

# Understand Amsterdam

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Some of the world's most iconic painters are Dutch, and you can view their masterpieces in Amsterdam's museums.

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Although the centuries-old cityscapes remain remarkably unchanged, Amsterdam's contemporary architecture is exceptional, too.

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Creative, witty, functional and unique...the Dutch interior, furniture, product and fashion design movement is celebrated worldwide.

# Amsterdam Today

From the famed coffeeshops to the Red Light District, Amsterdam's tolerance is on display wherever you wander. The city counts 180 nationalities living within its borders and most agree: the quality of life here makes other metropolises envious. Dramatic architecture and grand urban projects continue to rise up and transform the cityscape, merging Golden Age charm with hypermodernity. Meanwhile, the stylish, practical Queen steals the spotlight.

## Best on Film

**Zwartboek** (Black Book; directed by Paul Verhoeven; 2006) This action-packed story explores some of the less heroic aspects of the Dutch Resistance in WWII. It launched the international career of today's hottest Dutch actor, Carice van Houten.

**The Paradise Suite** (directed by Joost van Ginkel; 2015) A Bulgarian woman forced into prostitution, a Swedish piano prodigy, a Serbian war criminal and other troubled characters cross paths in Amsterdam.

## Best in Print

**The Diary of Anne Frank** (Anne Frank; 1952) A moving account of a young girl's thoughts and yearnings while in hiding from the Nazis in Amsterdam. The book has been translated into 60 languages.

**After the Silence** (Jake Woodhouse, 2014) Noir novel in which Inspector Jap Rykel, an Amsterdam detective, hunts down a murderer in the city's tangled streets. It's book one of a four-part series.

## Tolerant Culture

Laid-back. Progressive. Bilingual (sometimes trilingual). Industrious. Aware. International. Amsterdam's locals embody these qualities in spades with their famously tolerant attitudes toward diversity and differences. Perhaps this is why Amsterdam is celebrated for being a consummately easy and relaxed place to travel.

It's an open society in the literal sense. Walk down any street and notice the abundance of curtain-less windows – even in the ritziest neighbourhoods – where families and couples cook, eat, watch TV and play with their children in full view.

As of 2015, the Dutch economy is humming along. But even in the just-prior years when it wasn't, locals still ranked among the world's most contented people, according to the World Happiness Report by Columbia University. The nation placed seventh in the most recent study, thanks to its high quality of life based on freedom to make choices, social supports and other factors.

## Sex & Drugs

Amsterdam is famously open-minded when it comes to cannabis use and prostitution. But since 2008 a bit of a tussle has ensued, as the city embarks on a plan to reduce the number of coffeeshops and Red Light District windows. The city says organised crime has entered the scene and must be stopped; opponents say the city simply doesn't like its reputation for sin. The upshot: many spaces in the Red Light area are being converted to galleries, cafes and other more wholesome businesses. The industry certainly won't disappear anytime soon, but it is shrinking markedly.