

ANWBEXTRA

Amsterdam



The 15 highlights at a glance



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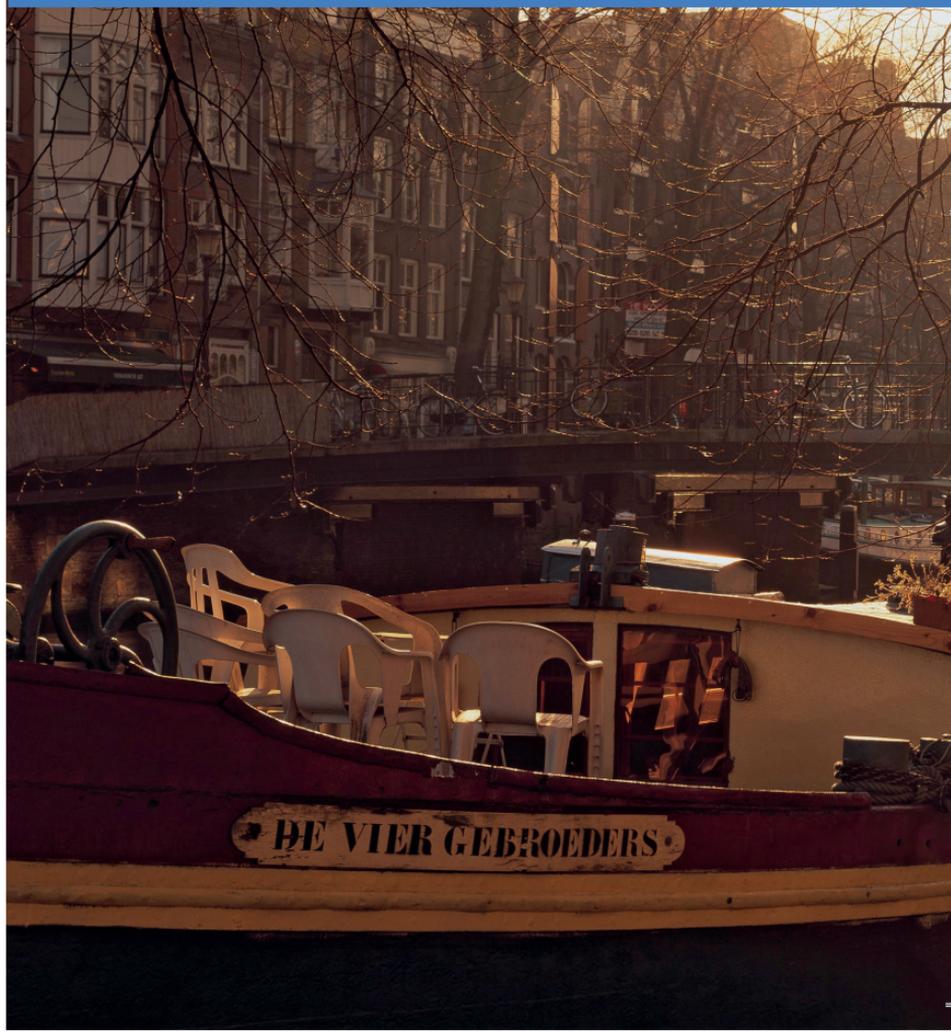
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Welcome



You'll quickly feel at home in Amsterdam. This image evokes that emotion for us: our favourite canal, the Prinsengracht, with its pointed and stepped gables leaning with age, creatively decorated houseboats lining the quays, the agitated ringing of bicycle bells as the inevitable confused pedestrians wander across a narrow bridge. And the assurance that the Westerkerk church tower with its heavy emperor's crown at the top still stands tall and watches over everyone, even when we are not in town...



Orientation

Pocket-sized metropolis

Amsterdam, which has the largest historical inner city in Europe, is home to more than 7000 listed buildings from the 16th century to today, as well as over 80 museums and 100 art galleries. The best part is that most of these are situated in close proximity, the majority within the city's main canals – which means that the city and its sights can easily be explored on foot. What other capital city can boast such convenience? World-famous monuments may not be prominent here, but Amsterdam makes up for it by presenting the entire **city centre** – the old inner city, the canals and the Jordaan district – as if it were a photographic record of the city's history and architecture.

Urban landscape

The various layers of the capital city's structure curl around each other in concentric circles, like the layers of an onion. The three rings of famous canals curve in half-moons around the **old city centre**, forming the **canal district**, added to the World Heritage List by UNESCO in 2010. Before the rings could be connected to the IJ River, the city had run out of steam and funds. When the northern sections of the canals were built (as far as Leidsegracht), a new and despised neighbourhood was emerging in the west of the city: the **Jordaan**, now one of the city's most popular residential neighbourhoods.

Where the canal ring was originally planned to continue its glorious curve, the **Plantage** leisure area was later created, with a residential area for well-to-do citizens of the city springing up around it. Adjacent to the Plantage

neighbourhood, the **Entrepotdok**, once a centre of port and shipyard activity, is now a successful urban renewal area.

Old city centre ► Map 2

The old city centre, bordered by Singel, Amstel, Oude Schans and the IJ River, was the heart of the city until the urban expansion in the 17th century. The street map still looks medieval, with its numerous stairways and alleys. Besides the countless sights worth seeing here, this district also includes Nieuwmarkt, Dam Square, the Old and New Churches, the Red Light District and Chinatown.

Canal ring ► E-G 2–6

The canal ring, a UNESCO World Heritage site, was built in two phases between Brouwersgracht and the Amstel River as part of the urban expansion during the Golden Age in the 17th century. It encircles the old city centre in a half-moon shape. The area is dominated by the decorative façades of richly varied canalside house, dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries.

Jordaan ► D/E 2–5

This coveted neighbourhood at the foot of the Westerkerk, enclosed between Singel, Brouwersgracht and Prinsengracht, was once home to the middle class, craftsmen and free labourers. Many creative professionals and yuppies live and work here now, and countless little shops and boutiques can be found here. Picturesque Jordaan is lively, not least thanks to its markets, festivals and many friendly pubs and sidewalk cafés.

