Michigan is blessed with a number of state parks along its coast, and Holland State Park is one of the most visited. It has direct access to Lake Michigan's white sandy beaches, coastal dunes, two campgrounds, a playground, boardwalk and boat launch.

The lakeshore always calls me to relax in the sun and sand, climb a dune or stay for the sunset. On this day, I strolled along the channel and Lake Macatawa.

I didn't regret taking the short trail and stairway to Mount Pisgah, one of the Historic Ottawa Beach Parks. This sand dune rises 157 feet above Lake Michigan, offering views of Lake Michigan, Big Red and Lake Macatawa. Time it right, and you can bask in a breathtaking sunset.

In the spring, the region's landscape comes to life with wildflowers and migratory birds. Flowering trees and deciduous forests pop with buds, and visitors can make it an immersive experience at several area nature preserves. Or bring your bike and ride the extensive network of bicycle trails that connect to other communities.

I ended my adventures at Tunnel Park, which is north of Holland State Park. Locals love this spot to swim in the cool waters of Lake Michigan, walk the beach or have a picnic on the dune bluff.

Stopping to rest on a park bench, I marveled at the beauty before me. An endless view of water and the soothing sound of waves never get old. If you're looking for respite or relaxation, you'll find it here. A day at the lake is always good for the soul. ●

BIG RED: PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEB SNELSON/GETTY IMAGES