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Free Amsterdam

Amsterdam, 1 Day

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Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: If you're looking for history, Amsterdam has more of it on its streets than most museums. A stroll around the city center will give you a glimpse of the wealth that was Amsterdam of the Golden Age - from beautiful canal side homes to the royal family.

Amsterdam's famous social policies have also created fascinating neighborhoods; from legalized prostitution to the tolerance of soft drugs, you really have to see it to believe it.

contact:

tel: +31 20 551 2512 / +31 20 201 8800

fax: +31 20 625 2869

location:

Between the Dam and Nieuwmarkt
Amsterdam 1012 LH

1 Red Light District

DESCRIPTION: Quite possibly Amsterdam's most defining feature, the Red Light District is the place to see some truly unique things. If prostitutes in windows aren't enough, you can also find an Erotic Museum, which takes you through the history of prostitution, the Hash Marijuana and Hemp Museum, which tells you all you need to know about weed, and the Banana Bar, a bar where waitresses are highly skilled in the various ways of eating a banana. If you want to learn more about prostitution in the Netherlands, visit the Prostitute Information Centre, located next to the Oude Kerk. If this doesn't excite you, the Warmoestraat, which runs along the Red Light District, is full of coffeeshops, bars, hostels and gay S&M clubs. Walking through the Red Light District today you may notice that some windows contain out of place fashion exhibitions. This is a result of the city's efforts to "clean up" the streets. © NileGuide



wcities

location:

Dam
Amsterdam

2 Dam

DESCRIPTION: Located in the heart of Amsterdam, from here you are waking distance to many of the city's attractions. You can grab a bite to eat at one of the many fast food joints around, and watch the various street performers put on a show. Otherwise, you can sit on the large white phallic World Ward II monument and people watch in this busy square; stay long enough and you're sure to see something bizarre. In the square you can find a few reasonably priced souvenir shops, as well as the official Amsterdam tourist bureau. © NileGuide



contact:

<http://www.vondelpark.nl/>

location:

Vondelpark

hours:

Daily

3 Vondelpark

DESCRIPTION: On one of the rare, sunny days in Amsterdam, the Vondelpark is so full of people it's difficult to find a quiet spot to yourself, but despite the bustle, the park is quite the bird sanctuary; you can watch storks flying around, as their nests are perched on high posts through out the park. If a sunny day at the park doesn't do it for you, you can also visit the park at night; after 11pm it is legal to have sex out in the open at Vondelpark. In the centre of the park you can also find the Filmmuseum, which shows interesting art films and has a nice indoor and outdoor café. © NileGuide



contact:
tel: +31 20 551 2512

location:
Rembrandtplein
Amsterdam 1017 CT

4 Rembrandtplein

DESCRIPTION: Rembrandtplein is one of Amsterdam's two main party areas (Leidseplein being the first). Whereas Leidseplein is a very popular destination for tourists, Rembrandtplein is more popular with the Dutch visiting the city for one night of partying. If you want to escape the bright lights and clubs of Rembrandtplein, adjoining Torbeckeplein offers a view over Amsterdam's famous seven bridges; beautifully lit up and reflecting in the water by night. In December, Rembrandtplein gets in the holiday spirit with a temporary skating rink set up in the square. © NileGuide



wcities

contact:
tel: +31 (0)20 201 8800
(Tourist Information)
fax: +31 (0)20 201 8850
(Tourist Information)
http://www.amsterdam.info/signs/magere_brug/

location:
Amstel 81
Amsterdam 1018 EM

5 Magere Brug

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:
Snap a picture of the bridge at night. This is probably Amsterdam's most famous postcard scene.

DESCRIPTION: In 1671 a small footbridge was built across the river Amstel. The bridge was made of wood and it could be raised. In the beginning the bridge was called the "chicken's bridge" because of its small construction. Later on, again due to the construction, it adopted the name "Skinny Bridge", being compared to a slender woman. It was rebuilt in 1871 and 1929, but it was once again made of wood and the construction was "skinny". Nowadays, at night the **Magere Brug** is lit up at night, beautifying the river Amstel in the dark. © wcities.com



wikipedia

location:
Leidseplein
Amsterdam 1017

hours:
Daily

6 Leidseplein

DESCRIPTION: Amsterdam's main nightlife area is undoubtedly the Leidseplein. Full of cafes and bars with outdoor seating and heated umbrellas, this is a great place to sit down for a drink and watch the city go by, both by day and by night. In Leidseplein you will also find the very large Bull Dog Coffeeshop; the building it's located in was once the police headquarters. On the streets leading away from the square you can find many bars with live music in the evenings, as well as small Italian restaurants that specialize in 5 euro pizzas; the food is good, fast and cheap. © NileGuide



contact:
tel: 31 20 6200 614
<http://www.kamer401.nl/>

location:
Marnixstraat 401
Amsterdam 1017 PJ

hours:
W-Th 6p-1a, F-Sa 6p-3a

7 Kamer 401

DESCRIPTION: This hip bar/pub is a popular spot for the trendy youth of the city, and it shows! As the evening progresses and tables become scarce and dining service can crawl. But with posh yet funky decor (including bright red walls and comfortable sofas) and loud music, Kamer 401 has established itself among the other modern lounges in the Leidseplein area. Stop by after a show or before heading out to the clubs-- and if hunger strikes, you can grab some Italian fare with your martini. © wcities.com



Kamer 401

contact:
tel: 31 20 622 9910
<http://www.hotelweber.nl/web-er.htm>

location:
Marnixstraat 397
Amsterdam 1017 PJ

hours:
Su-Th 8p-3a, F-Sa 8p-4a

8 Cafe Weber

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Weber is a great place to meet with friends for a drink before going out to a club. Drinks are slightly cheaper than at a club, and with plenty of seating you should be able to find a spot even on a busy night. Weber has an underground connection to Lux, another hip, chic bar - so you can bar hop without going out doors.

