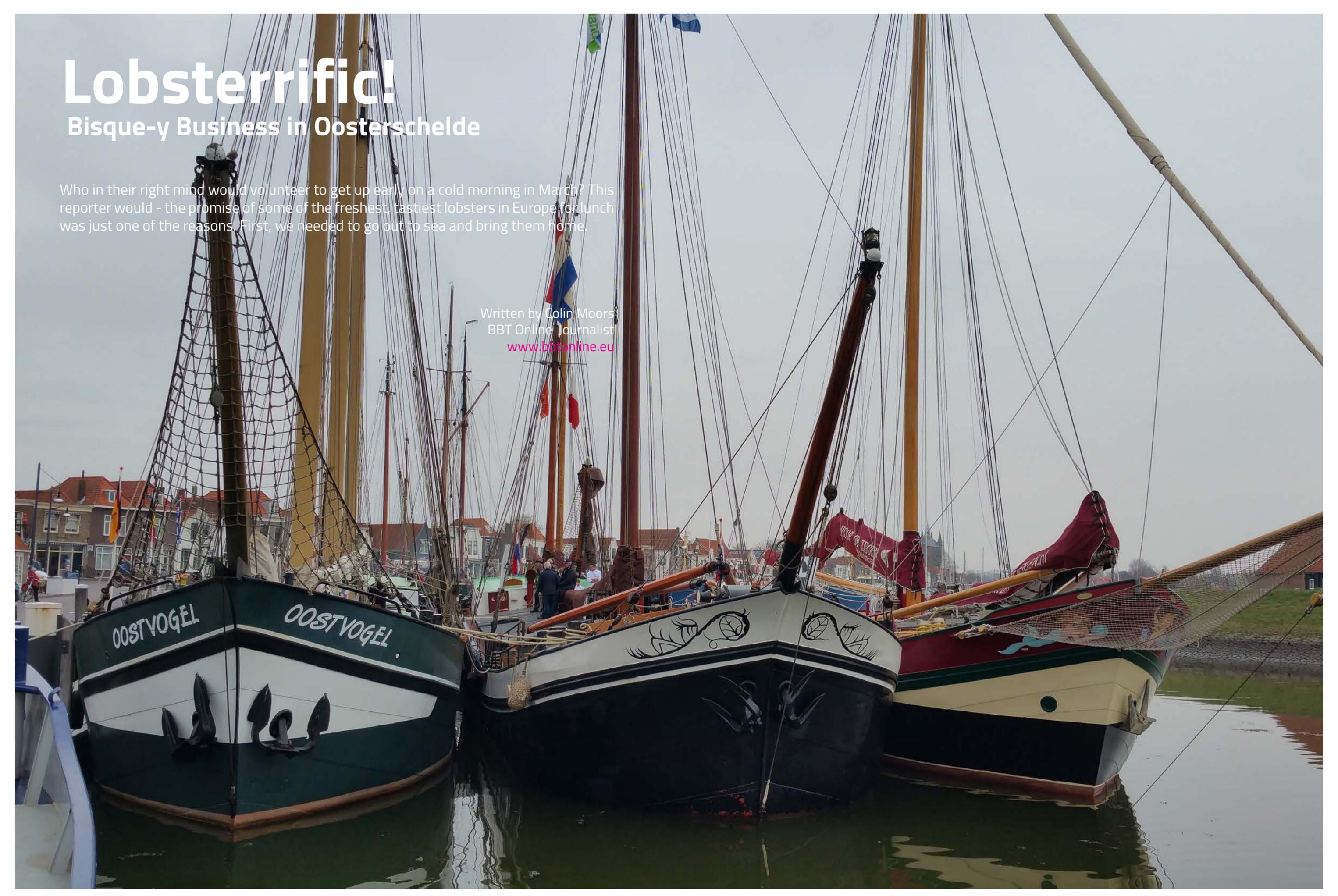


Lobsterrific!

Bisque-y Business in Oosterschelde

Who in their right mind would volunteer to get up early on a cold morning in March? This reporter would - the promise of some of the freshest, tastiest lobsters in Europe for lunch was just one of the reasons. First, we needed to go out to sea and bring them home.

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Zierikzee is a great little town for a quiet getaway. A pretty town with a relaxed attitude and, of course, some fine sea food.

You know when the press trip is about food, it's either going to involve travelling a long way, going to bed late or getting up early. The trip to Zierikzee for the opening of the lobster season in the Oosterschelde was no exception. Aware of the need to get up at a reasonable hour, I checked myself in to the restaurant/hotel De Wildeman van Zierikzee overnight, all ready for the morning of March 31, the start of the season. De Wildeman is a lovely little hotel with friendly staff and I would recommend it to anyone.

