

The Queen's Birthday

Orange unites, and Sells

Every year the Queen's birthday is celebrated, and the country displays its pride and turns orange.

All the normal souvenir shops become transformed into an ocean of orange. Customers can buy hats, T-shirts, shorts and skirts in orange, as well as orange paint to dye one's hair and face, let alone orange whistles, balloons and bags.

The Queen's Birthday is good for business. Only an international football match where the Dutch team ends in the finals can compete with the profits to be made during the Queen's Birthday.

The Queen's Birthday originally was a serious day, the celebration of the late Queen Juliana's birthday. A highly select group of people would be invited to parade by the doorstep of her Soestdijk palace in the central Netherlands for a formal outdoor flower reception.

The royal family, including the queen, would stand atop the doorstep and wave at her guests, while the rest of the country would be off work and participating in outdoor games or browsing through one-day flea markets.

At her coronation in 1980, Juliana's daughter Queen Beatrix determined that her mother's birthday would remain a national holiday. But she also introduced an innovation – she decided to meet the Netherlands' common people on the day by visiting two or three villages or cities every year, together with the entire royal family. For that one day of the year, the royal family would mingle with the rest of the country, playing their games with them and enjoying the accompanying entertainment.

From that time, the celebration has gained popularity, including in those cities not visited by the queen. Amsterdam boasts some 500,000 visitors on the Queen's Birthday, The Hague and Rotterdam 350,000 and Utrecht 250,000. The packed city centres are replete with flea markets, busking children on violin or guitar, and magicians.

As casual as the Queen's visits may appear on live television broadcasts, the truth is that they are strictly organised under the direct supervision of the queen herself. The city or village the queen is due to visit prepares a programme, which is then sent to the palace for inspection and approval.

This year, the queen and her family will be visiting Makkum and Franeker, with populations of 3,400 and 13,000 respectively. Hosting the queen costs several hundreds of thousands of euros – a major investment for a small town like Franeker, but hosting the queen is not only an honour, it pays off economically in the long run.

As for the financial benefits to the cities themselves, it is difficult to quantify details, but all cities that hosted her say their city's image improved considerably afterwards and attracted a lot more tourists.