DESCRIPTION: Weber is as chic as a bar can get. With art-deco lighting and interiors done up in fur and mosaic tiles, the decor is the first thing you notice as you walk in. The crowd is a mix of students, artists, business persons and theatre-goers that drop in after a movie or a play at one of the Leidseplein's theatres. The music sways from Brit pop to alternative tunes. The laid-back atmosphere welcomes you into the comfort zone—reason enough for the bar to be forever crowded! © wcities.com



editor

contact:
tel: 31 20 422 1412

location:
Marnixstraat 403
Amsterdam 1016 XR

hours:
Su-Th 8p-3a, F-Sa 8p-4a

9 Lux

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Can get very packed later in the evening so arrive earlier to get a seat! Conveniently connected to Cafe Weber.

DESCRIPTION: Although the Leidseplein area is quite touristy, laid-back Lux draws in a healthy dose of locals with its chic attitude. Sit on the upper level to enjoy a sweeping view of the place. © Frommer's



editor

Amsterdam Snapshot

Local Info

Dam Square is where it all began for Amsterdam. As this is the site where the Amstel River was dammed in the 1200s, the Amstel-dam eventually morphed into the name Amsterdam. Today the square is the core of the city, with the Royal Palace located at one end, and the War Memorial at the other. Full of souvenir shops, street performers, and pigeons, Dam Square is also surrounded by tourist information centers and is frequently the starting point of many excursions.

The Damrak leads from Dam Square to Amsterdam's main train station, Centraal Station, while the Rokin leads from the square to many of the city's tourist attractions. Both of these streets, along with the square itself, divide Amsterdam's medieval city center into the Old Side (east of this axis) and New Side (west of this axis).

The Red-Light District (De Wallen)

Amsterdam's most famous Red Light District is called De Wallen, and is located in the Old City Centre just east of Dam Square.

Full of the famous red-light windows, the neighborhood also has many sex shops, souvenir shops, coffeeshops and restaurants. In the center of the Red Light District you will find the Oude Kerk, Amsterdam's Oldest Church, while the District is bordered by two canals, the Oudezijds Voorburgwal and Oudezijds Achterburgwal. The Zeedijk (Amsterdam's Chinatown) runs along the eastern border of the District, along with Nieuwmarkt, a square dominated by De Waag (the weight house of the city's medieval gates) and surrounded by many cafes.

It is important to note that it is not allowed to take pictures of the women working in the windows of the Red Light District. They will get violently angry with anyone who breaks this rule.

Leidseplein and Rembrandtplein

By night, the Leidseplein (Leidse Square) and Rembrandtplein (Rembrandt Square) are the party destinations for both tourists and locals alike. Leidseplein has some of the city's most popular bars and concert venues, and is quite popular with expats and the Dutch visiting Amsterdam for

a night of partying. Rembrandtplein is Amsterdam's answer to Times Square, with flashy billboards and signs dominating the square. It is more popular with tourists from abroad, and surrounded by dance clubs catering to all music tastes. By day, both squares are lined with terraces and cafes, and frequented by street performers looking to entertain the crowds.

Jordaan

The Jordaan is Amsterdam's greenest neighborhood, and may have gotten its name from the French word "Jardin", meaning garden. Built in the 17th Century, the neighborhood was a result of Amsterdam's rapid growth during its Golden Age. In the 1960s, during a housing shortage, many of the city's famous houseboats were moored in this neighborhood, and to this day the Jordaan has a high percentage of these. Originally a neighborhood of bohemians and artists, the area is now becoming a favorite with Amsterdam's yuppies, and the many cafes and traditional "brown bars" are frequented by locals.

Canals

Amsterdam's famous canals, which wind for over 100 kilometers and divide the city center into more than 90 islands, all started at the Amstel River when it was dammed at Dam Square in the 1200s. From there on, a series of canals were dug to drain the swampy land and make it habitable. The Singel canal was the first, and by the Golden Age of the 17th Century the city had expanded so much that the Herengracht, Keizersgracht and Prinsengracht were dug to accommodate the wealthy merchants.

The result is a matrix of canals, creating a web-like city center that is very easy to get lost in. An easy trick to help you find your way is remembering that the canals are named in alphabetical order from the city center outward: Herengracht, Keizersgracht, Prinsengracht.

De Pijp

The streets in this neighborhood run in a pattern similar to that in a network of pipes, hence its name: De Pijp or The Pipe. The neighborhood's main street, the Albert Cuypstraat, is home to Amsterdam's biggest market: the Albert Cuypmarkt. This is also Amsterdam's most ethnically diverse

neighborhood, as is evident by the various ethnic stores and restaurants located in the winding side streets. The neighborhood itself is easy to find as it's located directly behind the famous Heineken Brewery.

