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AMSTERDAM



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Amsterdam has a reputation as Europe's naughtiest city with its tolerant approach to liberalization of prostitution and recreational drugs use. Appreciated for the 'easy going' attitude of its citizens and their open mentality, Amsterdam is also known as the 'Venice of the North'. Someone says Amsterdam is built on more than the 118 islands that form Venice...true or not...you can visit this city by bike!

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» AMSTERDAM AT A GLANCE

Amsterdam, situated in IJsselmeer, at the point where the rivers Amstel and IJ converge, is the capital of Holland. The city, built on 90 small islands (here's the answer!), linked



by over 500 bridges, spans out from its old historic district, located at the water's edge. Amsterdam is a double-sided city, of water and land, of orderliness and beauty and a network of canals, islands and waterways that blend harmoniously with the surrounding houses. The two eras, sea trading and industrial, are easily recognised within the fabric of the city.

The nucleus of the port area, housing 16th century buildings and factory warehouses, has three concentric canals (Grachten) running through it, with the Singelgracht indicating the zone's outer limits. This historic area is home to the city's administration centre, various large business organizations, the stock exchange and the Dam and Rokin banks.

The 18th century part of the city, housing the residential area of the port and factory workers, lies beyond the Singelgracht. Those companies linked to the port industry (Buiksloot and Tuindorp) are situated to the north of the river IJ.



The ancient city contains two centres, the Oude Zijde and the Nieuwe Zijde. The circle of canals in the centre of this zone are lined with numerous buildings dating back to Amsterdam's 'Golden Era', while the 'Plantage' parkland area of this zone houses the Hortus Botanicus, built in 1682 and which now contains over 6000 species of plants.

The Singel is the oldest circular canal in Amsterdam and indicates the confines, which separate the old medieval city from the circle of canals to the west and centre.

The historic buildings and monuments, located within the Oude Zijde, include: the Trippenhuys; the Montelbaanstoren, a 16th century tower; the Waag , Amsterdam's oldest port and the Pinterhuis public library. The city's museums comprise: the Cannabis Museum; the Museum Het Rembrandthuis, which contains hundreds of Rembrandt's watercolours and the Joods Historisch Museum, a complex housing four synagogues, displaying artistic and religious artefacts, narrating the history and culture of Judaism in the Netherlands. The Oude Kerk, a 13th century gothic church, which today has become a basilica, was

a medieval refuge for the poor and homeless. The basilica's Chapel of the Virgin possesses magnificent stained-glass windows. The south western area of the Oude Zijde is the site of the University of Amsterdam, founded in 1877. The red light district, known as Walleijes (the small walls), is situated beyond the Damstraat.



Nieuwe Zijde (new part) is located in the western zone of medieval Amsterdam and is easily reached by public transport. Dam square forms the main centre of this zone and the starting point for two bustling streets. These two streets house two of the city's finest monuments, the classic Royal Palace (1648-55), which today is the site of the Town Hall and the late gothic Nieuwe Kerk (new church), built in the 15th century. The city also has numerous examples of baroque

architecture both in its religious and civil buildings: Koninklijk Paleis, National Monument, Centraal Station, Postkantoor, Lutherse Kerk, Madame Tussauds Scenerama and the Amstelkring Museum. Some of the streets around the lively Kalverstraat shopping area, follow the route of ancient paths and alleys.



The Rokin and Nes streets are renowned for being the home of the city's financial institutions and the location of alternative theatres. Visitors should spend time to visit: the Begijnhof district, with its meeting square and beautiful houses, now considered to be a historical

monument; the Houten Huys, the oldest house in Amsterdam, the Catholic chapel and the English church. Jordaan, situated to the west of Grachtengordel, at only five minutes walk from the Dam and Centraal Station, is home to the most important canal-side houses. The zone is a labyrinth of narrow streets and canals with lively bars and 'dark' cafes, which spread onto the pavement during the summer months. It is also home to the Anne Frank Foundation, which purchased the house, where, during the Nazi occupation, the Jewish families Frank and Van Daan hid for over two years, until the moment of their arrest.

» TRANSPORTS

You can always experience Amsterdam on foot. The city layout is simple with circular canals and intersecting streets. Using Singel as the departure point, the canals are arranged in alphabetical order: Herengracht, Keisergracht, Prinsengracht and Singelgracht. The houses, starting from Central Station, are numbered, increasing in value as they approach Amstel. But, without a doubt the best method of transport within Amsterdam is

the bicycle (fiets), with the city's traffic system having been studied specifically to cater for the cyclists.