Museumkwartier and Spiegelkwartier

► D/E 6/7

The Spiegelkwartier area between Herengracht and the Rijksmuseum is dominated by galleries and art and antique dealers. The Rijksmuseum, the Van Gogh Museum and the Stedelijk Museum are surrounded by spacious streets that open onto Museumplein, the biggest square in Amsterdam. Just a few streets away, P.C. Hoofstraat is one of the most elegant shopping areas in town.

De Pijp ► E-G 7/8

De Pijp is definitely the most colourful part of Amsterdam – and not just because of the many nationalities living here. The many exotic shops, fast food joints, restaurants and of course the international Albert Cuyt Market, the most famous street market in the country, define the street scene here.

Plantagebuurt ► H/J 5/6

The Plantage area in the east of the city includes the Hortus Botanicus gardens and Artis Zoo. The affluent neighbourhood has retained much of its charm.

New Eastern Islands

► Map 3

The construction of this new residential area has attracted extensive international attention. It became the most densely populated urban area in the Netherlands. This eastern port area, with the artificial islands of KNSM, Java, Borneo and Sporenburg, fell into decline in the late 1970s. Large-scale urban renewal was not launched until the early 1990s. Daring architecture is intermingled with low-rise flats containing affordable single-family dwellings, which are in short supply in Amsterdam.

The fringes of the city

Initial explorations of Amsterdam generally starts with the neighbourhoods described above, in and around the city centre. Once you've seen that, take a look on the fringes of the city, where Amsterdam will surprise you with modern architecture, spacious green areas, multicultural flair, colourful markets and less spectacular sights that are still well worth seeing.

A daring urban renewal plan was carried out in the mid-1990s on the former port islands in Amsterdam East, including post-modern residential buildings.



Introduction, Amsterdam in facts and figures

City built on pilings

Arriving by train is the very best way to get your first impression of Amsterdam, since it follows exactly the same route taken by sailors entering Amsterdam for the first time, centuries ago. Curving around a final bend, the train chugs towards the world's biggest structure built on pilings, sometimes appearing to float just a few metres above the water's surface, before gliding slowly into the imposing Central Station. Once the sole domain of water and sky, the station now separates the city from the IJ, an inland body of water cut off from the IJsselmeer lake by locks. The station, a historical monument in its own right, is built atop pilings driven into the peaty ground – as is the rest of the city. Central Station serves a similar function to a medieval city gate, spewing forth hundreds of thousands of travellers day in and day out.

Wooden pilings were once driven some ten metres into the ground, but wood has been replaced by concrete these days. Holes of between 20 and 60 metres deep are drilled, so the concrete pilings can rest on a hard layer of sand. A narrow house needed several hundred pilings to stand on, but there are nearly 9000 under Central Station – and the Palace on Dam Square stands on 13,659 pilings.

Live and let live, so far

Since Amsterdam was established, over 700 years ago, people have flocked from all corners of the globe to settle here. The much-vaunted values of freedom and tolerance attracted humanist philosophers and schol-

ars from abroad, as well as refugees and immigrants. Over time, the city became a melting pot of cultures. In previous centuries, it was the Flemish, the Huguenots and the Jews – mainly religious refugees – who came to Amsterdam. In the twentieth century, the influx of newcomers primarily came from the former colonies, supplemented by guest labourers from southern Europe and northern Africa.

These days, one in two Amsterdam residents can trace their origins back to foreign countries. Moroccans, Turks, Britons, Surinamese, Germans, Chinese, Ghanaians and more: all imported their own cultural identity. The city has 178 nationalities in all, more than any other metropolis. This unique demographic mixture has made Amsterdam a vibrant cosmopolitan city, but has also led to pernicious problems in the past decade, not least fear, tensions and frustration. Calls for a more reserved immigration policy and a harder line on newcomers have been swelling in recent years. In that respect, Dutch national politics were gripped for over a year by the influence of PVV, a populist anti-Islam political party. The financial crisis and European issues have now caused a shift in political focus.

Living history

Besides the city's 790,000 inhabitants, Amsterdam also accommodates millions of visitors every year from the Netherlands and abroad, although most only stay for a short visit. They are treated to the largest historical city centre in Europe, with over 7000 monumental structures spanning five centuries. No need for Amsterdam to be

modest: no other city in the world has as many sights to see per square metre as the capital of the Netherlands. Amsterdam is occasionally accused of lacking majestic monuments, but a city that has something beautiful to discover every few metres doesn't need to aspire to such large-scale grandiosity. The beauty here is in the details, and there are so many to see! Amsterdam's secret is that its cultural legacy goes hand in hand with ordinary life.

Historic monument preservation and pragmatism

The idyllic canal ring is the main feature that attracts tourists to the city. The slightly off-kilter townhouses, some seeming to lean dangerously forward, appeal to everyone's imagination. Carillons and bells in the many church towers ring out their resounding melodies, and even an occasional pop tune. Until Napoleon introduced the system of numbered street addresses, the stones of the façade listed the occupant and his profession. The little courtyards all have their own intimate, cocooned existence. The houseboats, originally intended to relieve housing pressure and provide a freer life, are exclusive and enjoyable residences on the water. Amsterdam's considerable cultural heritage is carefully and lovingly maintained. Monument preservation is a functional, practical and pragmatic undertaking here: a church lacking both attendees and funds should preferably be converted into unique and modern office units rather than torn down to make way for a new office building. The façades of dilapidated old buildings are restored to pristine condition, while completely new buildings rise behind them.

Friendly and cheeky

Besides the historic beauty around eve-

ry corner, Amsterdam's friendly city life also draws visitors like a magnet. The people are known for their openness and hospitality, and frequently speak several languages competently. A frequent joke that compares the people of Amsterdam to Rotterdam's inhabitants says that the latter are hard-working pragmatists who earn the money that the former, the hedonists, are all too happy to spend. The people living in the capital are reputed to be stubborn and quite cheeky. These qualities are expressed to the fullest in municipal politics. Participation and contradiction are cherished here; opinions and challenges are considered necessary leavening here, both exalted and embraced. Almost no political decision is reached without having gone through extensive debate and heated discussion by large swaths of the population.

