

Welcome to Amsterdam

*Seventeenth-century buildings.
Joint-smoking alien sculptures. Few
cities meld history with modern
urban flair like Amsterdam.*

Admire Art

You can't walk a kilometre without bumping into a masterpiece in the city. The Van Gogh Museum hangs the world's largest collection by tortured native son Vincent. A few blocks away, Vermeers, Rembrandts and other Golden Age treasures fill the glorious Rijksmuseum. The Museum het Rembrandthuis offers more of Rembrandt via his etching-packed studio, while the Stedelijk Museum counts Matisses and Mondrians among its modern stock. And when the urge strikes for something blockbuster, the Hermitage Amsterdam delivers: the outpost of Russia's State Hermitage Museum picks from its three-million-piece home trove to mount mega exhibits.

Bike & Boat

Two-wheeling is a way of life here. It's how Amsterdammers commute to work, go to the shop and meet a date for dinner. With all the bike rental shops around, it's easy to gear up and take a spin. If locals aren't on a bike, they may well be in a boat. With its canals and massive harbour, this city reclaimed from the sea offers countless opportunities to drift. Hop in a canal boat (preferably an open-air one) or one of the free ferries behind Centraal Station for a wind-in-your-hair ride.

Feel Gezellig

Amsterdam is famously *gezellig*, a Dutch quality that translates roughly as convivial or cosy. It's more easily experienced than defined. There's a sense of time stopping, an intimacy of the here and now that leaves all your troubles behind, at least until tomorrow. You can get that warm, fuzzy feeling in many situations, but the easiest place is a traditional brown *café*. Named for their wood panelling and walls stained by smoke over the centuries, brown *cafés* practically have *gezelligheid* (cosiness) on tap, alongside good beer. You can also feel *gezellig* at any restaurant after dinner, when you're welcome to linger and chat after your meal while the candles burn low.

Wander into the Past

Amsterdam is ripe for rambling, its compact core laced by atmospheric lanes and quarters. You never know what you'll find: a hidden garden, a shop selling velvet ribbon, a *jenever* (Dutch gin) distillery, an old monastery-turned-classical-music-venue. Wherever you end up, it's probably by a canal. And a *café*. And a gabled building that looks like a Golden Age painting.



Why I Love Amsterdam

By Karla Zimmerman, Writer

I love walking around Prinsengracht in the morning. Houseboats bob, bike bells *cling cling*, flower sellers lay out their wares. The old merchants' houses tilt at impossible angles, and it's easy to imagine an era when boats unloaded spices out the front.

I love how cappuccinos appear and disappear in 350-year-old bars like Café Pieper, and how beers do the same in candlelit timewarps like Café de Dokter. It's all good fuel for ferrying across the IJ to see bands under twinkling lights at the Tolhuistuin come nightfall.

For more about our writers, see p328.