Museumplein

The Museumplein is Amsterdam's museum quarter. The Rijksmuseum and Van Gogh Museum are the city's most famous museums, each containing an extensive collection by the country's most famous artists: Rembrandt van Rijn and Vincent van Gogh, respectively.

The famous I Amsterdam sign travels around the city, but most frequently it can be found in Museumplein behind the Rijksmuseum. Also walking distance from the square are the Leidseplein and some of Amsterdam's most exclusive shopping streets, including the P.C. Hoofstraat and Van Baerlestraat.

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History

Amsterdam has always been a well-known name in world history. During the 17th Century Amsterdam was the center of world economics, but nowadays the city is known for its tolerant character.

Holland in the 12th Century was barely habitable. The land was very humid and consisted mainly of peat. Various rivers intersected the landscape including the River Amstel, which flows into the River IJ. By the end of the 12th Century a small settlement arose near a dam in the Amstel, and the city became known as Amsterdam. This dam is still a significant point in the city, and is now used as a square. Amsterdam became a town at the beginning of the 13th Century.

Meanwhile, the town extended slowly from the centre around the Dam. Various ramparts were thrown up and canals were dug. Around 1420 the town was bursting at the seams once again. On the eastern part a new wall was built along the present Geldersekaade and Kloveniersburgwal. On the west side a moat canal was dug. The economy at this time was not very developed, being based largely on beer and herrings. It was only after Amsterdam became a part of the Burgundian Empire

Amsterdam Snapshot continued

during the 15th Century that the economy began to pick up. Amsterdam's harbor had a stable function: fish from the south and grain from the Baltic countries were traded in the city's markets. Because of its economic prosperity, Amsterdam developed into Holland's largest city, with a population of about 30,000.

During the second half of the 16th Century, Europe had to deal with reformation. The Low Countries seceded from Spain after the Eighty Years' War, renouncing Catholicism. For a long period Amsterdam was allied with the Spaniards, but in 1578 the city was finally united with the rest of the Netherlands. Holland was one of the most tolerant regions in Europe during this period. For that reason, many Protestants and Portuguese Jews, who were persecuted elsewhere in Europe, moved to cities throughout Holland. A large number of merchants from Antwerp moved their businesses to Amsterdam, which meant a big boost for the local economy.

The Dutch were forced to find their own route to the Indies because of the annexation of Portugal by Spain in 1580. The first voyages to the Indies started in Amsterdam and were a major success. Stimulated by these results, plans were made everywhere in the country to send more ships to the Indies. Out of all these initiatives the United East Indian Company came into existence, the VOC. Over 50 percent of the capital from the new company was in the hands of Amsterdam. When the VOC was founded, not only merchants were involved, but citizens invested in the project as well.

The 17th Century was a period of glory for Amsterdam. Wealth, power, culture and forbearance flourished in the city. The population increased rapidly during this period and because of this, the city extended greatly. Amsterdam built its famous ring of canals, and tall houses were built on the canals, taller than in other city centres in Holland. The government strongly encouraged this development, because it added to Amsterdam's prestige. During the first half of this century two churches were built: Zuiderkerk and Westerkerk. The old gothic town hall was burnt down in 1652 and a new town hall, the present-day Palace on Dam Square was built. The Plaetse or Dam Square was enlarged by a great degree, just like the rest of the city. After the Jordaan was

completed, around 1700, approximately 200,000 people were living in Amsterdam.

Culturally these days were roaring as well. Due to Amsterdam's economic prosperity, its citizens could afford to surround themselves with objects d'art. Bredero, Vondel and P.C. Hooft wrote their famous poetry, while painter Rembrandt and his students had their atelier in Amsterdam. Philosophers like Spinoza and Descartes formulated their ideas on paper here.

Often however, in locations where things are going well, mischief lies in wait. In 1672 the powerful Netherlands got involved in a war with France and England. Amsterdam's harbor was inaccessible to the fleets sailing in from the Dutch Indies, and because of this the boisterous prosperity came to a halt by the end of the 17th Century. The structure of Amsterdam's economy changed: the city lost its position as a stable market for world trade. However, money transfers became more and more important and Amsterdam soon became the financial heart of the world, the banker for European Monarchs who financed their expensive wars with borrowed money.

Amsterdam moved on quietly until industrialization also took its hold on the Netherlands. After 1850, the population in Amsterdam suddenly increased greatly; people moved to the city from all over the Netherlands in quest for employment. New residential quarters were needed, resulting in town developments like the Pijp and the Vondelpark. After 1920, the large developments with new districts in the west, south and east followed. Plan Zuid, by architect Berlage, is still very popular. North of the River IJ, new quarters also arose.

In 1939 however, one of the darkest pages in world history became a terrible reality: World War II. Amsterdam's population was hit hard. Amsterdam had numerous Jewish inhabitants, who were deported and did not survive. Places like Anne Frank's House and the National Monument on Dam Square, are a reminder of this horrible period. After the war, Amsterdam continued growing. During the 1960s the Bijlmer was built, with its high blocks of flats.

Amsterdam is still the Netherlands' undisputed cultural center with orchestras, ballet, theaters, museums and galleries and two universities. Soccer plays an important role in the life of many Amsterdammers. In the 1970s Amsterdam was famous

once again because of Johan Cruyff and Ajax. Ajax and the Dutch national squad's victories are celebrated like real national feasts in Amsterdam.