Amsterdam's inhabitants are not difficult for the sake of being difficult; they simply have little sympathy for authoritarian administrations. Above all, they want to feel that their interests are being represented properly. If that is not the case, the locals are all too ready to make their concerns known. The municipal authorities are eventually forced to make concessions. For instance, the noisy protests by the Provo movement and the squatters in the 1960s and '70s led to municipal housing policies that were much less profit-driven.

Consequently, almost all of the city centre and the older neighbourhoods have been addressed in urban renewal projects over the past decades. This is not to say that everyone is happy with where they live. Many older houses have been completely renovated and converted into pricey flats, especially in the old city centre, the Jordaan neighbourhood and (more recently)



Foreign tourists marvel at the sophisticated policies in the Netherlands that prevent soft drugs from being dragged down into a life of crime

De Pijp; living in those areas now appears to be a privilege reserved for the happy few. Less well-to-do locals have been pushed out of these areas, frequently spending years on waiting lists for popular neighbourhoods or heading off to more affordable (and greener) surrounding towns like Almere, Purmerend and Zaanstad.

Big-city problems

More and more inhabitants are banding together to put a stop to increasing air traffic over the city. Whether they have any chance of making a difference in the long run is very much in doubt. Amsterdam benefits directly from having a national airport in close proximity – Schiphol is the city's biggest employer – but the airport's growth also has its downsides.

Back on the ground, another threat is causing concern among locals and visitors: drug-related crime. The tolerant policies that Amsterdam and the Netherlands had adopted for years led to a huge influx of addicts from abroad. These policies were adapted in response to pressure from neighbouring countries. Many of the short-sighted international politicians – especially those in France and Germany – overlooked the sophisticated support programmes available here, not to mention the fact that the municipal government does not automatically consider addicts to be criminals, instead treating them as people with a disorder who need professional help. Thanks to an open offensive against drug-related problems, the support programmes were accepted by the target group, making it possible for such initiatives to have a real impact. For instance, the number of AIDS cases among drug addicts is the lowest in Europe. More stringent drug policies have knocked Amsterdam from its pedestal as the European mecca for drug users, causing a noticeable drop in the influx of drug tourists.

Death knell for drug tourism?

The Netherlands has had extremely progressive policies on drugs since the 1970s, making a distinction between hard drugs and soft drugs. Soft drugs like marijuana and hashish can be sold in *coffee shops* and used by anyone. On the streets, possession of up to 5 grams is permitted without penalty; it's considered a maximum amount for personal use.

In contrast, police crack down sharply on possession and sale of hard drugs. The coffee shops provide special menus listing the soft drugs sold on the premises. Besides the smokable wares, these shops often also serve *space cake*

and *bonbons* which contain a soft drug. Tea made with hash is often also available.

From the government's point of view, the decision to allow coffee shops to open and to tolerate their operations was a way of declaring war on the elusive street trade. However, that aim was only partly successful. The number of coffee shops has dropped drastically, since many had become popular hangouts for young foreign tourists. People living near coffee shops were bothered by groups of young people hanging around aimlessly. Other countries regularly exert pressure, calling for the introduction of stricter measures to replace parts of the Dutch policy of tolerance. With the introduction of the weed pass, the conflict has entered its next stage. This ID would prevent non-residents from buying soft drugs in a coffee shop. Cities in the south of the Netherlands introduced the weed pass in 2012. Amsterdam was scheduled to join the initiative in 2013, but is still hesitant. The municipal authorities fear an increase in street trade, not to mention a decline in tourism. Of the more than 6 million international visitors who come to Amsterdam each year, up to 25% visit a coffee shop at least once.

A vibrant city working to build a future

The people of Amsterdam have learned to deal with drugs and other big-city problems. The liberal attitude keeps the city from becoming patronisingly prudish, while the leeway offered for experimentation creates an interesting tension in which politics, culture and the arts can flourish. The capital city does its best to live up to its name and fame as the country's most important centre of culture and tourism.

Other Dutch cities try to surpass Amsterdam's reputation, Rotterdam

in particular. And Rotterdam has in fact earned international renown, outstripping Amsterdam in several areas, such as film and modern architecture. The capital hasn't been sitting idly by, however; Amsterdam has developed a number of large-scale, futuristic urban renewal programmes and building projects. The Zuidas, a development along the southern stretch of the A10 ring road that separates the old city from the post-war neighbourhoods near Amstelveen, is rapidly becoming the most expensive and most striking business district in the country. Its architectural allure and concentration of international headquarters could be compared to the London Docklands and La Défense in Paris. Before the financial crisis in 2009 gripped the whole world in its iron fist, the prestigious and imposing bank buildings were widely praised. Now that financial institutions are in the doghouse, some people's opinions have reversed completely, leading to accusations of 'shameless ostentation'.

Such qualifiers are rarely heard regarding another ambitious project: the redevelopment of the long-abandoned banks of the IJ River. Old waterfront warehouses that had been empty for years now house luxury flats, shops, restaurants and theatres. Striking new buildings soar high between the renovated complexes. The most eye-catching structure, for now that is, is the EYE film institute on the north banks, a prominent white building that opened in 2012.

A great deal of time and energy is being invested in infrastructure improvements, creating comfortable connections between the inner city and the outer suburbs. Such large-scale projects sometimes pose a difficult undertaking for an elected city council, subject to elections and political vulner-

Introduction, Amsterdam in facts and figures

abilities. The North-South Line, a metro connection between Amsterdam North and the Zuidas business district via Central Station, faced technical flaws and careless errors that led to subsidence under historical buildings, sparking off unrest and dissatisfaction in the local community. Despite an initial budget of 1.5 billion euros, project costs have now 3 billion and comple-

tion has gradually been postponed from 2011 to 2017. On the other bank of the IJ, plans for redevelopment and expansion are underway in the traditional working-class neighbourhood of Amsterdam North.

Despite setbacks and economic malaise, Amsterdam is still very much alive and kicking, continuing to work toward the future.

