

A scenic view of gondolas in Venice, Italy, with the word 'EUROPE' overlaid in a white starburst shape. The gondolas are dark blue and are moored along a wooden pier. The water is calm, reflecting the sky and the buildings in the background. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The word 'EUROPE' is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, centered within the white starburst shape.

EUROPE



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AMSTERDAM

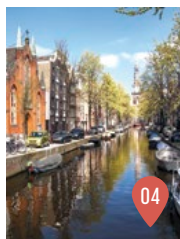
Like an heirloom bracelet passed through generations, Amsterdam offers a diverse array of ancient charms happily coexisting side by side with modern acquisitions, each with its own fascinating story. Altogether the city exudes a uniquely Dutch urban exoticism. Fortunately there's plenty of admiring that can be done for free.



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01 Houseboat Museum

Living on a canal is not uncommon for Amsterdammers, and you'll inevitably become curious about houseboats' interiors. Too shy to ask? Just head to this quaint converted boat that was built around 1914. Used first as a freighter then a family home, it's now set up to give an idea of how we'd function in a 2-bed residence undulating on water. houseboatmuseum.nl; Prinsengracht 296; see website for season-varying hours; €4.50.



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Vital statistics

- Population: 1.6 million
- Best for: Art, design and history, with no less than 44 museums and 7000 monuments, there's a lot to behold in this culture-packed city
- Unit of currency: Euro €
- Price index: US\$180 per day

02 Lunchtime Concerts at the Concertgebouw

Indulge your auditory senses at the stately Concertgebouw. The neoclassical 1888 structure is as impressive as its renowned acoustics. It offers free 12.30pm concerts featuring orchestral, chamber music and emerging musicians in the Main Hall or Recital Hall on Wednesdays (except July and August): proof that highbrow culture needn't come at a cost. concertgebouw.nl; Concertgebouwplein 10; free.

03 Bloemenmarkt (Flower Market)

Flowers liven up the brown buildings and North Sea skies of Amsterdam. Experience this juxtaposition via a leisurely canal-side stroll through the floating flower market. From azaleas to tulips and exotic flora, the 150-year old Bloemenmarkt provides an authentic Amsterdammer no-cost experience. Take-home bulbs and kitschy souvenirs aren't much more. Singel btwn Koningsplein and Muntplein; 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5.30pm Sun; admission free.