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NEIGHBOURHOODS

top picks

- **Van Gogh Museum (p109)**
Admire the vivid swirls of a tortured genius.
- **Oude Kerk (p75) and Nieuwe Kerk (p66)**
Pick out centuries of glorious detail.
- **Southern Canal Belt (p98)**
Bask in the magnificent canal architecture.
- **Museum Het Rembrandthuis (p78)**
Visit the inner sanctum of a master painter.
- **Red Light District (p74)**
Loosen your tie in the controlled sleaze.
- **Vondelpark (p115)**
Kick off your shoes in Amsterdam's answer to Central Park.
- **Anne Frank Huis (p93)**
Relive the horrors from a young girl's diary.
- **Amsterdams Historisch Museum (p68)**
Lift the veil on a storied past.
- **Jordaan district (p84)**
Explore the incredibly cosy lanes and cafés.
- **Artis Zoo (p121)**
Stroll through a rainforest or African savannah.

NEIGHBOURHOODS

If you could pick a shape for Amsterdam, what could possibly be more fitting than a bicycle wheel? Or at least half of one, as if sliced in two by a passing tram.

The old city is bathed by rings of canals known as the Grachtengordel (Canal Belt). Think of the main train station, Centraal Station, as being the hub of the wheel, with streets running out like spokes and linking the canals together. Once you know this much, you won't get lost (often). It also helps to remember the sequence of the main canals, from the centre moving outwards: Singel, Herengracht, Keizersgracht, Prinsengracht and Singelgracht.

The oldest districts are also the most central, and we've divided them up into three areas on the City Centre map. A good place to start your exploration is the Medieval Centre, home to many top sights such as the Royal Palace, the Nieuwe Kerk and the Amsterdams Historisch Museum. The city's intellectual life happens around the Spui, a leafy main square flanked by cafés and bookshops.

The Red Light District has been catering to worldly vices for centuries. Apart from the come-hither looks and giant joints, you'll find the magnificent Oude Kerk and lesser-known assets such as a clandestine church-museum. Surprising for some, this old sailor's quarter is quite picturesque. Apart from a Gothic weigh house and a café-lined square, Nieuwmarkt holds the keys to the Rembrandthuis – the master painter's studio – as well as to intriguing old synagogues and museums in the old Jewish quarter.

Moving outward, the Western Canal Belt is filled with stately mansions and home to the Anne Frank Huis. The towering Westerkerk, with its famous carillon and pot-bellied crown, is one of Amsterdam's signature buildings. Nearby you'll find the city's most alluring shopping in the Negen Straatjes, a tightly woven web of boutiques and specialist vendors. The houses become larger and more affluent in the Southern Canal Belt, where you'll find party zones around Rembrandtplein and Leidseplein, art and antiques in the Nieuwe Spiegelstraat, and charming shops and restaurants along Utrechtsestraat.

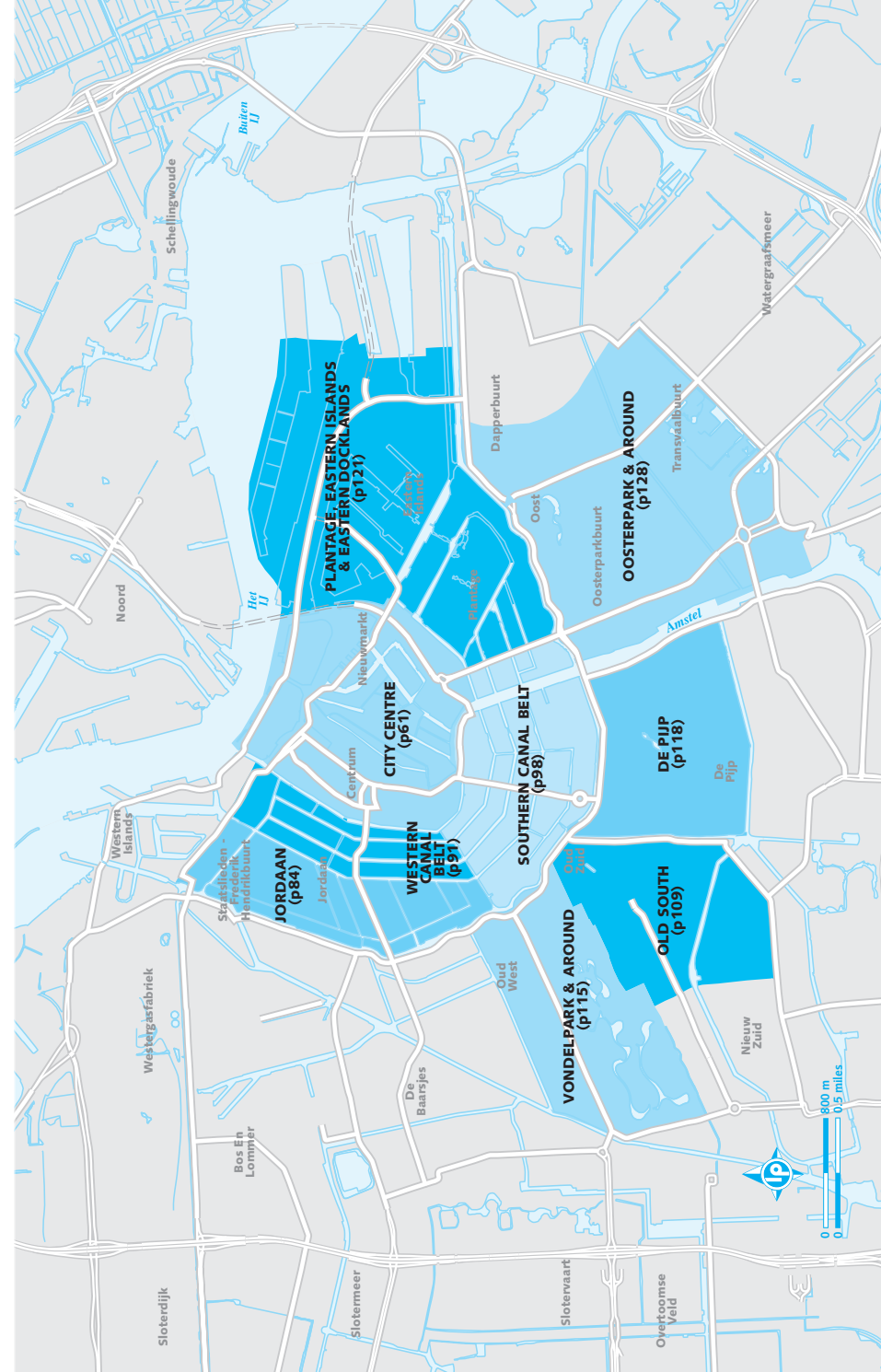
To the west of the Canal Belt, the popular Jordaan is a former workers quarter teeming with cosy pubs, cafés and galleries. Short on conventional sights, yes, but there's no better place to lose yourself for an afternoon's leisurely stroll. The offbeat Pianola Museum located here invites you to step back in musical history.

The Vondelpark is a green lung with personality. This English-style landscape park is replete with quaint features: a teahouse shaped like a flying saucer, a thatched colonial restaurant and a shell-like amphitheatre for summer plays. In fine weather it's always a hive of activity.

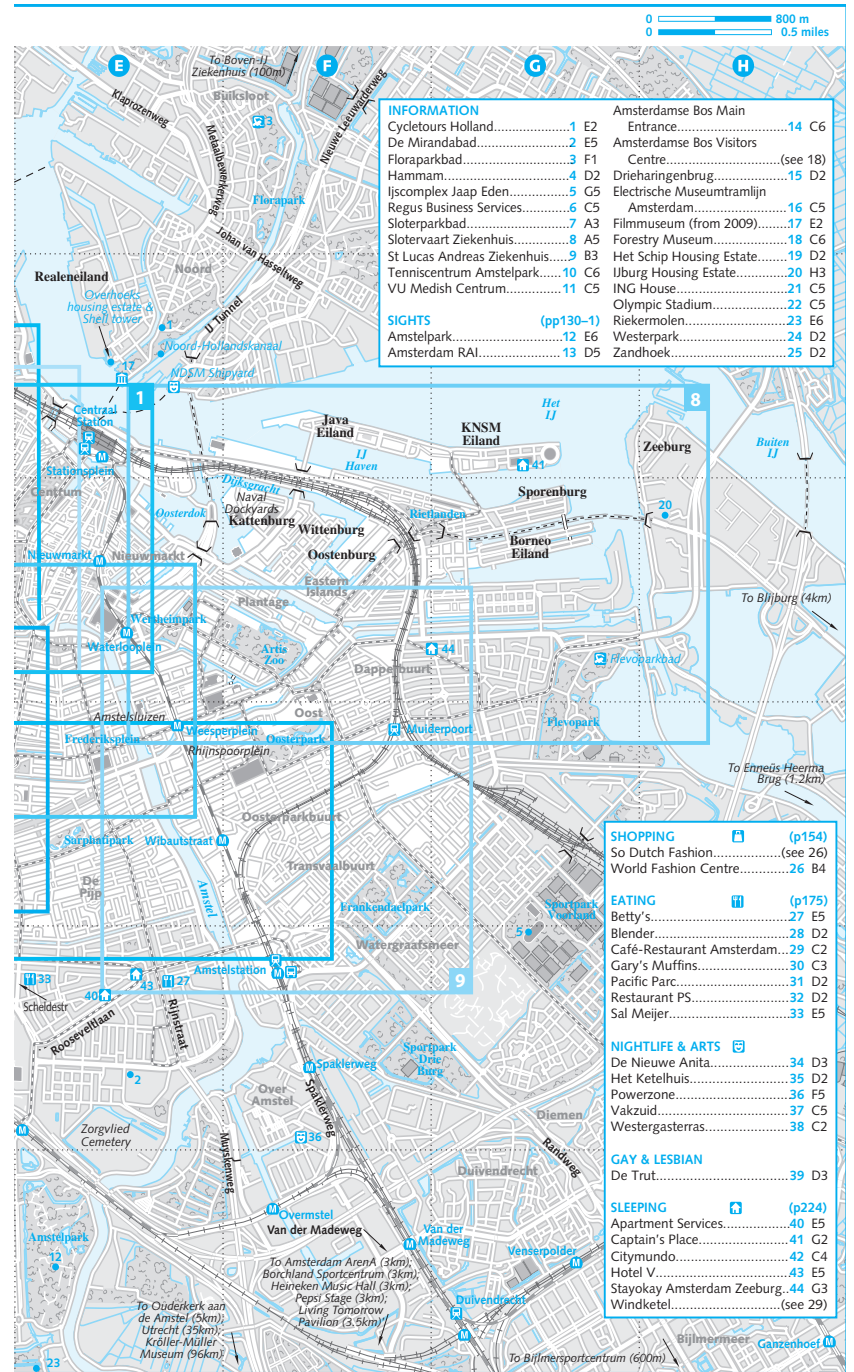
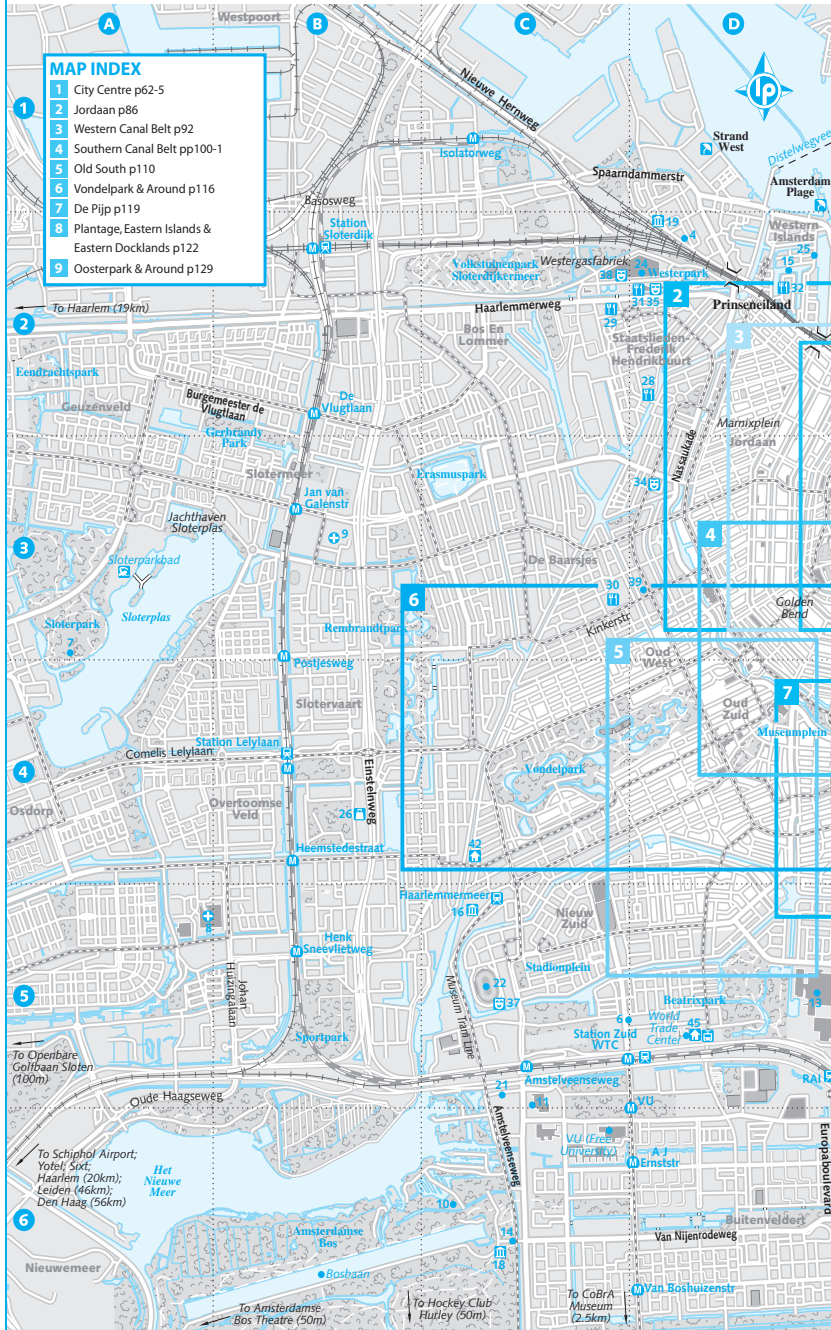
The renowned Van Gogh and Rijksmuseum collections, as well as the Concertgebouw music hall, are in the genteel neighbourhood Old South, a few minutes' walk south of the centre. Amsterdam's well-to-do reside here in handsome villas, and frequent the exclusive garment shops in PC Hoofstraat. Next door, ethnic meets trendy in De Pijp, an up-and-coming neighbourhood with the famed Albert Cuyp Market and eateries serving cuisine from the former colonies.

Immediately to the east of the Southern Canal Belt lies the Plantage, the former gardens that now hosts the lively Artis Zoo, the country's oldest animal park. The district segues into the old warehouse hubs of the Eastern Islands and Eastern Docklands, artificial islands that have been graced with attractive modern buildings such as the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ, a state-of-the-art performance hall. The highlight of the rambling Oosterpark district is the excellent Tropenmuseum.

'You'll find the city's most alluring shopping in the Negen Straatjes, a tightly woven web of boutiques and specialist vendors.'



GREATER AMSTERDAM



ITINERARY BUILDER

The table below allows you to plan a day's worth of activities in any area of the city. Simply select which area you wish to explore, and then mix and match from the corresponding listings to build your day. The first item in each cell represents a well-known highlight of the area, while the other items are more off-the-beaten-track gems.

AREA	ACTIVITIES	Sightseeing	Eating	Drinking & Nightlife
Medieval Centre		Amsterdams Historisch Museum (p68) Nieuwe Kerk (p66) Begijnhof (p68)	Supper Club (p158) Le Petit Latin (p159) Lucius (p158)	Café Dante (p182) Hoppe (p181) Bitterzoet (p196)
Red Light District & Nieuwmarkt		Museum Amstelkring (p75) Oude Kerk (p75) Museum het Rembrandthuis (p78)	Blauw aan de Wal (p160) New King (p160) Hemelse Modder (p161)	Winston Kingdom (p197) Cotton Club (p198) Café de Jaren (p185)
Jordaan		Pianola Museum (p85) Hofjes (courtyards; p85) Johnny Jordaanplein (p84)	Bordewijk (p161) Cinema Paradiso (p162) De Blaffende Vis (p163)	Café 't Smalle (p186) De Prins (p186) Café 't Monumentje (p186)
Western Canal Belt		Anne Frank Huis (p93) Westerkerk (p93) Theater Instituut Nederland (p93)	Christophe (p163) Buffet van Odette (p164) Envy (p164)	Café Het Molenpad (p187) De II Prinsen (p187) Café de Vergulde Gaper (p189)
Southern Canal Belt		FOAM (p99) Bloemenmarkt (p99) Museum Van Loon (p99)	Tujuh Maret (p167) Pata Negra (p168) La Rive (p166)	Oosterling (p189) Sugar Factory (p197) Paradiso (p199)
Old South, Vondelpark & De Pijp		Rijksmuseum (p111) Heineken Experience (p118) Van Gogh Museum (p109)	De Burgermeester (p173) Bazar Amsterdam (p172) Balti House (p172)	Bar Ça (p192) Pilsvogel (p192) Wildschut (p191)
Plantage, Eastern Islands & Eastern Docklands		Artis Zoo (p121) Verzetsmuseum (p123) Hortus Botanicus (p123)	A Tavola (p173) Odessa (p174) Plancius (p173)	KHL (p193) Café Koojse (p193) Brouwerij 't IJ (p192)
Other Districts		Tropenmuseum (p128) CoBRA Museum (p131) Amsterdamse Bos (p131)	Pacific Parc (p175) De Kas (p174) Restaurant PS (p175)	Amstel Haven (p194) Westergasterras (p197) To Night (p197)

CITY CENTRE

Drinking & Smoking p180; Eating p158; Shopping p137; Sleeping p212

The city's golden egg hatched at a weir built across the Amstel river. Two streets called Damrak (p70) and Rokin (p69), which run north and south from the Dam, formed the Amstel's final stretch. East of the Damrak-Rokin axis is the 'Old Side' of medieval Amsterdam, while the west bank is the Nieuwe Zijde (New Side). One of many oddities you'll discover in this quirky city is that the 'New Side' is actually older than the 'Old Side'; their names come from the parishes around the Oude Kerk (Old Church, p75) and the Nieuwe Kerk (New Church, p66).

Although it's hard to imagine now, the Damrak was Amsterdam's first harbour, a long, busy tongue of water where ships unloaded spices, salt and coffee. Soon the ships grew too large for the Dam and tied up to palisades along the outer harbour, and then unloaded onto lighters to be ferried up the canals. Today, Damrak is an agonising stretch of gaudy souvenir and sex shops, exchange bureaux, cheap restaurants and dumpy hotels, although the city is constantly fighting to make it more respectable.

The bottom of the Damrak ends in the Dam (p69), the hallowed spot where the original dam was built. (Put 'Amstel' and 'Dam' together, and you've got the city's name.) South of the Dam, the Damrak sheds its gutter qualities and becomes Rokin. Once a large canal, most of the Rokin was filled in during the 19th century, and quickly distanced itself from the seedy Damrak. It has a number of fine office buildings (including the modern Options Exchange at No 61), prestigious shops (such as the wood-panelled tobacconist Hajenius at No 92) and art dealers.

Amsterdam's notorious Red Light District has been lubricating libidos since the 14th century. Ships would drift into the Oudezijds Achterburgwal canal to unload their wares, and as soon as the ropes were set, the sailors would jump off and head for the next distillery or bordello. Many would squander their earnings in a few weeks and slink back to the ship, cursing their bad luck.

Quicker than you can say *la plus ça change*, you'll see that liquor and sex are still the main squeezes. Only the presentation has got more sophisticated; what seems rough and seedy is actually slick and regulated. It's a big money-spinner so the city does its best to keep everybody happy. If you'd like to get a taste of the Red Light District without going all the way, take a quick walk down Oude Nieuwstraat.

A main artery of the Red Light District is Zeedijk (p76), the original sea dyke that guided sailors from the mouth of the Amstel to Nieuwmarkt Square. The street was the first port of call after long sea voyages, and has a colourful history stocked with volumes of wine, women and song. Its great variety of entertainment – including brown cafés, gay bars, late-night hang-outs and music clubs – means it's buzzing pretty much around the clock. The Zeedijk used to be a virtual no-go area, but today it's quite safe thanks to the surveillance cameras and frequent police patrols.

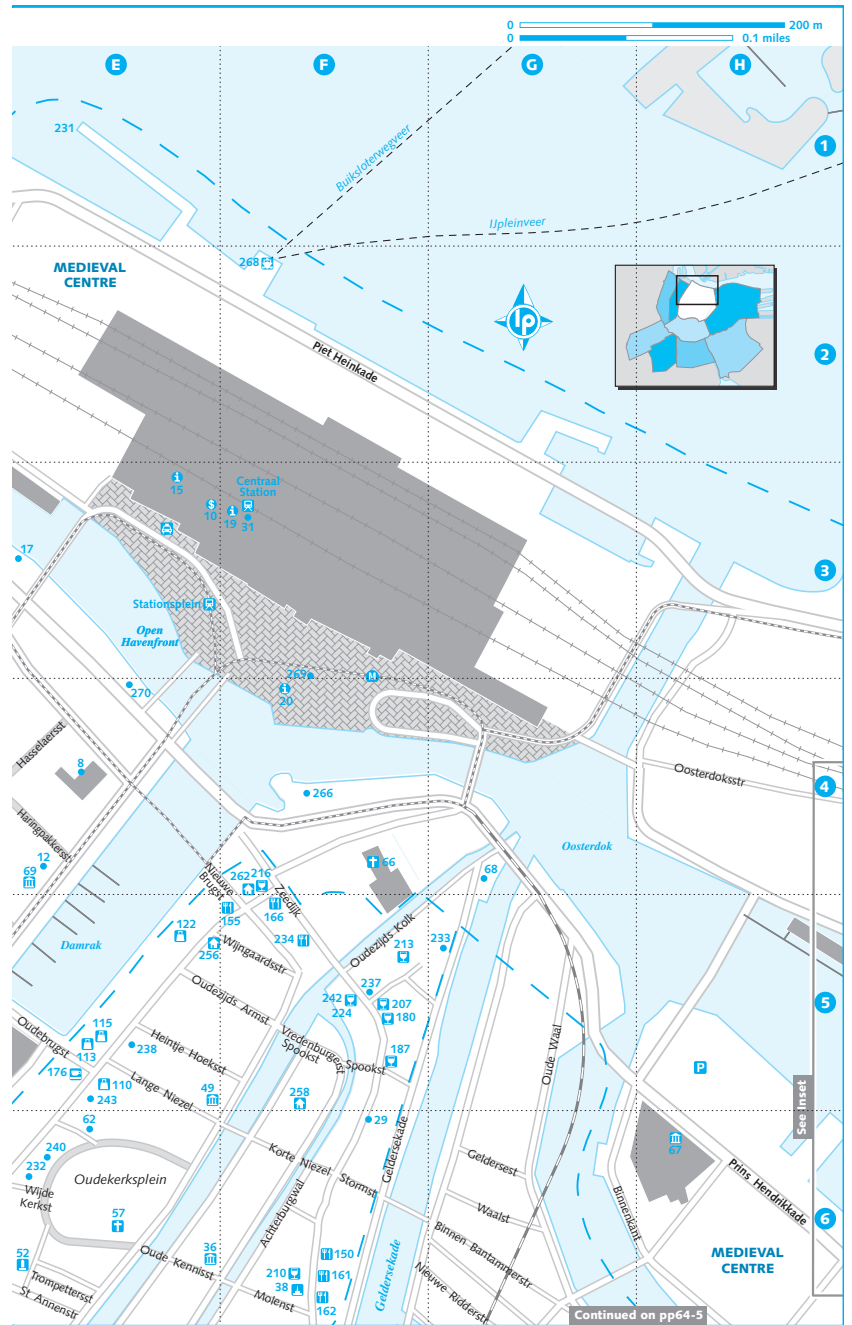
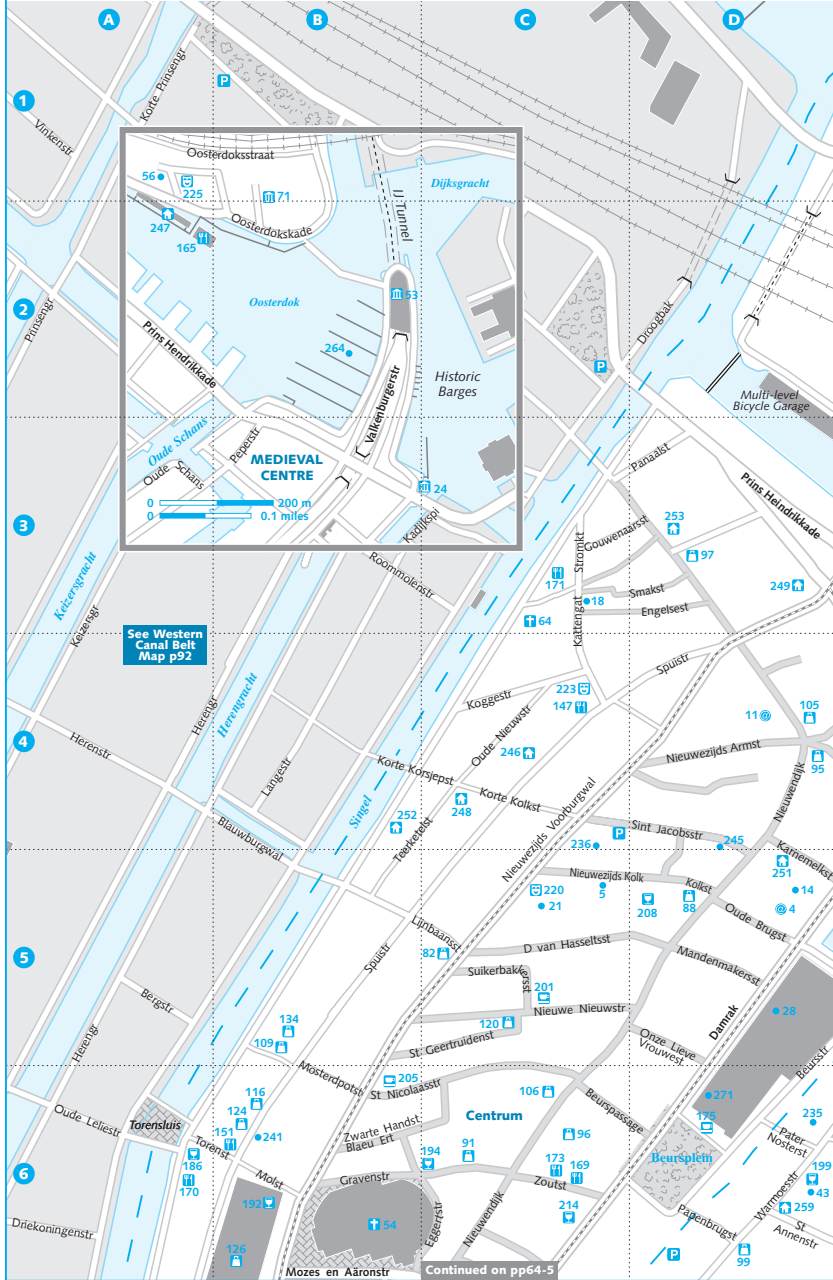
Nieuwmarkt is a district as historic as anything you'll find in Amsterdam – Rembrandt painted canalscapes here, and Jewish merchants generated a fair share of the city's wealth – yet many locals associate it with recent conflict. In the 1970s Nieuwmarkt's reputation had bottomed out. It had become the centre of Amsterdam's heroin trade, and drug dealers and mobsters controlled the streets. Things got so bad that the mayor basically threw in the towel, recommending people visit a miniature model of Nieuwmarkt (at the Madurodam amusement park near Den Haag) rather than risking personal harm.

As if that wasn't enough, a bitter conflict emerged over plans for a new metro line that would require the destruction of many homes. (Just for the record, the city won.) For a reminder, check out the giant black-and-white photos in the metro station at Nieuwmarkt.