Facts and figures

Population: Amsterdam is the largest city in the Netherlands. 790,000 people live there, 1.5 million in the greater Amsterdam area and 2.5 million in Amsterdam and surroundings. With inhabitants from 178 different nationalities, Amsterdam is one of the most diverse cities in the world, beating even New York. 50% of its inhabitants are immigrants, compared to a little less than 20% for the Netherlands as a whole. Surinamese are the largest group (about 69,000), followed by Moroccans (about 68,000), Turks (about 40,000) and Antilleans (about 12,000). The city is home to about 112,000 American and European immigrants. 88% of all Amsterdam's inhabitants have Dutch nationality, some in conjunction with another nationality.

Religion: 56% of Amsterdammers state they have no religious beliefs, 17% are Christian (10% Roman Catholic, 5% Protestant) and more than 14% are Muslim. 1% of the city's population are Jewish. The Christian population is declining and the Muslim population is growing slightly. The large influx of Ghanaians and Nigerians led to the founding of many African churches in the city. Buddhism, Confucianism and Hinduism are also represented.

Area: 219.3 km², of which 76.3% land and 23.7 % water. Based on the land area alone, the population density is 4591 inhabitants per square kilometre.

Government and policy: Amsterdam is the capital city of the Netherlands, though the government is based in The Hague. The city is run by a mayor, who is appointed by the Queen and the government, and an elected municipal council (the next elections are scheduled for 2014). The seven districts have fairly autonomous elected district councils. The current mayor is former government minister Eberhard van der Laan (PvdA – Labour Party). He succeeded Job Cohen, also from the PvdA, in 2010.

Economy: Schiphol Airport, 12 km southwest of the city centre, handles 50 million passengers a year, making it the fourth largest airport in Europe and the largest employer for the city, surpassing even the port. The port of Amsterdam is the fifth largest in Europe, just behind Rotterdam, which is the second largest in the world and the economic powerhouse of the Netherlands. Amsterdam, however, is the country's financial centre. Tourism accounts for about 5 million euros in revenue and is a mainstay of Amsterdam's economy. Six million foreign tourists (averaging two nights stay) and 16 million day-trippers visit every year.



A recurring visual element in city life: the municipal coat of arms with the emperor's crown and the St Andrew's crosses

On the right track

Businesses and local governments have partnered under the banner of *Amsterdam Smart City*. The goal is to become Europe's most energy-efficient city. Innovative technology is being deployed, attempts are underway to achieve a move toward behavioural change in the population, and economic investments must be sustainable. The hope is that measures will ultimately lead to a reduction in CO₂ emissions.

The community project *Our Energy*, for example, aims for prolonged, renewable and relatively inexpensive energy (from windmills) in Amsterdam North. Residents can join a co-op and become co-owners of the turbines as well as consumers of renewable energy. Seven windmills should soon provide for 20% of households in Amsterdam North.

In the *Klimaatstraat Utrechtsestraat* initiative, businessmen and entrepreneurs have joined with the municipi-

pality of Amsterdam to ensure that Utrechtsestraat flourishes economically and in terms of environmental awareness, becoming become a prominent street in Europe.

Water, fire and plague

The city crest shows a shield supported by two lions and has three St. Andrew's crosses topped by an imperial crown. Below are the three words, *Heroic – Resolute – Merciful*. There are several theories as to the precise meaning of the crest. One theory suggests that the three central crosses represent the plagues that constantly threatened Amsterdam during the Middle Ages: flood, disease and fire. In 1489, the German king, who later became Emperor Maximilian I, granted the city the right to add his crown to the crest, possibly in thanks for the financial support offered to him by the wealthy inhabitants of the city. That same imperial crown adorns the head of the Westerkerk church tower.

History, present and future

The Counts of Holland

In the 13th century, the Amstel River was dammed and a settlement built, to which Count Floris V of Holland granted the right and privilege to raise tolls in 1275. Amsterdam received its city charter shortly after 1300. Trade and shipping burgeoned and a stone wall fortified with towers was added around 1400.

Burgundian period

Circa 1500, the city fell into the hands of the Hapsburg dynasty and King Maximilian, who would later become the Holy Roman Emperor, granted Amsterdam the right to add his crown to the city coat of arms. His successors Charles V, and later Philip II, ruthlessly suppressed the rise of Protestantism. This culminated in a revolt, led by Prince William of Orange, of Dutch Protestants against the Spanish occupiers, resulting in the "Eighty Years' War". In 1578, Amsterdam sided with Prince William and officially became Protestant.

The Unified Netherlands

Amsterdam's tolerance made it a haven for persecuted minorities. Large parts of the Jewish populations of Spain and Portugal settled here. They were joined by thousands of wealthy Protestants who fled the fall of Antwerp, taking their skills, capital and contacts with them. Between 1570 and 1640 Amsterdam grew from 30,000 to 140,000 inhabitants. Planned expansion of the city began in 1613 with the construction of the first three canals of the canal district: the Gentlemen's (Herengracht), Emperor's (Keizergracht) and Prince's (Prinsengracht) canals.

Golden Age

In the meantime, Holland had achieved mastery of the seas and become the foremost trading nation of the 17th century. The East and West India trading companies brought in great wealth. Much of that capital was invested in the arts and in the construction of Amsterdam's characteristic canal houses, creating a unique blossoming of artistic expression by artists such as Rembrandt and Vermeer. With the 'Peace of Munster' in 1648, hostilities with Spain ceased. The power and prosperity of Amsterdam were symbolised by the building of the great City Hall (now the Royal Palace) on Dam Square.

Decline

In the 18th century the Netherlands' finances were drained by a series of naval wars with Britain and the threat of invasion from France. Its financial reserves shrank rapidly. The Dutch warships were destroyed in 1784 by the English. Napoleon's naval blockade of Britain at the beginning of the 19th century was a severe blow to Amsterdam, which had still been prosperous up to that point.

French period

Inspired by the French Revolution, Dutch radicals raised calls for freedom, equality and fraternity, founding the Batavian Republic with French military aid. This ended when Napoleon sent his brother to Amsterdam as regent. He reigned as King Louis Napoleon until 1813, converting the City Hall on Dam Square into his royal palace. By this point, the population had dropped from over 200,000 at the end of the 17th century to a mere 140,000.

Kingdom of the Netherlands

The Netherlands and Belgium were one unified kingdom until Belgium's independence in 1830. The new North Sea Canal made Amsterdam the foremost port for inland shipping and brought new prosperity, better living conditions and significant population growth.

