



This is an ice cool time to visit Amsterdam, writes Yvonne Gordon

LIGHT up your life

The huge piece of lace hangs over the water as we glide beneath it. It appears at first in the distance like an elaborate spider web, and then its intricate floral and leaf pattern comes into view as we pass below.

'The Lace' is a light installation on the Herengracht Canal in Amsterdam, one of many illuminated artworks in the city which are part of the winter Amsterdam Light Festival. The festival can be explored by boat, as we are doing, or on foot, coming alive at 5pm each day once the city gets dark.

We pass a giant bunch of multi-coloured tulips — an eye-catching inflatable artwork symbolising the 'tulipmania' craze in the city in the 1600s — plus a light installation on a canal wall

that reads 'memories are souvenirs too' and a rainbow of light around a canal bridge.

Each year the Light Festival transforms the canals into a glowing art gallery but a boat trip is a treat any time of the year here in the Dutch capital, where you can admire the beautiful canal houses.

We decide to explore the inside of a canal house in more detail at the Museum Van Loon on Keizersgracht (museumvanloon.nl). The house was once owned by a Dutch shipping family and the interior is still how it was in the 18th century, with rooms filled with portraits (the first resident of the house was the painter Ferdinand Bol who was a pupil of Rembrandt) plus antiques and porcelain.

We explore the drawing rooms, the dining room and bedrooms and admire the

formal garden which runs between the house and the coach house at the rear.

Some of the Van Loon family still live on the upper floors and the dining room is regularly used to host guests.

There's a light fog over the city the next day as we pass the Rijksmuseum, a building which dates back to 1885 and takes on a moody air in the low light.

In front of the museum there is a small open-air ice rink, where young and old try out their skating skills while couples and families sip hot chocolate.

Indoors, there's a touch of glamour at Nieuwe Kerk on Dam Square where the exhibition 90 Years Ms Monroe celebrates the year that Marilyn would have turned 90.

In the former church's grand setting are dresses worn by

the style icon (including the famous white dress she wore in *The Seven Year Itch*) plus numerous other personal items on display.

For a taste of real-life Monroe glamour, rest your head in a canal house bedroom at the Pulitzer Hotel (which was founded by the grandson of Pulitzer Prize founder Joseph Pulitzer).

The five-star hotel is made up 25 connecting canal houses between Prinsengracht and Keizersgracht, in the chic Nine Streets area and has just reopened after an extensive renovation. There's a movie-star vibe with antiques, art and in each room, a drinks cabinet with a cocktail mixing kit and a vintage telephone.

Winter is a lovely time to explore Amsterdam — there are fewer tourists, the canals take on a magical atmosphere in the wintry light and around every corner is a welcoming brown pub or café.

FACT BOX

The Amsterdam Light festival runs until January 22, see www.amsterdamlightfestival.com and the 90 Years Ms Monroe exhibition runs until February 5, see www.nieuwekerk.nl. Double rooms at the Pulitzer Hotel start at €220, see www.pulitzeramsterdam.com. Fly to Amsterdam with Aer Lingus, KLM or Ryanair. See www.iAmsterdam.com for more information on visiting Amsterdam.

WINTER MAGIC — The Book Collector's Suite at the Pulitzer Hotel and (top), the Amsterdam Light Festival