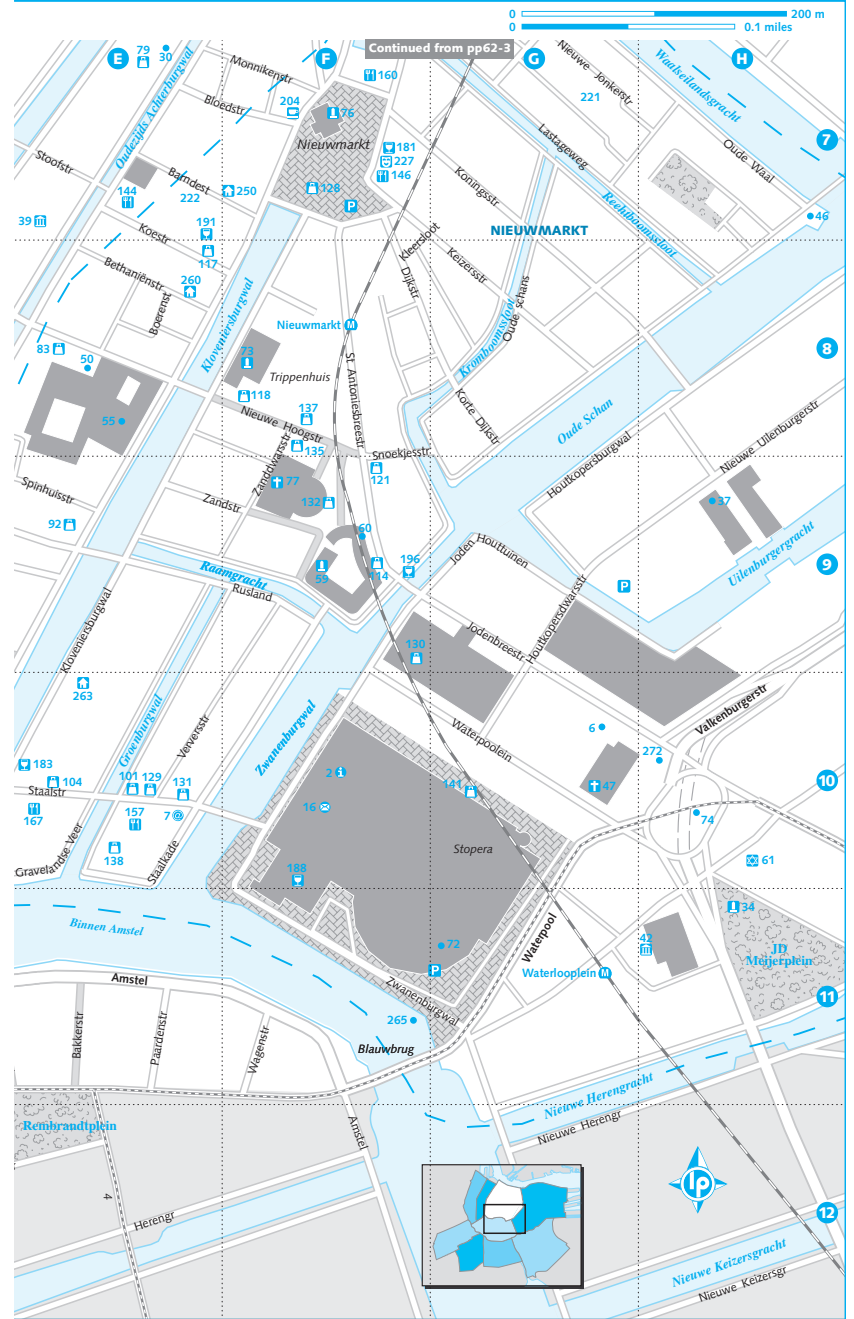
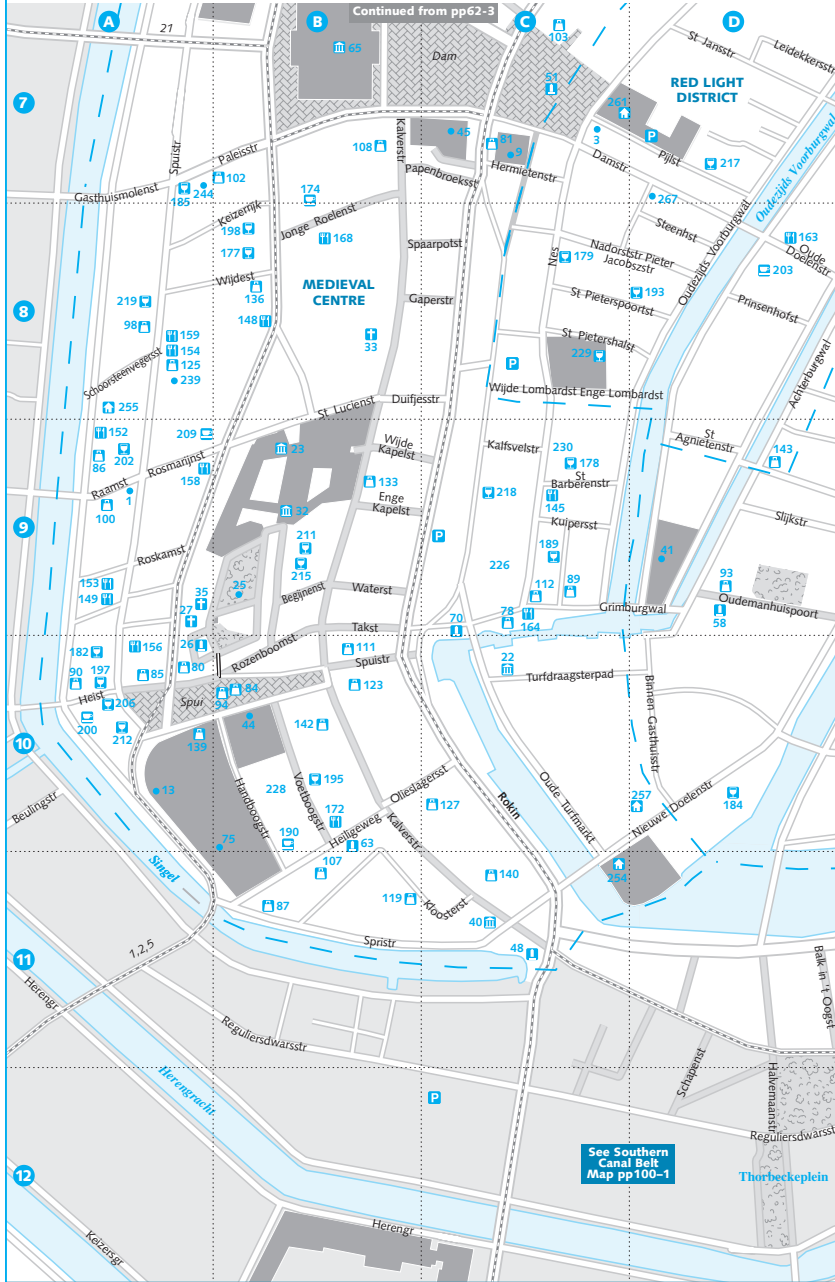
The turning point came when a policeman was murdered by a drug addict – not the best advertisement for a city just getting its head around the tourist trade. The police stepped in and the Nieuwmarkt was saved, not just in miniature. You might still encounter junkies, particularly along Geldersekaade to the north of the square, but nowadays they're few and far between.

The area southeast of here, the 'new' canals (Nieuwe Herengracht, Nieuwe Keizersgracht and Nieuwe Prinsengracht), intersected by the Weesperstraat traffic artery, was where the canal-belt project petered out around 1700. The canals on this far side of the Amstel were less in demand among the city's wealthy residents, and went to charities or were settled by well-off Jews from the Jewish quarter.

CITY CENTRE



CITY CENTRE (continued)



CITY CENTRE

INFORMATION		Mozen en Aäronkerk.....	47	G10	Book Market.....	94	B10	
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Dam Apothek.....	3	Museum Het Rembrandthuis.....	50	E8	Chills & Thrills.....	97	D3	
easyInternetcafé.....	4	Nationaal Monument.....	51	C7	Concrete.....	98	A8	
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goPengo.....	7	Nieuwe Kerk.....	54	B8	De Beestenwinkel.....	101	E10	
GWK Travelx.....	8	Oostindisch Huis.....	55	E6	De Bierkoning.....	102	B7	
GWK Travelx.....	9	Openbare Bibliotheek	56	A1	De Bijenkorf.....	103	C7	
GWK Travelx.....	10	Amsterdam.....	56	A1	Drrog Design.....	104	E10	
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		Statue of Queen Wilhelmina.....	70	C9	Joe's Vliegerwinkel.....	118	F8	
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		Book Market.....	93	D9				

MEDIEVAL CENTRE

The charming thing about Amsterdam's medieval heart is its remarkable state of preservation. The city steadily grew in layers around the leaf-shaped harbour, and although there have been countless changes – various canals have been filled in and modern streets like Kalverstraat scarcely betray their gritty roots – the overall layout and dimensions are little changed since the 17th century. The

happy result? The district has the air of a living museum, and certain vistas look cut out of a Golden Age landscape.

NIEUWE KERK Map pp62-5

New Church; ☎ 638 69 09; www.nieuwekerk.nl; **the Dam; adult/child under 6yr/child 6-15yr €10/free/7.50;** ☎ 10am-6pm Fri-Wed, to 10pm Thu On the Dam, this 14th-century basilica is the historic stage of Dutch coronations; the stained glass over the main entrance

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Haesje Claes.....	153	A9	Diep.....	198	B8	Internale.....	239	
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Kam Yin.....	155	F5	Dutch Flowers.....	200	A10	Prik.....	241	
Kantijl to Go.....	156	A10	El Guapo.....	201	C5	Queen's Head.....	242	
Krua Thai.....	157	E10	Gollem.....	202	A9	Rob.....	243	
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Nam Kee.....	161	F6	Fantasy.....	205	B6	SLEEPING	(pp212-14)	
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Sterk Staaltje.....	167	E10	Lokaal 't Loosje.....	211	B9	Flying Pig Downtown	Hostel.....	
Supper Club.....	168	B8	Luxembourg.....	212	A10	Hotel Brian.....	252	
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Village Bagels.....	171	C3	Pilsener Club.....	215	B9	Hotel Hoksbergen.....	255	
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Café Dante.....	182	A10	Dansen bij Jansen.....	228	B10	De Brakke Gronde.....	229	
Café de Doelen.....	183	E10	De Brakke Gronde.....	229	C8	Frascati.....	230	
Café de Jaren.....	184	D10	Café-Restaurant	Dantzig.....	188	F10	Muziektheater.....	(see 72)
Café Het Schuim.....	185	A7						
Café van Zuylen.....	186	A6						
Café Zilt.....	187	F5						

recalls Queen Wilhelmina, who ascended the throne in 1898, aged 18. Exhibitions and organ concerts are held here, but it no longer functions as a church.

The interior is plain, but several key furnishings – the magnificent oak chancel, the bronze choir screen and the massive gilded organ (1645) – alone justify a visit. Naval hero Admiral Michiel de Ruijter, as well as poets Joost van den Vondel and Pieter Cornelisz Hooft are among the luminaries buried here.

ROYAL PALACE Map pp62-5

Koninklijk Paleis; ☎ 620 40 60; www.koninklijkhuis.nl; **the Dam; adult/child under 6yr/child 6-16yr & senior €4.50/free/3.60, adult ticket with audio tour €6.50**

Today's Koninklijk Paleis began life as a glorified *stadhuis* (town hall) of republican Amsterdam, completed in 1665. The architect, Jacob van Campen, spared no expense to display Amsterdam's wealth in a way that rivalled the grandest European buildings of

top picks

MEDIEVAL CENTRE

- **Nieuwe Kerk** (p66) Take in a concert or an exhibition at the coronation church of Dutch royalty.
- **Royal Palace** (p67) Feel positively regal inside the lavishly decorated salons.
- **Civic Guard Gallery** (below) See the original giants of Dutch homeland security in ruff collars.
- **Begijnhof** (right) Spend a quiet interlude in this courtyard of historic almshouses and churches.
- **Amsterdams Historisch Museum** (right) Follow the twists and turns of city history over seven eventful centuries.

the day. The great *burgerzaal* (citizens hall) that occupies the heart of the building was envisioned as a schematic of the world, with Amsterdam as its centre. Look carefully and you'll see motifs representing the four elements: birds (air), fish (water), fruit (earth) and fire. On the far wall, a clock is constantly set to 11 o'clock, indicating that justice is possible even at the last hour.

Also worth noting are the balcony room, from where important announcements were made, and the council chamber, with its elaborate paintings and murals depicting themes of giving advice, including owls and a Jacob de Wit painting of Moses.

A century and a half after it was built, the building became the palace of King Louis, Napoleon Bonaparte's brother. In a classic slip-up in the new lingo, French-born Louis told his subjects here that he was the 'rabbit (*konijn*) of Holland', whereas he meant 'king' (*konink*). Napoleon dismissed him two years later.

The building later passed to the House of Orange before the national government bought it in 1935. Officially Queen Beatrix lives here and pays a symbolic rent, though she really lives in Den Haag.

At the time of writing, the Palace was closed till mid-2008 for a revamp; ring or check the website for updates.

CIVIC GUARD GALLERY Map pp62-5

☎ 523 18 22; Kalverstraat 92; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun

The enormous tableaux here are exclusively of medieval guards in group portraits, a captivating subgenre of Dutch painting.

Divisions such as *voetboog* (large cross-bow) and *kloveniers* (hackbut) protected the city and played a large part in deposing the Spanish government. Technically, every man had to serve in these guard units, although participation in the portraits was voluntary, as each member paid his own way. The size of the paintings was determined by the wall space in the guardhouses where the portraits were to be hung. Together with the Rijksmuseum's collection, this display is the largest of its kind and definitely not to be missed.

BEGIJNHOF Map pp62-5

☎ 622 19 18; www.begijnhofamsterdam.nl; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm

This enclosed former convent dates from the early 14th century. It's a surreal oasis of peace, with tiny houses and postage-stamp gardens around a well-kept courtyard.

The Beguines were a Catholic order of unmarried or widowed women who cared for the elderly and lived a religious life without taking monastic vows. The last true Beguine died in the 1970s.

Contained within the *hof* is the charming **Begijnhof Kapel**, a 'clandestine' chapel where the Beguines were forced to worship after their Gothic church was taken away by the Calvinists. Go through the dogleg entrance to find marble columns, wooden pews, paintings and stained-glass windows commemorating the Miracle of Amsterdam.

The other church in the Begijnhof is known as the **Engelse Kerk** (English Church), built around 1392. It was eventually rented out to the local community of English and Scottish Presbyterian refugees – the Pilgrim Fathers worshipped here – and still serves as the city's Presbyterian church.

Also note the house at No 34; it dates from around 1425, making it the oldest preserved wooden house in the country.

AMSTERDAMS HISTORISCH MUSEUM Map pp62-5

Amsterdam Historical Museum; ☎ 523 18 22; www.ahm.nl; Kalverstraat 92; adult/child under 6yr/child 6-18yr €7/free/3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun

Housed in the old civic orphanage, this museum takes you through all the fascinating twists and turns in Amsterdam's convoluted history. Begin with the large-screen TV depicting an aerial view of the city's evolution,

from tiny settlement on the mouth of the Amstel, as it was filled in to create the metropolis. You'll find models of old homes, religious objects (including some relating to the Miracle of Amsterdam; see the boxed text, p73) and a detailed history of Dutch commerce. Later sections cover the world wars, the spread of bicycle use and even a re-creation of the original Café Het Mandje, a touchstone in the gay-rights movement.

Outside, be sure to visit the courtyard (note the cupboards in which the orphans stored their possessions) and view the amazing portraits in the **Civic Guard Gallery** (opposite).

DAM Map pp62-5

The southern part of this famous square was the divine spot where Amsterdam was founded around 1270, and the rest is chequered history. But few people know that long before it hosted fun fairs, the square was split into sections called *Vissersdam*, a fish market where the *Bijenkorf* department store now stands, and *Vijgendam*, probably named for the figs and other exotic fruits unloaded from ships. Markets and events have been held here through the ages, including executions – you can still see holes on the front of the Royal Palace where the wooden gallows were affixed. From the 19th century onward the Dam became a sort of national square, meaning that when there's a major speech or demonstration, it's held here.

BEURS VAN BERLAGE Map pp62-5

☎ 530 41 41; Damrak 243

Named after architect HP Berlage (see p51), this landmark building from 1903 was once the leading stock and commodities exchange. The plans show Berlage's humour and an almost perverse willingness to show the guts of a building, such as the exposed steel struts and giant screws of the main hall. Trading quickly outgrew the *beurs*, however, and moved to the nearby Effectenbeurs less than two decades later.

The Beurs van Berlage is now home to the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra and hosts museum exhibitions. In the *Beurs' B van B Café* (p182), stop to ponder the 1903 murals by Jan Toorop, representing past, present and future.

ROKIN Map pp62-5

South of the Dam, this street is part of the route most visitors take from Centraal

Station into town, the name being a corruption of '*Rak-in*', or inward reach. In the early 16th century, the northern part was the site of the first Amsterdam stock exchange, which played a big part in spinning Golden Age riches. The *Rokin* is now in the grip of the underground construction of a new metro line, which has brought forth a number of archaeological finds from the Amstel's old river bed. At the intersection of *Rokin* and *Grimburgwal* stands a **statue of Queen Wilhelmina** on horseback, a reminder of the monarch's trots through Amsterdam during official processions.

SPUI Map pp62-5

Flanked by bookshops and cafés, this broad square split by tramlines is most closely associated with the 1960s, where the 'Provos' (p70), of the political counterculture, staged some of their mischievous pranks. The statue in the middle is of a playful urchin called *Lieverdje* (Little Darling), a gift from a cigarette company. The Spui was a body of water until the 1880s, and is now the site of Sunday book and art markets (see p151).

STEDELJK MUSEUM CS Map pp62-5

☎ 573 29 11; www.stedelijk.nl; 2nd & 3rd fl, Post CS Bldg, Oosterdokskade 5; adult/child under 7yr/child 7-16yr & senior €9/free/4.50; ☎ 10am-6pm

The modern classics here are among the world's most admired, amassed with great skill by postwar curator Willem Sandberg. The permanent collection includes all the blue chips of 19th and 20th century painting – Monet, Van Gogh and Picasso among them – as well as sculptures by Rodin, abstracts by Mondriaan and Kandinsky, and much, much more.

For the time being, only temporary exhibitions are held in this former post-office tower. At the time of writing it was due to close in October 2008, but selected treasures will be exhibited at different venues including the Van Gogh Museum through to the end of 2009, when the main **Stedelijk Museum building** (p113) on Museumplein is set to reopen after a lengthy renovation.

NEMO Map pp62-5

☎ 531 32 33; www.e-nemo.nl; Oosterdok 2; adult/child under 4yr/student €11.50/free/6.50;

☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, plus Mon Jul & Aug

Perched atop the entrance to the IJ-Tunnel is the wedge-shaped museum of science

THE PROVOS & THEIR PRANKS

In the Swinging '60s the Dutch had their own brand of hippies called 'Provos'. They sought to provoke – no surprise there – and their impish antics caught the imagination of a society seeking to renew itself.

The Provos were led by Robert Jasper Grootveld, a self-appointed shaman, window-washer and antimoking activist. The great supremo had no problem with marijuana, however, as he and his stoned disciples would chant mantras against Big Tobacco and consumer society at get-togethers in Grootveld's garage, near Leidseplein. There was no shortage of bizarre hangers-on, such as Bart Huges, who drilled a 'third eye' in his forehead to expand his consciousness. Amsterdam, the city 'full of refrigerators and food mixers', was set for a showdown.

Every week during the summer of 1965, the Provos would gather on the Spui at the *Lieverdje* statue (see p69) to perform their 'street pranks'. The throngs of young, flower-bearing, guitar-wielding followers would chant their nonsensical slogans around Grootveld, who dressed as a medicine man. Surprised police responded with the baton and brutal arrests, and soon the entire country was engaged in a heated debate for and against the authorities.

The generation gap was only part of it: many older people who were uneasy about how little Dutch society had changed since WWII came out in favour of the Provos and could not understand why the authorities had so completely lost the plot.

Throughout 1965 and 1966 the Provos launched a series of 'White Plans' to protect the environment, including the famous White Bicycle Plan. The idea was to alleviate traffic congestion by dispensing free white bicycles, to be stationed around town. To kick-start the programme, the Provos donated the first two-wheeler, which was promptly confiscated by the police.

Provos were also behind the 1966 riot over the wedding of Princess Beatrix to the German diplomat Claus von Amsberg, who had served in Hitler's army. Despite the tight security, a live chicken was hurled at the royal coach and smoke bombs were ignited as the procession made its way along Raadhuisstraat.

In 1967 the Provos dissolved, saying their goal of making people sit up and think had been met. Grootveld went on to found the absurdist *Kabouterbeweging* (Garden Gnomes Movement) and continued to rail against consumerism.

and technology, the largest in the Netherlands. Italian architect Renzo Piano (whose works also include the Centre Pompidou in Paris) conceived of this design as the inverse of the tunnel below it.

It's really meant for kids, but grown-ups will probably enjoy it too. There are loads of interactive exhibits, drawing with a laser, 'anti-gravity' trick mirrors and a 'lab' where you can answer such questions as 'How black is black?' and 'How do you make cheese?' Signage is in English and Dutch.

In summer, the terraced rooftop plaza hosts **Nemo Beach** (admission €2.50, with NEMO admission free; ☎ vary). The 'beach' itself is actually a rather elaborate sandbox occupying just a small section of the roof, but further up DJs spin, and there's a bar, a convivial atmosphere and nice views.

ARCAM Map pp62-5

Stichting Architectuur Centrum Amsterdam; ☎ 620 48 78; www.arcam.nl; Prins Hendrikkade 600; admission free; ☎ 1-5pm Tue-Sat

This showpiece building of the Amsterdam Architecture Foundation is a one-stop shop for all your architectural needs. Exhibits vary, but you are sure to find books, guide maps, suggestions for tours on foot, by bike and by public transport, and reference

materials on just about anything built in town from early history to the very latest housing development. Among the best titles are *25 Buildings You Should Have Seen* and *Eastern Docklands Map*.

DAMRAK Map pp62-5

The Damrak is the original mouth of the Amstel river in Amsterdam – 'rak' being a reach, or straight stretch of water – and the river flowed from a lock in the **Dam** (p69) into the IJ. In the 19th century the canal was filled in, except for the canal-boats docks on the east side. The gabled houses backing onto the water are among the town's most picturesque. The west side of Damrak is like a giant stretch of flypaper, with cheap tourist hotels, fast-food restaurants and souvenir shops ready to catch visitors arriving at Centraal Station. In 2002 the city removed some of the gaudiest signs for the royal wedding of Maxima and Prince Willem-Alexander.

CENTRAAL STATION Map pp62-5

Stationsplein

Built on an artificial island in 1889, the Centraal Station (Amsterdam CS, to train travellers) was designed as a neo-Renaissance 'curtain', a controversial plan that effectively cut off Amsterdam from the

IJ river. One of the architects, PJ Cuypers, also designed the **Rijksmuseum** (p111), and you can see the similarities – in the square faux-Gothic towers, the fine red brick and the abundant reliefs, for sailing, trade and industry. The garage in the right-hand wing was built to shelter the Dutch royal carriage, but it's rarely there (read: never).

As for all that construction, it's for another Amsterdam master traffic plan. By 2013 the inner harbour will be enlarged, the station square pedestrianised, and buses and trams rerouted to a new terminal in the rear.

ST NICOLAASKERK Map pp62-5

☎ 624 87 49; Prins Hendrikkade 73; admission free; ☎ 11am-4pm Tue-Sat, noon-3pm Mon, worship services 10.30am & 1pm Sun, 12.30pm Mon-Sat In plain view from Centraal Station, the magnificent cupola and neo-Renaissance towers belong to the city's main Catholic church, the first built after Catholic worship became legal again in the 19th century. The interior is notable for its high altar, the theatrical crown of Emperor Maximilian I and depictions of the Stations of the Cross, on which tireless painter Jan Dunselman laboured for 40 years. St Nicholas is the patron saint of seafarers, so the church became an important symbol for Amsterdam.

SEXMUSEUM AMSTERDAM Map pp62-5

☎ 622 83 76; www.sexmuseumamsterdam.nl; Damrak 18; admission €2.50, age 16yr & over; ☎ 10am-11.30pm

Even if it seems rather tame in this environment, the Sexmuseum gets loads of visitors and if you're in the right mood it's good for a giggle. You'll find replicas of pornographic Pompeian plates, erotic 14th-century Viennese bronzes, some of the world's earliest nude photographs, a music box that plays 'Edelweiss' and purports to show a couple *in flagrante delicto*, and an eerie mannequin of Marilyn Monroe re-enacting the sidewalk-grate scene from *The Seven Year Itch*. The route takes you through a 'bondage room' ('You could be shocked', a sign warns).

OPENBARE BIBLIOTHEEK AMSTERDAM Map pp62-5

Amsterdam Public Library; ☎ 523 09 00; www.oba.nl; Oosterdoksade 143; ☎ 10am-10pm Unveiled with great fanfare in 2007, this pleasingly symmetrical, nine-storey 'tower of knowledge' (its self-appointed nickname)

is the country's largest library and has claimed a commanding spot on Amsterdam's increasingly modern landscape. Much of the excitement is visual: as you enter, marvel at the airy lobby with its 30m-high gallery. Big, inviting couches sit before picture windows on the 7th floor, and the view from the Oosterdok over the city is magnificent. There's also free web access.

SCHEEPVAARTHUIS Map pp62-5

Shipping House; Prins Hendrikkade 108

The imposing Scheepvaarthuis was built in 1916 for a consortium of shipping companies. Utilising the street layout to resemble a ship's bow, this remarkable building was the first true example of Amsterdam School style (see p51). The prow-like front is crowned by a statue of Neptune, his wife and four female figures that represent the points of the compass. The window frames, entrances and interior walls display nautical imagery such as anchors and sailing ships. The building is now refurbished as a luxury hotel. Step inside to admire the intricate wrought ironwork and stained glass of the majestic central stairwell.

MADAME TUSSAUDS AMSTERDAM

Map pp62-5
☎ 522 10 10; www.madametussauds.nl; Dam 20; adult/child/senior €19.95/free/14.95; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Sep-Jun, to 9pm Jul & Aug, A delight for kids, who will be filled with wonderment when they realise there is absolutely no difference between the wax David Beckham and the real thing. The place is kind of a bellwether of who's hot in Holland, be it Tiësto (a DJ), Ali B (a rapper) or Princess Maxima. And you can decide for yourself whether Prince Willem-Alexander looks fit to rule or not.

NATIONAAL MONUMENT Map pp62-5

Dam
This is the Netherlands' best-known memorial to its fallen of WWII, a 22m pylon of concrete and travertine unveiled in 1956. Fronted by two lions, its pedestal has a number of symbolic statues: four males (war), a woman with child (peace), and men with dogs (resistance). The 12 urns at the rear hold earth from war cemeteries of the 11 provinces and the Dutch East Indies. The war dead are still honoured here at a ceremony every 4 May.

AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO AMSTERDAM, PART 1: STEVE KORVER *Simon Sellars*

Steve Korver is the editor of the super periodical *Amsterdam Weekly* and the irreverent and informative *Time Out Amsterdam*. Who could be better qualified, then, to give me the inside dirt on this wonderful city?

What's your favourite part of Amsterdam?

It varies and stretches further afield day by day as the inner city gets more and more 'organised'. I like those funky bits that were always easy to find in De Pijp and Jordaan and along the waterfront but are now getting scrubbed cleaner than clean. But the stereotypes are still nice: the canal girdle remains one of the planet's most painfully scenic places, especially when the water glows purple just before dawn.

Speaking of stereotypes, what's the least applicable?

The whole sex, drugs and rock'n'roll thang – it's there but mostly for the tourists.

Has Theo van Gogh's assassination (see the boxed text, p44) changed the disposition of Amsterdam and its people as much as we've been led to believe?

It was our September 11 – it only took that one death in this tiny country to have a similar effect. But after the initial hysteria flamed by populist politicians, things have mellowed and people are doing what they've done here forever: gathered as many parties around a table to talk, talk, talk... and, hopefully, hash out solutions.

