

East Frisia (Ostfriesland) Is Where Flowers Grow

Yes, spending a few days in East Frisia at the wrong time of year might lead you to appreciate the pronunciation of its German name, *Ostfriesland* (accent on the "FREEZE" ;-).

Yes, you might leave understanding why East Frisians drink more hot black tea per person than anyone else in the world. But neither of those is a good enough reason for you to stay away from this relatively undiscovered region of Lower Saxony.

Cycling along the canals and past the windmills, in fact, will fool you into thinking you're actually in Holland, as the friendly East Frisians welcome you with open arms. The town of Wiesmoor, while it may not boast the vast tulip beds of Holland, has a greenhouse industry which supplies potted blooms to most of Europe.

The North Sea coast of East Frisia presents a vast expanse of blue, with a nearly invisible horizon line where the ocean meets a sky broken only by white clouds scudding along before the relentless northwest breezes. The roadside trees are permanently bent in submission to the winds.

Get a taste of east Frisian seafaring life in the charming harbor town of Emden, with its boldly striped red-and-yellow lighthouse and East Frisia *Landesmuseum*. Stroll along the tree-shaded ramparts dating back to 1616.

For two hundred years the East Frisian islands have been attracting vacationers. Join the party with a ferry boat trip from Emden to the Island of Borkum, the largest and westernmost of them. A day at the beach, East Frisian Island-style, can be challenging unless you hire a wickerwork Strandkorb to shield you from the North Sea winds while capturing the rays of the North Sea sun!

If you find the elements too much, simply head for the Island of Norderney and relax at the casino or thalassotherapy spa. Explore the island's 19th century Biedermeier homes. If you

have the energy, climb the 253 stairs of the 1874 lighthouse, with its unusual counter-clockwise rotating beacon. Hike or bike the Schaumeile for a trip into the island's past, from the 19th century thermal baths to the cape navigation tower among its dunes.

East Frisia is an ideal cycling region, with the 162 kilometer Fehnroute covering a countryside dotted with windmills, balance bridges, churches, and typical East Frisian brick architecture. You can simply rent a bike for a very reasonable fee courtesy of the *Deutsche Bahn* Train and Bike Program, hop on a train with your bike in tow, and hop off at any of the national railway's other stations for further exploration! :-)

Like many of Germany's regions, Ostfriesland has its own regional beer brewed in the town of Jever. The most noticeable characteristic of Jever pils beer is its dryness, the result of extra hops added to counteract the soft local water. When you've sampled the brew, head for the port town of Wittmund. The windmills, fishing boats, scenic *Schlosspark*, and quaint brick architecture make great photo opps.

You can't really understand East Frisia, however, until you experience for yourself the mud flats (*Wattenmeer*). Rich in the unique life forms created from tidal flooding, the mud flats extend between the East Frisian mainland and islands, covering nearly 2200 square miles. They are protected as a National Park, the largest in central Europe.

More than 3200 different animals call the East Frisia mud flats home. They include crabs, starfish, mussels, mud worms, and snails. In the autumn of each year, those animals attract hundreds of thousands of migratory birds. The salt marshes around the mud flats also support a wide range of plant life including spectacular stands of sea lavender and sea plantain.

One of the reasons the East Frisians drink more tea than anybody else in the world, by the way, is that they always serve it with lots of heavy cream and a piece of rock sugar candy in each cup. So...

Life in East Frisia isn't all about those biting North Sea winds! ;-)