©

Hotel Insights

Every year, Amsterdam is visited by thousands of tourists from all over the world, all with varying budgets. Since Amsterdam offers hotels in all price classes, each and every tourist is guaranteed to find a good place to sleep, whether they have a lot to spend or not.

For those visitors who can really splash out and are willing to do so, there is the Amstel InterContinental, located in the very heart of the city: the best, the most luxurious and of course the most expensive of all. This is the hotel where film stars and royalty stay. It's conveniently located near the old centre, important theatres, museums, restaurants and clubs.

Dam and Surroundings

The Dam, with its square and Royal Palace, is one of the most visited tourist areas in Amsterdam. This area is filled with plenty of hotels. Among the more expensive ones is the Crowne Plaza Amsterdam City Centre, not far from Centraal Station. From here you can easily get to the boats for a tour of the canals. On Dam Square itself there is the beautiful Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky. Die Port van Cleve is somewhat less expensive and is located just behind the famous Bijenkorf, as well as the Tulip Inn Dam Square which also fits in this price category. For those who are on a tight budget but want to stay in this part of the city, there are hotels like De Korenaer and De Gerstekorrel. Both are very centrally located, within walking distance of all major tourist attractions.

Leidseplein & Rembrandtplein

Both squares are cozy in the summertime, when the weather is nice and the terraces are full of people. This is also the place to be if you're into clubbing. In this area you can find expensive accommodations at places like the American Hotel and Amsterdam Marriott Hotel. Other hotels in the area include the Golden Tulip Amsterdam Centre and the NH Schiller, right on Rembrandtplein. For the younger ones who like to go from youth hostel

Amsterdam Snapshot continued

to youth hostel, there is the comfortable City Hostel Vondelpark, very close to Vondelpark. Also in this area you can find the very reasonably priced Hotel Abba.

Close by is the famous workers' district, De Jordaan. This district used to be a rather tough area, but has become one of the most popular residential areas. You can find the Ramada Amsterdam City Centre close to here.

Museumkwartier

This is the area around Museumplein (Museum Square) where you will find all of Amsterdam's major museums within walking distance, including the Rijksmuseum, Van Gogh Museum and Stedelijk Museum (Municipal Museum). The Bilderberg Garden Hotel is among the more expensive accommodations in the area, while the four-star Ramada Amsterdam Museum Square and the Ambassade Hotel are a bit more moderately priced. The Banks Mansion and Ramada Hotel & Suites are more or less equally priced. For those who like to be in a quieter area, Hotel Heemskerk is recommended.

Along the river Gaasp you will find the Belfort Hotel which is located near the ring road. For the business traveller who needs to stay close to the airport, there is the Amsterdam Airport Schiphol Hilton, just two minutes from the main terminal. The rooms are all provided with soundproof windows, so don't worry about the noise. You can be in the city centre within 15 minutes. There is also the Sheraton Amsterdam Airport Hotel & Conference Center. Do keep in mind that most of the hotels in Amsterdam charge 5% city tax, which is often not included in prices of rooms given.

©

Restaurants Insights

Amsterdam is full of restaurants for every budget and every taste, in large part a result of the international nature of the city.

On nice days patios are overflowing with customers, while the variety of interiors make dining out at a restaurant a visual experience as well.

Dining out is popular amongst locals and tourists alike, so it's recommended to make a reservation if you have a place in mind.

The Dutch eat later, and restaurants experience a rush between 7 and 10pm.

Service is also very slow, and can be frustrating. The best thing to do is to remind yourself to enjoy the overall dining experience in a no-rush environment.

Traditional Dutch food consists of bitterballen: deep fried bar snacks that go well with beer. Pancakes are another option and are available with a variety of sweet and savory toppings; the Pancake Bakery near the Anne Frankhuis has an extensive menu.

However, food from the former colonies has also made it into Dutch culture. Indonesian kip sate (chicken with peanut sauce) is a staple dish on many menus in Dutch and Indonesian restaurants alike. Try Kantjil & de Tijger in Spui square for some excellent eat-in and take-away Indonesian.

If you're on a budget, the Zeedijk is the heart of Chinatown, and offers a variety of excellent Chinese and Thai restaurants.

And if you're looking for something a little closer to home, O'Reilly's is an Irish pub in Dam Square that attracts tourists and ex-pats on all days of the week. Rembrandtplein and Leidseplein also have a variety of pubs, bars and restaurants, such as the Heeren van Amstel, popular with a younger crowd.

Like in many European countries, apple pie is a classic dessert in The Netherlands.

A wander through the Jordaan and Pijp neighborhoods will not only take you past many local bars and cafes, but will also lead you to Winkel, a small cafe with the best apple pie in town.

© NileGuide

Nightlife Insights

Art & Culture

Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Vermeer and Frans Hals are the Old and Great Masters of Holland. As a result, Amsterdam has some of the finest art museums in Europe. As Amsterdam is the most liberal of cities, the museums are not purely of the conventional kind, but whatever your interest, you should be able to find it at one of the city's museums. The majority of museums are placed within a short range of one another, so you can easily walk from one to the next.