A century of changes

New residential neighbourhoods sprang up around the old city centre thanks to national politics and rent-controlled housing. These areas – generally built in the striking style of the Amsterdam School – were home to the city's less affluent citizens. The Second World War brought Nazi German occupation. During that dark period in history, Amsterdam lost 10% of its population: 75,000 of the 80,000 Jews living in Amsterdam. With the capitulation of the German Wehrmacht on the 5th of May 1945, the occupation of the Netherlands was at an end. The Dutch East Indies gained their independence in 1949. The '50s saw economic growth and increased prosperity. In the '60s

and '70s, the 'Provo' movement and rioting by students and squatters created great disorder. After Surinam's declaration of independence in 1975, approximately 100,000 Surinamese came to the Netherlands, many settling in Amsterdam.

Start of the 21st century

New suburbs are rising on the shores of the IJ River and the Markermeer lake. The main areas of city development are the banks of the IJ River, the North-South metro line and the Zuidas business district. The redevelopment of Amsterdam North is the next ambitious project. The aim is to improve this district, located between the centre and the Waterland green zone and separated from the rest of the city by the IJ, by means of new building projects and better bus and metro connections.

UNESCO added Amsterdam's 17th-century canal district to the World Cultural Heritage list in 2010. The 400th anniversary of the canal district will be celebrated in 2013, and several major museums will be reopening.

Newly built apartments (2002) on Silodam, designed by MVRDV



Practical information

Travelling to Amsterdam

By train

Amsterdam **Central Station** (► F/G 2/3) handles nearly a quarter of a million travellers every day. Trains come in from every corner of the country. Travellers from Belgium arrive via Antwerp or Maastricht. The other main international connections are Brussels/Paris and Cologne/Frankfurt/Basel.

The train is the best way to travel in the Netherlands. Not only do you avoid traffic congestion and parking problems, but many of the sights worth seeing can be reached from Central Station on foot. The disadvantages of train travel here include delays (statistically speaking, there is a 5-8% chance that you'll encounter a delay of more than 5 minutes) and the relatively high cost of non-discount tickets. If you're travelling in a group, taking the car quickly becomes more cost-effective, even if you factor in parking. In that case, check out the P+R options shown below. Information: www.ns.nl.

By car

If you prefer to travel to Amsterdam by car rather than train, you'll encounter few obstacles outside the city, other than the usual traffic congestion. The A10 motorway around the city provides access to all of Amsterdam. It's highly inadvisable to try to drive into the city centre; high-stress traffic, infuriating one-way roads and crowded downtown parking facilities are no fun. You're better off parking the car at one of the big **P+R parking lots** (€!) (Park & Ride) on the fringes of the city. Train, tram, metro or bus will take you com-

fortably into the centre. You can park your car in a P+R garage for up to 24 hours for only €8. That amount includes a return ticket for public transport for up to five people occupying the vehicle. The P+R system may change in 2013.

Please note! When you enter the garage with your parking slip, make sure you report to the P+R desk! That is where you receive the free public transport chip cards and arrange for the discount P+R parking rates; normal parking charges in these garages are between €1.50 and €3 an hour. It's also important that you remember to check in and out again with the chip card when you use public transport. If you can't prove that you travelled by public transport, you will have to pay normal parking charges.

There are seven P+R parking lots along the A10 ring road around Amsterdam, including the Arena stadium (Transferium) in the southeast, the Olympic Stadium in the southwest, Sloterdijk train station in the northwest and Zeeburg in the east. Special reduced parking charges are not available at the stadium parking lots if events or sporting matches are being hosted. Information: www.bereikbaar.amsterdam.nl.

Parking in the city: parking downtown costs €5 an hour; the zone around that costs €4 an hour, dropping to €3 or €2.50 as you move out towards the A10 ring road. Parking is free almost everywhere from midnight to 09:00 and on Sunday mornings. Most areas outside the canal ring offer free parking all day on Sunday (€!). Most **parking garages** in the city cen-

tre cost between € 4 and € 5 an hour, compared to € 3 or € 4 an hour outside the canal ring. Forget to pay or come back too late? You're likely to get a ticket, which costs more than € 50. If you have 5 unpaid fines, you'll get a yellow wheel clamp on your front tyre. To get it off, call +31 20 520 33 22. Amsterdam parking officers will come and remove the clamp after you pay a minimum fine of € 103.60 (only payable by PIN card or credit card). 24 hours after the wheel is clamped, the car will be towed to the impound; costs of retrieving a towed vehicle can quickly run up to hundreds of euros. Information: www.parkerenindestad.nl, www.stadstoezicht.amsterdam.nl, www.bereikbaar.amsterdam.nl.

By plane

If you're coming in from abroad or picking up international guests, you'll probably be visiting Schiphol Airport.

Amsterdam Airport Schiphol (► map 4) is 17 kilometres by road to the southwest of Dam Square. Information: tel. +31 20 794 08 00 or www.schiphol.nl.

Transport into town: besides driving a (rental) car, you can travel to Amsterdam by train, bus or taxi. Information: tel. 0900 92 92 or www.92920v.nl

Train: the easiest and fastest way to reach the city centre. Trains depart from Schiphol for Amsterdam Central Station every 10 to 20 minutes. Even between 01:00 and 06:00, trains still run once an hour. The trip takes 14 to 20 minutes. A one-way ticket costs € 3.80; a return ticket is € 7.60. Information: www.ns.nl

Bus: the Connexion Schiphol Hotel Shuttle runs at least twice an hour between 06:00 and 21:00 and serves dozens of hotels in downtown Amsterdam (trip takes 50 min., leaves from the A7 stop by the arrivals hall, tel. +31 38 339 47 41, www.schipholhotelshuttle.nl, € 16).

Interliner buses 197 and 370 drive directly to the city centre. Bus 370 goes to Amsterdam Southeast. Information: tel. +31 20 405 65 65 or www.92920v.nl

Taxi: the drive takes approximately 20 minutes and costs about € 42. Information: tel. +31 20 653 10 00.

