

An insiders guide to Amsterdam

Ah Amsterdam, You've seen the movies. You've heard the stories. Whatever your reason is for going to the enchanting city – you definitely want to make the most out of your time there.

Amsterdam is more affordable than London, friendlier than Paris and more fun than Rome – and it's no secret, everyone knows it.

This is why the city has approximately 18+ Million visitors a year. Which is 350K a week, in a central area that has only 830K residents. As you can envision, it gets a little crazy-busy on the weekends.

So you have the choice 1) wrestle with the masses, waste your time in queues and see what everyone else does. Or 2) hang out and see Amsterdam like a local, avoiding the crowds in the process and having an unforgettable experience.

Even in a populated small city, you can become an expert at avoiding crowds. For instance, you'll find all cyclists on one street and no one on the parallel street – so take a ride on the wild side, and make your own path through town.

TIP: Avoid getting run over by Cyclists

Ok, I admit. I've run over the occasional tourist. I rang my bell, ting and they jumped – the wrong way right in front of me... And in my defence, the old bike's brakes are shot and don't work. I tried to stop really I did... splat...

So a free tip – watch out for cyclists, where a bike is painted on the path that means it's a bike path, and when you hear 'ting ting' behind you – jump to your left, not to the

right. Walk and be aware, we are not trying to run you over... but may not be able to help it.



What to do, what to see, where to go:

While the magic of the city is endless, there are a few things that are always highly recommended that I never get sick of. Such as:

1. Canal Cruise

The best way to see Amsterdam. It's a water city and the view you get from the canal is unique night or day. The companies are all the same so get on a boat anywhere anytime!

2. Rent a bike

Getting around on a bike is the second best way to get around Amsterdam and an incredibly local experience. You can rent a bike from almost anywhere. Get a map and get off the same street as everyone else, you'll find all the tourists on one road while the next one over goes in the same direction with no one on it, so always take the opportunity to take the road less travelled! Tip: Remember where you park it – with more bikes in the city than people – it can be an adventure to find your bike

again at the best of times.

3. City Library

Not for the books. What many people don't know is that it has a café/ restaurant on the top floor where you can find an affordable lunch and enjoy the panoramic view of the city. It's one of the only spots in the city where you can get an aerial view, a great photo opportunity as it's a bit dull – there are rarely any tourists.

4. Quieter Shopping streets: (read: Skip Kalverstraat)

1. Amstelstraat: Not as touristy as the main shopping street but has some of the most unique design shops where you'll find some real treasures.
2. 9 Streets in the Jordan: Great tiny streets well lit up at night full of boutique stores – however these are publicized and will be full of tourists – yet due to the charm, still worth visiting.
3. StaalStraat: home of Droog Design and Puccini and a few other cute unique shops too – around the corner from the Waterlooplein markets – which are great on a Saturday. Rembrandt's house is also there, if there is no queue be sure to check it out – the oldest bar in town is across from his house – it's the one that may fall over at any minute.

5. Museums

1. [Droog Design Museum](#)

While it's not officially a museum they do have some of the best young, talented designers/artists that work for them so the items on show are inspiring.

2. [van Gogh Museum](#)

This museum got a huge makeover quite a few years back, and to everyone's horror, it was closed. Yet, all was made good when they reopened, as not only is the museum itself stunning, but it also shows off van Gogh's artwork like non-other. There will be a queue, however, this is one of the few

instances it's worth the wait (do get there as early as possible).

3. [FOAM Photography museum](#)

One of the most undervalued museums in my view, and yet perhaps it's something I am grateful for – as it's much less crowded. They always have local and international exhibits on, and the space



itself is a curiosity.

6. **ARTIS:** Not the zoo but the hood, it's one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Amsterdam and is so much quieter and more spacious than everywhere else. It's' as if someone has waved their magic wand and made all the tourists disappear. You can visit the butterfly room in the [De Hortus Botanicus](#) (Botanic Garden), and find a seat at a café on the canal at [Bloem](#). Take a look around the stunning architecture of the [Hermitage](#) or have a coffee in the garden (the inside is a bit overly stuffy, so don't waste your time unless that's your jive and you like Faberge eggs and paintings of men with tutus around their neck...).

