

Canals run through it

The city of Amsterdam shines with a rich heritage of art and culture

by VIKKI MORAN



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Amsterdam is a picture-perfect destination. Its charmingly tilted houses, winding cobblestone streets and bucolic canals date back hundreds of years and are enhanced by a multicultural vibe, a vibrant art scene and a variety of inviting bars, cafés and restaurants. Sweeping vistas of magnificent tulips and windmills add a secret sauce to a city unlike any other.

Art and history

Many masterpieces are housed in Amsterdam's art museums, all within a short walk of each other.

The Rijksmuseum holds Dutch masters like Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals—the most extensive exhibition in the Netherlands.

The neighboring Van Gogh Museum boasts the most comprehensive collection of the impressionist's work, and the Hermitage Amsterdam is presenting *Rembrandt & His Contemporaries*, history paintings from The Leiden Collection, on display until August 27.

For a taste of modern art, don't miss the Modern Contemporary (Moco) and Stedelijk museums.

The Anne Frank House is a gut-wrenching but important historic site to include on your visit. Plan to take at least a full hour in the house, following the self-directed audio. This site is a tiny house that needs to accommodate millions of visitors annually, so book early to ensure you do not miss it.

By water, wheel and trams

Every trip to Amsterdam, especially a first-time trip, should include at least one canal tour for education on the city and to get your bearings. The canals are engineering marvels and provide a unique historical perspective of the city. There are sunset tours, daytime tours and party boats with wine and beer. They all offer relaxation, wonderful guides on the winding waterways and great fun.

Amsterdam is a hugely popular bicycling city. To enjoy the city as its



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Amsterdam's many iconic canals are a huge feature of the city. Visitors tour them by boat, walking and cycling.

inhabitants do, look into taking a bicycle ride along the canals. As an active tourist, you can rent a bike and enjoy sightseeing at your own pace. Amsterdam also boasts an impressive public transport network of buses, metros, trams and trains to get you around; the distinctive blue-and-white trams frequently crisscross the city.

A day trip out into the country is easy. Opportunities to enjoy local cheeses, authentic Dutch food and sightseeing are as bountiful in the outskirts as in the city.

My go-to method of traversing Amsterdam is walking—my step counter runs overtime in this grand city! I like to walk, stop for a cocktail

or marvelous peppermint tea that is made with just boiling water and clipped peppermint, and people-watch.

Multicultural cuisine

Restaurants in Amsterdam offer everything from Michelin-starred *kaiseki* from Japan to *rijsttafel* from Indonesia; my favorite is the latter, as you can choose anything your taste buds wish. Make sure you're hungry when you go to a *rijsttafel*, because the food, while excellent, is never-ending.

If you wish to try authentic Dutch food, visit another standout: The White Room. The chef's ingredients include the Netherlands' finest cheeses, vegetables and fish from the North Sea. My most recent meal at The White Room included goat cheese with *baharat* (a Middle Eastern spice blend), egg yolk and lemon balm; I still crave it.

Amsterdam is a city unlike any other, one that you need to visit at least once. It will likely beckon you back again and again. ■

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Leaning into it

Early 17th century engineers created the canal system, beginning with one canal connecting the North Sea to the city. Along the canals,

houses were built on wooden pylons that began to sink into the marshy soil, thus causing the beguiling tilting evident today. This became a standard architectural feature, as furniture

and large objects needed to be hoisted into the tall, narrow homes from the street or canal. Most canal houses have a hoist beam leading to a pulley system in the attic.—VM