Do you have a favourite 'Amsterdam experience'?

Shooting the shit with friends on a terrace on one of those first sunny days of spring.

Your favourite nightspot?

I'm not telling. Everyone's got to find their own. But do try to go local rather than endlessly circling around the Red Light District's inner pit. The Melkweg and Paradiso still rule, but there are a lot of new, smaller venues like Sugar Factory, Bitterzoet and Nieuwe Anita that are pumping both live music and good ol' fashioned cosiness back into the mix. As for coffee shops, remember: you can do takeaway, kids!

Any foodie tips?

Fish stalls, for deep-throating herring – the poor, working person's sushi. Perfect for people on the move.

Can you tell me Amsterdam's best-kept secret?

Nope.

What are your favourite local slang or swear words?

Too many to list: just pick a disease, any disease. It's ever evolving, here: today's curse is tomorrow's Ajax football chant.

'Amsterdam equals bicycles' – so says the tourist board. What's the downside?

Tourists on bikes thinking they are in Disneyland, totally oblivious to the fact that basic traffic rules and precautions are just as relevant here as in any other city. Just because it all looks so cute, it doesn't mean you can't become road pizza. The same goes for pedestrians. And it's not just stoned backpackers – visitors just forget to look both ways before crossing a street. Theories abound as to why, but I haven't figured it out yet.

How has living in Amsterdam changed you?

It's probably slowed me down to enjoy the smaller, more social things in life – doing business over a coffee and a beer instead of over a desk.

Describe Amsterdam Weekly for someone new to it.

We are an English-language alternative weekly but we still use plenty of Dutch – especially when it's funny. We seek to be attached to the city and not detached. Our prime directive is to provide a paper for culturally savvy Amsterdammers to help plan their wacky weekends and go deeper into the cultural workings of this very special city. Oh, and we like to kick city hall's ass on occasion, whenever they think they can change things from above and not from the ground up. We aim to be the voice of the grassroots, the subcultures that are always busy bubbling up towards the surface. We just try to catch them when they're a little less moist.

MAGNA PLAZA *Map pp62-5*

☎ 626 91 99; Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 182;

🕒 11am-7pm Mon, 10am-7pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat, 10am-9pm Thu, noon-7pm Sun

This shimmering orange-and-white edifice was the General Post Office, built from

1895 to 1899 by the government architect CH Peters, a pupil of Pierre Cuypers. It has since been converted into a multilevel shopping mall with chain boutiques, but the hall remains impressive: three storeys of colonnades and an airy, skylit atrium.

RONDE LUTHERSE KERK *Map pp62-5*

Round Lutheran Church; ☎ 623 15 72; Singel 11; admission free; 🕒 9am-1pm Mon-Fri & Sun

This domed church, built from 1668 to 1671, has the curious distinction of being the only round Protestant church in the country. Falling attendances forced its closure in 1936, and it now serves as a conference centre for the nearby Renaissance Hotel. Ironically, the old church on the Spui that it was designed to replace is still in use.

Next door along the east side of Singel, the house at No 7 appears to be no wider than its door – except that this is actually the rear entrance of a house of normal proportions.

HEILIGEWEG *Map pp62-5*

Leading west from Kalverstraat, the Heiligeweg (Holy Way) was once part of a route pilgrims took to the spot where the Miracle of Amsterdam occurred (see the boxed text, below). It's now a shopping street, but slightly less frenetic than Kalverstraat. Halfway along, and directly opposite Voetboogstraat, you'll see the **Rasphuis Gate**, a correctional institute in medieval times. The pedestal bears the sculpture of a woman with two criminals chained at her side, under the Latin word *Castigatio* (punishment). Below, wolves and lions shrink before her whip.

HET ORANJE VOETBAL MUSEUM

Map pp62-5

☎ 589 89 89; www.supportersclub-oranje.nl; Kalverstraat 236; adult/child €7/5; 🕒 11am-5pm Sat & Sun

Here you'll find out why, for many Dutch, football isn't a matter of life or death – it's more important than that. Spread over four hallowed floors, this museum tells the story of Orange maestros including Cruyff, Van Basten and Gullit, and the revolution that

was Total Football. A tiny cinema shows a 20-minute film with some immortal footage, and hard-core fans can listen to recordings of 100 Orange songs. The downstairs shop is stocked with souvenirs in your favourite colour.

KALVERSTRAAT *Map pp62-5*

You're sure to end up on this crowded street at some point, so we might as well mention it. Named after the livestock markets held here in the 17th century, the Kalverstraat is now a place where shoppers lather themselves into a fever pitch over the latest sales. (The Dutch Monopoly game has Kalverstraat as its most expensive street.) An unexpected oasis in this sea of consumerism is the curious Petrus en Pauluskerk, aka **Papagai** (*Map pp62-5*; ☎ 623 18 89; Kalverstraat 58; 🕒 10am-4pm), a Catholic church from the 17th century that was a clandestine house of worship. Note the parrot over the door that gave the church its funny name. The slogan you'll see upon entering: 15 minutes for God.

ALLARD PIERSON MUSEUM

Map pp62-5

☎ 525 25 56; www.allartpiersonmuseum.nl; Oude Turfmarkt 127; adult/child under 4yr/child 4-16yr & senior €5/free/2.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun

Run by the University of Amsterdam, this museum boasts one of the world's richest archaeological collections. You'll find an actual mummy, vases from ancient Greece and Mesopotamia, a very cool wagon from the royal tombs at Salamis (Cyprus), and galleries full of other items providing insight into daily life in ancient times. Each section is explained in a detailed overview via English signage, although most individual items are labelled in Dutch only.

VOMITING THE HOST

The Miracle of Amsterdam had a rather unappetising start.

In 1345 the final sacrament was administered to a dying man, but he was unable to keep down the Host (communion wafer) and – there's no way to put this delicately – vomited it up. Here's the miracle part: when the vomit was thrown on the fire, the Host would not burn. Shortly thereafter, a chapel (demolished 1908) was built on the site across Kalverstraat from what's now the museum and it soon became a pilgrimage area; the final approach is along the street now known as Heiligeweg.

In the Amsterdams Historisch Museum is a wooden chest reported to have once contained the Host. In 1578, when Catholic property was parcelled out, the chest ended up in an orphanage, and several children are said to have been cured of illnesses by sitting on it.

FROM OUD AMSTERDAM TO NIEUW AMSTERDAM

Among the wall plaques on the Schreierstoren, one explains that the English captain Henry Hudson set sail from here in 1609 in his ship the *Halve Maen* (Half Moon). The Dutch East India Company had enlisted him to find a northern passage to the East Indies, but instead he ended up exploring the North American river that now bears his name. On the return voyage his ship was seized in England and he was forbidden to sail again to a foreign nation.

The maverick Hudson disregarded the order. Commissioned by powerful private investors from Britain and Russia, he sailed to America in search of the elusive Northwest Passage. Though an accomplished navigator, the headstrong Hudson hardly endeared himself to his crew, who mutinied in the summer of 1611. The hapless Englishman and a handful of others were set adrift in a rowboat in what's now known as Hudson Bay, where they are presumed to have died.

In any event, Hudson's reports about the island at the mouth of the Hudson River made it back to base. The Dutch soon established a fort on an island called Manhattan that flowered into a settlement called Nieuw Amsterdam; in 1626 an agent of the recently established Dutch West India Company purchased the island from Native Americans for 60 guilders (often cited as the equivalent of US\$24!). In 1664 the West India Company's local governor, the imperious, fanatically Calvinist Pieter Stuyvesant, surrendered the town to the British, who promptly renamed it New York. Stuyvesant retired to the Lower Manhattan market garden called Bouwerij, now known as the Bowery.

Fun fact: Manhattan's Wall St, one of the centres of world finance, was originally the site of a fortified wall erected by the Dutch to keep out the British.

It may not be in the same league as the British Museum or the Louvre, but the manageable scale of this museum makes it far more accessible.

UNIVERSITY LIBRARY [Map pp62-5](#)

☎ 525 23 01; Singel 421-425; 🕒 8.30am-midnight Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun

Today's library is a concrete hulk, not nearly the beautiful building you'd expect from such a historic site, but its background is fascinating. Citizens militias used to meet here: the 'hand-bow' (*handboog*) militia in No 421, and the 'foot-bow' (*voetboog*) militia in No 425, which also served as headquarters for the West India Company. Now you know where the names of the nearby streets Handboogstraat and Voetboogstraat come from. Their firing ranges at the back reached to Kalverstraat.

SCHREIERSTOREN [Map pp62-5](#)

Prins Hendrikkade 94-95

This prominent brick tower dating from around 1480 – the oldest of its kind still standing – was once part of the city's defences. Its name comes from an old Dutch word for 'sharp', for this sharp corner that jutted out into the IJ. Tourist literature prefers to call it the 'wailing tower' (from *schreien*, to weep or wail) and claims that sailors' wives stood here and cried their lungs out when ships set off for distant lands. There's even a fake plaque dedicated to the women. The tower now houses an attractive [café](#) (☎ 428 82 91).

RED LIGHT DISTRICT

If you're expecting an outright cesspool, think again: the atmosphere here is much more laid-back than in red-light districts elsewhere, and definitely less threatening. Crowds of sightseers, both foreign and local, mingle with pimps, drunks, weirdos and drug dealers – and it's no big deal. Salvation Army soldiers trawl for lost souls; police on patrol chat with the prostitutes. (Where else can you witness live-and-let-live quite like this?) One more thing: look up at the gorgeous gables and you'll realise this district is stunningly attractive. Its lovely architecture simply gets lost in the shuffle.

The best routes for wicked window-shopping are along Oudezijds Achterburgwal and in the alleys around the Oude Kerk, particularly to the south. You can shuffle through the dark, mediocrally claustrophobic Trompettersteeg, which ends abruptly at an interior gallery of prostitutes, cloying named La Vie en Rose ([Map pp62-5](#)).

Before you go, pause for a moment by the statue of Nelle ([Map pp62-5](#)), erected in 2007 on Oude Kerk square as a nod to 'sex-industry workers' worldwide. In the cobblestones nearby there's a bold statement, a golden torso of a naked woman held by a groping, padlocked hand. The torso mysteriously appeared one day, was removed by police and then put back as most people seemed to like it.

At Zeedijk 63, the legendary Café Het Mandje ([Map pp62-5](#)) was the city's first gay and lesbian café, founded in 1927. The owner was a leather-clad biker named Bet van Beeren, who, apart from sheltering Jews in WWII,

was notorious for cutting off men's ties for interior decoration. When Bet died, her body was laid out on the billiard table for three days' mourning.

Warmoesstraat ([p77](#)) occupies an original dyke along the Amstel, making it one of the town's oldest streets. It runs parallel to the Damrak behind the former warehouses that line the east bank of the river. Here you'll notice that the Red Light District is more than the sum of its tawdry parts. It's lot nicer than it used to be and has a rather well-kept, self-deprecating feel which of course blends nicely with commerce. The cheap hotels and restaurants, coffeeshops, gay-oriented leather joints and sex shops are like parts of a stage set.

OUDE KERK [Map pp62-5](#)

Old Church; ☎ 625 82 84; [www.oudekerk.nl](#); Oudekerksplein 23; adult/concession €4.50/3.50; 🕒 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun; tower per person €5; 🕒 every 30min 1-5pm Sat & Sun The city's oldest surviving building (1306) embodies a huge moral contradiction: it's in full view of the Red Light District, with

passers-by getting chatted up a throw from the church walls. But that's not all: this Gothic-style church has one of the finest carillons in the country, the city's oldest church bell (1450) and a stunning Müller organ. Check out the lively 15th-century carvings on the choir stalls, some of which are downright rude. Many famous Amsterdammers lie buried here under worn tombstones, including Rembrandt's first wife, Saskia van Uylenburgh. A Dutch Reformed service is held at 11am Sunday (doors close at 11am sharp).

MUSEUM AMSTELKRING [Map pp62-5](#)

☎ 624 66 04; [www.museumamstelkring.nl](#); Oudezijds Voorburgwal 40; adult/child 5-18yr/student €7/1/5; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun, longer hours for special exhibits

Hidden in the depths of the Red Light District, this fascinating museum has a single exhibit – an entire church, as it turns out. [Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder](#) (Our Dear Lord in the Attic) was founded after 1578, when Calvinist rulers outlawed public worship of the other religion. You'll find the city's richest

RED LIGHT DISTRICT FAQs

- Year prostitution was legalised in the Netherlands: 1810
- Year brothels were legalised: 2000
- Percentage of the Dutch public that claims to have 'no problems whatsoever with prostitution': 78%
- Percentage of working prostitutes born in the Netherlands: 5%
- Estimated percentage of prostitutes working illegally in the Netherlands: less than 5%
- Number of windows: approximately 380
- Number of prostitutes working each day in the windows: 1000 to 1200, comprising day, evening and night shifts
- Average rental cost per window (paid by prostitute): €40 to €100 per day, depending on location
- Typical base cost for either 'oral favours' or a 'quickie' in the Red Light District: €30
- Typical base cost for both: €50
- Typical duration of encounter with prostitute: 15 minutes
- Percentage of business from British clients: about 40%
- Most likely time to see prostitutes with Dutch patrons: Monday morning (when many businesses and most shops are closed)
- Do prostitutes pay taxes? Yes
- Are condoms required by law? No, but it's virtually impossible to find a prostitute who'll work without one
- Is there a union? Yes
- Are medical checkups required? No
- Is pimping legal? No
- Is trafficking in prostitutes legal? No
- Penalty for either of the above: maximum six years
- Are accommodations made if a patron can't perform? No
- What happens if a patron gets violent? Prostitutes' quarters are equipped with a button that, when pressed, activates a light outside. The offender had better hope that the police get there before the Hell's Angels do.
- Why red light? Because it's flattering. Especially when used in combination with black light, it makes teeth sparkle. Even as early as the 1300s, women carrying red lanterns met sailors near the port. Try it for yourself sometime.

collection of Catholic art, and a fantastic labyrinth of tiled staircases, cubbyhole quarters and items pertaining to the Miracle of Amsterdam (p73). Once upstairs, you'll see that the church itself is unexpectedly grand, with marble columns, steep gallery and a surprisingly good organ.

ZEEDIJK Map pp62-5

The curvy lane called Zeedijk is one of Amsterdam's oldest and its most notorious. Initially a shipping district, it was a respectable place to be until the 17th century, when the richer folk moved to fancy homes along newly dug canals such as Herengracht. After that it turned to come-hither entertainment for sailors, and things went rapidly downhill. In the 1960s and '70s the Zeedijk was riddled with drug dealers and street crime, but a clean-up campaign has left the street much safer than it was, with lively cafés, bars and eateries and a very mixed crowd of visitors bumping over the storied cobblestones.

PROSTITUTION INFORMATION CENTRE Map pp62-5

☎ 420 73 28; www.pic-amsterdam.com; Enge Kerksteeg 3; ☎ noon-7pm Tue-Sat or by appointment

Spin, curiosity and respect – things this refreshing centre has none of, plenty of, and hopes to earn. Established by a former prostitute and staffed by sex workers, the centre caters to study groups from around the world, including several police academies. It organises evening walks and private tours by a former sex worker (€12.50 per person, reservation-only), as well as offering a limited souvenir trade. For a small donation you can view a re-creation of a prostitute's working quarters, view historical photos and browse the enlightening reading material.

GUAN YIN SHRINE Map pp62-5

Fo Guang Shan He Hua Temple; ☎ 420 23 57; www.ibps.nl; Zeedijk 106-118; admission free; ☎ noon-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Europe's first Chinese Imperial-style Buddhist temple is dedicated to Guan Yin, the Buddhist prophet. The ornate 'mountain gate' – an intriguing concept in the narrow confines of the Zeedijk, let alone in horizontal Holland – refers to the traditional setting of Buddhist monasteries. The middle section set back from the street was designed along principles of feng shui. Make a donation,

light an incense stick and ponder the thousand eyes and hands of the Bodhisattva statue. Traditional Chinese-style recitations of the sutras (sayings of the Buddha) are held every Sunday at 10.30am and are open to the public.

HASH & MARIJUANA MUSEUM

Map pp62-5

☎ 623 59 61; www.hashmuseum.com; Oudezijds Achterburgwal 148; admission €5.70; ☎ 10am-10pm

Did you know that the first recorded use of marijuana was in ancient China? Or that Queen Victoria is said to have used marijuana for menstrual cramps? Just a couple of essential facts we learned at this simple exhibit, which feels like the back annex of a devoted user. Learn the basics of pot botany, the link between cannabis and religion, and the history of Amsterdam's coffee-shops. You can watch the plants grow in a greenhouse, and slowly understand why time feels different here.

CASA ROSSO Map pp62-5

☎ 627 89 54; Oudezijds Achterburgwal 106-108; admission with/without drinks €45/30; ☎ 8pm-2am In a quarter full of lurid logos, the pink elephant wearing a green tie doesn't quite capture the essence of this one. So we're going to tell you: live sex on stage, or, as we once heard a Casa Rosso barker put it, 'Quality sleaze and filth!' Acts can be male, female, both or lesbian (although not gay...sorry, boys!). Performers demonstrate everything from positions of the Kamasutra to pole dances, incredible tricks with lit candles, and moves readily associated with competitive figure skating. Other acts are comedic, some maybe intentionally so. You may even catch a good old-fashioned striptease.

Nearby, Casa Rosso runs two imaginative sex shops at Oudezijds Achterburgwal 46 and 76.

EROTIC MUSEUM Map pp62-5

☎ 624 73 03; Oudezijds Achterburgwal 54; admission €5; ☎ 11am-1am Sun-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat Ho hum. Your usual assortment of bondage exhibits, erotic photos and cartoons. Although this museum has the advantage of location, it's less entertaining, not as well laid out, more expensive and a little seedy when compared with the [Sexmuseum Amsterdam](#) (p71) on the Damrak.

CANAL KNOWLEDGE

In Dutch, a canal is a *gracht* ('khrakht'), and Amsterdam has an awful lot of them, more even than Venice or Hamburg. The best-known canals form the central Grachtengordel (Canal Belt); to the wandering visitor they're like lifelines, because the subtle turns in the centre can throw your inner compass out of whack. What's more, the Canal Belt reads like a history book.

The extents of the medieval city were marked by the Kloveniersburgwal – a *burgwal* was a fortified embankment, bristling with rifles of the Kloveniers guards – and Geldersekade (*kade* means 'quay', with more rifles) on the Oude Zijde. The Singel (moat) on the Nieuwe Zijde held the third major line of defence.

By the early 16th century, a city wall stood here with fortified gates at strategic points. You can still see some of the gates today, though the walls were largely torn down as the city burst its boundaries.

Expansion continued until it was clear that stop-gap measures (such as artificial islands) would not be enough. In the 17th century, decades of back-breaking labour produced the Canal Belt, a grand semicircle west and south of the Medieval Centre that was destined to become ruling-class property.

The semicircular canals formed a huge ring, cut by canals radiating from the middle like spokes on a wheel. Starting from the core, the major semicircular canals are the Singel, Herengracht, Keizersgracht and Prinsengracht. An easy mnemonic is that, apart from the singular Singel, these canals are in alphabetical order. Obvious though it may seem, it took us years to figure this out.

From west to east, the major radial canals are Brouwersgracht, Leidsegracht and Reguliersgracht, also in alphabetical order. East of the Reguliersgracht is another waterway that looks like a very broad canal; this is the river Amstel, and it ends in the IJ, the river that forms the northern border of the city centre.

The Canal Belt is enclosed by the Lijnbaansgracht and a zigzag-patterned canal originally called the Buitensingel (outer moat), now known as the Singelgracht.

An interesting quirk: many streets in modern Amsterdam also bear the name 'gracht'. That's because they were once canals as well, but they've since been filled in for reasons of sanitation or ease of transportation. Other streets have 'dwars' in their names, to indicate that they intersect (or intersected) with a canal, so Leidsedwarsstraat meets up with the Leidsegracht.

WARMOESSTRAAT Map pp62-5

Amsterdam's earliest canals grew out from the IJ river like the roots of a tree, and Warmoesstraat was one of the first streets to follow. Like [Zeedijk](#) (opposite), by the 1980s the Warmoesstraat was caught in a downward spiral of drugs and petty crime but has got its act together, thanks to frequent policing (note the CCTVs). Some people think things have gone too far: the leather bars, coffee-shops and fetish shops here now have a squeaky-clean 'safe sex' look to them, and any sign that blocks a historic gable stands to be removed.

OUDEMANHUISPOORT Map pp62-5

Btwn Oudezijds Achterburgwal & Kloveniersburgwal On the corner of Oudezijds Achterburgwal stands a distinctive gateway with spectacles over the pedestal. This indicated its role as an almshouse for the elderly, built here in 1601 from the proceeds of a public lottery. It's now the seat of the University of Amsterdam and closed to the public, although you can wander the courtyard. Note the bust of the learned Roman goddess Minerva over the courtyard entrance.

A secondhand [book market](#) has operated in the passage since the mid-1700s (see [p151](#)).

NES Map pp62-5

Beyond the glare of the Red Light District runs the dark, narrow lane called Nes, home to theatres for over 150 years. In 1614, Amsterdam's first bank opened in a pawnshop here, at No 57. One of the more sizzling performance stages in town is [Frascati](#) (p202).

NIEUWMARKT

In the 17th century, ships would sail from the IJ down to Nieuwmarkt (New Market) to take on board new anchors and unload produce. Today this square east of the Red Light District is a bright, relaxed place ringed with cafés, shops and restaurants. It is also a hub of the city's amazing New Year celebrations.

Although Nieuwmarkt is very much an open space – arguably the grandest in town after the Dam – nobody adds the word *plein* (square) to the name. It's a little confusing because the whole neighbourhood to the east and southeast is also known as Nieuwmarkt.

top picks

NIUWMARKT

- **Museum Het Rembrandthuis** (right) View an unparalleled collection of sketches by the master painter in his personal studio.
- **Joods Historisch Museum** (opposite) Follow the heartening success, and the haunting downfall, of Amsterdam's Jewish community.
- **TunFun** (p80) Give the little ones a romp in this centre of childhood fantasy.
- **De Sluyswacht** (p184) Enjoy a coffee or a *biertje* as the canal boats drift lazily by.
- **Portuguese-Israelite Synagogue** (opposite) Breathtaking temple of prayer for the Sephardic community.

The centre of attention is the grand fairytale Waag (Weigh House, right), that was once a defensive post in the wall surrounding the city. The square is lined with cafés, bars and restaurants. To the south, at the end of St Antoniebreestraat, stands the renowned Rembrandthuis (right), with an impressive collection of the master's sketches and paintings.

The area around the Waterlooplein flea market (p80) is closely associated with the Jewish community. Until WWII the main street, Jodenbreestraat, was where many Jewish shops were located, often stacked practically upon one other. Songs echoed in diamond workshops here and in the nearby Uilenburgstraat. Jews here enjoyed more freedom than elsewhere in Europe and turned Amsterdam into a centre not only for precious gems but also tobacco, printing and clothing. Few of the open-air markets they brought to town still survive (see p151).

It is here that you'll find several important sites of Jewish interest, including synagogues, current and former, as well as the Jewish Historical Museum. The controversial Stoper, the combined city hall and opera, remains a talking point among critics, as does the St Antoniesbreestraat, an aesthetically challenged stretch of housing.

The busy roundabout east of the Mozes en Aäronkerk (p82) is Mr Visserplein. LE Visser was a Jewish president of the Supreme Court ('Mr' stands for *meester*, which means 'master', the Dutch lawyer's title) who was dismissed by the Nazis. He refused to wear the Star of David and berated the Jewish Council for helping the

occupiers carry out their anti-Jewish policies. He died before the Germans could take their revenge on him.

Nearby, south of the Portuguese synagogue, is the triangular Jonas Daniël (JD) Meijerplein, named after the country's first Jewish lawyer (whose actual name was Joune Rintel). This man did much to ensure the full emancipation of the Jews in the Napoleonic period. On the square, Mari Andriessen's Dockworker statue (1952; Map pp62-5) commemorates the general strike that began among dockworkers on 25 February 1941 to protest against the treatment of Jews. The first deportation roundup had occurred here a few days earlier. The anniversary of the strike is still an occasion for wreath-laying, but has become a low-key affair with the demise of the Communist Party.

WAAG Map pp62-5

☎ 422 77 72; Nieuwmarkt 4; admission free; ☎ 10am-1am

The very grand, multiturreted Waag (Weigh House) dates from 1488, when it was part of the city's fortifications. It looked more like a castle in those days, fronted by a moatlike canal and built into the old city walls. From the 17th century onward it was the main weigh house.

The surgeons guild, which occupied the upper floor, commissioned Rembrandt's famous *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Tulp* (displayed in the Mauritshuis museum in Den Haag). The masons guild was based in the tower facing the Zeedijk; note the super-fine brickwork.

Public executions took place at the Waag, but more recently it served as a fire station and a vault for the city's archives. A bar-restaurant occupies it today, lit by medieval candle-wheels to great effect. The square is a venue for weekly markets and other events (see p151).

MUSEUM HET REMBRANDTHUIS

Map pp62-5

☎ 520 04 00; www.rembrandthuis.nl; Jodenbree-straat 4-6; adult/child under 6yr/child 6-15yr/student €8/free/1.50/7; ☎ 10am-5pm

Rembrandt van Rijn lived and worked in this beautifully restored house dating from 1606. He bought the house for a fortune in 1639, made possible by his wealthy wife, Saskia van Uylenburgh. (Later, chronic debt would force the master painter to move to cheaper digs in the Jordaan.) The years spent in this

house were at the high point of his career, when he was regarded as a star and ran the largest painting studio in Holland.

The museum is worth visiting for its near-complete collection of Rembrandt's etchings (250 of the 280 he is known to have made), although they are not all on display at once; expect to see between 20 and 100 etchings at any one time, depending on the exhibit. Demonstrations of etching techniques take place several times daily. Note that the crowds are lightest just after opening time.

Thanks to an itemised list drawn up by a debt collector, as well as the original drawings and paintings, the interior looks much as it did when Rembrandt lived there. The collection of objects alone is mind-boggling: seashells, weaponry, musical instruments, a Roman bust and military helmets from as far away as Japan. No wonder he went bankrupt!

JOODS HISTORISCH MUSEUM

Map pp62-5

Jewish Historical Museum; ☎ 626 99 45; www.jhm.nl; JD Meijerplein 2-4; adult/child under 13yr/child 13-17yr/senior & student €7.50/free/3/4.50; ☎ 11am-5pm, closed Yom Kippur

Impressive in scale and scope, the museum is housed in a beautifully restored complex of four Ashkenazic synagogues from the 17th and 18th centuries. The enormous Great Synagogue is home to two exhibitions – the history of the Jews in the Netherlands, 1600–1890; and Religion, about Judaism and Jewish traditions. Exhibits start with the pillars of Jewish identity and gradually give way to an engaging portrait of Jewish life in the city, with profiles of key figures and displays of religious items. The English-language audio tour is excellent (no extra charge). The museum also contains a bright new café serving kosher dishes.

GASSAN DIAMONDS Map pp62-5

☎ 622 53 33; www.gassandiamonds.com; Nieuwe Uilenburgerstraat 173-175; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm

A short walk from Waterlooplein, this vast workshop demonstrates how a rough, ungainly clump of rock is transformed into a girl's best friend. You'll get a quick primer in assessing the gems for quality, and ample opportunities to buy. The one-hour tour is the best of its kind in town.

The factory sits on Uilenburg, one of the rectangular islands reclaimed in the 1580s during a sudden influx of Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal. In the 1880s, Gassan became the first diamond factory to use steam power.

PORTUGUESE-ISRAELITE SYNAGOGUE Map pp62-5

☎ 624 53 51; www.esnoga.com; Mr Visserplein 3; adult/child 10-17yr €6.50/4; ☎ 10am-4pm Sun-Fri Apr-Oct, to 4pm Sun-Thu, to 2pm Fri Nov-Mar Built between 1671 and 1675 by Amsterdam's Sephardic community, this edifice was the largest synagogue in Europe of its time. The architect, Elias Bouman, was inspired by the Temple of Solomon, but the building's classical lines are typical of the Dutch capital. It was restored after the war and is in use today.