The system includes cycle routes (fietspaden), maps, traffic lights and link roads. Countryside is also easily reachable with 30 minutes by bike. So, rent a bike and explore your own! Recommendation: don't rent those goofy red or yellow bikes that scream 'I am a tourist!' There are some reliable companies that rent most incognito bikes (about 7€ a day): you can try 'Mike's Bike Tours' (Kerkstraat 134, ph: 020 622 79 70; www.mikesbiketoursamsterdam.com), Bike City (Bloemgracht 68-

70; ph: 020 626 3721) or ask at the reception of your hostel/hotel. We had very good discounts! Just a hint: if you are not used, better ask for handle-breaks bikes! Much easier to get on and off!

The well developed public transport network, comprising bus, train, tram and barge, has its nucleus based around the Central Station. Don't buy your tickets on the tram and pay the full price of 1,60€. A strip-ticket (strippen-kaart) at 6,40€ for 15 strips is much cheaper. It can be purchased directly from the driver, or the automatic ticket dispensers or the local tourist office (VVV: Track 2 in Central Station: Mon-Sat 8-8, Sun 9-6.45; Leidseplein: daily 9-5; Airport: 7am-10pm). These tickets are valid for travel anywhere within Holland. Amsterdam is divided into 11 zones and the cost of a ticket depends on the distance travelled between one and the other. A simpler solution could be to purchase a one day travel card (dagkaart). There are 17 tram routes in Amsterdam which operate from 6am to midnight. Those routes of major interest to the tourist are the lines which travel south from Central Station along the Damrak and the NZ Vooburgwal. Lines 13,14 and

17 run to the Jordaan. The metropolitan is rarely used by visitors to Amsterdam, it has only 3 lines and serves only 4 stations, all of which are located to the east of the city: Amsterdam CS, Nieumarkt, Waterlooplein and Weespeplein. The most beautiful view it is certainly from the canals! The Canalbus



offers a round trip from Singelgracht via Rijksmuseum to Central Station, calling at Leidesplein, Leidsestraat/ Keizergracht and Westerkerk for Anne Frankhuis. Canal trips leave from Central Station and run along the Prins, Hendrikkade, the Damrak and the Rokin. Visitors are free to get on and off as they please. But

we suggest you take a ride with a small non profit organization: the St Nicolaas Boat Club (www.boatclub.nl; ph: 020 65 080 5348) which is dedicated to preserving historic Dutch boats. It will be fun and you can visit places other boats cannot go. You are encouraged to bring things to eat and drink with your friends. Donations keep the boat club floating!

Taxi: in general are expensive but you can get a 5 or 6 person van for the same price of a car. Try for a TCA cab (look on the roof lights): they have one fixed fare: 3,40 euros to start and 1,90€ per km (ph. 777 77 77).

Bike Taxi: Cheapest and best way to get around. 3 min for 1€ per adult. Interesting conversation included! (020 0628 247 550)

» DON'T MISS THE CLASSICS!

The Museumplein is lined with the city's main museums and cultural centres.

The RijksMuseum (www.rijksmuseum.nl/index.jsp, open every day 9-6pm, on Fridays also from 6pm-10pm. Closed 1 January; Jan Luijkenstraat, 1 -1071 ZD) houses the world's largest

collection of Dutch masterpieces, from the earliest religious works to masterpieces from the golden era. The tour starts with 17th Century paintings by artists such as Vermeer and Haks and finishes with Rembrandt's Ronda. €10.



The Van Gogh Museum (Paulus Potterstraat 7; www.vangoghmuseum.nl/vgm/index.jsp; open daily from 10-6pm Closed 1 January. On Friday evenings, open until 10pm) houses 200 paintings and 500 designs by the famous artist, together with the 800 letters which passed between Van Gogh and his brother Theo. Admission



The Cobra Museum (www.cobra-museum.nl/en/home.html) A cobra is indeed a dangerous snake, but here the word Cobra is derived from the French names of the cities of Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam. The artists who founded the CoBrA group during a major international conference held in Paris in 1948 came from these three European capitals. A curled snake became the symbol of the movement. The CoBrA artists painted directly and spontaneously. Just like children, they wanted to work expressively without a preconceived plan, using their fantasy and much colour.

The Stedelijk Museum (www.stedelijk.nl; expects to re-open in Autumn 2008) has works of art by Matisse, Mondriaan, Monet and Picasso together with displays of sculpture and artistic and industrial design.

» TO WALK

Amsterdam, situated at the heart of Holland's transport system has fast and efficient links to the towns and villages in the Netherlands. The bicycle, however, still remains the best way to travel and is ideal in order to see the wonderful fields of flowers around the city. There are many interesting sights within easy reach of the city. Haarlem and Ledia are located just 15 minutes away, the historic town of Utrecht lies to the south of the city and the town of Edam is just 22km north of Amsterdam. Departing from Haarlem, it is possible to tour the wonderful fields of flowers. This 30km strip of land between Haarlem and Ledia is referred to as the Bloembollenstreek, and is best viewed from the middle of April to the end of May, when the tulips and lilacs are in their full splendour. The VVV supplies all the necessary information to visit the area together with details of hiring bicycles from Haarlem station.