Museums

Many of Rembrandt, Vermeer and Frans Hals' finest works are part of the national

heritage and housed in the Rijksmuseum. Take your time in this beautiful museum, as it is huge, and the exhibitions and surroundings need your attention for more than just an hour. Rembrandt's paintings are also largely represented in Rembrandthuis. The life and works of Van Gogh are presented in the Van Gogh Museum. For modern art you should definitely visit the exhibitions in the Stedelijk Museum.

Nature & Science

If you're interested in science and interactive entertainment, don't miss Science Center NEMO, a place designed for children with lots of hands-on exhibits and technology. The Scheepvaartmuseum will appeal to anyone who's interested in maritime and nautical experiences. Nature lovers should visit the Hortus Botanicus Amsterdam, which has over six thousand different kinds of plants.

Historical Museums

In Amsterdam, there are a lot of historical museums. One of the best is Amsterdams Historisch Museum, where you will learn about the city's developments from the thirteenth century to the present day. The popular Anne Frank House has recently been restored and is able to accommodate a lot more people than before.

Cinema

Amsterdam has only a few cinemas, but they show a great combination of big Hollywood blockbusters and European movies. The cinemas can be divided into two main categories: popular cinemas (with big movie successes) and filmhuizen (art houses), where art films, documentaries and retrospectives are shown. The Movies, with its extravagant interior, is a great place to visit and view art films.

Theatre & Dance

Amsterdam has a lot of theatrical events, and more in English than in Dutch. The De Parade is the prelude of the theater season, and is a great event at the end of summer with lots of different little shows, food and drink. The most important theater venues are Koninklijk Theater Carré, once home to a circus, now a beautiful theater by the Amstel Canal, with a wide variety of contemporary national and international productions. Amsterdam's dance scene is quite lively. There are two

Amsterdam Snapshot continued

main companies, Nederlands Dans Theater and Het Nationale Ballet. Besides these companies there are a lot of established dancers and companies worth watching.

Music

This city has a lively music scene, with lots of festivals and events and numerous concerts in different venues. There is everything from classic to rock. Tickets for concerts can be bought in advance at the AUB Ticketshop, located centrally on the Leidseplein.

Home to many beautiful venues that offer brilliant acoustics for soloists and orchestras, the Concertgebouw Orchestra, has a regular program of performances in the city. At Beurs van Berlage there are a lot of classical concerts on a regular basis. If you're more into opera, you should go to the Het Muziektheater (Stopera) on Waterlooplein, where the Netherlands Opera is often to be seen.

Local groups and jam sessions can often be heard in the lively city during the night. International stars visit the city to play at different venues. The best places to catch jazz legends in intimate confines are Casablanca and Bimhuis Jazz & Improvisation.

Big international stars such as the Rolling Stones enjoy playing in venues like Paradiso and Melkweg. Besides this there are a lot of rock festivals, eg. Drum Rhythm Festival, which takes place at Westergasfabriek or the Amsterdam Pop Prijs Wanted R & B & Hip Hop Prijs Finals, held at Melkweg.

House, Disco & World Music

The VIP Club on Fridays and Paradiso on Saturday evenings in Paradiso are hip dance evenings where a lot of cool people are to be seen. Techno, house and hip hop music can be heard. Melkweg has dance evenings with hard house and drum and bass. The crowd is diverse but mainly young, and the atmosphere is relaxed.

Gardens & Parks

Amsterdam has some beautiful gardens and parks, the Vondelpark being the most famous park amongst tourists and Amsterdammers. You will also find the Dutch Film Museum here, which has a beautiful terrace where you can spend a whole afternoon sitting, relaxing and

watching the strangest people going by. The Amstel Park is located a bit away from the centre, but is a good retreat with rose gardens and a glasshouse. The Amsterdamse Bos is a busy park where you can be as sporty as you like.

If you want a tour around Amsterdam's private gardens, go and inform yourself at the VVV, where they can tell you what's going on in Amsterdam at the particular time you're there.

Sports

Holland is well known for its passion for football, but besides football, the Dutch play a lot of other sports such as hockey, skating and cycling. Amsterdam has many cycling lanes, although you have to watch the traffic, especially the trams that won't stop for you; in comparison to other cities though, the traffic is a lot more accustomed to cyclists on the road. The parks are excellent for outdoor sports: running, skating and cycling. A lot of sports centres are to be found as well, for fitness and sauna, swimming and bowling.

©

Things to Do Insights

Amsterdam is one of Europe's main attractions, and the world famous coffeeshops and Red Light District are just the beginning. The city center is compact with a great deal of attractions over a relatively small area, and the locals speak English, both factors making Amsterdam easy to explore. Since Amsterdam is the world's most bike friendly city, it's not crowded by cars and is a pleasure to explore on rented bike or foot. The beautiful canals and many bridges are a delight to explore by day and night. Below you'll find some of the city's most visited attractions, but don't be afraid to explore all the gems in between!

Dam Square Every visitor to Amsterdam passes through Dam Square, the city's historic center. Dominated by the Royal Palace and the Nieuwe Kerk at one end, and the National Monument on the other, the square is also home to hundreds of pigeons and many street performers. Dam square is the frequent site of carnivals, and is lined with cafes, bars and souvenir shops. For something a little less touristy,

head west to enter the city's canal belt.

Here you will be able to find more local cafes and restaurants, as well as Meneer Pannekoek, where you can try the famous Dutch pancakes.

