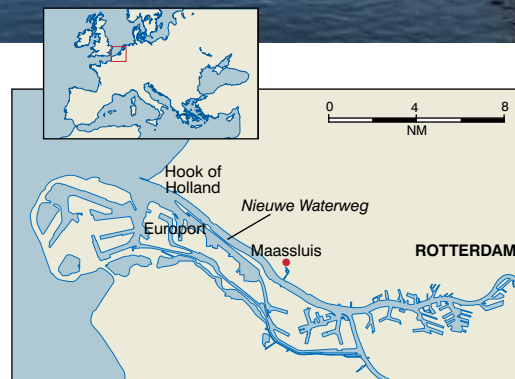




Making for



East Coast sailors may often venture across the Channel to France, but there's a little-known refuge waiting to be enjoyed if you can make it through the heavy traffic entering Rotterdam. Cameron Snell is your guide



The Port of Rotterdam is Europe's busiest and largest shipping port. More than 200 vessels a day, ranging from barges, tugs and the biggest ships you could imagine, ply the entrance at the Hook of Holland: enough to deter many a willing sailor. Most of the bigger ships turn right into the newly enlarged Europort, while smaller vessels keep left for the Nieuwe Waterweg on to Rotterdam and the canal routes to Germany. Less than 3NM inside the Nieuwe Waterweg is Maassluis, a once busy trading port in its own right that is now sealed off by a lock and three bridges.

Commercial traffic has to report to the Rotterdam Traffic Co-ordination Centre

on Ch11. Pleasure vessels are not required to report prior to entry, but a listening watch should be monitored on Ch11 as far back as the Hook of Holland. This will ensure that if you are at risk of impeding the flow of traffic, the centre will let you know. They can sound quite intimidating, but don't worry – it's just the way the 'Dutch Navy' sound over the radio! Don't be surprised if they 'order' you to keep close to the port side of the channel on entry.

Traffic flows thick and fast along the Nieuwe Waterweg, but even more surprising is the variety. Huge 80m barges pushing 40m barges three abreast are not an uncommon sight, all helmed by an incredibly experienced crew of two –

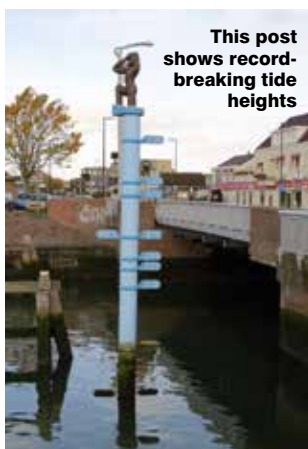
usually husband and wife. Look out for two (only one in the winter) local passenger/car ferries crossing the Nieuwe Waterweg just after Maassluis. They are free running, without chains, and are the only ferries crossing the Nieuwe Waterweg – so if they fall astern of you, you've gone too far.

Opposite Maassluis, on the south side, is the Port of Rotterdam's buoy storage depot. A huge array of multicoloured buoys line the riverbank here and are easy to spot in daylight, but the lights don't illuminate them at night. On the north side (portside on entry), a large display of concrete letters boldly spell out MAASSLUIS just before the small entrance to the Port of Maassluis. It is essential to identify the buoy storage and ferries before this, as the letters can easily be hidden by passing ships. The traffic co-ordination centre for Maassluis is on VHF Ch62: you need to call them when you enter their sector, but monitoring this channel will suffice as they will call you.

The tide at the approach to Maassluis runs across the entrance, so check if it's flooding or ebbing on your approach, and proceed upstream or downstream to counter its effect before you turn. Once inside, calm prevails and you can catch your breath. The bright yellow boats of 'Sima Charters' and the museum tug *Elbe* occupy the outer walls. There's no 'holding pontoon' in the entrance, so prepare to hover, or



Vessels entering the port of Maassluis



This post shows record-breaking tide heights

take a space on the wall.

Once inside, call Maassluis harbour control on Ch68 for the bridges and lock. There is no point calling before as they will not lift the bridges if they cannot physically see you waiting in the entrance. (Call sign: Maassluis harbour master.) The lock is mostly open on free flow as the tidal range is generally not more than 2m, but it is closed for rough weather or spring tides. There's often a wait for the bridges as one of them carries a train line into the city. Traffic lights indicate clearance for the bridges, but be ready to 'jump the lights' as the harbour master doesn't like to hold the terrestrial traffic for long.

English is the spoken language on the radio, and the officials at Maassluis are very relaxed and informal. If you're lucky, you may get berthed along the canal wall. It is tidal, and not suitably fendered for yachts, but this inconvenience is offset by the feeling of being in the middle of a scenic and historic 'town'. Shore power, water and rubbish disposal are available alongside the quay. If there is no space along the quay walls you will be directed all the way up the canal to the turning bay. Another bridge will lift, giving you access to the 'shipyard', which is also home to a small marina with pontoon berthing, shore power and water.

Distinct character

The charm of Maassluis is undeniable. Clean cobbled streets, hand-painted mooring posts and classic Dutch architecture define its distinct character. There are plenty of friendly bars and restaurants in Maassluis, all with walking distance from your mooring, while a visit to the Nationaal Sleepvaart Museum offers a comprehensive and fascinating insight into the history and development of the Dutch tug boat industry.

■ www.nationaalsleepvaartmuseum.nl



Classic Dutch architecture helps to define the port's distinctive character



One of the clean, cobbled streets...



..in this scenic and historic town



If you're lucky, you may get berthed along the canal wall



A small lifting bridge traversing the canal
INSET One of the many hand-painted mooring posts

USEFUL CONTACTS

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■ When looking online you may discover the yacht haven (or 'jachthaven Maassluis'), but my article focuses on a different place. Both are in the district of Maassluis, but the yacht haven has height restrictions and is accessed from another route. If searching, type in 'Port Of Maassluis'.