A Quiet Night Out

Because I was there at the very end of March, the tables were all out in the town square and the patio heaters were sputtering away, using the final drops of

their gas to try to tempt the last customers of the evening into their warmth and light. Zierikzee, I learned, is a highly seasonal place – one that, in the high summer season, is absolutely mobbed with people clamouring for a table at which to eat the seafood the Zeeland province is rightly famous for. But more of that later.

Low Season Secrets

I can let you into a secret at this point; go out of season if you can. The people there are very friendly and you'll have them all to yourself. The bars and cafés are all open and you can have your choice of tables. With the lobster season starting in late March, you'll get the pick of the local fruits de mer without queueing. Don't tell everyone though – I want to go back next March!



Joop Braakhekke, a lobster and a very large proportion of the Dutch media

In the morning, earlier than I'd like, I made my way to the waterfront, a small-ish dyke chopped into the land to make Zuidhavenpoort, a base for the working boats of the Oosterschelde, including the guys and girls who brave the cold of the open sea to bring the delicious local lobsters to our plates. Obviously, I was not expected to get my hands dirty in any way, unless you include the kreeftsaus, but if you want to follow the fishermen, you need to get up when they do.

The 2016 Lobster Wine is Unveiled

We (and there were many of us, mostly from The Netherlands and Belgium) were shown into a tent big enough to hold a rock concert in and given coffee and macarons. I doubt the fishermen get macarons, but

I'm not one to complain. There was all the usual pomp and ceremony of a province rightly proud of its contribution to the tables of gourmets the world over. The opportunity was taken to introduce the Kreeftenwijn (lobster wine) for 2016. The wine was, in fact, a fruity Weissburgunder Trocken (Pinot Blanc) from Nahe in southwest Germany made by Weingut Lorenz & Söhne. Aside from the wine itself, there is the prestige event of unveiling the design for the label, produced every year by a different artist. This year, it was the turn of Roland Deussen, a renowned sculptor, cartoonist and designer. He describes his motivation as "...it is a kind of logo, a logo of the Rolls Royce of the sea."



Lunch just doesn't get any fresher than when you have just watched it pulled from the sea.



Gone Fishing

With the formalities of the speeches out of the way, we were led out to the waterfront for the moment we'd all been waiting for – to get on the boats and get at the lobsters. Luckily, I was put on a small boat, provided by [Goldie's Travel](#) who not only supplied all of us with personal service and a close-up view of everything going on but brought out some lobster wine and platefuls of some of the most delicious oysters I have ever eaten – from the Oosterschelde, naturally. A fine way to divert myself from the cold and from the rather uneventful trip out to the lobster fishing grounds. Once we were all out to sea and the boat was in place, the ceremonial pulling up of the first lobsters began. Fisherman Gerrie van den Hoek did the honours,

accompanied by a smattering of ambassadors and dignitaries and ceremonially handed the first lobster to Joop Braakhekke, one of the most well-known chefs in The Netherlands.

The Price of Fame

This freshly plucked lobster was taken straight to the auctions in nearby Colijnsplaat and was auctioned by Braakhekke himself for 25,000 euros. Yes, you read that correctly – 25,000! It was all for a good cause, and the entire proceeds went to the Dutch Cancer Foundation.

Once the photos had been taken and the lobsters had been loaded onto the boat, we set off for the harbour again – by now, it was lunch time.



The lobster enjoyed its 15 minutes of fame before being auctioned off in aid of a cancer charity.

This much-anticipated part of the day was where the assembled guests, personalities and journalists were to get their first taste of the new season lobster. The question is; was it worth getting up early and going out in the cold for? Yes, it certainly was. Served simply and naturally with a light sauce on the side, it was sweet and delicate and the claw meat was the sort of thing that made you wish lobsters had ten of them.

We're Going to Need a Bigger Boat

My situation was improved by the boat's skipper, who pulled me to one side and said "don't go on the big boat to eat, there's always a huge scramble. Stay and eat with us". He returned some ten minutes later with several plates of fresh lobster and a second bottle of the Kreeftenwijn tucked under his arm, which we put with the other two he had already salted away for emergencies. Nothing gives me an appetite quite like watching other people work, so I naturally cleaned my plate. And the next one they came up with.

So, mark it in your calendars – the third Sunday of March is the start of the lobster season in the Oosterschelde, and the official ceremony takes place soon after that. If you can beg, borrow or steal an invitation, I suggest you do. It's a great day out and a treat for your tongue.

Some photographs were kindly provided by Marieke Mandemaker of www.mariekemandemakerfotografie.nl

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