Red Light District

The Red Light District, located east of Dam Square, just might be Amsterdam's most famous attraction.

The Warmoesstraat (Vegetable Street as it was the site of the city's medieval vegetable market), marks the beginning of the neighborhood, and itself houses many sex shops, coffeeshops, S&M shops and the Condomerie, a novelty condom shop.

Wander around the Red Light District by day and by night for a completely different experience; it's very safe and organized, and one should not let any preconceived notions discourage them from exploring.

However, it is important to remember not to take pictures of the women working in the windows, as they will get violently angry with you if you do so. Make sure you stop by the Oude Kerk, Amsterdam's oldest church and the heart of the Red Light District, for a truly unique urban juxtaposition.

If you head eastward of the Red Light District, you'll end up on a street called Zeedijk, which is also Amsterdam's Chinatown. The Zeedijk is a great place for fast, cheap and quality Chinese food. At the end of the Zeedijk is Nieuwmarkt, a square surrounded by bars and cafes and dominated by De Waag, the weigh house and entrance to Medieval Amsterdam.

Anne Frank House

The Anne Frank House is located west of Dam Square in a neighborhood called the Jordaan. The house is the city's most visited tourist destination; arrive early in the day or an hour before closing to avoid the long lines. The house is now empty, so an hour is more than enough time to visit if it's not packed with other visitors.

The neighborhood itself is also worth exploring, with the Westerkerk (Western Church) located near the house (Anne Frank wrote about the church's bells in her famous diary). The square around the

Amsterdam Snapshot continued

Westerkerk has two main monuments: the Anne Frank statue on the southern side of the church, and the Homomonument on the eastern edge of the square.

In the Jordaan you will also find the Negen Straatjes (The Nine Little Streets), a great place to shop for its many quirky shops, galleries and cafes. If you get lost wandering along Amsterdam's canal, remember: the three main canals are arranged alphabetically from Dam Square out (Herengracht, Keizersgracht, Prinsengracht).

Flower Market

Amsterdam's flower market is the city's most famous market, and a great place not only to admire beautiful tulips, but also do all your souvenir shopping. At the north end of the market you will find a small square called Spui, which has many cafes and restaurants, including the city's most popular Indonesian Restaurant, Kantjil & De Tijger. For a good overview of Amsterdam's history, visit the Amsterdam Historisch Museum is just north of Spui on the Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal.

Museumplein

Amsterdam's museums are clustered around Museumplein (or Museum Square) in the Oud Zuid (Old South) neighbourhood.

The Rijksmuseum is temporarily under construction and as a result only a fraction of the exhibition is open to the public, but this is still the place to see Rembrandt's masterpiece the "Nightwatch". The neighboring Van Gogh Museum contains the world's biggest collection of Van Gogh paintings and gives an excellent overview of the painter's life. The square is also frequently the home of the traveling IAmsterdam sign, along with various souvenir vendors that have similar items to the official museum shop, but at a fraction of the cost.

On the south side of Museumplein is the Concertgebouw (Royal Concert Hall), where you can catch a free concert every Wednesday at lunchtime of the cultural season. In the neighborhood you can also

find the PC Hooftstraat, Amsterdam's exclusive shopping district.

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Travel Tips

Getting There

By Air

The majority of flights departing and arriving in the Netherlands utilize Amsterdam Airport Schiphol (+800 72447 465/ <http://www.schiphol.nl/>). Despite ranking among the world's busiest airports, Schiphol retains a passenger friendly environment. The arrivals halls on the ground floor open directly into Schiphol Plaza, which has the ubiquitous shopping and dining choices. Short term parking lots are connected directly to the terminal, and tourist/information booths, ATMs, currency exchange centers, post offices, a hotel and even a massage parlor are also readily available. Airlines serving Schiphol include:

Air Berlin (+45 30 41 47 75 10/ <http://www.airberlin.com/>) Air Canada (+1 888 247 2262/ <http://www.aircanada.ca/>) Air France (+1 800 237 2747/ <http://www.airfrance.com/us/>) American Airlines (+31 20 2013 610/ <http://www.aa.com/>) British Airways (+1 800 247 9297/ <http://www.ba.com/>) Condor (+1 800 524 6975/ <http://www7.condor.com/>) Continental Airlines (+1 800 525 0280/ <http://www.continental.com/>) Delta (+1 800 221 1212/ <http://www.delta.com/>) Easy Jet (+33 8 25 08 25 08/ <http://www.easyjet.com/>) Japan Airlines (+1 800 525 3663/ <http://www.japanair.com/>) Lufthansa (+1 800 645 3880/ <http://www.lufthansa.com/>) Northwest Airlines (+1 800 225 2525/ <http://www.nwa.com/>) Singapore Air (+1 800 742 3333/ <http://www.singaporeair.com/>) United Airlines (+1 800 241 6522/ <http://www.ua.com/>) U.S. Airways (+1 800 428 4322/ <http://www.usairways.com/>)

From the Airport

Taxi: Schiphol Travel Taxis (+31 20 653 1000) provide service from the airport to destinations throughout the Netherlands. Fares range from EUR22 to EUR112 depending on the postal code of the stop. Most fares to downtown Amsterdam are around EUR30-EUR40. The taxi rank resides just outside Schiphol Plaza.

Pre-booking is available online (<http://www.schiphol.nl/>).