The interior features massive pillars and some two dozen brass candelabra, suspended from the ceiling and lit for evening services. The large library belonging to the Ets Haim seminary is one of the oldest and most important Jewish book collections in Europe.

TRIPPENHUIS Map pp62-5

Kloveniersburgwal 29

Making their fortune in arms-dealing, the Trip brothers commissioned a young Dutch architect, Justus Vingboons, to build the Trippenhuys in 1660. It's a greystone mansion with eight Corinthian columns across two houses – one for each brother – and in a nod to their profession, the chimneys are shaped like mortars. It's closed to the public.

STOPERA Map pp62-5

☎ 551 81 17; Waterlooplein 22

This hulking white pile between Waterlooplein and the Amstel houses both the *stadhuis* (city hall) and the opera, hence the name 'Stopera' (1986). The building's design was highly controversial, and protest delayed construction for two decades. When it was finally completed, one critic derided the Stopera as having 'all the charm of an Ikea chair'. Our view: yea on the music theatre, nay on city hall.

See p200 for details of performances in the **Muziektheater**. There are usually free lunch-time concerts on Tuesdays. In the arcade between city hall and the theatre,

TAKING A NAP

It is widely known that Amsterdam (and indeed more than half the Netherlands) lies a couple of metres below sea level, but when's the last time you heard anyone ask which sea level? In fact, sea level varies around the globe and even around the Netherlands. The average level of the former Zuiderzee, in the lee of Holland, was slightly lower than that of the North Sea along Holland's exposed west coast.

A display in the arcade of the Stopera shows the ins and outs of Normaal Amsterdams Peil (NAP; Normal Amsterdam Level), established in the 17th century as the average high-water mark of the Zuiderzee. This still forms the zero reference for elevation anywhere in the country and is also used in Germany and several other European countries.

Water in the canals is kept at 40cm below NAP and many parts of the city lie lower still. Water columns represent different sea levels, as well as the highest level of disastrous floods in 1953 (4.55m above NAP). Information sheets explain the details.

you'll find a display on NAP water levels (see the boxed text, [above](#)).

WATERLOOPLEIN [Map pp62-5](#)

This square was once known as Vlooienburg ('flea town'), a good description for the wares on offer here today ([p151](#)). The street market was started in 1880 when two canals were filled in, and Jewish traders living around the neighbouring Jodenbree-straat were allowed to vend their wares here. It was so successful that in 1893 it became a daily market, apart from on the Sabbath (it's now closed on Sunday only). Since the 1980s the square has stood in the shadow of the Stopera, but the market is usually jam-packed with sharp-eyed customers seeking antique knick-knacks, imitation Diesel jeans and cheap bicycle locks (highly recommended).

TUNFUN [Map pp62-5](#)

☎ 689 43 00; [www.tunfun.nl](#); Mr Visserplein 7; adult & child under 1yr/child 1-12yr free/€7.50; 🕒 10am-6pm (last entry 5pm)

This cool indoor playground is located in a former traffic underpass, an unused eyesore for over a decade. These days kids can build, climb, roll, draw, jump on trampolines and play on a soccer pitch. There's even a children's disco – this is Amsterdam – and a café serving *poftertjes* (little pancakes). Kids must be accompanied by an adult. It gets rather busy when the weather's bad.

PINTOHUIS (OPENBARE BIBLIOTHEEK) [Map pp62-5](#)

☎ 624 31 84; [www.oba.nl](#); St Antoniesbreestraat 69; admission free; 🕒 2-8pm Mon & Wed, 2-5pm Fri, 11am-4pm Sat

The street that runs from Nieuwmarkt Sq towards Waterlooplein is St Antoniesbree-

straat, once a busy street that lost its old buildings during the construction of the metro line. One of the original buildings still standing is the Pintohuis, once owned by a wealthy Sephardic Jew, Isaac de Pinto, who had it remodelled with Italianate pilasters in the 1680s. It's now a *bibliotheek* (library) – pop inside to admire the beautiful ceiling frescos while you can, for it's threatened with closure.

ZUIDERKERK [Map pp62-5](#)

☎ 552 79 87; Zuiderkerkhof 72; admission free; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, noon-4pm Sat

Near the Pintohuis, a passageway through the modern *Pentagon housing estate* leads to the Zuiderkerk, the 'Southern Church' built by Hendrick de Keyser ([p48](#)). His tower, 1m off plumb, dates from 1614. This was the first custom-built Protestant church in Amsterdam – still Catholic in design but no choir. The final church service was held here in 1929 and at the end of WWII it served as a morgue.

Now thoroughly modern inside, the Zuiderkerk houses the Municipal Centre for Physical Planning and Public Housing, displays on urban planning and the occasional art exhibition.

OOSTINDISCH HUIS [Map pp62-5](#)

East Indies House; Oude Hoogstraat 24

This is the former office of the mighty VOC, the Dutch East India Company (which was the very first multinational). You could easily walk past it, as there's no sign or plaque to identify it. This sweeping complex, built between 1551 and 1643, was attributed to Hendrick de Keyser, the busy city architect. On the Kloveniersburgwal side you can see that the gables defy convention by tilting backward, making

AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO AMSTERDAM, PART 2: PETER MOSKOS *Simon Sellars*

Peter Moskos, along with Toine Rikken, founded the St Nicolaas Boat Club in 1997, a boat-tour company that provides an alternative angle on Amsterdam and its waterlogged history. I asked Peter to regale me with his unique perspective.

Favourite area of Amsterdam?

On a boat in the IJ. There's no better place to understand the importance of water and shipping to Amsterdam's history – plus it's beautiful out there.

And your least favourite?

Any big, ugly road with too many cars, although architecturally every place has something interesting and can tell you something about urban planning.

What's the biggest misconception about Amsterdam?

That it's the world's sex capital. It's not – the Dutch just have the sense to put it all out in the open and capitalise on it. And while it may be the world's recreational-drug capital, stop bingeing and enjoy it like you live here year round.

Tell me your favourite 'Amsterdam experience'.

Biking and boating. And Koninginnedag (Queen's Day; [p17](#)) – the biggest drunk garage sale in the world.

Least favourite?

The weather – especially the winter weather. Or the winter weather in the summer. And the rain that never stops.

What Amsterdam-specific film or book would you recommend?

The film *Amsterdamed* is fun, with a great high-speed boat chase, but it doesn't depict anything of reality. *Simon* is the best Amsterdam film ever – and maybe the best-ever Dutch movie. Jan-Willem van der Wettering's cop stories are pretty good, but Geert Mak's *Amsterdam* is the single best book about the city.

Your favourite Amsterdam bar and coffeeshop?

Any brown café in the Jordaan is great – get a *jenever* and a beer and talk with the locals. The coffeeshop De Rokerij has a supercool atmosphere – sort of how I imagine a 19th-century Chinese opium den would have been. And of course my brother's bar at Boom Chicago, because that's the home base for our boats.

What about restaurants?

Semhar on the Marnixstraat – the only Ethiopian restaurant in town that makes its *injara* bread with *tef*, the traditional Ethiopian flour. Semhar is distinctive in a city that has a great variety of food but very few truly memorable restaurants. I like the herring stands on bridges. A *broodje haring* is a very cheap lunch – so Dutch, and you just can't get it anywhere else. Eel is also delicious.

What's Amsterdam's best-kept secret?

Co-ed, naked saunas that aren't sleazy. I like Fenomeen out past Vondelpark – essential when the weather is bad.

Favourite local slang or swear words?

I'm trying to get '*spetterend*' back into the vocab – it's a very uncool way of saying 'cool'. But the Dutch have a shortage of swear words, so they often resort to English.

What's your strangest Amsterdam bike story?

A guy wearing a jockstrap on rollerblades. He used to be everywhere, even in the cold weather. He disappeared a couple of years ago. Perhaps he caught pneumonia and passed on.

What annoys you the most about Amsterdam: the dog shit, the service or something else?

Taxis. Avoid them like dog shit. But the dog-shit problem is basically a thing of the past – if you have a problem with it now, you should have seen how it was before. I really have to say the bad service, without a doubt – it's legendary.

How has living in Amsterdam changed you?

It's made me realise that bikes are the best form of urban transit possible. And that, basically, this is a city that works. There's something to be said for literally living on top of each other and in close-knit surroundings. It's given me the opportunity to see how a large city can allow everyone to do their own thing without getting all bent out of shape about it.

Describe the St Nicolaas Boat Club for someone new to it.

We're a friendly entry point to understanding Amsterdam from the greatest perspective of all: the canals. We offer cosy rides with knowledgeable pilots, and all we ask for is a donation at the end.

them seem much larger. Pass through the carved Tuscan entrance vault to reach the grand inner courtyard, and on the opposite side you'll spy a small VOC emblem above the door. The mighty VOC sailed into rough waters and was dissolved in 1798.

MOZES EN AÄRONKERK Map pp62-5

Moses & Aaron Church; ☎ 622 13 05; www.mozeshuis.nl; Waterlooplein 205

This neoclassical Catholic church, built in 1841 on the northeastern corner of Waterlooplein, shows that this wasn't exclusively a Jewish area. It replaced the 'clandestine' Catholic church that occupied two houses named Mozes and Aäron in what is now the rear of the church along Jodenbreestraat (note the wall tablet of Moses above the street corner). Despite its impressive organ, it is no longer used as a church, but rather by social, cultural and educational organisations which often hold exhibitions. Otherwise, the church is generally closed to the public.

MONTELBAANSTOREN Map pp62-5

Montelbaan Tower; Oude Schans 2

The lower part of this striking tower was built to strengthen Amsterdam's eastern defences in 1512. Positioned on the old city wall, it gave sentries a good view of suspicious characters on the wharves along Oude Schans. The octagonal base and open wooden steeple were added in 1606, to dampen the bells on the clock after the neighbours complained. Just a few years later the tower began to list under the weight, but residents attached cables and pulled it upright. The elegant tower has two sets of bellworks, four clock faces and a nautical vane like the one on the top of the Oude Kerk.

RED LIGHTS & NIEUWMARKT

Walking Tour

1 Nationaal Monument Begin at the soaring **Nationaal Monument** (p71) and head north along the Damrak past the elegant **Beurs van Berlage** (p69), designed by HP Berlage, founder of the Amsterdam School of architecture. Heading southeast along Oudebrugsteeg, you'll hit Warmoesstraat, where you can sample the city's wild side. (If that's too much for you, turn back now!)

2 Oude Kerk The venerable **Oude Kerk** (p75) is your unlikely gateway to the Red Light District proper. At the nearby **Prostitution Information Centre** (p76) you can pick up maps to your desires or see what a sex worker's quarters look like from the inside (without paying for the sex worker, but please leave a donation for the centre).

3 Museum Amstelkring North of here is the **Museum Amstelkring** (p75), an average-looking canal house that has a surprisingly beautiful house of worship on the top floor. Before being turned into a museum in 1888, this clandestine church was one of the relatively few places in Amsterdam where Catholicism could be practiced.

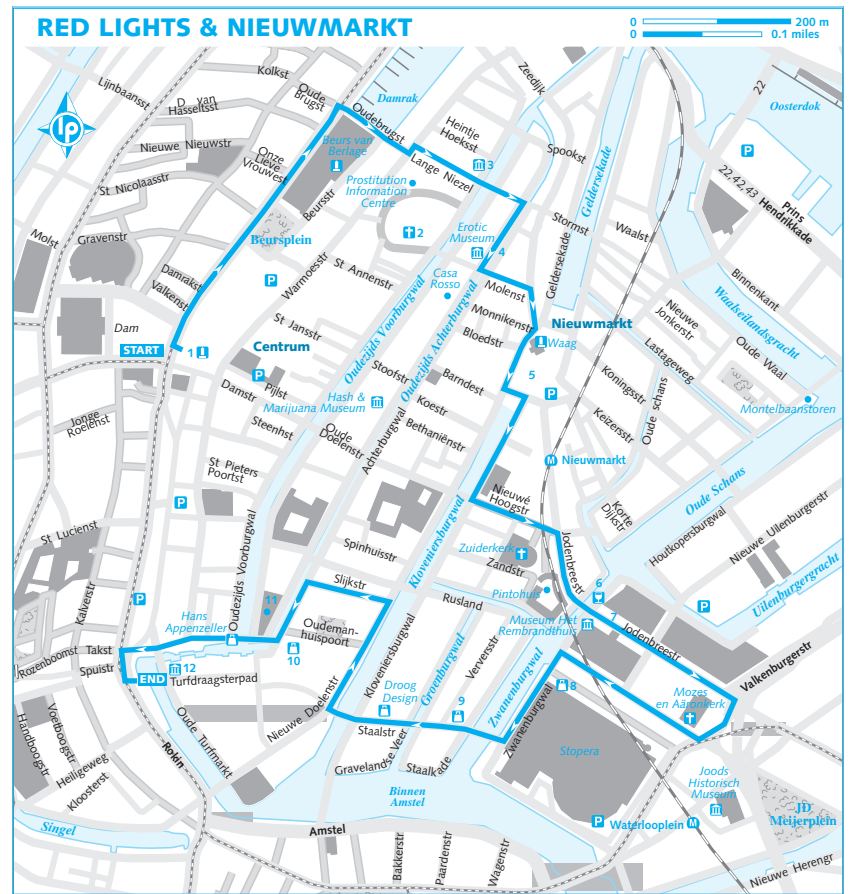
4 Oudezijds Achterburgwal A jump over to the **Oudezijds Achterburgwal** and then south takes you past the low-key **Erotic Museum** (p76), the famous **Casa Rosso** (p76) erotic theatre and the **Hash & Marijuana Museum** (p76).

5 Nieuwmarkt In **Nieuwmarkt** you'll find the historic and multitowered **Waag** (Weigh House; p78). Heading south from Nieuwmarkt, along Kloveniersburgwal, note the impossibly narrow **Kleine Trippenhuis**. **Nieuwe Hoogstraat** leads you to the elegant **Zuiderkerk** (p80), with the 17th-century **Pintohuis** (now a library; p80) nearly opposite.

6 De Sluyswacht Across the Oude Schans, **De Sluyswacht** (p184) makes an ideal beer break, with a classic view of the canal and the **Montelbaanstoren** (left). The **Museum Het Rembrandthuis** (p78) is across the street.

7 Jodenbreestraat A sweep down **Jodenbreestraat** takes you past the **Mozes en Aäronkerk** (left), a one-time clandestine Catholic church that was expanded in grand style, with large sandstone columns and twin belfries. About 100m southeast is the **Joods Historisch Museum** (p79), a moving collection of art, icons and historical objects from Amsterdam's storied Jewish past.

8 Waterlooplein market This renowned **flea market** (p151) faces the **Stopera** (p79), the modern opera house cum city hall. On a sunny day it's fun to peruse the vintage clothes, antiques and bicycle parts on display under the vendors' canopies, the air thick with the scent of *frites*. Your shopping finished, cross the bridge over the Zwanenburgwal.



WALK FACTS

Start Nationaal Monument
End Allard Pierson Museum
Distance 4.5km
Duration 2½ hours

9 Puccini Bomboni Chances are the chocolate aroma of **Puccini Bomboni** (p142) will suck you inside the shop; its dozens of delectable, freshly made varieties have killed many a diet. Along Straalstraat there's also **Droog Design** (p142), whose clever innovations turn tired old living rooms into sleek exhibition spaces.

10 Oudemanhuispoort book market Head north along Kloveniersburgwal and turn into the covered arcade joining Oude-

zijds Achterburgwal, passing the pretty inner courtyard of the University of Amsterdam to reach the **Oudemanhuispoort book market** (p151). A fixture since 1897, stacks of used titles (sometimes quite rare) are sold from the wooden chests bolted to the walls.

11 Huis aan de Drie Grachten Carry on past the quaint **Huis aan de Drie Grachten** (House on the Three Canals; p48), which in the 16th century housed a brewery owned by Amsterdam's enterprising mayor. You can inspect the classy jewellery shops along Grimburgwal, including **Hans Appenzeller** (p141).

12 Allard Pierson Museum Finish your walk with a visit to ancient Egypt in the **Allard Pierson Museum** (p73), which has galleries full of fascinating items.

JORDAAN

Drinking & Smoking p185; Eating p161; Shopping p142; Sleeping p214

Though gentrified today, the Jordaan was a rough working-class district in the early 17th century. As the Canal Belt was extended, it became clear that a place was needed to house all the artisans, canal-diggers, carpenters, bridge-builders and stonemasons employed by the rich. So the city's architects got to work and quickly drove in the first stakes.

Pleasant the Jordaan was not, at least in the beginning. All those smelly, noisy or otherwise useful but disgusting industries that were banned from the centre – tanneries, breweries, sugar refineries, smithies and coopers, among others – set up shop here just outside the town walls, and thrived. The quarter drew working talent from around Europe at a time when Amsterdam was practically a city-state, with the deep pockets to match.

The name 'Jordaan' wasn't used until the 18th century, and its origin is unclear. Some believe it comes from the French *jardin* (garden), as many Huguenots – religious refugees known as the French Calvinists – settled in the market gardens beyond the city walls. Many streets here are named after trees and flowers. But some historians contend that the name had biblical connotations and referred to the Jordan River.

For centuries this was a boisterous quarter whose colourful, outspoken residents were notoriously difficult to govern. Many people were poor. By the early 20th century one in seven Amsterdammers lived in the Jordaan, and up to 1000 people were packed into small city blocks in appalling conditions.

Riots occurred on a regular basis. The infamous Eel Uprising of 1886 left 25 people dead after police intervened in a game of eel-pulling. Then came the Potato Uprising, a major protest over jobless benefits and a series of other incidents that felt like civil war. Roads were tarred because brick paving could be used as projectiles during riots.

Around the same time, many of the Jordaan's ditches and narrow canals were filled in to improve sanitation. Their names still recall the *grachten* (canals): Elandgracht, Lindengracht, Palmgracht and Rozengracht, now a major thoroughfare. Bloemgracht (p87) was the grandest of the canals and, for that reason, was never filled in. Many wealthy artisans built smaller versions of the patricians' canal houses on the Bloemgracht.

In the 1960s and '70s the Jordaan lost much of its working-class character as residents moved to more spacious digs in the suburbs. In came the students, artists and tertiary-sector professionals (read: *yups*, or yuppies), which caused some growing pains (see the boxed text, p88). Some changes have preserved the old ways: the area south of Rozengracht, for instance, was renowned for its workshops and artists' studios, and many galleries are still located there today.

A certain misty-eyed, heart-on-your-sleeve romance pervades the district. This is the Amsterdam of accordion ballads, where daily life played out on the streets, houses were tiny but tidy, and life was either joy or tragedy. The songs bring to mind the lace curtains and window-box geraniums where Auntie Cori watched the street with the help of a *spionnetje* (spy mirror) attached to the window-sill. It was also the picture of the neighbourhood as social unit, where everyone did absolutely everything together – living, working, shopping, schooling and entertainment.

Such popular conceptions still hold true, as you will discover when you wander the narrow lanes. Take your time and don't worry if you get lost (which you will); there are plenty of inviting pubs and restaurants, offbeat shops and weird little art galleries to grab your attention.

The area doesn't hold many official sights, but a worthy exception is the Pianola Museum (opposite), where dozens of old player pianos are fired up for in-house demonstrations. Probably the city's most charming open-air market, the Noordermarkt (p151), is held at the northern tip of the district by the Noorderkerk.

A caretaker of sentimental value is Johnny Jordaanplein, a shady little square situated just west of Prinsengracht, at the corner of Elandsgracht. That colourful painted hut – a municipal transformer station – proudly displays the lyric '*Amsterdam, wat bent je mooi*' (Amsterdam, how beautiful you are) from a song by Johnny, the greatest expression of Jordaan's ethos since the last riots. Behind the hut you'll find members of the Jordaan musical hall of fame, cast in bronze.

Haarlemmerdijk, the extension of the main thoroughfare Haarlemmerstraat, was part of the original sea dyke and the road to Haarlem. Warehouses sprang up as well; many have been converted to romantic housing. With train lines and expressways, this district has reverted to its more intimate character, and recent years have seen it boom as a centre for the same sorts of quirky shops, pubs and restaurants that characterise the Jordaan.

BROUWERSGRACHT Map p86

Pretty as a Golden Age painting, the 'Brewers Canal' took its name from the many breweries located here in the 16th and 17th centuries. Goods such as leather, coffee, whale oil and spices were stored and processed here in giant warehouses, such as those with the row of spout gables at 188–194. Amsterdam's last distillery of *jenever*, De Ooievaar, was located on the corner of Driehoekstraat. The Brouwersgracht was voted 'most beautiful street' in Amsterdam by newspaper *Het Parool* in a 2007 readers survey, and is a great place to stroll (see p89), not to mention see the waterborne action on Queen's Day (p17).

NOORDERKERK Map p86

Northern Church; ☎ 626 64 36; Noordermarkt 48; admission free; ☎ 10.30am–3pm Mon, Wed & Thu, 11am–1pm Sat, 10am–noon & 7–8.30pm Sun
Near the northern end of the Prinsengracht, this imposing Calvinist church was completed in 1623 for the 'common' people in the Jordaan. (The upper classes attended the Westerkerk further south). It was built in the shape of a broad Greek cross (four arms of equal length) around a central pulpit, giving the entire congregation unimpeded access to the word of God in suitably sober surroundings. This design, unusual at the time, would become common for Protestant churches throughout the country.

NOORDERMARKT Map p86

Northern Market; Noorderkerkplein; ☎ markets 8am–1pm Mon, 10am–3pm Sat
A market square since the early 1600s, the plaza in front of the Noorderkerk now hosts several lively markets a week. Monday morning there's a flea market with wonderful bargains; early on Saturday morning

HOFJES

A charming legacy of the Jordaan are its many *hofjes*, the courtyard homes built by wealthy benefactors to house elderly people and widows – a noble act in the days before social security. Some *hofjes* are real gems, set back from the street with lovely prim gardens and beautifully restored houses. Unfortunately, many courtyards became such tourist magnets that residents complained, and they were closed to the public (a big exception being the Begijnhof, p68).

However, if you should find any of the following open, try to take a discreet peek. The oldest *hofje* is the **Linden-hofje** (Lindengracht 94–112), dating from 1614; the **Suyckerhofje** (Lindengracht 149–163) is a charming *hofje* founded in 1670. **Karthuizerhofje** (Karthuizersstraat 89–171) is a *hofje* for widows, dating from 1650 and on the site of a former Carthusian monastery.

Claes Claeshofje (1e Egelantiersdwarstraat 3), also known as Anso's Hofje, has three courtyards dating from around 1630. **St Andrieshofje** (Egelantiersgracht 107–141), the second-oldest surviving *hofje*, was finished in 1617, and founded by cattle farmer Jeff Gerritsoom. **Venetiae** (Elandsstraat 106–136) was founded in the mid-1600s by a merchant who traded with Venice, and features a very pretty garden.

top picks

JORDAAN

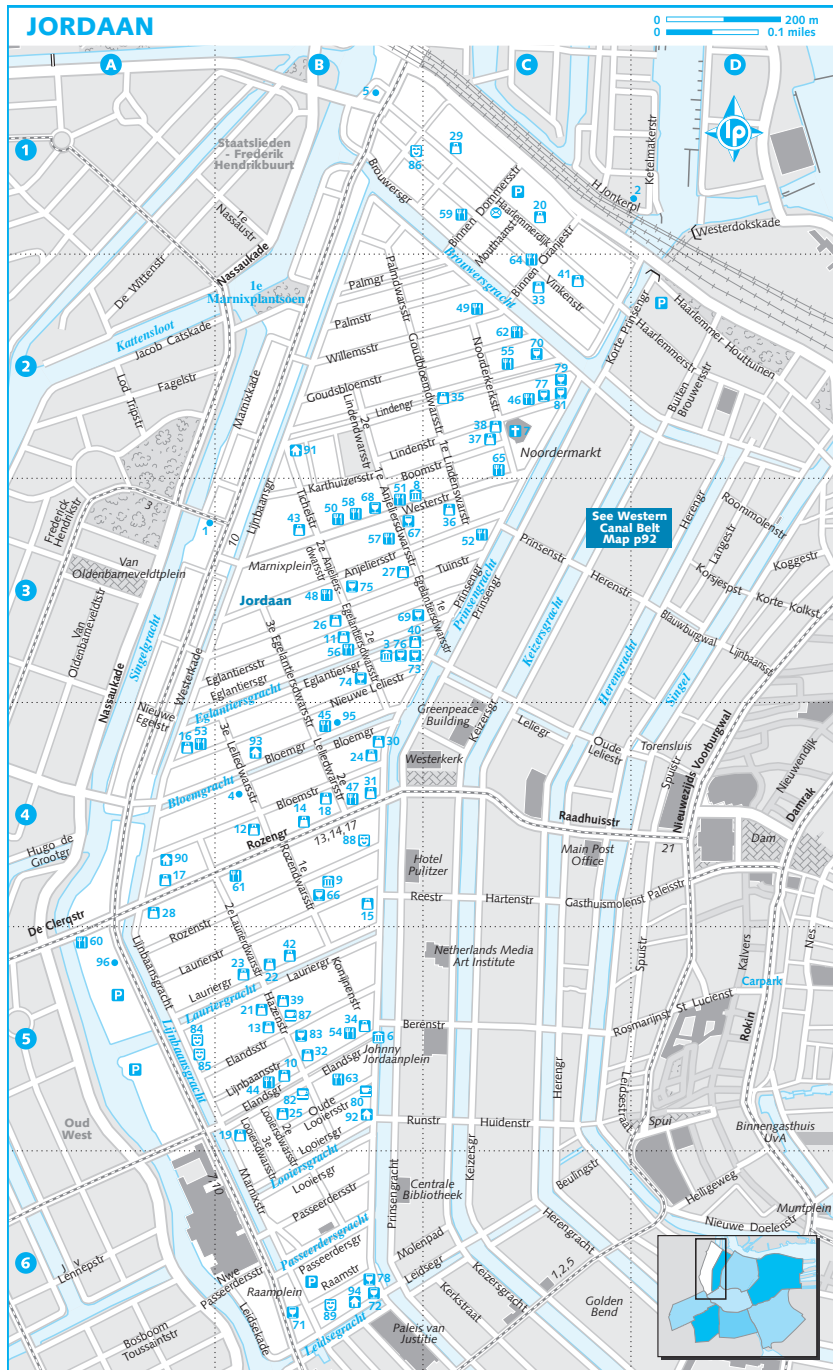
- Wander the delightful backstreets for one-of-a-kind shops, galleries and cafés full of *gezelligheid*.
- Noordermarkt** (left) Browse the Jordaan's leafiest, most adorable street markets for crumbly cheeses and exotic herbs.
- Pianola Museum** (below) Listen to rare musical gems immortalised for the player piano.
- Houseboat Museum** (p88) Experience the charms and challenges of life on the canals.
- Hofjes** (below) Explore the manicured gardens of these time-warped courtyards.
- Brouwersgracht** (left) Inspect handsome old warehouses on what is surely Amsterdam's comeliest canal.

there's a bird market (in cages, a holdover from the former livestock market), followed till early/mid-afternoon by a *boerenmarkt* (farmers market) with herbs and organic produce. There's a nice selection of cafés surrounding the square, including **Winkel** (p163) on the southwest corner, home of some of the city's best apple pie.

PIANOLA MUSEUM Map p86

☎ 627 96 24; www.pianola.nl; Westerstraat 106; adult/child under 12yr/student & senior €5/3/4; ☎ 2–5pm Sun

This is a very special place, crammed with Pianolas from the early 1900s. The museum has a stock of 50 Pianolas, although only a dozen are on display at a given time, as well as nearly 20,000 music rolls. There's even a player pipe organ. Every month player-piano concerts are held, featuring



JORDAAN

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anything from Mozart to Fats Waller and rare classical or jazz tunes composed especially for the instrument. The curator gives demonstrations with great zest.

AMSTERDAM TULIP MUSEUM Map p86
 ☎ 421 00 95; www.amsterdamtulipmuseum.com;
 Prinsengracht 112; adult/child €2/free; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sat

Sponsored by a bulb-growing company, this small, rather clinical exhibit traces the prince of petals from its beginnings in Turkey. Displays cover Tulipmania (p90), bulbs as food in the war years, and present-day scientific methods of growing and harvesting. A highlight is the tulip paintings by 17th-century painter Judith Leijster, a student of Frans Hals (p33). The gift shop is one-stop shopping for all your tulip souvenirs.

