



Amsterdam

THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO AMSTERDAM.
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Why go

This beautiful watery city is full of cobbled streets, elegant 17th-century canal houses, pretty bridges and thousands of bicycles, but there's a lot more to it too, with great night-life, fashion and design. Although it has a seedy side – the red light area and legalised cannabis, it's easy to avoid (as most of the locals do) and fall in love with the city's more charming and enchanting side. The best way to get around is to walk, catch a tram or rent a bicycle – the city is flat so cycling is not too strenuous. Or for a gentler option, take a canal tour by boat.

Where to sleep

If you want to experience a stay in a 17th-century canal house, check into the *Ambassade Hotel* (Herengracht 341. Tel: +31 20 555 0222; ambassade-hotel.nl) on the lovely Herengracht canal. It's made up of ten connected canal-side houses and no two rooms are alike. It's full of art and antiques and there's a lovely little library for guests.

The *Lloyd Hotel* (Oostelijke Handelskade 34. Tel: +20 561 3636; lloydhotel.com) in the Eastern Docklands is a quirky hotel in a listed 1920s building. Its 116 rooms range from one-star to five-stars and there are plenty of innovative design features. In the past, it has been everything from a prison to artists' studios, so there's an interesting history, and it also has an in-house cultural embassy.

What to see

Strolling or cycling along one of the many canals – the main ones are Prinsengracht, Herengracht and Keizersgracht – is a pleasant way to while away a few hours. There are plenty of picturesque canal houses, and you can stop at a traditional brown café or browse in one of the little shops along the way. Don't miss the Jordaan area, a lovely neighbourhood with pretty houses, great restaurants and boutiques.

Another interesting way to see the city is to take a canal tour by boat – there are everything from hop-on, hop-off tours (departing from opposite Central Station) to specialised dinner or candlelight cruises.

If museums are your thing, Amsterdam has around 50 of them. Some of the highlights are the *Rijksmuseum* (Jan Luijkenstraat 1. Tel: +20 674 7047; rijksmuseum.nl), one of the country's largest. Set in a stunning red-brick building, its superb collections include Dutch masterpieces from Rembrandt and Vermeer. Also in the Museumplein area is the *Van Gogh Museum* (Paulus Potterstraat 7. Tel: +20 570 5200; vangoghmuseum.nl) which has the world's largest collection of works by the artist.

The *Anne Frank House* (Prinsengracht 267. Tel: +31 20 556 7100; annefrank.org), where the young Jewish girl and her family hid from the Nazis during World War II, is a moving experience which is highly recommended. The *Science Centre Nemo* (Oosterdok 2; e-nemo.nl) at the edge of the eastern docklands, has some great interactive exhibits for both adults and kids – and the whole building is shaped like the bow of a ship.

Some of the smaller and more unusual museums are worth checking out, including the *Houseboat Museum* (Prinsengracht opp 296. Tel: +20 427 0750; houseboatmuseum.nl) set in a houseboat parked up along the Prinsengracht canal in the beautiful Jordaan area. Many Amsterdammers live on barge-like

houseboats along the canals so this is a great chance to see inside and find out what life is like onboard. The *Pianola Museum* (Westerstraat 106. Tel: +31 020 627 9624; pianola.nl) is a tiny museum



Opposite page: *Café 't Smalle*. **Clockwise from top left:** *Ambassade Hotel*; *Brouwerij 't organie* brewery; Ten green bottles; Flower market.



Clockwise from top left: Rijksmuseum; Giant clog installation; Python bridge.

dedicated to pianolas (automatic pianos). Another quirky museum is Our Lord in The Attic (Oudezijds Voorburgwal 40. Tel: +31 020 624 6604; opsolder.nl), a 17th-century house with a hidden church in the attic.

Coffee break

Know your coffee shops from your cafés – coffee shops are for smoking cannabis, while the brown cafés are where you can drink coffee. Traditional brown cafés are great for lunch or afternoon coffee, canal-side cafés offer the best views. Try Café Karpershoek (Martelaarsgracht 2. Tel: +31 20 6247886; cafekarpershoek.nl), one of the oldest brown cafés, or Café De Prins (Prinsengracht 124. Tel: +31 20 624 9382).

popular area, with lots of bars, café and clubs.

The Waterhole pub (Korte Leidsedwardsstraat 49. Tel: +31 20 620 8904; waterhole.nl) is a late-night bar with nightly live music and sessions, and hard-core clubbers will like the nightclub Escape (Rembrandtplein 11. Tel: +31 20 622 1111; escape.nl). The nightclub Jimmy Woo (Korte Leidsedwardsstraat 18. Tel: +31 20 626 3150; jimmywoo.com) attracts a cooler, more sophisticated crowd. For live music, Paradiso (Weteringschans 6. Tel: +31 20 626 5461; paradiso.nl) is a great venue set in a refurbished church.

Where to shop

With over 10,000 shops, 141 galleries, 165 antique dealers and 26 markets, you'll find everything from high fashion to specialist shops in Amsterdam.

In Dam Square, De Bijenkorf (debijenkorf.nl) is the city's up-market department store. Nearby is Kalverstraat – a hectic strip with all of the ubiquitous high-street brands and Leidsestraat, with a similar choice.

The Nine Streets area (Negen Straatjes), a set of nine narrow streets connecting three canals between Herengracht and Prinsengracht, is a vibrant and colourful shopping area with a mix of everything from vintage clothing to specialist ribbon and paper shops.

Amsterdam also has some great markets. The Bloemenmarkt (flower market), a floating market along Singel, is packed with tulips and bulbs. The Albert Cuyp Market (Monday to Saturday) in the thriving De Pijp area is over 100 years old and has everything from shoes to cheese to furniture. For designer labels, PC Hoofstraat is the place to be seen. **a**

Where to eat

Haesje Claes (Spuistraat 273-275. Tel: +31 20 624 9998; haesjeclaes.nl) is one of the city's best Dutch restaurants. Set in six historic buildings, it has many preserved architectural features. Specialities include seafood or tasty meat and poultry dishes like candied duck leg with sauerkraut and port sauce, or calf's liver with onions, bacon and apple.

Pasta e Basta (Nieuwe Spiegelstraat 8. Tel: +31 20 422 2222; pastaebasta.com) is a great Italian restaurant and the waiters are trained as singers, so they frequently break into an aria or musical number. For a tasty breakfast or lunch and a spot of people-watching, grab a window seat in Café Luxembourg (Spui 24. Tel: +31 20 620 6264; luxembourg.nl).

After dark

Leidseplein is at the heart of the city's nightlife area. There are plenty of watering holes in this area – bars, clubs and cafés, and it really comes alive at weekends. Rembrandtplein is another

ESCAPE THE CITY

Take a train from central station to the beautiful city of Delft, home of the painter Johannes Vermeer (think *Girl With A Pearl Earring*) and the famous blue and white pottery. On the way you'll get to see some of the famous flat countryside, tulip fields, windmills and canals. The city centre is quite small but many buildings date back to the 14th and 15th centuries.

travel file

GETTING THERE

Aer Lingus (aerlingus.com) operates daily flights from Dublin and Cork to Amsterdam. Flight and hotel packages available with gohop.ie