» SHOPPING AND MARKETS

The city is one large market, where it is impossible not to find what you are looking for. For a funny though useful gift, try Condomerie (Mon-Sat. 11am-6pm; Warmoesstraat, 141; ph. 020 6274174; www.condomerie.com); at Bloemen Markt (Flower market) you can buy up to 50 bulbs of different flowers for as cheap as 5€. Marañon is a shop specialized



in every kind of hamacas at Singel

488-490 (ph.:+3120-6225938; www.maranon.com) in the Flower Market (corner with Konings Plein); Old Toys Shop in Westerstraat (Jordaan).

Notable shopping areas include: Nieuwendijk, a pedestrian zone, parallel to Damrak; Dam Square; Rokin, which is a continuation of Damrak, and the large bustling pedestrian Kalverstraat. The Jordan district, between Prinsengracht and Lijnbaansgracht, is the area which offers incredible surprises with its array of extraordinary shops.



Don't miss the Noordermarkt flea market, in Noorderstraat (Mon 8am-1pm; Sat. 10am-3pm: market of birds and small animals).

Other cool markets: Albert Cuyp and Waterloo-Plein: Mon-Sat 9am-5pm. Can't resist buying souvenirs? Best T-shirts without wooden shoes, sex or drugs are created by

the artist Mark Raven (Museumplein, near the pond). Concerto is the best independent record store (Utrechtse-straat, 52). For an easy way to get some discounts look for those minicards that usually hotels and hostels have for their guests in the main hall: handy and useful! Internet Café: EasyInternetcafé (Reguliersbreestraat, 22 open 9am-10pm; also in Damrak, 33 and in Leidsestraat, 24) or the most wanted by backpackers: InternetCity (ph: 020 6201292 in Nieuwendijk, 76



9am-midnight). About 1,50/2 € per hour.

Coffee shops: Although the rest of the world wastes billions on an unending War on Drugs, Holland decided that drug use is more a health problem than a criminal issue! A part from this comment that reflects Dutch mentality and way

of life, here there is a selection of best Coffee shops in town. In any case: avoid those Jamaican, Bob Marley's fancy, neon lights traps... for tourists!

The Bulldog (Mon-Thurs/ sun 9.30am-1am, Fri&Sat till 3am), the most renown in town either as coffee shop, Sport Café with Internet Point access and as a Luxurios Hostel! Find it in the Red Light District! Cannabis Café just off the Leidseplein (Korte Leidse-dwars-straat 145 open 10 am-1am) is an attractive and friendly place that sells good weed.

La Tertulia, owned by friendly mother and daughter, is a laid back oasis...looks like a neighbourhood café than a coffee shop (Prinsengracht 312; open Tue-Sat 11am-7pm).

The Grey area is a psychedelically painted place focused on pot and run by 2 Americans that moved here. Won numerous Cannabis Cup awards! (Oude Lelie-straat, 2; between Anna Franks' House and Dam Sq. Tue-Sun 12-8pm).

A great store for alternative shopping: the Old Man and the Hemp Works that stock a huge spectrum of great looking clothes, tobacco accessories, camping

equipments and things that would pissed off your boss! For more depth than these suggestions, pick up the Smokers Guide, full of useful info at 4€.

» EAT AND DRINK

Amsterdam provides something for all tastes. The city's continuous restaurant activity allows the visitor to sample a wide variety of food in any of its numerous bars and cafes. Eetcafes are small, reasonably priced restaurants. The more typical



of these restaurants are the 'bruine kroegen' (dark cafes), so called because of their ceilings and walls, stained by smoke and nicotine. Many of the best are in Jordan: Café 'T Smalle (Egelantiersgracht, 12; ph: 020 623 96 17) lively during the

day and romantic in the evenings, it was an old distillery founded in 1786; The Hoppe, to feel you are part of the history (ph:020 420 4420 Centre-Spui); the Oosterling (ph: 020 623 4140 Utrechtstraat, 140) has been run by the same family since 1877. It's always full of local people: a guarantee! Another one decorated with blue Delft porcelain and 400 years old is the Het Papeneiland (ph: 020 624 19 89; Prinsengracht, 2).

