

Hostelworld Guide for Amsterdam

Colm Hanratty

Known as the 'Venice of the North', Amsterdam is a city built on a cobweb of canals that boasts one of the most picturesque settings in the world. True, it is a city full of hazy coffee shops where stoners smoke all day and where prostitutes standing in red-lit windows try to lure in prospective customers, but there is much more to the Dutch capital than hookers and hash. It boasts world-class museums, great architecture and a buzzing nightlife making it the perfect city for a few days break.

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The Essentials

Getting There

By plane: Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport is 15km southwest of the city. An express train service connects it to Centraal Station. The journey takes 20 minutes and costs €3.60.

By train: Centraal Station in the city centre is where all trains arrive. There can be some shady characters around it so have your wits about you at all times.

By bus: Buses going to Amsterdam from around Europe go to Amstelstation which is 3.5km southeast of the city centre. It is connected to Centraal Station via metro.

Getting Around

On foot: Using Centraal Station as your focal point, places such as Dam Square and the Red Light District are within walking distance.

By tram: You'll need to use trams to get to other major places such as the Leidseplein and the museums. They are easy to use and most routes leave from Centraal Station.

By bicycle: By far the most enjoyable mode of transport is the bicycle. One in every two people in the city owns one. You can rent them for about €9 for the day.

Useful phrases

Hello: Hallo
Goodbye: Doei
Please: Alsjeblieft
Thank you: Bedankt
You're welcome: Geen probleem
Yes: Ja
No: Ne
Of course: Natuurlijk
Excuse me: Pardon
How are you?: Hoe gaat het?
Open: Open
Closed: Gesloten
What is your name?: Hoe heet je?
My name is...: Ik heet...
How much?: Hoeveel?
May I have the bill?: Mag ik de rekening?

Climate

Amsterdam experiences cool winters and mild summers. The coldest months of the year are January and February when temperatures can drop below 0°C. In some instances the canals can freeze up in these months, although it doesn't happen too frequently. The average temperature takes a considerable jump in March, and by April the days begin to get mild, although can still be chilly enough in the evening. During the summer the weather is quite warm, with temperatures rising to an average of 22°C although they can climb to 27°C.

Useful Information

Language: Dutch
Currency: Euro
Electricity: 220 Volts, AC/50Hz
Telephone Codes: +31 (Netherlands), 020 (Amsterdam)
Emergency Codes: Ambulance/Fire/Police 112
Time Zone: Central European Time (GMT + 1)
Central Post Office: Singel 250-256 at Raadhuisstr
Main Tourist Office: VVV Office, Stationsplein 10 (in front of Centraal Station)

Embassies

USA: +31 (0)70 310 9209
UK: +31 (0)70 427 0427
Canada: +31 (0)70 311 1600
Australia: +31 (0)70 310 8200
South Africa: +31 (0)70 392 4501
Ireland: +31 (0)70 363 0993
Germany: +31 (0)70 342 0600
Spain: +31 (0)70 364 3814
Italy: +31 (0)70 302 1030
New Zealand: +31 (0)70 346 9324
France: +31 (0)70 312 5800

Unless stated, all embassies are in The Hague.

Cheap Eats

Eat Mode, 105-107 Zeedijk, Nieuwmarkt Located in the heart of Amsterdam's Chinatown, Eat Mode specialises in Asian fusion cuisine rather than just Chinese food. Here you can enjoy Thai Tom Yam soup, Japanese style curry and much more, all at reasonable prices. They're also known for their sushi which is always fresh. *Open daily 12 noon-11pm.*

't Blauwe Theehuis, Vondelpark 5 A sandwich here is a tad more expensive than in your average sandwich bar, but the setting is worth the extra couple of Euro. Overlooking Vondelpark, if the sun is shining you can't beat a couple of hours relaxing here, watching the rollerbladers zoom through the park. *Open daily from 9am-1am.*

The Pantry, Leidsekruijsstraat 21 It is a crime to travel to a country and leave without trying out some native dishes. So if you fancy a Dutch culinary delight come here. Located just 5 minutes from Leidseplein, the staff are friendly and the meatballs are particularly tasty. *Open Mon-Fri 5pm-11pm, Sat & Sun 12 noon-11pm.*

In the words of Vincent Vega...