EGLANTIERSGRACHT Map p86

Many parts of the Jordaan are named after trees and flowers, and this canal takes its

name from the eglantine rose, or sweet-brier. (You can see its dainty pink petals and hooked prickles in many a Jordaan garden.) Built for artisans and skilled tradesmen, the houses here are scaled-down versions of those in the Western Canal Belt. There are many *hofjes* (courtyards) in the Jordaan, including the St Andieshofje at Eglantiersgracht 107-141 (see the boxed text, p85).

BLOEMGRACHT Map p86

In the 17th century the 'Herengracht of the Jordaan', as the gorgeous Bloemgracht was called, was home to paint and sugar factories, and boasted a large number of fine gabled houses. A striking example is De Drie Hendrieken, built in a sober Renaissance style. The gable stones above the ground floor depict a townsman, a farmer and a seafarer. Artists also lived on Bloemgracht, including Jurriaen Andriessen, whose work is displayed in the Rijksmuseum.

OOH JORDAAN, HOW LUVVERLY YOU ARE

Eibert Draisma is the author of *Jordaan*, a potted history of this popular district to the west of Amsterdam's centre. Draisma has worked at the local community centre, the Wijkcentrum Jordaan, for the past quarter-century. He and his colleague Wim Wassenaar chatted about what makes the Jordaan so special.

What's the biggest change you've seen in the Jordaan over the last couple of decades?

Draisma: It's much better now. It was a dilapidated slum area until the '80s. What a huge difference! The neighbourhood looks really nice now, and people want to live here again.

How many original Jordaaners still live here?

Draisma: Maybe 15% born and bred. It's a group that's slowly dying out, but in recent years some of the 'indigenous' have moved back.

Where did the rebellious attitude of the Jordaaners come from?

Draisma: Resistance to injustice, poverty and oppression. Other areas also suffered, but the Jordaan of the late 19th century was a densely populated district with deplorable conditions – large families in tiny, run-down homes.

And are they still rebellious?

Wassenaar: Last year Jordaaners were up in arms over plans to redig a canal on the Elandsgracht, with an underground parking garage. The Jordaaners weren't asked for approval, only the population of Amsterdam as a whole found it a good idea. And the plan was eventually called off (smile).

What do you think of the Jordaan's newer residents, the yuppies?

Draisma: It's been said that the Jordaan is no longer what it was – a *volksbuurt*, a district for the common people. But this talk is exaggerated. If you look at the city's figures you'll see that the overwhelming majority of Jordaan residents have quite average incomes. Wealthy people have also moved in, but it's a limited group. You notice this on the street, and it makes for a nice mix of people. Sure, there are complaints about the rich and yuppies, but that's all part of the Jordaan.

When does everyone not get along?

Draisma: The carillon of the Westerkerk plays a little melody every 15 minutes, even at night. People new to the area are woken up, get irritated and complain to the local council. The old Jordaaners say the carillon is a part of the neighbourhood. 'If the carillon is turned off at night, then we'll lie awake,' they say. You can't touch the carillon, and if you do, there'll be a huge performance and discussions with a lot of verbal abuse.

Wassenaar: When people buy a new home here they have to fit in quickly, go through a sort of citizenship course. If they don't make an effort to participate they get looked at strangely. If you want to feel at home, you have to get to know your neighbours. The Jordaan lifestyle isn't for everyone.

I understand the Jordaan is still the most densely populated neighbourhood of the Netherlands.

Draisma: Yes. It's amazing, because when you walk around it feels a bit like a village, with all the greenery, potted plants and little gardens. I think the Jordaan should be used more often as a model of compact, livable neighbourhood planning. But it's difficult to reproduce the Jordaan elsewhere. In other parts of the city there are more tourist attractions, but it's the little things that are nice here – the lanes, the old façades, the funny little shops. Visitors like all of this, think it's *gezellig* (cosy). The Jordaan is certainly not spectacular, but it has charm.

What's the biggest challenge to the Jordaan at the moment?

Draisma: That people with lower incomes still be able to afford to live here. There's an enormous pressure on rents due to the popularity of the area.

HOUSEBOAT MUSEUM [Map p86](#)

☎ 427 07 50; www.houseboatmuseum.nl; Prinsengracht, opposite No 296; adult/child under 152cm €3.25/2.50; 🕒 11am-5pm Tue-Sun Mar-Oct, 11am-5pm Fri-Sun Nov-Feb, closed most of Jan

This quirky museum, a 23m-long sailing barge from 1914, offers a good sense of how *gezellig* (cosy) life can be on the water. The actual displays are minimal, but you can watch a slide show of houseboats pretty and ghastly, and inspect the sleeping, living, cooking and dining quarters with all mod cons. In case you were won-

dering, houseboat toilets used to drain directly into the canals, but now most have sewerage hook-ups.

STEDELIJK MUSEUM BUREAU AMSTERDAM [Map p86](#)

Municipal Museum Office; ☎ 422 04 71; www.smba.nl; Rozenstraat 59; admission free; 🕒 11am-5pm Tue-Sun
Don't blink or you might walk right past this unobtrusive outpost, a 'project space' of the leading Stedelijk Museum; it's in a one-time

clothing workshop on a very quiet block. Exhibits here – from painting and sculpture to new media and installation pieces – mix contemporary artists who have some connection to the city with some 'international context'. Shows change about every couple of weeks; ring to make sure it's not closed while changing exhibitions.

HAARLEMMERPOORT [Map p86](#)

Haarlem Gate; Haarlemmerplein

Once a defensive gate to the city, the Haarlemmerpoort marked the start of the busy route to Haarlem, a major trading route. The structure was finished just in time for King William II's staged entry on his 1840 coronation, hence its little-known official name of Willemspoort (see the plaque inside). Traffic no longer runs through the gate since a bypass was built over the Westerkanal. Today this grand archway is home to apartments with an alluring view of the canal and Westerpark beyond.

JORDAAN

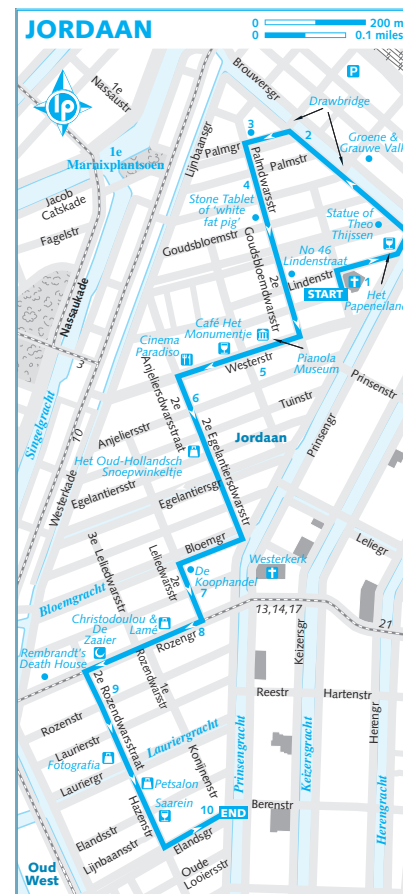
Walking Tour

1 Noorderkerk Begin at the **Noorderkerk** (p85), site of Amsterdam's most attractive **farmers market** (p151). The impressive, cross-shaped church was revolutionary at the time, providing the working-class congregation of the Jordaan with alter views from four transepts.

2 Brouwersgracht Head north along the Prinsengracht to pretty **Brouwersgracht**. Fall into a terrace chair at **Het Papeneiland** (p186) and order a coffee. As you move east along Brouwersgracht, you'll spy a **statue of educator Theo Thijssen** scrutinising a pupil's work, and the fantastic old warehouses **Greene & Grauwe Valk** (Green & Grey Falcon), their huge red shutters swung open on five floors.

3 Rapenhofje At the second drawbridge, turn left into the wide, shady Palmgracht, and look out for the modest red door to the **Rapenhofje**, at Nos 28–38, watched over by a coat of arms and a white porthole window. This placid little courtyard was home to one of Amsterdam's oldest almshouses (1648).

4 Palmdwarsstraat This part of the Jordaan has a village-like character, and moving south along **Palmdwarsstraat** you'll pass tiny food shops frequented by the locals. Note the **stone tablet** of



WALK FACTS

Start Noorderkerk
End Johnny Jordaanplein
Distance 2.5km
Duration One hour

the 'white fat pig' over the butcher-deli at 26 Goudsbloemdwarsstraat 26. Crossing over the broad Lindengracht, pause a moment to consider the quaint house at **Lindenstraat 46**, leaning at an impossible angle above street level.

5 Westerstraat Soon you reach **Westerstraat**, a main drag of the Jordaan, with the quirky **Pianola Museum** (p85), and such alluring places for a bite or drink as **Café 't Monumentje** (p186) or **Cinema Paradiso** (p162).

TULIPMANIA

When it comes to investment frenzy, the Dutch tulip craze of 1636–37 ranks alongside the South Sea Bubble of 1720, the Great Crash of 1929, Enron and the Netherlands' home-grown Ahold scandal.

Tulips originated as wildflowers in Central Asia and were first cultivated by the Turks, who filled their courts with these beautiful spring blooms ('tulip' derives from the Turkish word for turban). In the mid-1500s the Habsburg ambassador to Istanbul brought some bulbs back to Vienna where the imperial botanist, Carolus Clusius, learned how to propagate them. In 1590 Clusius became director of the Hortus Botanicus in Leiden – Europe's oldest botanical garden – and had great success growing and cross-breeding tulips in Holland's cool, damp climate and fertile delta soil.

The more exotic specimens of tulip featured frilly petals and 'flamed' streaks of colour, which attracted the attention of wealthy merchants, who put them in their living rooms and hallways to impress visitors. Trickle-down wealth and savings stoked the taste for exotica in general, and tulip growers arose to service the demand.

Ironically, the frilly petals and colour streaks were symptoms of a virus – healthy tulips at the time were solid, smooth and monotone; the virus itself wasn't discovered until the 20th century. In the 17th century Holland's most beautiful tulips were heavily cross-bred, making them even more susceptible to the virus and difficult to cultivate, and their blossoms unpredictable.

A speculative frenzy ensued, and people paid top florin for the finest bulbs, many of which changed hands time and again before they sprouted. Vast profits were made and speculators fell over themselves to outbid each other. Bidding often took place in taverns and was fuelled by alcohol, which no doubt added to the enthusiasm.

At the height of the Tulipmania in November 1636, a single bulb of the legendary *Semper augustus* variety fetched the equivalent of 10 years' wages for the average worker; a couple of *Viceroy* bulbs cost the equivalent of an Amsterdam canal house. One unfortunate foreign sailor made himself rather unpopular with his employer by slicing up what he thought was an onion as a garnish for his herring. An English amateur botanist, intrigued by an unknown bulb lying in his host's conservatory, proceeded to bisect it, and was put in jail until he could raise an astronomical 4000 guilders.

Of course, this bonanza couldn't last, and when several bulb traders in Haarlem failed to fetch their expected prices in February 1637, the bottom fell out of the market. Within weeks many of the country's wealthiest merchants went bankrupt and many more people of humbler origins lost everything. Speculators who were stuck with unsold bulbs, or with bulbs that had been reserved but not yet paid for (the concept of options was invented during the Tulipmania), appealed for government action but the authorities refused to become involved in what they considered to be gambling. Thus the speculation ended.

However, love of the unusual tulip endured, and cooler-headed growers perfected their craft. To this day, the Dutch continue to be the world leaders in tulip cultivation and supply most of the bulbs planted in Europe and North America. They also excel in other bulbs such as daffodils, hyacinths and crocuses.

So what happened to the flamed, frilly tulips of the past? They're still produced but have gone out of fashion, and are now known as Rembrandt tulips because of their depiction in so many 17th-century paintings.

6 Garden Quarter At the 2e Anjeliersdwarstraat, turn left to enter what locals call the 'garden quarter' of cosy, ivy-clad lanes and diminutive squares. **Het Oud-Hollandsch Snoepwinkelje** (p143) is stacked high with glass jars of traditional sweets like cinnamon sticks and liquorice.

7 Bloemgracht Carry on south over the Eglantiersgracht to the stunning elm-lined waters of the **Bloemgracht** (p87). Plant your feet on the bridge facing east, and drink in the view. The steeple of the mighty **Westerkerk** (p93) pokes over the rooftops. Among the distinctive buildings is **De Koophandel**, a tall, incredibly narrow old warehouse at No 49.

8 Rozengracht At busy **Rozengracht**, sink into a colourful pillow at speciality shop **Christodoulou & Lamé** (p144). Looming over the street are the enormous towers of the former Catholic

church **De Zaaier**, now a mosque. At No 184 you can see **Rembrandt's sterfhuus** (death house), where the master painter died in 1669 (see the plaque).

9 2e Rozendwarstraat Turn south into **2e Rozendwarstraat**. This part of the Jordaan is a mad jumble of styles, and though the winc beams may appear decorative, they still see plenty of active duty. Further along, you'll find intriguing shops such as **Fotografia** (p143) and **Petsalon** (p145), and also a rare lesbian café, **Saarein** (p206).

10 Johnny Jordaanplein What better place to conclude this tour than **Johnny Jordaanplein**, a tiny square dedicated to the singer of schmaltzy tunes such as *Bij ons in de Jordaan*. There are bronze busts of Johnny and other immortals, but the real star here is the colourful utility hut splashed with nostalgic lyrics.

WESTERN CANAL BELT

Drinking & Smoking p187; Eating p163; Shopping p145; Sleeping p215

The canals bordered by the Brouwersgracht and Leidsegracht (to the north and south respectively), the Singel to the east and the Prinsengracht to the west, are among the most gorgeous areas of town, for residents and visitors alike. They are filled with stately homes, refined museums and businesses, intimate cafés and some of the city's finest speciality shops.

This elegant area has its origins in the end of the 16th century, when the city burst its medieval walls as refugees flooded in: Jews from Portugal and Spain, and Protestants from Antwerp. In the 1580s new land was reclaimed from the IJ and the Amstel for the east side of town. In 1613 the authorities embarked on an ambitious plan that would triple the city's area, with canals sprouting to the west and the south.

The blueprint was drawn up by the city carpenter, Hendrick Jacobsz Staets, and, oddly enough, the result resembled half of a bicycle wheel, comprising semicircular and radial canals with bridges and connecting roads. Collectively, these new canals have come to be called the Grachtengordel (Canal Belt), the layout you see today.

The plan called for the whole city to be enclosed by a new outer moat, a zig-zagging canal now known as the Singelgracht. The moat's outer quays became the Nassaukade, named for the Dutch royal House of Orange-Nassau, the Stadhouderskade (for the magistrates) and Mauritskade (for Maurits of Nassau, who played a pivotal role in liberating the Netherlands from Spanish rule). Work began at the Brouwersgracht and headed south. Parcels of land were sold along the way to finance the project, buildings arose gradually, and the Western Canal Belt was completed by 1625.

Society here was clearly divided into haves and have-nots. Before the completion of the Western Canal Bank, merchants lived more or less in their warehouses, mingling with their labourers and suppliers in the thick of the city's activities. Businesses that could be annoying or offensive were banned, and bridges were fixed to exclude large vessels, though this didn't prevent barges from unloading and loading goods at the warehouses.

The wealthiest residents escaped the sweat and the stench by building mansions along the Herengracht, named after the Heeren XVII – '17 Gentlemen' – of the United East India Company. Almost as swanky was the Keizersgracht (Emperor's Canal), a nod to Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I.

The Prinsengracht – after William the Silent, Prince of Orange and the first Dutch royal – was designed as a slightly cheaper canal with smaller residences, warehouses and workshops. It also acted as a barrier against the crusty working-class quarter beyond, the Jordaan. Today the Prinsengracht is the liveliest of Amsterdam's inner canals, with shops and cafés for enjoying life's summer charms. Though on the small side, apartments are relatively affordable by canal standards, and houseboats line the quays.

At the northern end of the Canal Belt, the Brouwersgracht (the Brewers' Canal) was named after the breweries that used to operate here. It's one of the most picturesque canals in town and a great place for a stroll, although it wasn't always so: throughout most of its history it was an industrial canal full of warehouses, workshops and factories banned from the residential Canal Belt. Note the almost uninterrupted row of former warehouses from No 172 to No 212. Houseboats add to the lazy, residential character.

The western part of the district is lorded over by the Westerkerk (p93), with its enormous blue-crowned steeple and gracious square, which is home to the Homomonument (p95). The area's biggest draw is the Anne Frank Huis (p93), which has excerpts of the famous diaries and some of the original furnishings of the Frank family in hiding.

Within the southern reaches of the Western Canal Belt, one of the most delightful areas is the Negen Straatjes (Nine Alleys), the tic-tac-toe board of Amsterdam shopping. The names of the lanes come from the trades once practiced here, mainly for animal furs and products (ie the Wolvenstraat, or Wolf's Street).

The Negen Straatjes are bounded by Reestraat, Hartenstraat and Gasthuismolensteeg to the north, Prinsengracht to the west, Singel to the east and Runstraat, Huidenstraat and Wijde Heisteeg to the south. The *straatjes* are full of quirky little shops dealing in antiques, fashions, housewares and one-offs including everything from toothbrushes to antique eyeglass frames. It's all peppered with pubs, cafés and informal dining.

WESTERN CANAL BELT

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top picks

WESTERN CANAL BELT

- **Anne Frank Huis (below)** Be moved by the story of Anne Frank – get there early or late to avoid the crowds.
- **Negen Straatjes (p91)** Even the shop-averse will be charmed by the quirky and diverse offerings of the myriad boutiques.
- **Step 1:** find yourself a seat at one of the many brown cafés lining the Prinsengracht. **Step 2:** relax.
- **Theater Instituut Nederland (p93)** If the play's your thing, don't miss this excellent, handsome Theater Museum.
- **Westerkerk (right)** Go on, legs of steel: climb the tower for a gorgeous view.

ANNE FRANK HUIS Map p92

☎ 556 71 05; www.annefrank.org; Prinsengracht 276; adult/child under 10yr/child 10-17yr €7.50/free/3.50; ☎ 9am-9pm mid-Mar–mid-Sep, to 7pm mid-Sep–mid Mar, closed Yom Kippur
 It is one of the 20th century's most compelling stories: a young Jewish girl forced into hiding with her family and their friends to escape deportation by the Nazis (see the boxed text, p94). The house they used as a hideaway should be a highlight of any visit to Amsterdam; indeed, it gets nearly a million visitors a year. The house itself is now contained within a modern, square shell.

It took the German army just five days to occupy all of the Netherlands, along with Belgium and much of France. Anne's famous diary describes how restrictions were gradually imposed on Dutch Jews: from being forbidden to ride streetcars to being forced to turn in their bicycles and not being allowed to visit Christian friends. These, of course, were only some of the mildest examples.

The focus of the museum is the *achterhuis* (rear house), also known as the *secret annexe*. It was in this dark and airless space that the Franks observed complete silence during the daytimes, outgrow their clothes, pasted photos of Hollywood stars on the walls and read Dickens, before being mysteriously betrayed and sent to their deaths.

The Anne Frank Huis does not accept the Amsterdam Pass or the Museumkaart, and

queues can be quite long at peak times. Come early or late in the day to avoid the crowds. To save time, buy your tickets online, print them out and use the separate entrance for advance ticket holders. Also note: there's no cloakroom, and no large rucksacks are permitted.

WESTERKERK Map p92

Western Church; ☎ 624 77 66; www.westerkerk.nl; Westermarkt; church admission free, tower €6 by tour only; ☎ church 11am-3pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, tower 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, church services 10.30am Sun Apr-Sep

The main gathering place for Amsterdam's Dutch Reformed community, the church was built for rich Protestants to a 1620 design by Hendrick de Keyser. The nave is the largest in the Netherlands and covered by a wooden barrel vault.

The huge main *organ* dates from 1686, with panels decorated with instruments and biblical scenes. Rembrandt, who died bankrupt at nearby Rozengracht, was buried in a pauper's grave somewhere in the church.

Another highlight is the *bell tower*, topped by the blue imperial crown that Habsburg emperor Maximilian I bestowed to the city for its coat of arms in 1489. The climb of the 85m tower can be strenuous and claustrophobic (inside a tower, after all), but the guide takes breaks on the landings while describing the bells.

Carillon recitals take place on Tuesdays between noon and 1pm; best listening is from the nearby Bloemgracht. The bells also chime mechanically every 15 minutes.

THEATER INSTITUUT NEDERLAND

Map p92

Theater Museum; ☎ 551 33 00; www.tin.nl; Herengracht 168; adult/senior, student & child €4.50/2.25; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun

Theatre buffs will be in their element at the Theater Museum. Exhibits cover the history of Dutch theatre via dioramas (including the first theatre built in Amsterdam, in 1638); displays of costumes from lush to stark; heady sepia-toned early photographs of 19th-century actors; and video clips of famous modern-day productions. It's also a unique opportunity to learn about one of the most interesting legacies of the Dutch theatre: the *rederijkamers* (chambers of

ANNE FRANK

Anne Frank's father, Otto, was a manufacturer of pectin (a gelling agent used in jam) who had the foresight to emigrate with his family from Frankfurt to Amsterdam in 1933. In December 1940 he bought what is now known as the Anne Frank Huis on the Prinsengracht and moved his business here from the Singel. By then the German occupiers had already tightened the noose around the city's Jewish inhabitants, and even though he signed the business over to his non-Jewish partner, Otto was forced to go into hiding in July 1942 with his family – his wife and daughters Anne (aged 13) and Margot (16).

They moved into the specially prepared rear of the building, along with another couple, the Van Daans, and their son Peter, and were joined later by a Mr van Dussel. The entrance hid behind a revolving bookcase, and the windows of the annexe were blacked out to prevent suspicion among people who might see it from surrounding houses (blackouts were common practice to disorient Allied bombers at night).

Here they survived until they were betrayed to the Gestapo in August 1944. The Franks were among the last Jews to be deported and Anne died in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in March 1945, only weeks before it was liberated. Otto was the only member of the family to survive, and after the war he published Anne's diary, which was found among the litter in the annexe (the furniture had been carted away by the Nazis). Addressed to the fictitious Kitty, the diary – written in Dutch – traces the young teenager's development through puberty and persecution, and displays all the signs of a gifted writer in the making.

In 1957 the then owner donated the house to the Anne Frank Foundation, which turned it into a museum on the persecution of Jews in WWII and the dangers of present-day racism and anti-Semitism.

The diary, meanwhile, has taken on a life of its own. It's been translated into some 60 languages and was made into a stage play performed in 34 countries, a 1959 Hollywood movie and a 2001 British movie. The diary has been reissued in recent years, complete with passages deleted by Otto about Anne's awakening sexuality and relationship problems with her mother, all of which only round out her character and remind us that she was, among other things, an ordinary girl, unable to swim against the tide of extraordinary times.

rhetoric), medieval literary societies that staged large-scale productions throughout the Netherlands and Flanders. Most signage is in English.

Even if you're not interested in theatre, the museum has a stunning interior, and spills over into the **Bartolotti House** (Herengracht 170-172), which has one of the most stunning facades in the city: a red-brick, Dutch Renaissance job that follows the bend of the canal. It was built in 1615 by Hendrick de Keyser and his son Pieter.

NEWS PHOTO Map p92

☎ 330 84 00; www.newsphoto.nl; Haarlemmerstraat 24-26; admission free; 🕒 11am-6pm Wed-Mon

This shop-museum displays enormous blowups of photos that accompany headlines, by photographers from around the world. In fact the museum operates like something of a newsroom itself. Themed exhibitions (terrorism, the Tour de France etc) change every few weeks, but as news is made the curators use giant printers to print out the latest, and – presto – it's up on the conveniently magnetic walls. You can order fresh prints in a number of sizes, produced on the spot.

FELIX MERITIS BUILDING Map p92

☎ 623 13 11; www.felix.meritis.nl; Keizersgracht 324; 🕒 box office 9am-7pm

This centre for the performing arts was built in 1787 by Jacob Otten Husly for an organisation called Felix Meritis (Latin for 'Happy through Merit'), a society of wealthy residents who promoted the ideals of the Enlightenment through the study of science, arts and commerce. The colonnaded façade served as a model for that of the Concertgebouw, and its oval concert hall (where Brahms, Grieg and Saint Saëns performed) was copied as the Concertgebouw's Kleine Zaal (Small Hall) for chamber music.

Nowadays the reconstituted Felix Meritis Foundation promotes European performing arts and literature. On a sunny morning the café's huge windows make for comfy reading.

NETHERLANDS MEDIA ART INSTITUTE Map p92

☎ 623 71 01; www.montevideo.nl; Keizersgracht 264; adult/student €2.50/1.50; 🕒 gallery 1-6pm Tue-Sat & 1st Sun of month

From the hilarious and the ridiculous to the deep and the experimental, there's always something interesting in this gallery's

changing exhibits. Don't expect to see works by the hit-makers or TV directors of tomorrow, though. The institute is specifically about video as art; there's an artist-in-residence program if you get inspired. The collection numbers some 1500 works, assembled since the institute was established in 1978. The **mediatheek** (admission free; 🕒 1-5pm Mon-Fri) works like a library, complete with librarians to advise you.

HOMOMONUMENT Map p92

Cnr Keizersgracht & Radhuisstraat

Behind the Westerkerk, this 1987 cluster of three 10m x 10m x 10m granite triangles recall persecution by the Nazis, who forced gay men to wear a pink triangle patch. One of the triangles actually steps down into the Keizersgracht, and is said to represent a jetty from which gays were sent to the concentration camps. Others interpret the step-up from the canal as a rising symbol of hope.

Just south of the Homomonument is the **Pink Point** (🕒 noon-6pm Mar-Aug, limited hours rest of year). Part information kiosk, part souvenir shop, it's a good place to pick up gay and lesbian publications, and news about parties, events and social groups.

HUIS MARSEILLE Map p92

☎ 531 89 89; www.huismarseille.nl; Keizersgracht 401; adult/child under 17yr/student €5/free/3; 🕒 11am-6pm Tue-Sun

This well-curated photography museum stages large-scale, temporary exhibitions, drawing from its own collection as well as hosting travelling shows. Themes might include portraiture, nature or regional photography, spread out over several floors and a 'summer house' behind the main house.

Huis Marseille also has a noteworthy building. The name refers to its original owner, a French merchant in 1665, and the original structure has remained largely intact. It retains some antique touches such as the 18th-century fountain in the library, and a painting of Apollo, Minerva and the muses in the garden room.

MULTATULI MUSEUM Map p92

☎ 638 19 38; www.multatuli-museum.nl; Korsepoortsteeg 20; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue, noon-5pm Sat & Sun (closed Sat Jul & Aug)

Better known by the pen name Multatuli – Latin for 'I have suffered greatly' – novelist

Eduard Douwes Dekker was best known for *Max Havelaar* (1860), about corrupt colonialists in the Dutch East Indies. Dekker himself worked in colonial administration in Batavia (now Jakarta), and the book made him something of a social conscience for the Netherlands. This small but fascinating museum-home chronicles his life and works, and shows furniture and artefacts from his period in Indonesia.

HUIS MET DE HOOFDEN Map p92

House with the Heads; Keizersgracht 123

A shining example of Dutch Renaissance style, this whimsical structure has a beautiful step gable with six heads at door level representing the classical muses. Folklore has it that the heads depict burglars, decapitated in quick succession by a fearless maid as they tried to break in. The façade veritably drips with decorations – lion masks, obelisks and vases – as well as the famous heads (match 'em up): Apollo, Diana, Ceres, Bacchus, Minerva and Mars. The building now houses the Bureau Monumentenzorg, the city office of monument preservation.

BIJBELS MUSEUM Map p92

Bible Museum; ☎ 624 24 36; www.bijbelsmuseum.nl; Herengracht 366-368; adult/child under 12yr/child 13-17yr €7.50/free/3.75; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11-5pm Sun

This place first gained notoriety thanks to a dedicated minister, Leendert Schouten, who built a scale model of the Jewish Tabernacle described in Exodus. Now on the museum's 3rd floor, the model is said to have attracted thousands of visitors even before it was completed in 1851. Another large exhibit examines the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem from Christian, Jewish and Muslim perspectives. A collection of Dutch Bibles includes a **Delft Bible** printed in 1477. On the ground floor you can sniff scents mentioned in the Good Book and stroll through a garden of biblical trees.

