



Fly over the Defence Line of Amsterdam via Fort Pampus and discover its watery history with a virtual hot-air balloon tour. FROM 1 APRIL, PAMPUS.NL



Fantastic Forts

Forty-six forts surrounding Amsterdam once protected the city from attack. They're still there, but all transformed into something else.

Among the golden fields of Beemster, a grassy mound cuts an unusual picture of an otherwise flat land. This is Fort Beemster, a one-time defensive fortification built as part of the Defence Line of Amsterdam to help the city withstand any attack. But things around here have since changed. Beyond its stony exterior, this fort has been revived as something entirely new. Inside you'll find state-of-the-art spa facilities, while its former ramparts have been transformed into a serene garden decked out with a pool, private island and saunas. What was once Fort Beemster is now Fort Resort Beemster. It's by no means the only example of a repurposed fort. Fort Pampus, once the forerunner of the Defence Line, has swapped its role as an island fort

to an island for food. Elsewhere, Fort Vijfhuizen is now Kunstfort Vijfhuizen, a recognition of its new status as a contemporary centre for art.

Far from floods

While these updates have been sensitively done, they're a far cry from the forts' original purpose. Built between 1815 and 1940, the Defence Line of Amsterdam (which, together with the New Dutch Water Line, formed the Dutch Water Defence Lines) was designed to protect the capital from potential invasion. These forts, serving as viewpoints to spot incoming forces, could flood the land surrounding them, and with it immobilise and even wash away enemies. Cleverly, the water would only reach knee height – too deep for man and horse to move, but too shallow for boats. >>

These forts have long proved that they can be almost anything

Learn all about aerial warfare in World War II at **Crash Museum** Aalsmeer.
CRASHMUSEUM.NL

From useless to useful
Made up of 46 forts – or 96 if you include the New Dutch Water Line – the Dutch Water Defence Lines was built in time for World War I. But they were never used. Could World War II, the rise of air warfare rendered them less useful to the military. Even when the lands were flooded, the enemy just ended up flying overhead. Since then, the forts have been used for everything from political imprisonment (check out the murals at Fort Spijkboor) to munitions stores. But their loss of defensive status in 1960 and sale to municipalities begged the question: What happens next? Fortunately, these forts have long proved that they can be almost anything – apart from a defence in wartime.

THE EASTERN OUTPOST

From the air, Naarden's unique fortress layout resembles a gigantic snowflake and it was used as a rallying point for Allied bombers during World War II. Explore the green ramparts and underground passages of the Vesting (Fortress) Museum, try your hand at fencing and archery, or watch the 200-year-old cannons fire on Cannoneers Day, each third Sunday of the month.

VESTINGMUSEUM.NL



Deep in the Beemster Polder, this fort-turned-luxury spa has it all. From saunas and salt baths to wholesome food and luxe body treatments, pamper yourself in stunning surroundings.

FORTFEE.MSTER.NL



A fort-turned-contemporary centre for art, Kunstfort Vijfhuizen is home to a curated exhibition programme plus a restaurant, and garden producing artisanal honey. Ringed by water, this museum makes for a gorgeous afternoon out.

KUNSTFORT.NI

Forming part of the Dutch Water Defence Lines, the New Dutch Water Line is a series of forts and locks that used existing bodies of water to flood surrounding areas as a defence mechanism. Created between 1815 and 1940, it spans 85km from Zeesluis Edam to Fort Bakkerskil (now a B&B).



4 THE LEGENDARY ISLAND

An island fortress located near IJmuiden, this is one of the Netherlands' most notorious forts and opens every first Saturday of the month (this spring on 2 March, 6 April and 4 May). Half underground, this is the largest building in the Defence Line of Amsterdam. If you book a tour, you'll take the ferry from IJmuiden which takes you to the island in about five minutes. It's a real treat.

FORTEILANDIJMUIDEN.COM



What looks like a normal island is actually a submerged sea fort. After a restoration in 2007, you can now visit Fort Pampus by boat and explore its secret tunnels or embark on a culinary adventure on this mysterious fortress island.

PAMPUS.NI



Roam through the dark passageways, encountering hands-on exhibits dedicated to military history and local wildlife, or join a guided tour. The fort is located in a nature reserve, so you might spot birds while you're there.

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