At the beginning of 'Pulp Fiction', Vincent Vega talks to his partner in crime Jules about the little differences between the Netherlands and the USA. One of them he mentions is how the Dutch drown their French fries in mayonnaise. He wasn't lying. All over the Dutch capital are fast food outlets where you can get burgers, kebabs and such fare. If you get chips and you're asked whether or not you want mayo, be warned - they really do drown them in it!

FEBO, various locations No matter where you are in the Dutch capital, you will never be far from a FEBO outlet. For around €2 you'll be able to get yourself a burger of some description.

After Dark

Escape, Rembrandtplein 11 Located on the vibrant Rembrandtplein in the city centre, Escape is Amsterdam's number one club. Holding over 2,000 people, the biggest night is 'Chemistry' which is on every Saturday. Dress to kill if you plan on fitting in with the rest of the city's clubbers. *Open Thurs-Sun 11pm-4am (7am on Sat); admission varies.*

Boom Chicago, Leidseplein Theatre, Leidseplein Since opening twelve years ago, Boom Chicago has become an Amsterdam institution. Every night this improv-comedy group entertains packed audiences with their formula of scripted material and improvisation comedy. *Open daily from 12 noon-1am/3am; shows nightly at 8.15pm; tickets €12-€20.*

Gay / Lesbian Amsterdam

Amsterdam is one of the gay capitals of Europe - fact. While there are gay bars and clubs all over the city, there are four main areas.

The **Warmoesstraat area** is the most central and also the most daring as this is where the 'leather bars' are located. The **Reguliersdwarsstraat area** is the trendy gay area. Close to the Leidseplein, the **Kerkstraat area** is the oldest gay area, while around **Rembrandtplein** and the Amstel is also popular with the gay community.

Red Light District, Oudezijds Achterburgwal No visit to Amsterdam is complete without a trip to its infamous Red Light District after dark. There is no denying that it is an extremely seedy part of the city, but it is a tourist attraction in its own right and the Dutch capital is as well-known for its hookers as it is for its canals. Keep in mind though that it can be an intimidating place at the best of times, and while it is safe enough due to all the tourists, avoid walking through it alone at night.

Melkweg, Lijnbaansgracht 234 Just minutes from Leidseplein, Melkweg has been around for a long, long time and has something for everyone. Not only does it play host to some of the world's biggest DJs and live acts, but it also doubles up as a cinema and art gallery. *Open nightly from 9pm-4am; admission varies.*

Leidseplein/Rembrandtplein These two squares are the liveliest in the city and are fringed by a wide host of busy bars and clubs. During the summer months both squares get very busy, particularly Leidseplein where everyone sits under canapés.

Don't Miss

Anne Frank House, Prinsengracht 267 A visit to the house where Anne Frank hid from the Nazis for over two years is an extremely emotional experience, yet also a very enjoyable one. The museum tells the history of the eight people in who hid there between 1942 and 1944 and those who helped them during their hiding. *Open daily from 9am-7pm (10pm March-Sept); admission €8.50.*

Amsterdam's largest museum

Rijksmuseum, Jan Luijkenstraat 1 The Rijksmuseum is regarded as one of the ten principal museums in the world and is acclaimed for its collection of Netherlandish paintings from the 15th to the late 19th century. Its most famous painting is Rembrandt's *Nightwatch*. *Open daily from 9am-6pm; admission €12.50 (18 and under free).*

Van Gogh Museum, Paulus Potterstraat 7 With over 1.3 million visitors in 2004, the Van Gogh Museum is the Dutch capital's most popular museum. It houses a permanent collection of over 200 paintings and 500 drawings by Van Gogh and tells the story of the eccentric Dutch artist. *Open 10am-6pm (10pm Fridays); admission €14 (17 and under free).*