POEZENBOOT Map p92

Cat Boat; ☎ 625 87 94; www.poezenboot.nl; Singel, opposite No 40; admission free (but donations encouraged); 🕒 1-3pm

This boat on the Singel is a must for cat-lovers...and hell for mouse-lovers. It was founded in 1966 by an eccentric woman who became legendary for looking after

several hundred stray cats at a time. The boat has since been taken over by a foundation and holds a mere few dozen kitties in proper pens, ready to be spayed, neutered, implanted with an identifying computer chip (as per Dutch law) and, hopefully, adopted out.

VAN BRIENENHOFJE [Map p92](#)

Prinsengracht 89-133; open to the public; ☎ 6am-6pm

This charming courtyard was named in the late 18th century for Jan van Brienen, who bought the Star Brewery located here, one of 13 breweries in town at the time. (The place is still called *De Star hofje* by many.) It was turned into an almshouse for older residents, and although not dirt poor they had a clear division of labour: the women cleaned house for the single men, who in turn toted water buckets from the outside pump (topped by a curious lantern). There's also a manicured garden.

If *hofjes* grab you, be sure to visit the [Jordaan](#) (p85).

DE RODE HOED [Map p92](#)

The Red Hat; ☎ 623 56 06; [www.rodehoed.nl](#); Keizersgracht 102; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm, except during special events

De Rode Hoed is a cultural centre that occupies three glorious 17th-century canal houses. Its line-up includes lectures by world-renowned authors and debates on the topics of the day, sometimes in English. It's worth a visit, even when nothing's on, to view the three-storey main auditorium, which was once the largest clandestine church in the Netherlands. De Rood Hoed – 'the Red Hat' – was named for the hat shop once located here (spot the tile on the façade that identified the place).

VEDDY CIVILISED WESTERN CANALS

Walking Tour

1 The Dam Much more than the birthplace of Amsterdam, today the [Dam](#) (p69) is dominated by the [Royal Palace](#) (p67), worth a visit for its grand interior and art collection. To the right, the impressive [Nieuwe Kerk](#) (p66) often stages excellent exhibitions, while [Madame Tussauds Amsterdam](#) (good for kids; p71) is to the left.

2 Magna Plaza Head west, and across [Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal](#) you'll see the massive shopping complex [Magna Plaza](#) (p72) – check out its atrium lobby and, if you like, dozens of shops.

3 Torenluis Continue west and then head north towards the [Torenluis](#), the bridge over our first canal, the Singel. If you're craving coffee and apple pie, [Villa Zeezicht](#) (p159) has some of the best in town. The bridge features a [statue](#) of the Dutch literary giant Multatuli; there's a [museum](#) (p95) dedicated to him a few blocks north.

4 Brouwersgracht The Singel soon intersects with the pretty [Brouwersgracht](#). Cross over [Brouwersgracht](#) and walk west to the head of the [Herengracht](#), one of our favourite views in town, with boats passing in three directions.

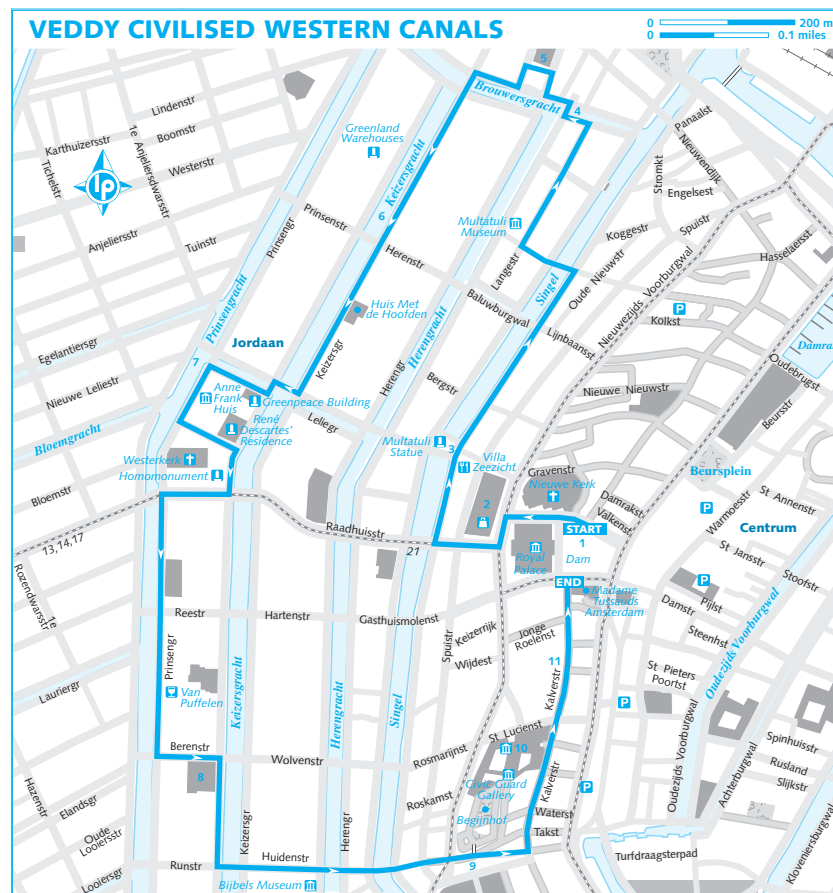
5 Westindisch Huis To the north is [Herenmarkt](#), with the 17th-century [Westindisch Huis](#), the former head office of the Dutch West India Company. It was here that the booty of Admiral Piet Heyn, the great naval hero, was stored after his men captured the Spanish silver fleet off the coast of Cuba.

6 Keizersgracht Turning south, cross the [Brouwersgracht](#) into the [Keizersgracht](#). You'll soon spot the imposing [Greenland Warehouses](#) (p48) and, further on, the curious [Huis Met de Hoofden](#) (House with the Heads; p95), with carvings of Apollo, Ceres and Mars.

7 Prinsengracht At peaceful [Leliegerecht](#), by the [Greenpeace Building](#) (p50), head to [Prinsengracht](#) to pass the [Anne Frank Huis](#) (p93) and the soaring tower of the [Westerkerk](#) (p93). Behind it is [Karin Dann's](#) quietly moving [Homomonument](#) (p95) and, at [Westermarkt](#) 6, the house where René Descartes stayed during his sojourn in Amsterdam. Further south on [Prinsengracht](#) is [Van Puffelen](#) (p188), an atmospheric brown café.

8 Felix Meritis Building Back on [Keizersgracht](#), you can't miss the quirky [Felix Meritis Building](#) (p94), a one-time enlightenment society turned alternative theatre. After WWII this monumental, columned edifice served as the head office of the Dutch Communist Party – that is, until 1981, when the party's dramatic collapse prompted a move elsewhere.

9 Spui Cross the canals again and head east to the [Bijbels Museum](#) (p95), with its impressive models of biblical sites, en route to the [Spui](#) (p69) for a



WALK FACTS

Start The Dam
End Kalverstraat
Distance 3.5km
Duration 1¼ hours

coffee or beer or weekend book and art markets. The [Begijnhof](#) (p68) is just off the square.

10 Amsterdams Historisch Museum The [Amsterdams Historisch Museum](#) (p68) is just up the

alley, along with the group portraits that fill its [Civic Guard Gallery](#) (p68). A former orphans home, the museum is the best place to understand Amsterdam's peculiar evolution from obscure trading post to Golden Age arts hub and now the service-oriented metropolis it is today.

11 Kalverstraat The busy shopping street [Kalverstraat](#) (p73) leads you back to the Dam. For a short course on Dutch football legends, seek out the hallowed halls of [Het Oranje Voetbal Museum](#) (p73).

SOUTHERN CANAL BELT

Drinking & Smoking p189; Eating p166; Shopping p148; Sleeping p217

If the Western Canal Belt is upscale and refined, the Southern Canal Belt is more diverse and populist, though no less stately. The Southern Canal Belt spans the area from the radial Leidsegracht in the west to the Amstel in the east, anchored by two key nightlife districts: Leidseplein and Rembrandtplein. In between are the elegant antique and art shops of the Spiegel Quarter, the gay nightlife hub on the Reguliersdwarstraat, and the Golden Bend (p103), a stretch along the Herengracht that makes some Western Canal Belt houses look like servants' quarters.

The canal project, which began with the Western Canal Belt, stopped at the Leidsegracht in 1625 because of lack of funds, but it was picked up again at a later date. Even then, work on the southern section progressed much more slowly; it took 12 years to construct the western canals, but to extend the Canal Belt all the way to the Amstel took another 40. The Canal Belt was to have continued across the Amstel to the eastern IJ, but the only one ever completed was the Nieuwe Herengracht.

A very short walk west of the Amstel, Rembrandtplein (p104) is a hub of café culture and nightlife of any stripe. You won't have any trouble finding a café or a restaurant on Rembrandtplein or on neighbouring Thorbeckeplein. Many are large and spill onto the sidewalks, but our favourite is the more intimate Café Schiller (p191), an Art Deco marvel that's popular with the pre-theatre crowd. De Heeren van Aemstel (p198) is a fun place to kick back a beer or to catch a performance. Utrechtsestraat, off the southeast corner of Rembrandtplein, is the city's best row of restaurants.

For the gay scene head north on Halvemaansteeg and to the Amstel for a cluster of bars and cafés, or a block west across Vijzelstraat to the always busy Reguliersdwarstraat; the friendly lesbian café Vivelavie (p206) is just east of Rembrandtplein.

The street running west from Rembrandtplein is Reguliersbreestraat. Before the construction of the Canal Belt, the monks of the Regulier (Regular) order had a monastery outside the city walls roughly where Utrechtsestraat now crosses Keizersgracht, which explains the frequent use of the name in this area. Reguliersbreestraat is pretty busy, but on the southern side of the street you can see the Tuschinski theater (p200), opened in 1921 and still the most glorious cinema in the country. The building's blend of Art Deco and Amsterdam School architecture, with its recently refurbished interior, is a visual feast. Inquire about tours.

Southwest of Rembrandtplein, Thorbeckeplein is named after Jan Rudolf Thorbecke, the Liberal politician who created the Dutch parliamentary system in 1848. His statue faces outwards from the square, although he might have enjoyed its leafy car-free atmosphere. There are a number of cafés and clubs on both sides of the square, plus a weekly art market (📅 10.30am-6pm Sun Mar-Oct), which offers mostly modern pictorial work.

A small statue by the Amstelkerk (p104) commemorates Professor Kokadorus, aka Meijer Linnewiel (1867-1934), the most colourful market vendor Amsterdam has known. People would buy anything from spoons to suspenders ('to hang up your mother-in-law') just to watch his performances interlaced with satirical comments about politics. Amsterdam has a long tradition in creative vending, and if you understand Dutch, you can pick up some great lines in the markets of the Jordaan.

The square around the Amstelkerk was kept free of construction, as another church was to have been built there. The funds never materialized, and the square called Amstelveld remains open and pleasant. A Monday market has been operating here since 1876, even before the one on Thorbeckeplein. This lively 'free market' had vendors from out of town peddling a wide range of goods, and it still operates as a garden market (📅 3-6pm Mar-Dec) in the summer months, focusing on plants and flowers. An antiques and collectibles market (📅 9am-6pm) has started on the last Friday of the month in warmer months. In summer the Amstelveld is a pleasant space where children play soccer, dogs run around, and patrons laze in the sun at the café Janvier (p191) against the south side of the Amstelkerk.

Even if you have neither the inclination nor the money to buy art, luxury antiques or collectables, it is well worth taking a look at Nieuwe Spiegelstraat (which begins at the Herengracht) and its pretty extension the Spiegelgracht (which ends across from the Rijksmuseum). Many of the shops and galleries here in the Spiegel Quarter feel like museums in their own right.

top picks

SOUTHERN CANAL BELT

- **Metz Department Store (p106)** Get a bird's-eye view of Amsterdam's canals from the café.
- **Museum Van Loon (right)** See up close what it meant to be wealthy in the Golden Age.
- **Leidseplein (below)** Join the throngs of visitors in Amsterdam's own neon-lit version of Times Sq.
- **FOAM (right)** See cutting-edge photography from some of the world's greatest shooters.
- **Café Schiller (p191)** Cap your eventful day with a beer or dinner in these Art Deco chambers on Rembrandtplein.

LEIDSEPLEIN Map pp100-1

A one-stop shop for party-goers, this hyperactive square is a major tram intersection and a litmus test for nightlife at any given time. On its eastern side stood the Leidsepoort (Leiden Gate), demolished in 1870, where farmers would leave their horses and carts before entering town. The strip of greenery with large chestnut trees on the other side of the Singelgracht is sweetly called 'Leidsebosje' (Leiden Wood).

There's something here for everyone. The sidewalk cafés at the northern end of the square are perfect for watching street artists and eccentric passers-by. There are countless pubs, clubs and a smorgasbord of restaurants. Entertainment venues radiate from its centre, and nearby Kerkstraat has some trendy gay establishments.

BLOEMENMARKT Map pp100-1

Flower Market; Singel; 📅 9am-5pm, closed Sun in winter

Amsterdam's famous flower market is located at the spot where nurserymen, having sailed up the Amstel from their smallholdings, would moor their barges for direct selling to customers. The market here dates from the 1860s, no longer floating but perched on piles. It's a colourful sight and the place is packed with tourists (and pickpockets). Prices are steep by Amsterdam standards but the quality is good. Just make sure that your home country allows you to import bulbs (bulbs destined for the USA are marked with a special label).

FOAM (FOTOGRAFIE MUSEUM AMSTERDAM) Map pp100-1

☎ 551 65 00; www.foam.nl; Keizersgracht 609; adult/child under 12yr/student & senior €7/free/5; 📅 10am-6pm Sat-Wed, to 9pm Thu & Fri
Simple, functional but roomy galleries, some with skylights or grand windows for natural light, make this museum an excellent space for all genres of photography. Two storeys of exhibition space create a great setting for admiring the changing exhibits from photographers of world renown, including Sir Cecil Beaton, Annie Leibovitz and Henri Cartier-Bresson, just to name a few. In case you become enthused after your visit, it also publishes the FOAM magazine.

AMSTERDAM AMERICAN HOTEL

Map pp100-1

☎ 556 30 00; www.amsterdamamerican.com; Leidsekaade 97

The only reason this gorgeous hotel (see p217) got its Yankee-Doodle label is because the architect, CAA Steineweg, studied hotel design in the United States. Steineweg made sure that the style (mostly Viennese Renaissance actually) was adorned with abundant Americana – life-sized Indian chiefs and their squaws as well as a 4m heraldic eagle over the entrance. That building was demolished in 1900, but the magnificent structure you see today is broadly similar, if less bombastic. The brilliant **Café Americain (p190)** in Art Deco style was added in 1927, and still looks much like it did then.

DE APPEL Map pp100-1

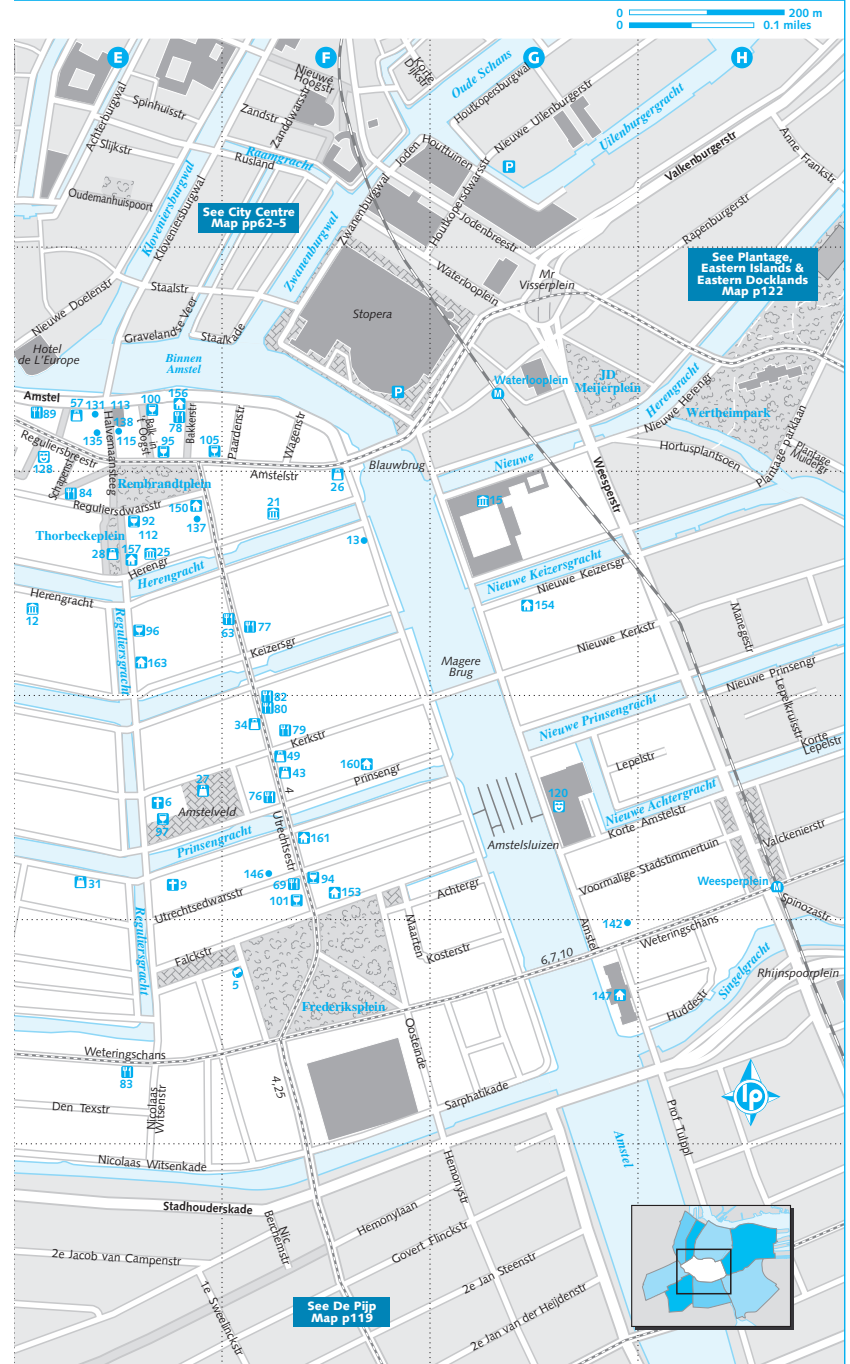
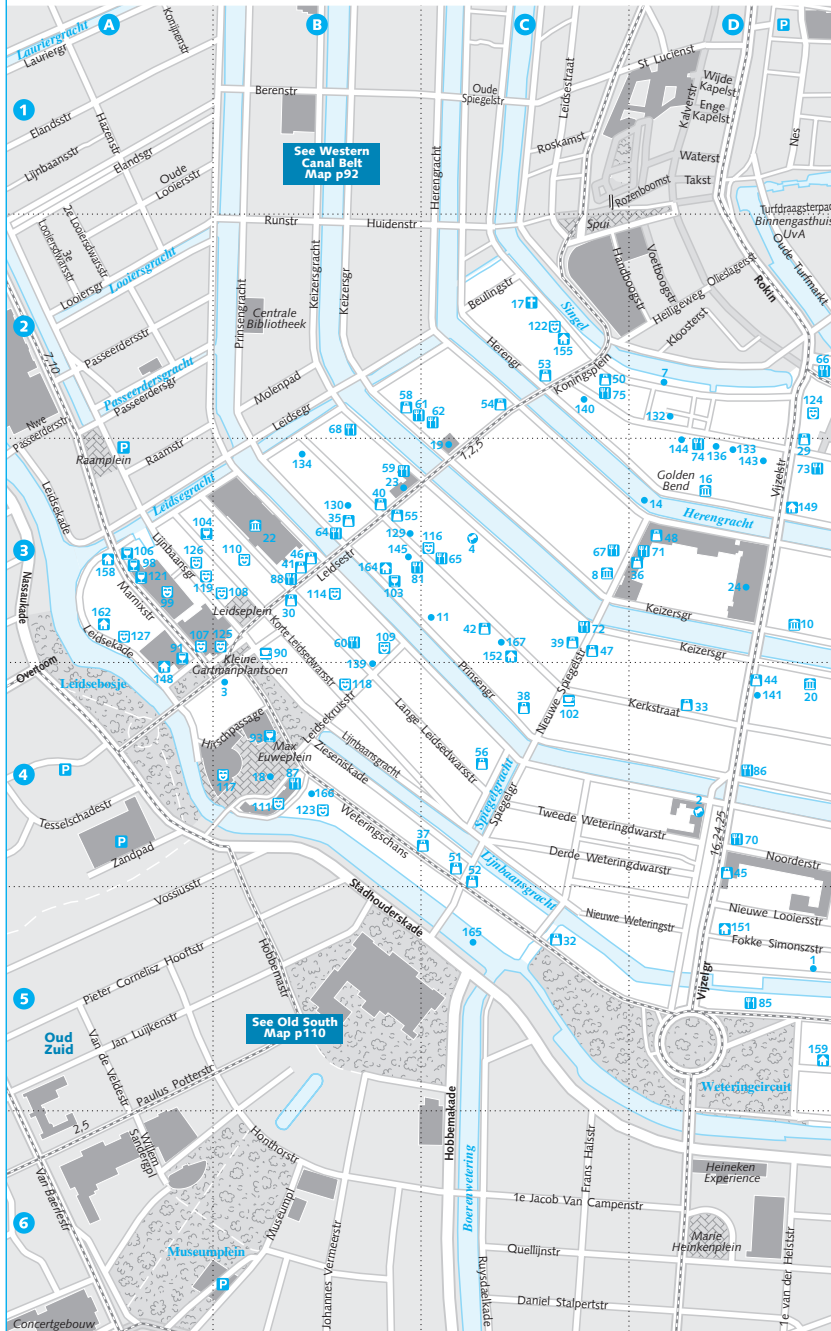
☎ 625 56 51; www.deappel.nl; Nieuwe Spiegelstraat 10; admission €4; 📅 11am-6pm Tue-Sun during exhibitions

Despite its location in the antiques street of the Spiegel Quarter, this contemporary arts foundation is anything but old-fashioned. Rather, it's a large art and media space with ever-changing exhibits of contemporary works: installation pieces, painting, sculpture and multimedia. Themes vary, but the aim is always to present something not otherwise readily available to the Dutch public. Phone or check the website to find out what's on.

MUSEUM VAN LOON Map pp100-1

☎ 624 52 55; www.museumvanloon.nl; Keizersgracht 672; adult/child under 6yr/child 6-18yr €6/free/4; 📅 11am-5pm Wed-Mon
Our favourite house-museum in town, this opulent residence was built in 1672 for a

SOUTHERN CANAL BELT



SOUTHERN CANAL BELT

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rich arms dealer. In the late 1800s it was acquired by the Van Loons, one of the most prominent patrician families (thanks to the herring trade and the United East India Company, of which the original Mr Van Loon was a founder). Inside there are important paintings such as *Wedding Portrait* by Jan Miense Molenaer and a collection of some 150 portraits of the Van Loon family. But the main exhibit is the house itself, quiet, calm, and exuding the security of old money.

TASSENMUSEUM HENDRIKJE

Map pp100-1

Museum of Bags & Purses; ☎ 524 64 52; www.tassenmuseum.nl; Herengracht 573; adult/child under 12yr/student & senior €6.50/free/5; 🕒 10am-5pm

The next time you refer to 'that old bag', think again: we're talking half a millennium's worth of arm candy here, the largest collection of handbags in the Western world. You'll find everything from a crumpled 16th-century pouch to dainty Art Deco and design classics by Chanel, Gucci and Versace, as well as Madonna's tasteful ivy-strewn 'Evita' bag from the film premiere. Even if you don't see the '80s touch-tone phone bag, the 17th-century interiors alone are worth the entrance price.

MUSEUM WILLET-HOLTHUYSEN

Map pp100-1

☎ 523 18 22; www.willetholthuysen.nl; Herengracht 605; adult/child under 6yr/child 6-18yr €5/free/2.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun

This sumptuous residence, now part of the Amsterdam's Historisch Museum, is named after the widow who bequeathed the property to the city in the late 19th century. Highlights include paintings by Jacob de Wit, the *place de milieu* (centrepiece) that was part of the family's 275-piece Meissen table service, and the intimate French-style garden with sundial – you can also peek at the Amstelstraat end. Be sure to borrow the notebook from the front desk, with details that make the house come alive (how meat was roasted and windows were cleaned).

GOLDEN BEND Map pp100-1

Gouden Bocht; Herengracht btwn Leidsestraat & Vijzelstraat

The Golden Bend is about the most prestigious stretch of real estate in Amsterdam, a monument to the Golden Age, when

top picks

IT'S FREE

It's possible to spend a fortune in Amsterdam, but many enjoyable sights and activities cost nothing.

- **Red Light District** (p74) Keep your eyes on the architecture and you needn't spend a cent.
- **Civic Guard Gallery** (p68) Stroll through this monumental gallery of city defenders by the Amsterdam's Historisch Museum.
- **Southern Canal Belt** (p98) Get lost amid the gabled beauty.
- **Concertgebouw** (p199) and **Muziekgebouw** (p200) Treat yourself to great musicians playing great numbers gratis, with near-perfect acoustics.
- **Stopera** (p79) Attend a free recital by renowned, and probably edgy, talent in the Muziektheater.
- **Vondelpark** (p115) Take a bike ride through this lovely historic park
- **Eastern Docklands** (p126) Admire the cutting-edge architecture on a relaxing bike ride.

precious goods swelled in cellars of homes already stuffed with valuables (see the boxed text, p27). The earliest mansions date from the 1660s, when the Canal Belt was expanded south. Thanks to some lobbying at city hall, the gables here were twice as wide as the standard Amsterdam model, and the rear gardens were deeper. The richest Amsterdamers lived, loved and ruled their affairs from here. Apart from the museum **Kattenkabinet** (below), the homes are opened to the public only on Open Monument Day (see p19).

KATTENKABINET Map pp100-1

Cats in Cabinet; ☎ 626 53 78; Herengracht 497; adult/child under 3yr/child 4-16yr €5/free/2.50; 🕒 9am-2pm Tue-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun

One Golden Bend house that's open to the public is this offbeat museum, devoted, of all things, to the feline presence in art. It was founded by a wealthy financier, John Pierpont Morgan III, in memory of his red tomcat. The collection includes works largely from Dutch and French artists (Theophile-Alexandre Steinlen, 1859–1923, figures prominently) as well as a small Rembrandt (a Madonna and Child with cat and snake) and Picasso's *Le Chat*. There's also a nice selection of 19th-century magazine covers and circus posters.

THE WINNER BY A NARROW MARGIN

Canal-boat commentators like to point out the narrowest house in Amsterdam, explaining that property was taxed on frontage – the narrower the house the lower the tax, regardless of height. But each guide seems to have a different ‘narrowest’ house. So which is it?

The house at Oude Hoogstraat 22, east of the Dam, is 2.02m wide and 6m deep. Occupying a mere 12 sq metres, it could well be the least space-consuming self-contained house in Europe. The house at Singel 7 appears narrower still, just a door and a slim 1st-floor window, but canal-boat commentators fail to point out that it’s actually the rear entrance of a house of normal proportions. On the other side of Singel, at No 144, is a house that measures only 1.8m across the front, though it widens to 5m at the rear.

GEELVINCK HINLOPEN HUIS Map pp100-1

☎ 639 07 47; www.geelvinckhinlophenhuis.nl; Herengracht 518; adult/child under 6yr/student €4/free/3; 🕒 11am-5pm Sun

East of the mayor’s residence at No 502 stands this 17th-century house with stylish rooms, a formal garden and art in the carriage house. Though not quite as impressive as Museum Van Loon or Museum Willet-Holthuysen, it’s more serene, and definitely worth a look, especially if you can organise a private tour for your group on a weekday. Note: the entrance to the museum is around the back at Keizersgracht 633.