Train: Taking the train is the most expedient form of transport between the airport and the city center. Trains operated by Dutch Railways (a.k.a NS Railways) (+31 20 900 9296 <http://www.ns.nl/>) exit the NS Station under Schiphol Plaza up to five times an hour during peak times and every half hour during off peak times. Night trains depart the station about every hour through the night. The Schiphol Line runs to Amsterdam's Centraal Station via stops on the west side for around EUR3 one way. The trip takes approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Thalys offers daily high speed train service to various domestic and international locales. Tickets can be purchased at the Dutch Railways desk at Schiphol Plaza.

Bus: Buses leave from stops outside Schiphol Plaza for various points and cities is around the region. Bus 197 stops at the Marnixstraat bus station in the Center district (i.e. downtown), and is one of the cheapest ways to get into Amsterdam at EUR3.40. Hotel courtesy buses also leave from outside the Plaza.

Rental Cars: No matter which option suits your needs getting to the center of Amsterdam is trouble-free and relatively quick. While the city has the same notorious reputation as other European metro areas for driving, rental cars are obtainable and are a fine preference for those wanting to explore the countryside or head on to another city. On-site companies are: Alamo (+1 800 462 5266/ <http://www.alamo.com/>) Avis (+1 800 230 4898/ <http://www.avis.com/>) Europcar (+31 20 316 4190/ <http://www.europcar.com/>) Hertz (+1 800 654 3131/ <http://www.hertz.com/>) Sixt (+31 23 569 8653/ <http://www.e-sixt.com/>)

By Bus

Eurolines (+31 20 560 8788/ <http://www.eurolines.com/>) departs for destinations throughout Europe from the Amstel Station.

By Car

The Netherlands has a good highway system composed of speedy superhighways and slower national highways, most of which are just two lanes and perfect for country sightseeing. The E231 from the south, the E231 from the

Amsterdam Snapshot continued

southeast, the E19 from the southwest, and the E22 from the north all stream into Amsterdam, with most connecting to the A10 ring road lassoing the city.

By Rail

Like most countries in Europe, the Netherlands has an extensive rail network connecting its cities and linking it with other destinations on the continent. All trains arrive and depart from Centraal Station in Amsterdam; a mammoth facility with its own host of services and a bit of an ominous character after dark. Although often maligned with service delays and maintenance issues, Nederlandse Spoorwegen (i.e. Netherlands Railways) (+31 20 900 9296/ <http://www.ns.nl/>) remains the best mode to hobnob around the country and abroad. The Benelux train makes hourly trips (up to 16 a day) between Amsterdam and Brussels, with numerous stops along the way including one at Rotterdam and Antwerp. Thalys (+31 20 302 3539/ <http://www.thalys.com/>) provides high speed train travel from Amsterdam to Brussels, Paris and the south of France. ICE International makes jaunts between Amsterdam and Frankfurt, Germany via Cologne, Germany. The CityNightLine train affords a comfortable overnight trip from Amsterdam to Switzerland or southern Germany. Daily service is also available to and from Berlin, Germany.

By Water

About 100 cruise ships a year make Amsterdam's Felison Terminal (+31 20 5552 1111/<http://www.felisonterminal.nl/>) or Oostelijke Handelskade (+31 20 509 1000) passenger terminal a port of call. For a more laborious from a seafaring opt for ferry transport. Numerous companies sail between ports in northern Europe and the Netherlands. DFDS Seaways (+44 871 522 9955/<http://www.dfdsseaways.co.uk/>) has overnight ferry service from Newcastle, England to Amsterdam (via IJmuiden and a bus ride across the isthmus). P&O Ferries (+31 20 210 3333/ <http://www.ponsf.com/>) float from Hull to Rotterdam, where you can then hop a train to Amsterdam. Stenaline (+31 17 438 9333/ <http://www7.stenaline.co.uk/>) offers sail/ rail service from destinations in England to various cities in the Netherlands. The ferry leaves from Harwich, England and arrives at port in Hook of Holland, where you can catch an express train to

Centraal Station (or drive if you brought the car) in Amsterdam. All the boats travel overnight (most journeys exceed 10 to 15 hours) but numerous time diversions like casino rooms and movie house make the motion sickness bearable.

Getting Around

Car

Although plenty of visitors scamper around town in subcompact mini mobiles and locals get behind the wheels of some of the smallest (and slowest) cars on earth, driving is by far more of a frustration than the equivalent of a casual Sunday cruise. Many main streets would be considered alleyways or even hallways in other cities. Roads are that narrow in places. Plus, the system of canals in the city center has left the roads to wander into dead ends and one-way jams. Parking is also quite a task, with very few free zones and a kiosk payment structure that is enforced to the maximum degree by Amsterdam's notorious Dienst Parkeerbeheer (Parking Authority) who has a communal itchy trigger finger when it comes to booting and towing illegally parked cars. So it is best to park the car either in a park and ride lot at a metro station on the outskirts (Olympisch Stadion, ArenA, Slottedijk) or at one of the abundant pay lots around town including Centraal Station, which has a day rate of EUR32.