7. **Day out to the Historic village of Volendam.**

If you are spending more than a weekend there are also a few things to do outside of town. Volendam is a small bus ride away (public bus in 20 mins and a few euros) and captures some of the old-world Dutch charms. You'll catch the odd person still wearing the traditional

dress, it has typical houses, including one that is a museum. And you can try the raw herring, or at least use one for a photo prop as everyone else does.

8. Tulips fields forever

now if you are lucky to be there around spring, and the weather is favourable – you'll get the opportunity to visit one of my very favourite places: [Keukenhof](#). An endless array of tulips – as well as many other flowers, remind the world that the Dutch are one of the largest flower exporters in the world, and certainly know how and where to grow them. If you can get out of town, at least visit the Flower market in town.



Foodies Delight: Best places to Eat in Amsterdam:

Chocolate: [Puccini](#). [StaalStraat](#). This without a doubt is the

best handmade chocolate spot in the world, not only do they have an amazing array of flavours, from pepper, chilli, and cinnamon through to cognac – they make it out the back so the smell is as intoxicating as the taste.



There is such a wide selection it's not rare to see some tourists in there for hours as they try to make a choice before buying most of the shops.

Rakang. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: This really is the best Thai restaurant in the world (Yes, even better than in Thailand). It's an all-time favourite thanks to the incredible food, service, kitsch twist and ambience. What's really great is that you can have any dish on the menu made with tofu instead of meat. Approx. €50p.p Elandsgracht 31. Tel: 020 620 9551 <http://www.rakang.nl/>



Breakfast / Cake: [Gartine.](#) There are few spots that do a real breakfast. As the Dutch staple is bread and cheese.

Not so at Gartine, the food is beyond delicious, the chef has her own cookbook, and they grow a lot of their own produce on their plot outside of town. Their cakes are so good, I admit it's the only place I'll also pre-order my dessert without questioning the calories.

The only downside is getting a table, they're always booked out in advance and it's a small place, yet if you'd like to experience the best breakfast spot and cakes in town it's well worth the phone call, or the wait. Tel: 020 320, Taksteeg 7, Amsterdam.

Modern Dutch: Greetjes, I've heard so many discourses on whether Real Dutch cuisine actually exists (beyond french fries). I know for a fact it does. I am Dutch and while it might not be the cuisine of the century, and you might not see a Dutch Restaurant in every (or any) city, there is a rather modest yet delicious one right in the centre of Amsterdam. And trust me, this is the age-old grub my family relished ok, albeit a more modern somewhat funky version.

Fries: Vlaamsefriethuis, voetboogstraat 33 – Best place ever, once again tucked away in a side street, and looks like and is a hole in the wall, however, you can follow your nose or the queue, as there are always people waiting in this spot. be sure to try the 'Oorlog' which means war, with onions, mayo and sate sauce!

Olliebollen Van: this is a big van parked at the odd place around town – depending on the time of the year, that has what looks like big fat juicy doughnuts. And they are only 100 times more delicious and authentic!

Insiders' guide to Amsterdam

I have skipped the museums that I find depressing. Reminders of wars, and relics, are full of old masters that go on forever and can get a little overwhelming.

As a local, I've included a short list of where I take visiting friends. Places that I never tire of. I've been on 100's canal rides and still love it. I never tire of seeing the Magere Brug (Skinny bridge) at night, and will always stop for a second when I cycle past it, to savour a moment of its

magic. To me, this is more breathtaking than any expensive museum.



I recommend if you are going for a few days be sure to grab yourself the [iamsterdam card](#), which gets you into most museums and public transport free for a few days. It gives you the opportunity to pop in and out of museums that you might not visit otherwise.

I hope you take yourself off the well-worn path, avoid the masses, and see the “Real Amsterdam”. The joy of travel comes from unique experiences and insights into a local culture, a real taste of a mysterious foreign land, that you rarely find standing in a queue with many other moaning tourists.

So head out into this enchanting world and go and create some unique and memorable experiences of your own. Uncover the lesser seen – yet even more enjoyable – Amsterdam for yourself.