Travelling in Amsterdam

Tram, bus, ferry and metro

Amsterdam has a good public transport network: 16 tram lines, more than 50 bus lines, 11 night buses, 4 metro lines (partly overlapping) and 5 ferry lines across the IJ River.

An overview map showing all the lines is available for € 1 from the ticket office of the GVB municipal transport company, located in the Noord-Zuid Hollandsch Koffiehuis across from Central Station (Mon-Fri 07:00-21:00, Sat/Sun 10:00-18:00). Maps are also available on www.gvb.nl and can be downloaded and printed out.

Tickets: the public transport chip card is valid on all forms of public transport. If you expect to use public transport extensively, you may want to consider buying a day ticket. The GVB calls them *hour tickets*, (€) because they are valid for 24, 48, 72 hours and so on, up to 7 days; they cost € 7.50, € 12, € 16 etc., up to € 31. These cards are also based on the public transport chip card system, so you still need to check in AND check out. The 'hour tickets' are sold at the GVB Tickets & Info service desks (across from CS and in various train and metro stations), VVV offices, hotels and campgrounds; the 24-hour ticket can also be purchased from the driver or conductor.

Trams and buses run between 06:00 and 00:30. Night buses run between 00:30 and 07:00.

Amsterdam also offers regular transport by water. Besides the free GVB fer-

Practical information



Dutch new herring, the first young catch of the season, served with onions

ryboats across the IJ River, € the **Canal Bus** also offers a 'hop-on, hop-off' boat service. If you buy a day ticket for € 22, you can get on and off the canal boats as many times as you like for 24 hours, using the four Canal Bus lines that travel through the ring canals, past Central Station, around Artis Zoo and through the Singel canal (www.canal.nl).

North-South Line

Convinced that public transport could be even better, the city council pushed ahead plans from circa 1970 that had been shelved due to major pressure from residents. The North-South Line is being built to provide better connections throughout the city, especially to Amsterdam North. Sadly, implementation, costs and timeline have all mushroomed. The new line will not open before 2017, while it was originally planned for 2011. The method used to excavate the tunnels led to leakages and subsidence of historical buildings.

Taxi

There are about 3500 registered taxis in Amsterdam. Since taxi rides have always been relatively expensive in the Netherlands, the government liberal-

ised the market in 2000. The introduction of a free market was intended to lead to more competition, followed by improved quality and lower prices. More taxis were added, but quality continued to decline and prices rose sharply. Fights occasionally broke out between taxi drivers at busy taxi stops at Leidseplein, Rembrandtplein and Central Station. The Wild West image that the chauffeurs earned for themselves scared customers away, causing the number of fares to drop and the prices to continue rising. Taxi drivers regularly refuse to accept short-distance fares. Rudeness and uncouth behaviour are no exception, not to mention a less than thorough knowledge of the city streets. And drivers who do know their way around may well prefer to take the long route so they can jack up the price.

Bicycle

Visitors from rural areas may find it difficult to cycle in Amsterdam due to the hectic pace of complex traffic. You have to keep an eye on trams, cars, cyclists who ignore all the rules and – especially in the city centre – tourists who aren't used to bicycles and may stand gawking in the middle of the street or cross suddenly without looking. The antisocial ('free-spirited') behaviour of some of Amsterdam's cyclists is monitored more closely by the police these days, but increased enforcement doesn't seem to make much difference. You can **rent a bike** from shops like MacBike on the east side of Central Station, Stationsplein 5, tel. +31 20 6248391, www.macbike.nl, daily 09:00-17:45. A bike with coaster brakes costs € 9,50 a day, € 14 for two days. MacBike also has shops at Weteringschans near Leidseplein and at Marnixstraat 220. Various other bike rental shops offering similar rates are located through-

out the city centre. Remember to take along an ID, deposit and/or credit card.

Tours of the city

Hop-on, hop-off bus/boat: travel to the main sights of the city for 24 hours for about € 25 (admission fee not included) by taking a tourist bus or using the Canal Bus. Tickets available from Tours & Tickets (Damrak 34) or online (<http://www.tours-tickets.com/home>).

Tour boat: the Canal Bus offers a regular scheduled boat service through the canals; see the section on public transport. Many companies offer canal cruises. A range of options is offered all year round; a boat tour usually lasts between 60 and 90 minutes. You can board the boats out front of Central Station or at Rokin, Leidseplein or Stadhouderskade. A daytime canal cruise costs between € 10 and € 15. One-hour or two-hour 'candlelight tours' can also be booked in the evenings (€ 12.50 - € 30). A couple of shipping lines offer 'normal' tours as well as special or thematic tours, including Lovers (www.lovers.nl), Kooij (www.rederijkooij.nl) and Holland International (www.hir.nl).

Tours: the VVV tourist information office can tell you about Amsterdam's many walking tours, with or without a guide, and the other guided tours offered in the city. Here are a few suggestions.

Informal walking tours in small groups are provided by **Mee-in-Mokum**. An enthusiastic and authentic Amsterdam local takes about eight people along and tells his personal tale. There are four different routes, each taking about 2.5 hours including a stop for coffee. Tue-Sun 11:00, leaving from Museumcafé Mokum (in the Amsterdam Historic Museum). Price € 7.50 p.p. Information: <http://www.gildeamsterdam.nl/>

Architectour offers guided tours highlighting architecture and urban devel-

opment. Information: tel. +31 20 625 91 23.

Former Dutch actor Rob van Hulst started giving walking tours of the **red light district** over 20 years ago. His events management agency has grown since then. It still offers the walking tour of the Red Light District, but the agency offers many other excursions in the surrounding area. Information: www.robvanhulst.nl

Festivals and celebrations

Chinese New Year: beginning of February. In Amsterdam's Chinatown, exuberant celebrations start at 11 AM in honour of the Chinese New Year.

5daysoff: March, www.5daysoff.nl. A five-day international festival of electronic music in Melkweg, Paradiso and other venues.

Queen's Day: 30 April. A huge, colourful party to celebrate the birthday of Queen Beatrix (actually held on the birthday of her mother, Queen Juliana): everything and everybody goes *orange*. The inner city turns in a gigantic flea market. This year's celebrations will mark the end of an era, as the queen abdicates in favour of her son, Willem-Alexander, soon to be the first king that the Netherlands has seen since 1890.