Bike

By far the preeminent and the fastest way to explore the town is by pedal power. Bikes are ubiquitous and the local's chosen mode of hobnobbing from point to point. Despite cobblestone streets, heavy foot traffic and the sport of tram dodging, the biggest problem with biking in Amsterdam is theft. It is absurdly rampant and certainly an enormous black blotch on a city with an unrivaled cycling cultural. So make sure to tote along a lock. Dedicated lanes on just about every major street in the "City of Bikes" make it simple to ride in traffic and bike lanes even have cycle-specific traffic lights. Roads are flat and painless to maneuver and bike traffic is generally unhurried as the locals dote more over fashion than fitness when it comes to pedaling around. Bikes can be rented at most train stations (usually from around EUR30-EUR40 per week) and an assortment of private companies including Damstraat (+31 20 625 5029/

<http://www.bikes.nl/>) and Bike City (+31 20 626 3721/<http://www.bikecity.nl/>).

Public Transport

Meandering by foot and by bike is supplemented by a varied and widespread public transit system operated by Gemeente Vervoerbedrijf (GVB) (+31 20 900 9292/ <http://www.gvb.nl/>). Four metro lines, more than 30 bus routes, four ferry lines and 16 tramways span the city with most beginning at Centraal Station. The metro lines (Green(54), Red(53) Yellow(54) and Orange(51)) are a good option for getting to the suburbs, but the trams, which crisscross the small central districts, are most effective for seeing the area's sites. The metro lines also connect with suburban and national rail lines. The buses complete the scheme but most likely you will not use one unless you are on the north side of town or it is one of the nine night buses that roam the city once everything else shuts down. Trams, buses and the metro run from 6am-12:30a. The Opstapper minibus travels up and down the length of the Prinsengracht Canal daily from 7:30a until 6:30p. It sticks to the Canal Belt and needs to be hailed by holding out a hand since there are no set stops. Fares are based on zone travel and starts at EUR1.60 for a single journey and EUR5.50 for a day pass.

Ferries

Of the four ferries darting back and forth between Centraal Station and North Amsterdam only one is accessible for cars: the Distelweg. The Buiksloterweg and Adelaarsweg ferries are both free to ride and available to foot traffic, cyclists and moped users. The Buiksloterweg floats 24 hours daily. The Adelaarsweg operates daily from 6:20a until 11:57p. The fourth ferry, Waterbus, is free to Java Eiland but costs EUR1.10 for a trip to Aambeeldstaat and Boorstraat in North Amsterdam.

Taxis & Watertaxis

Taxis are not usually hailed from the street, but that doesn't mean a driver will not stop. But it is probably best to reserve a cab in advance at Central Taxi (TCA). Book online through Taxi.nl (<http://www.taxi.nl/>) or head to a rank outside a train station or major hotel.

Water taxis are also a good way to get around and see the sites from the narrow canals, but it is not the cheapest mode of transport and is best for groups.

Amsterdam Snapshot continued

Amsterdamse WaterTaxi Centrale(+31 20 535 6363/ <http://www.lovers.nl/>) boasts having a fleet of limos on water and the prices(starting at EUR75 for hour for a group of 1-8) reflect it. A more tourist friendly option is the Canal Bus(+31 20 623 9886/ <http://www.canal.nl/>), which offers three hop-on/hop-off excursions starting at EUR15. The company also rents Canal Bikes(pedal boats) and has seven self guided routes to pursue and six landing bays where you can dock or start a journey. Fares start at EUR8 per person per hour.
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Fun Facts

Weird fact: During WWII the Dutch had to eat their own tulip bulbs to survive the "Winter of Hunger"- the bitter winter of 1944.

Interesting Fact: Even though prostitution is legal in the Netherlands, streetwalking is illegal. This is why the women working in the Red Light District cannot leave their windows to solicit customers.

Interesting Fact: Marijuana is illegal in the Netherlands – it is merely tolerated by officials.

Fun Fact: The Royal Palace in Dam Square was built during Amsterdam's Golden Age and its original purpose was that of city hall. The Magna Plaza behind it was a mere post office.

Fun Fact: When France invaded and Louis Bonaparte became king, Louis converted the city hall into his Royal Palace. He wanted to learn Dutch and address his new people. Unfortunately, the Dutch word for "king" and "rabbit" are very similar, and when Louis spoke from the balcony of his palace, he proclaimed: "I am your new rabbit!"

Random Fact: The Dutch had no last names until the French invaded and forced them to get some. When registering their new last names, the Dutch thought they would take advantage of the fact that the French don't speak Dutch by choosing silly names. In the long run, the joke is on the Dutch, and there is still more than one Mr. Of the Pants(Van Den Broek) in the phone book.

Random Fact: Rembrandt's world famous painting, the Nightwatch, was cut down in

size so it could fit in the hall of the Royal Palace.

Weird Fact: Bloedstraat, or "Blood Street", is a small street off Nieuwmarkt. It got its morbid name because Nieuwmarkt was the site of public executions, Amsterdam is a rainy city, and Bloedstraat is a sloping street.

Random Fact: Amsterdam has a population of 750 000, but there are over 1 000 000 bikes on the streets at any point in time.

Weird Fact: Amsterdam's main train station, Centraal Station, is built on four man made islands on the site of the city's old port. This is done to preserve that site as the city's main entry point despite changing modes of transportation.

Interesting Fact: Amsterdam has over 100 kilometers of canals, 1500 bridges and 90 islands

Fun Fact: Over 30 000 bicycles end up in Amsterdam's canals each year.

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