Heineken Experience, Stadhouderskade 78 Divided into 19 different rooms, this self-guided tour is surprisingly enjoyable and the combination of nostalgia and modern technology work particularly well. *Open daily 11am-7pm; admission €15.*

Lindbergh Canal Cruise, Damrak 26 To fully appreciate Amsterdam's architecture, get a canal cruise around the city. Lasting an hour, they tell the stories behind some of the city's most famous buildings. *Tours depart every 15-30 mins from 10am-4.30pm/6pm (April to Sept); adult tickets from €11.49 (children from €7.07).*

Mark Your Calendar

February/March - Ice skating in Dam Square Every year in front of the Royal Palace on Dam Square, a huge ice-rink is set up to allow locals don their skates for another year.

March - Stille Omgang This silent procession through the streets of Amsterdam commemorates the 'Miracle of the Host' from 1345 where a dying man vomited after being given his last rites!

April - Queen's Day Over 1 million people take to the streets on April 30th for the year's biggest party. The whole city goes into overdrive for the day when everyone wears orange and has boot sales.

May to August - Vondelpark Summer Amsterdam's answer to Central Park is awash with activity during the summer months. On the open-air stage in the middle of the park you can catch concerts along with dance, theatrical and dramatical performances.

May - Liberation Day Shortly after Queen's Day, Liberation Day (5th) is celebrated throughout the country to mark the end of World War II. Street parties take place all over the city and live music can be heard everywhere you go.

June - Holland Festival This annual festival is the biggest arts festival on the Dutch calendar and lasts more than three weeks. Over 80,000 people attend theatrical, musical and other types of performances.

August - Canal Parade Part of 'Amsterdam Pride' which occurs every August, this parade sees thousands of Amsterdam's gay community take to the canals for the year's most outlandish parade.

September - Flower Parade Not as risqué as the aforementioned canal parade, this one involves flower floats which parade from the flower auction at Aalsmeer to The Dam in the city centre.

October - Canoe Tour Over 500 illuminated canoes and kayaks light up the city's canals for this annual event making the city look prettier than ever.

November - Cannabis Cup Definitely one for the stoners, different coffee shops compete for such coveted awards as 'Best Import Hash' and 'Best Seed Company (Sativa)'.

December - New Year's Eve Celebrations If you are lucky enough to ring in the New Year in the Dutch capital make your way down to Dam Square.

Get Connected

easyInternetcafé, Damrak 33 The second easyInternetcafé to open in Amsterdam, this one is the most central, only 5 minutes from Dam Square. There are over 140 terminals so you won't have a problem finding a free one. *Open daily from 9am-10pm; €2 per hour; minimum purchase €1.*

The Internetcafé, Martelaarsgracht 11 While the proprietors of this cyber café didn't wrack their brains when trying to come up with a name, they did find a wonderful location as this place is only 100 meters from Centraal Station. *Open Sun-Thurs 9am-1am, Fri & Sat 9am-3pm; €1 per half hour (plus compulsory drink).*

Cyberlounge, Elandsgracht 144 Located in between Leidseplein and the Anne Frank House in the middle of Amsterdam's beautiful Jordaan area, Cyberlounge is an internet café which enjoys a cosy lounge setting. Internet access is speedy thanks to a broadband connection. *Open Mon 10am-7.30pm, Tues-Fri 9am-7.30pm, Sat 10am-6pm; €2 per half hour, €3.25 per hour.*

Softland, Spuistraat 222 This internet café attracts a strange sort as, not only does it supply the facility to write emails home, but they happen to be one of the city's many suppliers of soft drugs. *Open daily from 12 noon-midnight; €3 per hour.*

Bulldog Sports Café, Leidseplein Perfect for a quick mail when you're having a beer as this popular bar has some terminals out back. *Open Mon-Thurs/Sun 9.30am-1am, Fri & Sat 9.30am-3am; €1 per 10 mins.*

www.

www.underwateramsterdam.com
www.boomchicago.nl
www.amsterdamtourist.com

Retail Therapy

Magna Plaza, Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 182 Magna Plaza, located just behind the Royal Palace, is an old restored 19th century post office which was later transformed into a shopping complex. There are over four floors here, with shops specialising in everything from clothes to jewellery. *Open Mon 11am-7pm, Tues-Sat 10am-7pm (until 9pm Thurs), Sun 12 noon-7pm.*

Leidsestraat This street between the Leidseplein and Spui is jammed with shops which cater for everybody. It's only downfall is that you have to be careful not to get run over by the many trams which travel up and down it!