Liberation Day: 5th of May, also known as Liberation Day. Street parties, markets, concerts, flea markets. The liberation of the Netherlands from German occupation in 1945 is joyfully remembered.

www.bevrijdingsfestivals.nl

GRID: from halfway through May to the beginning of June in even years (2014, 2016), www.gridphotofestival.com. International photography festival with famous artists and rising talents in the Port Halls in east Amsterdam (Cruquisweg). The OFF GRID Festival is the parallel programme (exhibi-

Amsterdam card

The **iAmsterdam City Card** €! was designed especially for tourists. It offers special discounts and comes in one-day, two-day and three-day versions (€ 40, € 50, € 60). The chip card is available at the VVV offices and the AUB. Admission to over 30 museums is free with the City Card, as is access to public transport. The card also includes a free canal cruise.

Several other facilities and attractions, various restaurants, a range of guided walking tours and a couple of city tour buses offer 25% discounts with the card. See www.iamsterdamcard.com

The **All Amsterdam Transport Pass** €! (€ 30.50) is valid for a whole day and offers free unlimited access to the tram, bus, metro and night bus throughout Amsterdam, as well as all four lines of the Canal Bus. The pass also includes discounts for a select number of museums, restaurants and attractions. Sold at Canal Bus ticket offices, VVV offices, hotels and the GVB office across from Central Station. For more details, see the GVB site (www.gvb.nl) and the Canal Bus site (www.canal.nl).

tions and more) that takes place in galleries, museums and cultural institutes.

Holland Festival: June, www.holland-festival.nl. The most important theatre, opera, music and dance festival of the Netherlands. Four weeks of top performances in the Stadsschouwburg municipal theatre, Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ and other venues, with an emphasis on new works.

Vondelpark Open-Air Theatre: June-August, www.openluchttheater.nl. Three months of almost daily performances: theatre, film and music, including children's programmes.

Amsterdam Roots Festival: beginning of July, www.amsterdamroots.nl. Four days of world music in the Oosterpark, Bimhuis, Melkweg and other locations.

Julidans: July, www.julidans.com. International festival of contemporary dance, two weeks, in Melkweg, the Stadsschouwburg municipal theatre and others.

Over het IJ Festival: July, www.over-hetij.nl. Two-week theatre festival with spectacular performances on the former NDSM wharf, including lots of pantomime shows and musicals.

Robeco Zomerconcerten: July/Aug, www.robecozomerconcerten.nl. The premier summer concert event in the Concertgebouw, sponsored by the fund management group since 1990. Classical music and jazz.

Gay Pride: first weekend in August. www.amsterdamgaypride.nl. LGBT pride festival with street and dance parties, culminating in the spectacular Canal Parade on Saturday.

De Parade: August, www.deparade.nl. For two and a half weeks the Martin Luther King park hosts this theatre festival in a carnival setting, featuring loads of small-scale performances. Includes live music, dance and cabaret shows.

Grachtenfestival: mid-August, www.grachtenfestival.nl. Ten days, 170 concerts, mainly classical, admission entirely free. Held on the canals, in houses, terraces and gardens, in the Amstel Hotel and the heritage shipyards of Amsterdam.

Uitmarkt: last weekend in August. www.uitmarkt.nl. Dynamic cultural 'market' where hundreds of thousands come to see and hear a preview of the theatre, music and dance scheduled in

the coming cultural season. Central focus is on the Museumplein square.

Jordaanfestival: weekend in mid-September, www.jordaanfestival.nl. Festival of the Amsterdam 'levenslied', dramatic and sentimental songs in the style of Johnny Jordaan, Tante Leen and Willy Alberti.

IDFA (International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam): second half of November. Internationally renowned documentary festival in various film theatres, including the EYE film institute.

Lost & Found

Police: Korte Leidsedwardsstraat 52, tel. +31 20 251 02 22, Mon-Fri 9:00-16:00.

GVB municipal transport (bus, tram, metro): Arlandaweg 100, tel. 0900 80 11, Mon-Fri 9:00-18:30.

Train: NS Service Desk, Central Station, tel. 0900 321 21 00.

Lost & Found items are sent to the Central Bureau in Utrecht after five days.

Health and medical care

Emergency medical care: the Amsterdam Central Doctors Service can help you contact general physicians, dentists and pharmacies, tel. 0900 15 15. One of the hospitals that has an Accidents & Emergency ward is the OLVG, Oosterpark 9, tel. +31 20 599 91 11. For treatment by a general practitioner (GP) between 17:00 and 08:00 and on weekends and holidays, please call the Amsterdam GP Service, tel. 088 003 06 00.

Information

In Amsterdam

VVV Amsterdam tourist information: tel. +31 20 201 88 00, Mon-Fri 08:00-18:00; www.iamsterdam.com/nl, info@atcb.nl

Offices: Stationsplein 10 ► G 3, across from Central Station in the Noord-Zuid Hollandsch Koffiehuis, daily 09:00-19:00/18:00/17:00, Sun 10:00-17:00; **Stadhouderskade 550** ► D 6, across from no. 78 in the kiosk of Amsterdam Canal Cruises, daily 09:00-17:00; **Schiphol Airport, Arrivals 2**, daily 07:00-22:00; **Leidseplein-AUB Ticketshop (agency)** ► D 6, Leidseplein 26, Stadsschouwburg terrace side, Mon-Fri 10:00-19:00, Sat 10:00-19:00, Sun 12:00-18:00; **Het Muziektheater (agency)** ► C/D 4, Amstel 3, Mon-Fri 12:00-18:00 or until start of show, Sat, Sun and holidays 12:00-15:00 or until start of show.

Amsterdams Uit Buro (AUB): Leidseplein 26 (in the Stadsschouwburg municipal theatre), tel. +31 20 795 99 50 until 16:00; www.aub.nl, www.amsterdamsuitburo.nl, Mon-Sat 10:00-19:30, Sun 12:00-18:00. Biggest ticket sales office in Amsterdam, including last-minute tickets; the *iAmsterdam Card* is also sold here (see page 22) and the *Museum Card* (see page 76). A VVV tourist information agency offering brochures is located here.

