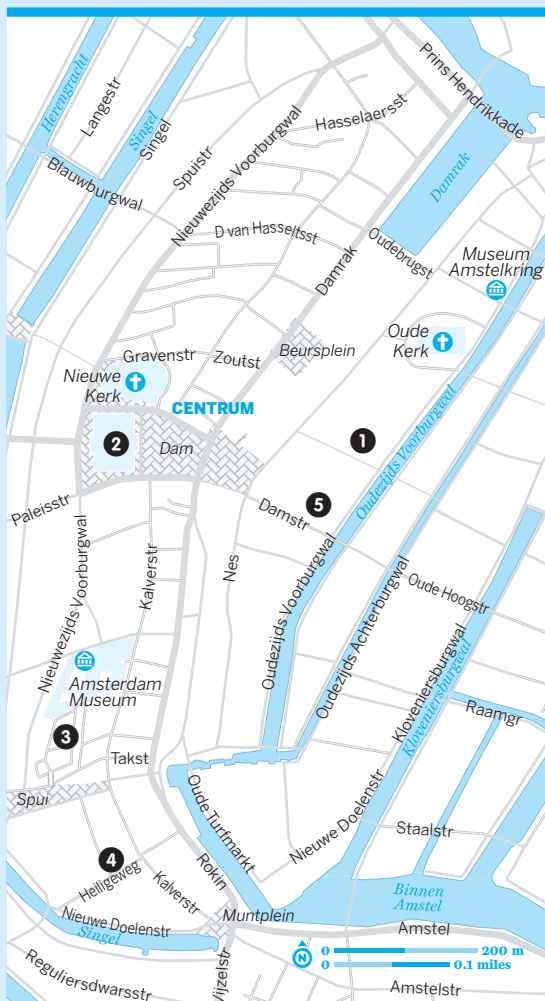


# Medieval Centre & Red Light District

MEDIEVAL CENTRE | RED LIGHT DISTRICT



## Neighbourhood Top Five

- 1 Wandering through the **Red Light District** (p68), which will make your jaw go limp, even if near-naked women beckoning from back-lit windows is the oldest Amsterdam cliché.
- 2 Ogling the chandeliered opulence and getting a Dutch history lesson in the **Royal Palace** (p60).
- 3 Pushing open the door to the **Begijnhof** (p61) and beholding the hidden gardens and churches.
- 4 Biting into a crisp golden spud slathered in mayo, curry or peanut sauce at **Vleminckx** (p71).
- 5 Bowling up to a 17th-century tasting house such as **Proeflokaal Wynand Fockink** (p78), to knock back a *jenever* (Dutch gin).

For more detail of this area, see Map p286 and Map p290 ➔

## 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 cafes, hidden courtyards and wee specialty shops are the prizes for those who venture off the main drags.

As for the infamous Red Light District, far from being a no-go area, it has some beautiful historic bars, as well as the stunning Oude Kerk, the city's oldest church. You'll probably find yourself on Warmoesstraat and Zeedijk while you're here, both commercial thoroughfares chock-a-block with 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

- ➔ **Cafe Hangouts** Inviting cafes and brainy bookstores ring the Spui (p64), a favoured haunt of academics and journalists.
- ➔ **Shopping Strip** With its designer jeans and leather boots and fancy chain stores, Kalverstraat (p67) buzzes all day long with package-laden locals.
- ➔ **Dam Bikes** A fair, a protest, a speech by the Queen – there's always something drawing people to Amsterdam's main square (p63), evident by the sea of cycles locked up in the middle.

## Getting There & Away

- ➔ **Tram** Eleven of the city's 16 tram lines go through the neighbourhood en route to Centraal Station.
- ➔ **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 over the bar, with your hands behind your back, and take a deep sip. That's what tradition dictates.

### Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Gartine (p71)
- ➔ Blauw aan de Wal (p73)
- ➔ Vleminckx (p71)
- ➔ Thais Snackbar Bird (p74)
- ➔ 'Skek (p74)

For reviews, see p71 ➔

### Best Places to Drink

- ➔ Proeflokaal Wynand Fockink (p78)
- ➔ Hoppe (p75)
- ➔ In 't Aepjen (p78)
- ➔ Crea Café (p75)
- ➔ Cafe Belgique (p75)

For reviews, see p75 ➔

### Best Places to Shop

- ➔ Condomerie Het Gulden Vlies (p83)
- ➔ American Book Center (p80)
- ➔ PGC Hajenius (p80)
- ➔ Hempworks (p80)
- ➔ Kokopelli (p83)

For reviews, see p80 ➔