Kalverstraat If you don't find somewhere to do some damage to your flexible friend in Magna Plaza or Leidsestraat, chances are you will here. Running parallel to Rokin, it is lined with shops selling jeans, trainers, music and much more.

Albert Cuypmarkt

Located ten minutes the city centre via tram, this market is worth a visit if nothing else but to get out of the inner city for a while. Over a hundred stalls line each side of the market. Every type of cuisine under the sun can be sampled but you can also pick up everything here from cheap toiletries to cut-price portable stereos. *Open Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm.*

Nieuwendijk Similar to Kalverstraat, this pedestrianised street is the closest shopping street to Centraal Station and has all the usual culprits - clothes, trainers and music shops.

Bloenmarkt (Flower Market) This market along the 'Singel' canal is popular with tourists thanks to its tulips and clogs on offer. A stroll past it is an extremely enjoyable experience.

Budget Tips

Catch a free concert (1) Every Wednesday afternoon (Sept-June) you can catch a free concert in Amsterdam's Concertgebouw which is located at Concertgebouwplein 2-6. The concerts take place at 12.30pm and doors open at 12.15pm.

Chill out in Vondelpark Just south of the city centre, Vondelpark is Amsterdam's answer to Central Park. Stretching for around one and a half kilometres, it has numerous paths, lakes and open green areas. It also has a restaurant/bar which is perfect for people-watching.

Rent a bicycle for the day

Rent a bike for the day Without question, the best way to get around Amsterdam is on the trustworthy bicycle. They say one in every two of the city's inhabitants has one. You can rent out a bike, either for the day for around €6.50, or for 24 hours for around €9. You will definitely get your money's worth if you go for the latter option.

Catch a free concert (2) The Boekmanzaal, which is part of the Muziektheater (Opera House), hosts free concerts every Tuesday afternoon at 12.30pm (September to May). Performed by either Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, the Choir of the Netherlands Opera or the Netherlands Ballet Orchestra, they shouldn't be missed.

Get to North Amsterdam for free The 'Buikersloterwegveer' (the ferry that leaves from behind Centraal Station and goes to North Amsterdam) is free. While it isn't the most adventurous of journeys, there is a nice view of the harbour behind the station.

Go on a FREE walking tour Leaving from the National Monument in Dam Square daily at 11.15am and 1.15am, New Europe Tours operate free walking tours of the Dutch capital.

A Day in Amsterdam...

Before doing anything, go and rent out a bike for 24 hours. They are the best way to get around the city.

To avoid the queues visit the Van Gogh Museum early. This is presently the most popular museum in Amsterdam.

Not far from the museum is the Albert Cuypmarkt. Here you can pick up everything from toiletries to personal stereos for €20.

Cycle up to Damrak, park your bike, grab your lunch somewhere and sit down in Dam Square to watch life go by for a while.

Make your way to the Damrak 26 and get a cruise around the city's canals. Lasting an hour, they are a great way to see the city in its entirety and learn about its architecture.

After the canal tour, relocate your bike and cycle down to Vondelpark. Full of lakes and greens, it's a great place to chill out.

Another unmissable museum is the Anne Frank House in the charming Jordaan area. Explore it for an hour or two.

Dotted around the Jordaan are brown cafés and many restaurants. For a taste of real Amsterdam dine out here.

Park your bike back wherever you are staying and go down to Leidseplein, home to numerous bars.

After a few beers, finish the night off in one of the city's best clubs such as Escape or Melkweg.