What alternatives if you wish to feel like an indigenous and unwind in a fresh regenerating green area with other locals, still be offered shows of skaters and rollerbladers? Go to Vondelpark and have a mint tea with an apple pie (with cinnamon and cream!) at the 't Blauwe Theehuis (Vondelpark,5). Very nice sundeck, weather permitting! Open daily from 9am-1am. If you are there during the summer, consider spending the evening entertained by artists, musicians, open air performances as the park is a gathering point for many cultural events! Other cheap easy suggestion: find a bar/ deli (avoid Febo's if you can) where you can get a baguette or a fresh sandwich, (for example: Ah to Go, Damrak 89-90; open Mon-Sat:

8am-10pm; Sun 12noon-10pm; average baguette €2.50) and find your spot in the green field right in between the 3 museums...very nice view! Many people have their brunch there on Sundays or lunch breaks during the week! Other



(sorry!) green delicious alternative is the cafeteria at the Botanical Garden (De Hortus, Metro stop: Waterlooplein; Tram 9,14; ph: 020 625 90 21; www.hortus-botanicus.nl; open 7 days a week): absolutely the best place we have been for environment, company and food! By the way it worth a visit!

» RESTAURANTS

The city offers now above-average global cuisine, and modish restaurants spring up with increasing regularity. It is smart to reserve!

Gossips say the eastern harbour is cool! There remember 2 numbers: the '11' (Ooster-dokskade, 3; ph: 020 6255 999; totally unique space with great views of the 11th floor of an old building next to the Central station) and the Fifteen (www.fifteen.nl Jollemanhof 9, ph:020 0900 3438336). In Jordaan area, locals consider the Bordewijk one of the best restaurant of the city: French-italian dishes, fine service (Tue- Sun; average prices 25-50 €).

For a modern Dutch menu try an institution: D'Vijff Vlieghen (www.thefiveflies.com; Spuistraat294-302; average prices: 20-40 €): it occupies 5 ancient buildings, fine decorated with Delft porcelain: you can sit on old chairs still reporting the names of famous people that ate there. Don't miss it! Amsterdam is also rich in ethnic restaurants. On Zeedijk, in the Red light District there's a cluster of fine Chinese, Japanese (try the familiar atmosphere at the A-FUSI-N: Zeedijk, 130; ph: 020 33 040 68: honest and tasty) and

Thai places (Top Thai, next to Anna Frank's House: main dishes 13-20 euros: vegetarian dishes even cheaper) and the Pijp has some of everything. For good Asian food at 7 euros we suggest to try Wok to Walk: they have 4 places in the city and you can eat there or take away your mixed of everything! (Leidsestraat, 96; Kolksteeg, 8; Warmoesstraat, 85).



Ever tried Ethiopian? No need to order: just count the number of people in your group and you will all eat meat and vegetables from the same big spongy sort of pancake... Trust us: it's better than it sounds! From 11-14 euros per person at the Semhar (Marnix Straat, 259; ph: 020 638 1634; daily 4pm-10pm).

» GOING OUT

Amsterdam offers a wide range of entertainment at international level. American Jazz is played in various locations around Amsterdam and the city annually hosts the Blues Festival and the Drum Rhythm Festival. The main jazz club in the city is the Bimhuis, with the Café du Lac (Haarlemmerstraat, 118; open 4pm-1am; till 3am weekends; Kitchen 5-11pm. Ph:020 6244265 Grand cafe done up in a kitsch Art Deco-ish style, catering to a trendy public. It has a balcony and a glassed-in conservatory with lots of private rooms and little corners to sit in. Occasional live music on Sunday afternoons) and the Grand Zilver Café (020-6238101; Rembrandtplein, 19) offering jazz music Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon.

Alto (Korte Leidse-dwars-str 115) is all about jazz. The Bourbon Street (Leidse-kruis-straat 6) is louder with more blues. The Waterhole (KorteLeidse-dwars-str 49) is a mixed bag of rock, funk, pop, blues, jazz and pool tables. Never to pay a cover and bands start at 10pm.

The Escape (Rembrandt-plein, 11): giant club hosts different nights and one offs. Thursday nights for students, Sat and Sun regular

offerings.

Amsterdam has many street artists, cafes open until late and in the summer months, offers its visitors various open air



theatres: Vondelpark, Nederlands Filmmuseum, Amsterdamse Bs and Amstelpark. A calendar of events is detailed in the monthly Amsterdam Times; the weekly What's On in Amsterdam; or the free Uitkrant, available in cafes and bookshops or see our best recommended events in www.flashbooking.com.

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Flashbooking staff wishes you a pleasant stay!



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Area Code: +31 (Netherlands)

020 (Amsterdam)

Ambulance/Fire/Police: 112

Info Public transports: 0900 8011

Medical service: 0900 50320442

Hospital (centre): 59 991 11

Women Health: 6166222;9-5pm

Central Post Office: Singel 250-256 at Raadhuisstr

Main Tourist Office(VVV): Stationsplein, 10 (in front of
Centraal Station)

Yellow Pages: 118

Language: Dutch

Currency: Euro

Electricity: 220 Volts, AC/50Hz

» Embassies

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