REMBRANDTPLEIN Map pp100-1

Originally called Reguliersplein and then Botermarkt, after the butter markets held here until the mid-19th century, this square takes its name from the statue of the painter erected in 1876. He’s gazing pensively towards the Jewish quarter where he lived until circumstances forced him to the Jordaan.

Rembrandtplein soon evolved into a nightlife hub as various cafés, restaurants and clubs opened their doors. It’s almost genteel during the day, though often heaving with visitors. On the north side of the square, *De Kroon* (p190), one of the grandest cafés in town, is from 1898. Opposite, *Café Schiller* (p191), from 1892, is renowned for its fabulous Art Deco interior, including lead-tinted glass windows.

GIJSBERT DOMMER HUIS Map pp100-1

Amstel 216
Look closely, ladies and gentlemen, at the façade of this sober residence known locally as the ‘House with the Blood Stains’. As he lost his marbles, six-time mayor and diplomat Coenraad van Beuningen scribbled graffiti here in his own blood, and his unfathomable message –

including Hebrew letters and obscure cabal symbols – from the 17th century is still faintly visible. Well-to-do businessman Gijsbert Dommer commissioned this house from 1671, but the mad mayor is better known today.

BLAUWBRUG Map pp100-1

Blue Bridge, btwn Waterlooplein & Amstel street
Built in 1884, one of the city’s most striking bridges replaced an old wooden version that connected these shores of the Amstel since the 17th century. Inspired by the Alexander III bridge in Paris, it features tall, ornate street lamps topped by the imperial crown of Amsterdam, fish sculptures and foundations shaped like the prows of a medieval ship.

REGULIERSGRACHT Map pp100-1

This peaceful canal was dug in 1658 to link the Herengracht with the canals further south. It was named after an order of monks whose monastery was located nearby. It rates right up there with Amsterdam’s prettiest canals, and through a quirk of construction you can peer through the arches of at least seven bridges, a fact not lost on canal-boat operators. A number of houses along here have intriguing gables, tablets and fancy decorations (see p107).

AMSTELKERK Map pp100-1

☎ 520 00 70; Amstelveld 10; admission free; 🕒 9am-5pm

The unique, pinewood Amstelkerk was erected in 1668 as a *noodkerk* (makeshift church) under the direction of the city architect, Daniël Stalpaert. The idea was that the congregation would have somewhere to meet while a permanent church arose next to it. Plans for a stone church were abandoned in the 1840s, and the Amstelkerk’s square interior was updated with neo-Gothic alterations, including a pipe

organ. The building now houses the offices of a local city restoration group, and is a popular concert venue. The seats under the shady plane trees at the adjacent bar-restaurant *Janvier* (p191) are a wonderful place to nurse a drink.

DE DUIF Map pp100-1

The Dove; ☎ 520 00 70; Prinsengracht 756; 🕒 services 10am Sun

In 1796, shortly after the French-installed government proclaimed freedom of religion, De Duif was the first Catholic church to be built with a public entrance for over two centuries. These days De Duif is no longer Catholic but Ecumenical, and it’s

top picks

FOR CHILDREN

- **Vondelpark** (p115) A hot favourite with the small fry, this park near the old centre is replete with leafy picnic spots, playgrounds and duck ponds.
- **Kinderkookkafé** (p171) Put the kids to work on their own gourmet creations, and take a load off.
- **Amsterdamse Bos** (p131) A huge recreational area with a forestry museum, a petting zoo and energy-burning meadows.
- **Tram Museum Amsterdam** (p131) Take a historic tram complete with clanging bells from the Vondelpark to the Amsterdamse Bos.
- **NEMO science and technology centre** (p69) A tailor-made, hands-on science fun fair useful for answering all those How and Why questions.
- **Tropenmuseum** (p128) The children’s section devoted to exotic locations is a hit in any language.
- **Joods Historisch Museum** (p79) The kids’ section on Jewish life in Amsterdam is accessible and fun.
- **Artis Zoo** (p121) The extrovert monkeys, shimmying fish and the planetarium will keep those young eyes shining for hours
- **Nederlands Scheepvaartmuseum** (p124) The old masted ship is staffed with costumed hosts who always put on a grand show.
- **Civic Guard Gallery** (p68) A bite-sized gallery of giant paintings guaranteed to awe the young ‘uns.
- **Canal bike** (p252) Take a unique pedal-powered ride through the city’s beautiful canals.
- **TunFun** (p80) Set ‘em loose for a romp in this underground all-round pleasure centre.
- **Koninginnedag** (Queen’s Day; p17) Kids of all ages revel in the madness of 30 April, the country’s biggest party.

also a venue for concerts, opera and private events. If you’re able to peek inside, check out the clay friezes of the Stations of the Cross on the right-hand wall. The pulpit carvings are of St Willebrordus of Utrecht, and the organ is a sight in its own right, reaching clear to the vaulted ceiling.

MAGERE BRUG Map pp100-1

Skinny Bridge; Amstel river, btwn Kerkstraat & Nieuwe Kerkstraat

This undeniably picturesque bridge is the site of many a Dutch wedding photo. Dating from the 1670s, the nine-arched structure has been rebuilt several times, in both concrete and timber. It’s still operated by hand and remains photogenic even at night, when 1200 tiny lights make the bridge look like a Christmas confection. You can spot it in many films, including the James Bond thriller *Diamonds are Forever*. Stand in the middle and feel it sway under the passing traffic.

AMSTELSLUIZEN Map pp100-1

Amstel Locks; Amstel river, nr Theater Koninklijk Carré

These impressive sluices, or locks, date from 1674 and allowed the canals to be flushed with fresh water from lakes north of the city, rather than salt water from the IJ, an innovation that made the city more livable. They were still operated by hand until recently. Four times a week in summer, and twice a week in winter, the locks are shut while fresh water flows in. The sluices on the west side of the city are left open as the stagnant water is pumped out to sea.

KONINKLIJK THEATER CARRÉ

Map pp100-1

☎ 524 94 52; www.theatercarre.nl; Amstel 115-125; 🕒 box office 4-8pm

This esteemed theatre was built in 1887 by the Carré family, who had started their career years earlier with a horse act at the annual fair. The first structure was of wood, and eventually rebuilt in concrete because of the fire hazard, as early performances for 2000 spectators were lit by gas lamps. The classical façade is richly decorated with faces of jesters, dancers and theatre folk. Today the Carré books high-calibre musicals, theatre and dance events, and its Christmas circus is regarded as a seasonal highlight.

PALEIS VAN JUSTITIE Map pp100-1

Court of Appeal; ☎ 541 21 11; Prinsengracht 436; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri

This authoritative pile began life in 1666 as an orphanage designed for 800 occupants, but by the early 19th century more than half the city's 4300 orphans were crammed in here. A royal decree finally relocated them to other towns, amid cries that children were being stolen. The building's current scowl, in sober neoclassical, is from an 1829 renovation after the orphanage was closed. You can wander inside, but as a rule you won't get beyond reception unless you have, er, official business. At the time of writing the court was due move into a fancy new office in Westerdokeiland (see p52) in 2010.

STADSARCHIEF Map pp100-1

Municipal Archives; ☎ 251 15 11; <http://stadsarchief.amsterdam.nl>; Vijzelstraat 32; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 11am-5pm Sun In 2007 the Amsterdam city archives moved into the historic ABN-Amro building, a monumental structure from 1923 that was long the bank's head office. Anyone interested in the history of their family or the city can peruse the documents free of charge, and occasionally there are some interesting exhibitions. There's a large library with books about Amsterdam in different languages on everything from housing to legal briefs and sports clubs, as well as a café.

KRIJTBURG Map pp100-1

☎ 623 19 23; www.krijtberg.nl; Singel 446; ☎ 12.30-5pm Tue, Wed, Thu & Sun

The soaring turrets of this neo-Gothic church are an odd sight in this row of sedate Singel homes. Officially known as the St Franciscus Xaveriuskerk, it replaced a clandestine Jesuit chapel on the same site; these days it's still Jesuit. The lavish paintings and statuary make this one of the most beautiful church interiors in the city.

Krijtberg's name means 'chalk mountain', referring to a house that once stood here and belonged to a chalk merchant.

MAX EUWE CENTRUM Map pp100-1

☎ 625 70 17; www.maxeuwe.nl; Max Euweplein 30a-1; admission free; ☎ noon-4pm Tue-Fri & 1st Sat of month, limited hours Jul & Aug

Max Euwe (1901-81) was the Netherlands' only world chess champion, in the 1930s, and here you'll find a permanent exhibition devoted to the history of the game. You can

play against live or digital opponents. The pavement of the square out front is often crowded with players and onlookers bent over the outsized chess board.

METZ DEPARTMENT STORE Map pp100-1

☎ 520 70 36; cnr Keizersgracht & Leidsestraat This building opened in 1891 to house the New York Life Insurance Company (hence the eagles inside and out), but soon passed to Metz, a purveyor of luxury furnishings which still owns it today. The functionalist designer and architect Gerrit Rietveld added the gallery on the top floor where you can have lunch or (literally) high tea.

STADSSCHOUWBURG Map pp100-1

City Theatre; ☎ 624 23 11; www.stadsschouwburgamsterdam.nl; Leidseplein 26; ☎ advance ticket sales 10am-6pm Mon-Sat

In 1894, when this theatre with the grand balcony arcade was completed, public criticism was so fierce that funds for the exterior decorations never materialised. The architect, Jan Springer, couldn't handle this and promptly retired. The theatre is used for large-scale plays, operettas and festivals such as Julidans (p18).

UTRECHTSESTRAAT Map pp100-1

This popular artery stocked with enticing shops, designer bars and cosy eateries seems a world away from the gaudy lights of Rembrandtplein, a stone's throw to the north. Lack of space becomes a charm as the trams, confined to a single line apart from passing points on the bridges, play a game of stop and go as passers-by marvel at the choreography of it all. The southern end of street used to terminate at the Utrechtse Poort, a gate to the nearby city of Utrecht, hence the name.

HERMITAGE AMSTERDAM Map pp100-1

☎ 530 87 51; Nieuwe Herengracht 14; www.hermitage.nl; adult/child under 16yr €/free; ☎ 10am-5pm

The long-standing ties of Russia and Holland – remember Czar Peter learned shipbuilding and Dutch cursing here – led to an Amsterdam branch of the State Hermitage Museum of St Petersburg. Prestigious exhibits, such as of Persian art or the Art Nouveau, change about twice per year, and they're as stately as you'd expect.

In 2009 the museum will expand into the Amstelhof (1683), a former almshouse

A MEDLEY OF MUSEUMS

Whether it's modern art or art about cats, stately homes or tropical cultures, stories of historical tragedy or miracles of modern technology, Amsterdam offers a range of museums for any taste (visit www.amsterdammuseums.nl).

Most of the leading museums in town display captions in English. If captions are in Dutch only, you can usually get an English-language brochure (often free) or borrow a binder explaining the exhibits. Many museums have pleasant cafés with gardens or courtyards – good places to relax or read up.

As to be expected, weekends tend to be the busiest times, along with Wednesday afternoons when many primary schools have the afternoon off and children are herded into museums. The most common museum closing day is Monday.

A handful of museums offer free entry, but most charge admission. Adult admissions run from about €2.50 to €10, which is pretty reasonable by the standards of world capitals; special exhibitions may cost extra. Discounts are available for those aged over 65 (though rarely) or under 18, for students and holders of other types of cards and passes (see p245).

If you plan to be in the Netherlands for a while, get the **Museumkaart** (Museum Card; ☎ 0900-404 09 10, per call €0.35; www.museumkaart.nl); over/under 26yr €35/17.50 plus €4.95 fee for first-time registrants), which gives you free (mostly) or discounted (occasionally) admission to several hundred museums around the country for a year. It's valid for most museums in Amsterdam, although not the Anne Frank Huis or the Royal Palace. After five or six museums the card will have paid for itself. Inquire at participating museums.

If you are making just one quick trip to Amsterdam, you might consider the **I Amsterdam Card** (per 24/48/72hr €33/43/53). It includes many of the same museums as the Museumkaart (though, again, not the Anne Frank Huis or the Royal Palace), a free canal cruise, freebies and discounts at a number of shops and attractions and a transit pass good for anywhere the GVB goes. The pass can come in handy: although Amsterdam is not an enormous city, a half-hour walk between museums can certainly eat into your limited time. The I Amsterdam Card is available at tourist office locations (p255).

The Rederij Lovers Museumboat day pass (p250) is also worth considering for the discounts it offers.

and sweeping courtyard next door. Now in the throes of renovation, the Amstelhof broke with social norms by housing women in small quarters of four beds each, rather than dormitories. Behind the handsome façade, however, little remains of the original interiors.

SOUTHERN CANAL BELT STROLL

Walking Tour

1 Spiegel Quarter Set off at the Singelgracht near the **Rijksmuseum** (p111) and head north into the nexus of art and antique shops, the **Spiegel Quarter**, along the Nieuwe Spiegelstraat. Historic prints, paintings and period furnishings can be found along this attractive lane in galleries such as **EH Ariëns Kappers** (p148) and **Jaski** (p148).

2 Golden Bend One of Amsterdam's swankiest patches of real estate, the aptly-named **Golden Bend** (p103) on Herengracht is awash with classical French flourishes. No other part of Amsterdam exudes more Golden Age wealth. The statue-studded mansion at **Herengracht 475** once belonged to art collector Jan Gildemeester; a painting in the Rijksmuseum depicts him proudly showing his collection to visitors.

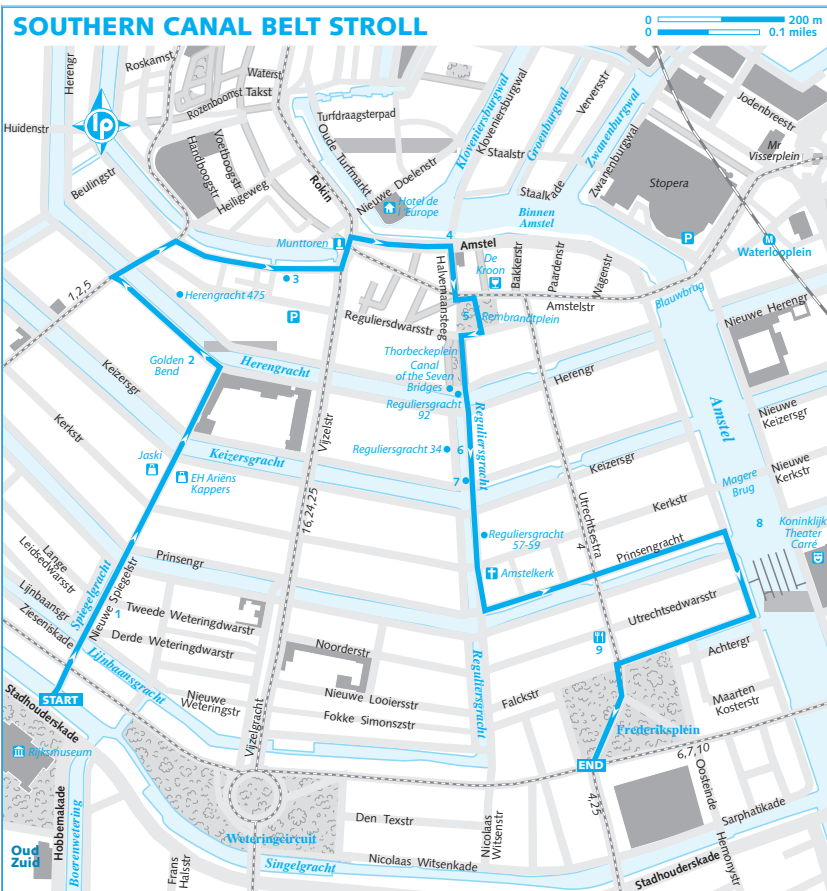
3 Bloemenmarkt The bustling **Bloemenmarkt** (Flower Market; p99) is a reminder of what it

means to have Tulip Fever. Rounding the eastern end of the market you'll immediately see one of Amsterdam's most enduring emblems, the striking **Munttoren** (Mint Tower; p48), which turned out precious little cash before falling into French hands.

4 Amstel river From the tower, head east along the **Amstel river** to take in the grand **Hotel de l'Europe** (p212), where polished skiffs moor at the terrace restaurant. This is a good spot to stand on Queen's Day, when boats bend over backwards to pass the low-lying bridge connecting to Muntplein.

5 Rembrandtplein At the bridge, turn south into tiny Halvemaansteeg (Half-Moon Lane) and the beating heart of the entertainment district around **Rembrandtplein** (p104). As you cross the square, stop to admire the statue of master painter Rembrandt. If it's coffee 'n' cake time, best make a beeline to **De Kroon** (p190) one of the most stylish 'grand cafés' equipped with an alluring upstairs terrace.

6 Reguliersgracht Saunter over shady **Thorbeckeplein** to the Herengracht, lean on the bridge and sigh over the gooey postcard vista of **Reguliersgracht**, aka the **canal of the seven bridges** (p104). Sights include the corner house at **Reguliersgracht 92**, decorated with the statue of a stork that canal-boat drivers fantasise had to do with



WALK FACTS

Start Spiegel Quarter
End Pata Negra
Distance 4.2km
Duration 1½ hours

midwifery. The house at **Reguliersgracht 34** has an unusual twin entrance and an eagle gable for the original owner, Arent van den Bergh (*arend* is a Dutch word for eagle).

7 15 Bridges Where the Keizersgracht and Reguliersgracht join up, there's a scene to outdo the mere seven bridges before: here you can count more than twice that number as you peer east-west and north-south. The beautiful carved wooden façade at Reguliersgracht

was made by a carpenter. A few steps further south you'll come to the **Amstelkerk** (p104), the curious wooden church with a belfry that still looks quite makeshift.

8 Amstel river From here, head east down this quiet section of the Prinsengracht till you reach the shores of the **Amstel river**. From this vantage point you can admire the comely **Magere Brug**, and beyond the *sluizen* (locks), the neon-lit roof of the **Koninklijk Theater Carré** (p105), the premier stage for musicals.

9 Pata Negra Now you can settle down to tapas and sangria at **Pata Negra** (p168), where the after-work crowds gather under the suspended garlic and shanks of cured ham. Then catch a tram or bus from **Frederiksplein**.

OLD SOUTH

Drinking & Smoking p191; Eating p170; Shopping p152; Sleeping p219

This wedge-shaped district is one of Amsterdam's most *genteel*. It is roughly bordered by Stadhouderskade to the north, the Vondelpark to the west and Hobbemakade to the east. It's also variously known by its landmarks: some call it the 'Museum Quarter' (for the Rijks, Stedelijk and Van Gogh Museums), the 'Concertgebouw area' or the 'Vondelpark area'. All are worthy emblems.

The origin of this gentility goes back to real estate. By the 1860s the Canal Belt was no longer sufficient for the population needs of this city, rapidly expanding with the industrial revolution.

If the Canal Belt was the essence of urban planning, this round of expansion was a pure expression of market capitalism. Cheap tenement housing was built across Hobbemakade in the neighbourhood that came to be known as De Pijp, but wealthy investors wanted an upmarket neighbourhood for themselves and saw to it that tenement blocks and businesses were prohibited on this side. Instead, they thought it a suitable spot for a grand national museum (the Rijksmuseum) and an equally grand new concert hall (the Concertgebouw).

In the centre of it all is the Museumplein (p111), a large, grassy park bordered by a clutch of illustrious museums: the Rijksmuseum (p111), the Van Gogh Museum (below) and the Stedelijk Museum (p113). Off the southern fringe stands the grand entrance of the Concertgebouw (p111). Dotted in and around Museumplein is a wealth of shopping and dining options, and some lovely places to stay. The district also possesses some stunning buildings in the Amsterdam School style.

Museumplein was laid out to host the World Exhibition in 1883, but gained its lasting title only when the Rijksmuseum was opened two years later. One of many face-lifts lifted a triangle of turf at the southern end, dubbed the 'ass's ear' for its shape; it's a popular spot for sun worshippers. There's a large supermarket, Albert Heijn, concealed below.

For as long as anyone can remember, the square has been used for concerts, special events and political demonstrations. At other times it's a relaxing place to hang out, play hacky-sack, skateboard (ramp provided), toss a Frisbee or enjoy a picnic. In winter the long concrete pond is transformed into a festive skating rink. Near the pond you'll find a tic-tac-toe board that plays musical notes when you step on the different squares.

Many of the streets around the Museumplein are named for exemplary Dutch artists, musicians and writers. Pieter Cornelisz (PC) Hooftstraat between Stadhouderskade and the Vondelpark is the shopping street for the cream of society and the *nouveau riche*. (Sport utility vehicles are sometimes called 'PC Hooft tractors' for this reason.) You'll find some of the world's leading brands here, both in shops of their own name and in others, as well as a few surprisingly friendly cafés for a break. PC Hooft (1581-1647) was the son of a mayor of Amsterdam who grew up to become a historian, author and founder of a literary society that included Joost van den Vondel of Vondelpark fame. We wonder what Hooft would have made of such blatant commercialism.

VAN GOGH MUSEUM Map p110

☎ 570 52 00; www.vangoghmuseum.nl; Paulus Potterstraat 7; adult/child under 12yr/child 13-17yr €10/free/2.50, audio or palmtop tour €4; 🕒 10am-6pm Sat-Thu, to 10pm Fri

Next to the Stedelijk Museum building is the Van Gogh Museum, one of Amsterdam's must-sees. Opened in 1973 to house the collection of Vincent's younger brother Theo, it consists of about 200 paintings and 500 drawings by Vincent and his friends and contemporaries, such as Gauguin, Monet, Toulouse-Lautrec and Bernard.

Vincent van Gogh was born in 1853 and had a short but astonishingly productive life. Through his paintings, the museum chronicles his journey from Holland (where his work was dark and sombre) to Paris

where, under the influence of the Impressionists, he discovered vivid colour. From there he moved to Arles, where he was incredibly productive, often completing a canvas every day.

Astoundingly, Van Gogh was self-taught as a painter and had a career that spanned less than a decade. A volatile character liable to mood swings, he famously cut off his ear after an argument with Gauguin. In 1890, while in the depths of depression, he finally committed suicide. He would come to be regarded as a giant among artists but during his lifetime Van Gogh sold only a single painting.

Famous works on display include *The Potato Eaters* (1885), an example of his sombre Dutch period, *The Yellow House*

OLD SOUTH

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See Vondelpark & Around Map p116

See De Pijp Map p119

in Arles (1888), *The Bedroom* (1888) and several self-portraits and still lifes of sunflowers and other blossoms that shimmer with intense Mediterranean light. One of his last paintings, *Wheatfield with Crows* (1890), is an ominous work finished shortly before his suicide.

The permanent collection also includes many of the artist's personal effects. Van Gogh received a milk jug from Theo and used it in several works. There are also knots of wool which he used to study contrasts in colours.

Van Gogh's paintings are on the 1st floor; several other floors display his drawings and Japanese prints, and works by his friends, contemporaries and others he influenced, some of which are shown in rotation. The **library** (☎ 570 59 06; Museumplein 4; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri) has a wealth of reference material for serious study.

The entrance queues can be long, as only so many visitors are allowed inside at a time. Come early or on Friday night, when the museum hosts special cultural events.

The museum's main building was designed by Gerrit Rietveld, the seminal Dutch architect. Behind it, reaching onto Museumplein, is a separate exhibition wing (1999) designed by Kishio Kurokawa, commonly referred to as 'the Mussel'.

RIJKSMUSEUM Map p110

☎ 674 70 00; www.rijksmuseum.nl; Stadhouderskade 42; adult/child under 18yr €10/free; ☎ 9am-6pm Sat-Thu, to 10pm Fri

The Rijksmuseum (National Museum) is the premier art museum of the Netherlands, and no self-respecting visitor to Amsterdam can afford to miss it. Though most of the building is closed for renovations until early 2010, there is an excellent collection of around 200 masterpieces exhibited in a side section, the Philips wing. Still, over a million people visit every year, so come early to avoid the queues or buy your (printable) tickets online. The exact works on display in the Philips wing are subject to change.

The Rijksmuseum was conceived as a repository for several national collections, including art owned by the royal family. The collection includes some 5000 paintings, most importantly those by Dutch and Flemish masters from the 15th to 19th centuries. The emphasis, naturally, is on the Golden Age.

Pride of place is taken by Rembrandt's *Nightwatch* (1650), showing the militia led by Frans Banning Cocq, a future mayor of the city. The painting only acquired its name over time with a layer of grime (it's nice and clean now). Other 17th-century Dutch masters include Jan Vermeer (*The Milkmaid* and *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*), Frans Hals (*The Merry Drinker* and *Jan Steen* (*The Merry Family*)).

Other good sections are Sculpture and Applied Art (delftware, dolls houses, porcelain, furniture), Dutch History and Asiatic Art, including the famous 12th-century *Dancing Shiva*. The museum's famous print archives have some 800,000 prints and drawings.

Architecturally, the Rijksmuseum forms the gateway to the Museum Quarter. It was completed in 1885 to a design by Pierre Cuypers, who also designed Centraal Station four years later. Both buildings are a mixture of neo-Gothic and Dutch Renaissance. The neo-Gothic elements (towers, stained-glass windows) brought a hailstorm of criticism from Protestants including the king, who dubbed the building 'the archbishop's palace' (Cuypers was Catholic, and proudly so in his approach to architecture).

MUSEUMPLEIN Map p110

Paulus Potterstraat

This vast, open park behind the Rijksmuseum was cleverly redeveloped in 1999-2000 and today is one of Amsterdam's busiest open spaces. Beneath the park are a car park and a supermarket, while back at street level there is a café, a skate ramp and a large, sparkling pond (perfect for ice-skating in winter).

CONCERTGEBOUW Map p110

☎ 671 83 45; www.concertgebouw.nl; Concertgebouwplein 2-6; ticket prices vary; ☎ box office 10am-7pm

The literal name 'Concert Building' scarcely does justice to this amazing facility, which attracts some 850,000 visitors a year to 800 shows. This makes it the busiest concert hall in the world but, refreshingly, it hasn't lost its common touch.

The Concertgebouw was completed in 1888 to a neo-Renaissance design by AL van Gendt. In spite of his limited musical knowledge, he managed to give the two-tiered Grote Zaal (Main Hall) near-perfect

AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO AMSTERDAM, PART 3: SEAN CONDON *Simon Sellars*

Australian Sean Condon is the author of the bittersweet 'nonfiction novel' *My 'Dam Life*, about his time in Amsterdam and his bemused efforts to adapt to the rhythms of Dutch life (the book was saddled with the Orwellian epithet 'Down and Out In Amsterdam' by one reviewer). I prodded Sean to give me his appraisal of this eccentric town.

Do you have a favourite part of Amsterdam? Anywhere to avoid?

My favourite is the Jordaan, because most of my friends live there. I dislike the main red-light area behind Warmeroesstraat, because it's usually full of loutish drunken tourists who spoil the otherwise lovely, rosy ambience.

Pick an Amsterdam cliché – now debunk it.

There are far fewer Dutch doors than you'd think.

Describe your favourite, and least favourite, 'Amsterdam experience'.

My favourite is riding anywhere, any time, in any weather – on a bike. My least favourite is encountering groups of the aforementioned louts.

Speaking of bikes, can there be anything funnier than a bicyclist giving a ride to a blowup sex doll?

Yes. Those big, wooden trays on the front of bikes, full of infants, that teachers use to transport kids from one place to another. Hilarious.

What book set in Amsterdam would you recommend for newcomers?

There are few that I know of. There's *Amsterdam*, an excellent and lively history of the city by Geert Mak. Maybe Ian McEwan's *Amsterdam*, but I haven't read it. Some of the scenes early on in Ian Fleming's *Diamonds Are Forever* are set in Amsterdam, and they're cool.

You're a writer – you must have a favourite Amsterdam bar.

Without doubt my favourite is Proeflokaal Fockinck (p184), a tiny *jenever* bar founded in the 17th century. It's congenial and a superb place to meet strangers. Every day I miss it and every day my liver thanks me that it's now on the other side of the world.

Where do you like to eat in Amsterdam?

My favourite Amsterdam restaurant is De Reddende Engel, but it's in Antwerp, which should give you some idea of the culinary scene in Amsterdam. There is one place, on Leliegracht, called Christophe (p163) – it's excellent, but boy you'll pay for it. Also the Gouden Real on Prinseneiland used to be good – and it has a great setting, too.

