

Medieval Centre & Red Light District

MEDIEVAL CENTRE | RED LIGHT DISTRICT



Neighbourhood Top Five

- ❶ Wandering through the **Red Light District** (p74), which will make your jaw drop, even if near-naked women beckoning from backlit windows is the oldest Amsterdam cliché.
- ❷ Ogling the chandeliered opulence and taking a Dutch history lesson in the **Royal Palace** (p68).
- ❸ Pushing open the door to the **Begijnhof** (p69) and beholding the hidden gardens and churches.
- ❹ Biting into a crisp golden spud slathered in mayonnaise, curry or peanut sauce at **Vlemminckx** (p77).
- ❺ Bowling up to a 17th-century tasting house such as **Wynand Fockink** (p84), to knock back a *jenever* (Dutch gin).

For more detail of this area see Maps p300 and p304 ➔

Explore Medieval Centre & Red Light District

Amsterdam's heart beats in its medieval core, as well as in the centuries-old Red Light District. All visitors end up here at some point. Centraal Station is the main landmark – indeed, it is the first thing most visitors see as they arrive by train from the airport or elsewhere in Europe. Damrak slices south from the station to the Dam – Amsterdam's central square and home to the Royal Palace.

A tourist-heavy crowd packs the neighbourhood day and night. While there are several intriguing sights, the big-ticket museums lie elsewhere. The main thing to do here is wander. The compact area is laced with atmospheric lanes, and 17th-century tasting rooms, brown *cafés*, hidden courtyards and wee speciality shops are the prizes for those who venture off the main drags.

Far from being a no-go area, the Red-Light District has some historic bars, as well as the stunning Oude Kerk, the city's oldest church. You'll probably find yourself on Warmeroesstraat and Zeedijk while you're here, both commercial thoroughfares full of shops and restaurants.

The charming thing about Amsterdam's core is its remarkable state of preservation. The overall layout has changed little since the 17th century. The happy result? The district has the air of a living museum and certain vistas look like they belong in a Golden Age landscape. You could easily spend your entire trip here, especially when factoring in the quick-ferry-ride-away northern region, so remember: there are more neighbourhoods beyond.

Local Life

- ➔ **Café Hangouts** *Cafés* and bookstores ring the Spui (p71), a favoured haunt of academics and journalists.
- ➔ **Dam Bikes** A fair, a protest, a speech by the monarch – there's always something drawing people to Amsterdam's main square (p71), evident by the sea of bicycles locked up in the middle.
- ➔ **Go North** Amsterdam-Noord (p85) is a hot spot, with hip *cafés*, cultural centres and hotels popping up one after the other.

Getting There & Away

- ➔ **Tram** The majority of the city's 15 tram lines go through the neighbourhood en route to Centraal Station. Useful lines include trams 1, 2, 5, 13 and 17, which travel to the station's west side, and trams 4, 9, 16 and 24, which travel to the east side.
- ➔ **Boat** Free ferries run to NDSM-werf and elsewhere in Amsterdam-Noord, departing from the piers behind Centraal Station.

Lonely Planet's Top Tip

You're at the local tasting house, and you've ordered a *jenever*. It arrives filled to the brim. You can't pick it up without spilling it. What to do? Bend forward over the bar, with your hands behind your back, and take a deep sip. That's what tradition dictates.

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Gartine (p76)
- ➔ De Laatste Kruimel (p77)
- ➔ Vleminecx (p77)
- ➔ Thais Snackbar Bird (p80)
- ➔ Blauw aan de Wal (p81)

For reviews, see p76. ➔

Best Places to Drink

- ➔ Wynand Fockink (p84)
- ➔ Hoppe (p81)
- ➔ In 't Aepjen (p84)
- ➔ Café Belgique (p81)
- ➔ Café de Dokter (p81)

For reviews, see p81. ➔

Best Places to Shop

- ➔ Condomerie Het Gulden Vlies (p91)
- ➔ American Book Center (p88)
- ➔ PGC Hajenius (p89)
- ➔ Oudemanhuis Book Market (p89)
- ➔ Kokopelli (p91)

For reviews, see p88. ➔