Internet links

www.iamsterdam.com: Exceptionally useful site operated by the Amsterdam VVV tourist information office, offering a wealth of information on every possible aspect of city life, from sightseeing and events or shopping and entertainment to hotels (which can be booked directly from the site), as well as background information on a wide range of topics. See the *Living* tab on the English version of the site for more details. These pages are intended not only for tourists, but also for international expats living in Amsterdam, so they also include *gay & lesbian suggestions*, tips on heading out on the town with kids, and information for business travellers.

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www.amsterdam.nl: The very user-friendly site of the municipality of Amsterdam. It provides a vast amount of information on all sorts of topics, including city parking and current tourism-related announcements. The *goodies* are a nice extra feature, offering webcams, photos, maps and links.

www.simplyamsterdam.nl / www.amsterdamhotspots.nl: Two alternative English-language sites for 'independent' tourists, including search functions, events calendars and everything a tourist in Amsterdam should know, or should want to know. Also has extensive tips on restaurants and nightlife.

www.amsterdam.info: Informative site for tourists (and expats) in many different languages. Covers a wide range of topics and has a map that can be printed out in sections. Many topics include a link to the latest relevant info.

www.underwateramsterdam.com: Independent English-language site run by Pip Farquharson, a Brit living locally; her city guide is especially fun, offering personal tips in nearly twenty categories.

www.spottedbylocals.com/amsterdam: Amsterdam locals offer their per-

sonal tips in eleven categories, including handy map search. In English, also available as app and as PDF.

www.gayamsterdam.com: English-language site with information for gays (but hardly any for lesbians): hotels, restaurants, neighbourhoods, clubs, discos, bars, etc., including handy maps.

www.arcam.nl: The Architecture Centre of Amsterdam has a site that includes an architecture guide, offering various search options. Arcam also has a smartphone app with *augmented reality*.

www.gvb.nl: Everything you might need to know about public transport in the city: timetables for all the buses, trams, metros and night buses, how to pay with the public transport chip card, and so on. You can view and print out various maps, including a map of the whole municipal public transport network, a metro map and the stylised 'combindo map'.

www.amsterdamsuitburo.nl: Excellent search engine operated by the Amsterdams Uitburo (see page 19) that literally maps all the cultural events in the city. Last-minute offers for ma-

Safety and emergencies

Amsterdam is just as safe (or unsafe) as any other city in the world that attracts lots of tourists. Keep a close eye on your belongings in crowded areas, especially in train stations, the VVV office, Leidseplein, the major museums, in the tram and in the busy shopping streets. Driving a car? You should know better than to leave visible valuables in your car. Don't forget the car radio! (Take it out or remove the detachable front panel.)

Important phone numbers

Police, fire department, ambulance: tel. 112, **Amsterdam Tourist Assistance Service (ATAS;** helps foreign victims of crime): tel. +31 20 625 32 46, **Roadside assistance:** tel. +31 88 269 28 88. **Emergency credit card blocking service:** International Card Services (includes MasterCard and Visa) tel. +31 20 660 06 11, **Bank card blocking service:** each bank has its own phone numbers; check the website of your bank or visit www.pasblokkeren.nl

jour discounts are posted daily at noon. Also includes links to entertainment sites for the rest of the Netherlands.

Children and families

Parents don't have to worry that their kids will be bored in the 'great theatre' of Amsterdam. Take a boat tour of the canals, pilot your own pedal boat (page 39), climb towers (page 68), see elephants and lions at Artis Zoo (page 58), go skating in Vondelpark (page 63) – it's all possible in downtown Amsterdam. The Amsterdamse Bos (Amsterdam Forest), a municipal forest to the south of the city (see page 81), has options for children to go horseback riding, visit the Ridammerhoeve organic goat farm and pet, comb and feed some of their 150 goats (Nieuwe Meerlaan 4, www.geitenboerderij.nl, Wed-Mon 10:00-17:00) and eat pancakes – an enjoyable outing that easily fills the day and fills their stomachs. Another kid-friendly attraction for children up to about 12 years old is the Tun-Fun indoor play park (page 77), where they can go wild in a multilevel underground playground while parents enjoy a cup of coffee or a snack and watch from the sidelines.

Museum fun: These museums are fun for kids, and not just when it's raining outside! Some museums have special sections targeting kids, including the NEMO science and technology museum, the Junior department of the Royal Tropical Museum (page 80), the Jewish Historical Museum (page 57) and the Amsterdam Museum (page 38). Other highlights include the wax statues at Madame Tussaud's (page 32) and the Museum Tram Line (page 79) and Tram Museum. A tip for parents of boys and girls who love football: check out the imposing Amsterdam ArenA stadium and the Ajax Experience (page 78).

Accommodations: It's generally not a problem to find a nice place for a family to stay. Various hotels, B&Bs, rooming houses and youth hostels offer rooms that can accommodate three, four or more people, and most hotels also have options for putting an extra bed in the room (often the cheapest solution). Budget-friendly options that are tons of fun for kids include campgrounds in or near the city, like Vliegenvos in Amsterdam North or the campground on the island of Zeeburg. De Badhoeve campground by the IJsselmeer lake is just a 15-minute bike ride from the city. You can even sleep on a farm not far from Amsterdam. There are several holiday farms that rent out rooms within a 15-kilometre radius (www.boerderijkamers.nl).

Out to dinner: Children are welcome in most restaurants, and almost all offer special children's menus or smaller services, not to mention highchairs and play corners.

Opening hours

Stores in general: Mon-Sat 08:00/09:00/10:00-17:00/18:00. Supermarkets are generally open every day until 20:00 or 22:00. Quite a few shops and department stores have a special shopping evening on Thursdays, when they stay open until 21:00. Some of the shops are closed on Monday morning, but quite a few are open Sunday afternoon.

Banks: Mon 13:00-17:00, Tue-Fri 09:00-17:00.

Main post office: Mon-Fri 09:00-18:00, Sat 10:00-12:00.

Restaurants: Most restaurants are open seven days a week; if they close for a day, it's generally on Sunday or occasionally on Monday.

Museums: Several museums are closed on Monday.