Do you have a favourite local slang or swear word?

Jammer (shame).

Care to reveal Amsterdam's best-kept secret?

No.

What annoys you the most about Amsterdam?

The appalling – and yet very expensive – food served by the rudest wait staff in Europe.

How did living in Amsterdam change you?

It introduced me to the world beyond Australia, and now that I'm back here, I kind of wish it hadn't.

Describe *My 'Dam Life* for someone who hasn't read it.

Unfortunate cover, great book. A love story about both my wife, Sally, and Amsterdam.

acoustics that are the envy of sound designers worldwide. Add in baroque trim, panels inscribed with the names of classical composers, a massive pipe organ and a grand staircase via which conductors and soloists descend to the stage, and you've got a venue where the best performers are honoured to appear.

In the 1980s the Concertgebouw threatened to collapse because its 2000 wooden piles were rotting. Thanks to new technology, the piles made way for a concrete foundation, and the building was thoroughly

restored to mark its 100th anniversary. The architect Pi de Bruin added a glass foyer along the southern side that most people hate, though everyone agrees it's effective.

HOUSE OF BOLs *Map p110*

☎ 570 85 41; www.houseofbols.com; Paulus Potterstraat 14; €10, age 18yr & over; ☎ 12am-6pm Wed-Mon

Wanted to know what was slipped into your drink? This is the place to find out. An hour's self-guided tour takes you on a journey that will leave you stirred but

not shaken – that is, until you try the Tom Cruise moves on a TV monitor here for your friends. The visit includes a confusing sniff test, a distilled history of the Bols company and a cocktail made by one of its formidable bartenders, who train at the academy upstairs.

DIAMOND MUSEUM *Map p110*

☎ 305 53 00; www.diamantmuseum.nl; Paulus Potterstraat 8; adult/child under 13yr/senior, student & child 13-18 yr €6/free/4; ☎ 9am-5pm More of a showroom than a serious gem collection, Amsterdam's diamond museum provides an interesting look at the history of the trade and the sparkling creations that have adorned the world's rich and powerful. Almost all of the exhibits are clever re-creations, in glass cases spread over two floors. It's run by **Coster Diamonds** (p154) next door, which kind of says it all.

STEDELIJK MUSEUM BUILDING

Map p110

Paulus Potterstraat 13

Built in 1895 to a neo-Renaissance design by AM Weissman, this is the permanent

home of the National Museum of Modern Art, one of the world's great collections. However, at the time of writing it was closed for renovation and expansion until the end of 2009. Until then its modernist statements will appear in a former high-rise post office near Centraal Station, and at exhibition spaces around town; for full details see p69.

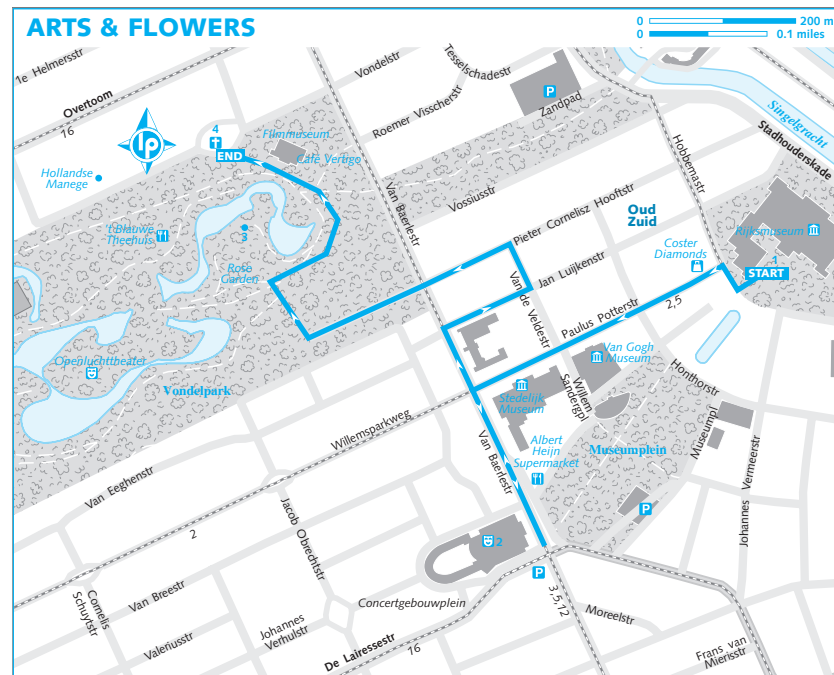
ARTS & FLOWERS

Walking Tour

1 Museumplein Although the **Rijksmuseum** (p111) will be closed due to construction until late this decade, its grand exterior makes a great starting point. You'll be looking out over **Museumplein** (p111), a monumental grassy expanse for lolling, strolling and open-air

WALK FACTS

Start Museumplein
End Vondelkerk
Distance 4km
Duration 1½ hours



concerts. To your right, on the corner of Hobbemastraat, is [Coster Diamonds](#) (p154), where you can take a free tour – diamonds are a kind of art, aren't they? Or you may prefer to continue along Paulus Potterstraat to the [Van Gogh Museum](#) (p109), with its modern, clam-like annexe. The main building of the [Stedelijk Museum](#) (p113) is next door, though it's closed for renovation till 2009.

2 Concertgebouw The neoclassical [Concertgebouw](#) (p111) is diagonally across Van Baerlestraat – check schedules for the free lunchtime concerts. Otherwise pick up a picnic at the big [Albert Heijn supermarket](#) on Museumplein.

3 Vondelpark Weave northwest through a quiet residential quarter. Shoppers may enjoy taking a detour to [Pieter Cornelisz Hoofstraat](#), Amsterdam's own little Regent St, towards the sprawling [Vondelpark](#) (opposite); highlights of the park include the [rose garden](#) and the [open-air theatre](#) (p202). Have a break and enjoy coffee and cake at parkside [Café Vertigo](#) (p192) at the [Filmmuseum](#) (opposite) or in ['t Blauwe Theehuis](#) (p171).

4 Vondelkerk Step out of the park to admire the horses at the [Hollandsche Manege](#) (opposite) and stop by the [Vondelkerk](#) (p117), a pretty 19th-century church that has been turned into an office complex. From here, you can head back into the park or along Vondelstraat towards the buzz of Leidseplein.

VONDELPARK & AROUND

Drinking & Smoking [p192](#); Eating [p170](#); Shopping [p152](#); Sleeping [p220](#)

This pleasant, English-style park with ponds, lawns, thickets and winding footpaths was laid out on marshland in the 1860s and '70s as a park for the bourgeoisie. It made up for the loss of the Plantage, the existing city park that became residential around this time. The Vondelpark was soon surrounded by upmarket housing. Long and thin – about 1.5km long and 300m wide – the park is named after poet and playwright Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679), the Shakespeare of the Netherlands.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s the authorities turned the park into a temporary open-air dormitory for the droves of hippies who descended on Amsterdam. The sleeping bags are long gone and it's now illegal to sleep in the park.

The park is now used by one and all – joggers, in-line skaters, children chasing ducks or flying kites, couples in love, families with prams, teenagers playing soccer, even acrobats practicing or performing – and can be crowded on weekends, but never annoyingly so.

There always seem to be people performing in the park, and on a summer day a great place to follow the action is the upper terrace of [Café Vertigo](#) (p192). Also check out the open-air theatre (p202) and the lovely ponds and rose gardens.

VONDELPARK [Map p116](#)

As vital to Amsterdam as Rembrandt, canals and coffeeshops, on a sunny day there's no place better than the Vondelpark. As people from all walks of life descend on this sprawling equivalent to New York's Central Park, a party atmosphere ensues. Some kick back by reading a book, others hook up with friends to share a spliff or cradle a beer at one of the cafés, while others trade songs on beat-up guitars. The Vondelpark offers an abundance of ponds, lawns, gardens and winding footpaths that encourage visitors to get out and explore.

FILMMEUSEM [Map p116](#)

☎ 589 14 00; [www.filmmuseum.nl](#); Vondelpark 3
Not a museum with displays as such, the Filmmuseum has a large collection of memorabilia and a priceless archive of films that are screened in two theatres, often with live music. One theatre contains the Art Deco interior of Cinema Parisien, an early Amsterdam cinema. The [information centre](#) (☎ 589 14 35; Vondelstraat 69-71; admission free; 🕒 1-5pm Mon-Fri) has loads of books and DVDs that can be viewed in booths.

The museum's grand [Café Vertigo](#) (p192), with its theatrical balcony and expansive outdoor seating, is a popular meeting place overlooking the park. On summer evenings films are shown on the terrace.

At the time of writing the Filmmuseum was due to reopen in 2009 in a sleek new building in Amsterdam-Noord ([Map pp58-9](#)).

HOLLANDSCHE MANEGE [Map p116](#)

☎ 618 09 42; [www.dehollandschemanegenl](#); Vondelstraat 140; 🕒 9am-10pm

Just outside the Vondelpark is the neoclassical Hollandsche Manege, an indoor riding school inspired by the famous Spanish Riding School in Vienna. Designed by AL van Gendt and built in 1882, the building was fully restored in the 1980s (but kept its charming horse-head façade). After you reach the arena, turn left and right again through the stable to the rear, up the stairs and into the café. You can sip a beer or coffee and, from the balcony, watch the instructor put the horses through their paces.

ORGELPARK [Map p116](#)

☎ 515 81 11; [www.orgelpark.nl](#); Gerard Brandtstraat 26; tickets adult/child under 12yr/student & senior €12.50/5/7.50

Not a park as we know it, but a new stage for organ music located in a lovely restored church on the edge of the Vondelpark. The Orgelpark has three (soon to be four) big organs, and every year puts on over 100 events including concerts of classical, jazz and improvised music. Concerts are typically on Tuesday and Thursday evenings at 8.15pm, and every Wednesday at 12.30pm there are free performances by organ students.

DE VONDELTOUIN [Map p116](#)

☎ 664 50 91; [www.vondeltuinnl](#); Vondelpark 7; skate rental 1/2/3hr adult €5/7.50/10; Mar-Oct Located near the Amstelveenseweg entrance at the southwestern end of the

VONDELPAK & AROUND

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FRIDAY NIGHT SKATE

This weekly event (www.fridaynightskate.com) is a great way to see the city. You'll also get to meet new people: hundreds of in-line skaters (perhaps thousands in peak season) gather at 8pm near the Filmmuseum in the Vondelpark, for departure at 8.30pm. The route varies each week, but generally it's between 15km and 20km; expect the whole skate to finish by 10.30pm.

Skaters should be advanced and able to brake well; bring a helmet and knee protection. Even so, organisers caution, skating is at your own risk. The skate is cancelled if streets are wet, meaning that on average it actually takes place about twice a month.

park, this kiosk rents in-line skates and protective gloves, and has a café.

VONDELKERK Map p116

Vondelstraat 77; ☎ 8am-6pm

Architect Pierre Cuypers' favourite church (1870-80), it suffered from a lack of funds during construction and a fire in 1904, and was marked for demolition in 1978. It's a charming steepled church, featuring a fascinating series of shapes with an octagon at its base. People in the offices inside are happy to let you in for a peek.


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gently rolling meadow and wooded fringe. In the centre you'll see the Sarphati memorial (1886), a bombastic temple with a fountain, gargoyles and a bust of the great man himself. Water is pumped to the fountain via an underground pipe from a canal hundreds of metres away.

Sarphati's diverse projects – a waste-disposal service, a slaughterhouse, a factory for cheap bread, trades and business schools, the Amstel Hotel and a mortgage bank – exasperated the dour city council, though many of these ventures survive to this day.

DE DAGERAAD Map p119

Dawn Housing Project; Pieter Lodewijk Takstraat;

 open to the public

Following the key Housing Act of 1901, which forced the city to rethink neighbourhood planning and condemn slums, the Dageraad housing estate was developed for poorer families between 1918 and 1923. One of the most original Amsterdam School architects, Piet Kramer, drew up plans for this idiosyncratic complex in collaboration with Michael de Klerk. The swirling contours of the main tower have been compared to a butter churn.

PLANTAGE, EASTERN ISLANDS & EASTERN DOCKLANDS

Drinking & Smoking [p192](#); Eating [p173](#); Shopping [p153](#); Sleeping [p222](#)

Immediately east of the Nieuwmarkt neighbourhood lies the very leafy district known as the Plantage.

The 19th-century discovery of diamonds in South Africa led to a revival of Amsterdam's diamond industry and the Jewish elite began to move into the Plantage (Plantation), where they built imposing town villas.

Until then the Plantage was a district of parks and gardens, named after the plantations the Dutch tended in their colonies. In the 18th century, wealthy residents rented parcels of land here to use as gardens, and the area developed into a weekend getaway with teahouses, variety theatres and other establishments where the upper class relaxed in green surroundings.

East of Centraal Station and north of the Medieval Centre, Nieuwmarkt and Plantage areas, the islands of Kattenburg, Wittenburg and Oostenburg were constructed in the 1650s to handle the rapidly expanding seaborne trade.

The Dutch East India Company (VOC) set itself up on the eastern island of Oostenburg, where it established warehouses, rope yards, workshops and docks for the maintenance of its fleet. Private shipyards and dockworkers' homes dominated the central island of Wittenburg. City architect Daniël Stalpaert's Oosterkerk (1671) on Wittenburgergracht was the last, and the least monumental, of the four 'compass churches' (the others were the Noorderkerk, Westerkerk and Zuiderkerk).

Admiralty offices and buildings arose on the western island of Kattenburg, and warships were fitted out in the adjoining naval dockyards that are still in use today.

North and east of the Eastern Islands, the Eastern Docklands, a one-time shipyard and warehouse district, sat derelict for decades, despite some excellent warehouse-style buildings. Recently, though, it's been the focus of a huge amount of attention from architects and architecture critics for its elaborate updates and extremely adventurous new construction. If you're looking for one place to see the cutting edge of Dutch – and indeed European – architecture, this is the place to come. When complete, there will be more than 8000 dwellings and 17,000 inhabitants.


PLANTAGE

The key attraction here is the Artis Zoo ([right](#)); behind the characteristic eagle-topped gates you'll find Europe's oldest zoo. The Hortus Botanicus ([p123](#)) has been a herb garden since 1683 and is a repository of the valuable seeds and plants brought back by ships of the Dutch East India Company.

Across from the botanical garden lies the Wertheimpark, a brilliant shady spot for lazing by the canal Nieuwe Herengracht. It also contains a memorial to the victims of the Auschwitz concentration camp, their tragedy symbolized by shards of broken glass.

Nearby, you can delve into the history of the Dutch resistance at the Verzetsmuseum ([p123](#)).

ARTIS ZOO Map p122

 523 34 00; www.artis.nl; Plantage Kerklaan 38-40; adult/senior/child 3-9yr/child under 3yr €17.50/16.50/14/free;  9am-5pm, to 6pm in summer

The world's third-largest zoo (and the oldest in mainland Europe) is the place to bring children in Amsterdam. Laid out in the former Plantage gardens, locals as well as tourists visit to stroll the lush,

top picks

PLANTAGE, EASTERN ISLANDS & EASTERN DOCKLANDS

- **Artis Zoo** ([right](#)) Apes to zebras, with a great aquarium and planetarium.
- **Energetica** ([p124](#)) Supercool museum of technology.
- **Entrepotdok** ([p123](#)) Dramatically renovated former warehouses.
- **Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ** ([p125](#)) Riverside concerts in a glistening glass wrapper.

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well-manicured paths. Packed with listed 19th-century buildings and monuments, it feels like a zoological museum.

In addition to the expected zoo attractions – the big cats, apes and gorillas – the **African savannah** is a highlight. Another must-see is the **aquarium**, a graceful purpose-built hall with some 2000 fish. The tanks are enormous and the variety of colourful fish stunning. Here you'll also see a rainforest, a tropical coral reef and a cross-section of an Amsterdam canal. The **planetarium** gives fascinating shows with Dutch commentary and a summary in English. The entrance fee includes all of these venues.

HORTUS BOTANICUS Map p122

☎ 625 90 21; www.hortus-botanicus.nl; Plantage Middenlaan 2a; adult/child €6/3, ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun, to 9pm daily Jul & Aug, to 4pm daily Dec & Jan

Established way back in 1638, this venerable garden became a repository for tropical seeds and plants brought in (read: smuggled out of other countries) by Dutch trading ships. From here, coffee, pineapple, cinnamon and palm-oil plants were distributed throughout the world.

The 4000-plus species are kept in wonderful structures, including the colonial-era seed house and a three-climate glasshouse (1993). The 300-year-old cycad is possibly the world's oldest potted plant. The butterfly house is a hit with kids and stoned adults. Guided tours (additional €1) are held at 2pm Sunday year-round and also at 7.30pm Sunday in July and August.

VERZETSMUSEUM Map p122

Resistance Museum; ☎ 620 25 35; www.verzetsmuseum.org; Plantage Kerklaan 61; adult/child under 7yr/child 7-15yr €5.50/free/3; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, noon-5pm Sat-Mon

This museum shows, in no uncertain terms, how much courage it takes to actively resist an adversary so ruthless that you can't trust neighbours, friends or even family. The exhibits give an excellent insight into the difficulties faced by those who fought the occupation from within – as well as the minority who went along with the Nazis. Topics include the concepts of active and passive resistance, how the illegal press operated, how 300,000 people were kept in hiding and how all this could be funded. Labels are in Dutch and English.

HOLLANDSCHE SCHOUWBURG

Map p122

Dutch Theatre; ☎ 626 99 45; www.hollandscheschouwburg.nl; Plantage Middenlaan 24; admission free; ☎ 11am-4pm, closed Yom Kippur This historic theatre – first known as the Artis Theatre after its inception in 1892 – quickly became a hub of cultural life in Amsterdam, staging major dramas and operettas. In WWII the occupying Germans turned it into a 'show theatre' for Jews, then a detention centre for Jews awaiting deportation. Up to 80,000 Jews passed through here on their way to the death camps.

In 1961 the building was demolished except for the façade and a bit of the interior, which became a memorial. Glass panels are engraved with the names of all Jewish families deported, and upstairs is a modest exhibit hall with photos and artefacts of Jewish life before and during the war.

NATIONAAL VAKBONDSMUSEUM

Map p122

National Trade Union Museum; ☎ 624 11 66; www.deurbucht.org; Henri Polaklaan 9; adult/concession €2.50/1.25; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Fri, 1-5pm Sun, closed public holidays

Architect HP Berlage considered this building his most successful work, and it's easy to see why. Built in 1900 for the General Netherlands Diamond Workers' Union (ANDB), it's a wonder from the diamond-shaped pinnacle to the magnificent hall with its brick arches, murals, ceramics and leadlight windows by famous artists of the day. The soaring, atrium-style staircase is graced with a chandelier three storeys tall.

All that will be enough for most visitors. Those with an abiding interest in labour issues will find the displays (in Dutch) a bonus.

ENTREPOTDOK Map p122

Alexanderplein

The area east of the Plantage was the stomping ground of the VOC, aka the Dutch East India Company, which grew rich on sea trade in the 17th century. The VOC owned this 500m row of warehouses, conveniently located in a customs-free zone and the largest storage depot in Europe at the time. Some of the original façades have been preserved, and the facility has been converted into desirable

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offices, apartments and nice cafés, with tables at the water's edge (see p193).

DE GOOYER WINDMILL [Map p122](#)

Funenkade 5
This 18th-century grain mill is the sole survivor of five windmills that once stood in this part of town. It moved to its current spot in 1814, when the nearby Oranje-Nassau barracks were built and blocked the wind. The mill was fully renovated in 1925 and is now a private home. Alongside, the public baths were converted into the [Brouwerij 't IJ](#) (p192) in 1985. The mill makes a postcard canvas when seen from the central harbour, looking west down the Nieuwe Vaart canal.

MUIDERPOORT [Map p122](#)

Alexanderplein
This grand classical arch was built in 1770 as a gateway to the city. On the south side you'll see the Amsterdam emblem of three St Andreas' crosses, while on the other side there's the previous emblem, of a cog ship. In 1811 Napoleon rode triumphantly through the gate with his royal entourage, and promptly demanded food for his ragged troops. The 1st floor, just under the grey dome, is now occupied by a financial advisors body.

EASTERN ISLANDS

When the Plantage was constructed in the 1680s, the original sea dyke was moved north to what are now the Hoogte Kadijk and Laagte Kadijk (the high and low sections of the quay dyke). Apart from the impressive Scheepvaartmuseum ([right](#)), the only sight out here is Energetica ([below](#)), a quirky array of transformers, street lamps and crackling generators.

ENERGETICA [Map p122](#)

☎ 422 12 27; Hoogte Kadijk 400; adult/child under 12yr €3/free; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri
Housed in a former power station, this quirky museum has a bewildering array of whizz-bang equipment that conjures up visions of mad scientists. Galleries are named for key pioneers (Marconi, Minckelers), and the soaring main hall is filled with steamship engines, gas streetlamps, antique lifts (elevators) from Vienna and Paris and high-voltage generators that send lightning between

enormous V-shaped prongs. There's also an early refrigerator that resembles a brass cement-mixer. Its guides are volunteers, some of them retired engineers, and they'll enthusiastically escort you through centuries of technological history.

NEDERLANDS SCHEEPVAARTMUSEUM [Map p122](#)

Netherlands Shipping Museum; ☎ 523 22 22; www.scheepvaartmuseum.nl; Kattenburgerplein 1; ship Amsterdam adult/child under 6yr/senior & child 6-17yr €4/free/4; ☎ 10am-5pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-Sep-mid-Jun
Since 1981, this historic admiralty building has housed one of world's most extensive collections of maritime memorabilia. Early shipping routes, naval combat, fishing and whaling are all explained in loving detail, and there are 500 models of boats and ships. Unfortunately, at the time of writing the museum was shut till mid-2009 for a major renovation.

You can, however, visit a full-scale replica of the United East India Company's 700-tonne *Amsterdam*, one of the largest ships of the fleet. Actors in 18th-century costume re-create shipboard life, and you'll see the Great Cabin is beautifully set for an elegant dinner. The ship is moored outside [NEMO](#) (p69).

WERFMUSEUM 'T KROMHOUT [Map p122](#)

☎ 627 67 77; www.machinekamer.nl; Hoogte Kadijk 147; adult/child €4.75/2.75; ☎ 10am-3pm Tue

On the outer side of the dyke is an 18th-century wharf that still repairs boats in its western hall. The eastern hall is a museum devoted to shipbuilding and even more to the indestructible marine engines that were designed and built here. Anyone with an interest in marine engineering will love the place; others will probably want to move on. Signage is almost entirely in Dutch only.

EASTERN DOCKLANDS

There are few sights in the Eastern Docklands, but all the new construction is well worth a look. A good place to start is the wavy roof of the Passenger Terminal, where huge cruise ships moor, and the sparkling performance halls of the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ ([opposite](#)). The wonderful Press Museum ([opposite](#)) is full of colourful ad placards.

BICYCLES: THE MAN-MACHINE RULES

While researching this book, we couldn't help but take notes on some of the better bicycle sightings on Amsterdam's streets:

- A man with one leg in plaster pedalling his bike with the other leg, with crutches strapped to his back.
- A man riding a bike with a blow-up sex doll strapped to his back.
- Four drunks riding one bike.
- A woman riding a bike while wearing stilettos and with her G-string showing.
- A girl riding side-saddle while kissing the boy piloting the bike.
- A customised bicycle modelled after Dennis Hopper's hog in *Easy Rider*.
- A man riding with one hand while holding a plate-glass window with the other, seemingly oblivious to the threat of severed arteries in the event of emergency braking.
- A man who must have been over 100 years old riding a bicycle at about 2km/h.
- A woman riding a bicycle weaving and wobbling all over the place, her vision almost totally obscured by a massive bunch of flowers.
- A group of kids playing football while riding bicycles.
- Numerous mothers riding three-wheelers with toddlers in a barrow attached to the front or in a box towed along behind.
- A bicycle barrelling down a side street with no-one on it.
- An abandoned bicycle that looked as though it had been twisted into a figure 8.
- A bicycle up a tree.
- Bicycles in canals.
- Dutch police riding the same crappy bicycles as everyone else.
- Almost everyone steering their bikes with one hand and talking on a mobile phone or eating a sandwich with the other, while perilously weaving in and out of trams, trucks and cars.

Tips

- When on foot, don't play the dumb tourist and stand in the city's dedicated bike lanes staring at the sights: you'll be knocked over by a speeding bike before you can say 'moederneuker', because here you give way to them.
- When riding, watch for cars. Cyclists have the right of way, except when vehicles are entering from the right, although not all motorists respect this. Also watch for dumb tourists (see above).
- Watch out for tram tracks – if your wheel gets caught in one, you will break your bones.
- By law, after dusk you need to use lights on your bike (front and rear) and have reflectors on both wheels.
- Always lock your bike securely. Bike theft is rampant.

Fast Facts

Amsterdam has 400km of bike paths, identified by signage and their reddish colour. There are an estimated 600,000 bicycles in Amsterdam at any given time. The bike-parking garage at Centraal Station has space for 2500 bicycles.

Find a Bike

- Visit the Fietsfabriek (p153) for custom bicycles.
- Combine two Dutch passions, beer and bicycles: hire a Fietscafé (p185), a mobile, pedal-powered bar that seats up to 17 people per bike, with a big beer keg attached. One pedals, the other 16 sit at the bar and drink.

See [p240](#) for a list of bike-rental shops.

MUZIEKGEBOUW AAN 'T IJ [Map p122](#)

☎ tickets 788 20 00, office 788 20 10; www.muziekgebouw.nl; Piet Heinkade 1; bldg admission free, performance prices vary; ☎ ticket office noon-7pm Mon-Sat

The bold and beautiful 'Music Building on the IJ' brings the long-standing theatre IJsbreker (which changed its name to the new building) and the jazz house [Bimhuis](#) (p197) under one roof. This performance complex was some 20 years in the making, and designed by the Danish firm 3xNielsen.

Even if you don't catch a show here, the building is a feast for the eyes. Its [Star Ferry café](#) (☎ 10am-1am Sun-Fri, to 2am Fri & Sat) makes a great stop for the view alone. On the upper floor you'll find the computerised 'sound garden', a perfect diversion for the small fry.

PERSMUSEUM [Map p122](#)

Press Museum; ☎ 692 8810; www.persmuseum.nl; Zeeburgerkade 10; adult/child under 6yr/child 6-18yr €3.50/free/2.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, noon-5pm Sun

The caretaker of Dutch journalism history, this museum is loads more interesting to non-Dutch speakers than it may sound. Housed in sleek new premises, it has a large collection of historic newspapers (going all the way back to 1600), political and editorial cartoons and press photos, as well as a great stock of old publicity posters, many of them quite amusing.

ARCHITECTURE OF THE EASTERN DOCKLANDS

Cycling Tour

1 Lloyd Hotel Arrive by tram 26; take a moment to explore the lobby bar and shop of the landmark **Lloyd Hotel** (p223). As you pedal along Borneokade, across the shipping channel you'll see former warehouses used by the cocoa trade, while closer in are large yachts and commercial vessels.

2 Scheepstimmermanstraat Once you round the end of the island onto Stokerkade, you'll get a good view across the former shipping channel to **Scheepstimmermanstraat**, a fascinating collection of houses where owners were free to build to their own designs, making

it the most colourful and diverse group of houses in this district. You can cross the little footbridge in the middle of the channel to see the homes from the front (although they're better viewed from the water side).

3 Red footbridge You won't be able to ride a bike across the **red footbridge** – you'll barely be able to walk it – but it certainly demands a look-see. Take a left on Stuurmankade and head west. Take the flat bridge at Kwartiermeesterstraat.

4 Whale The footbridge deposits you by the **Whale** apartment building (1999), the landmark of Sporeburg Eiland. Its sloping roof and base make it seem more imposing than its dozen storeys would suggest, but also somehow more open and airy. From here make a dogleg left and then right, and you're on the Verbindingsdam to KNSM Eiland, named for the Royal Netherlands Shipping Company.

5 Piraeus Once over the bridge, follow the path to the right towards Levantkade. The heavy black buildings on the left are the stark **Piraeus** housing complex by Hans Kollhoff and Christian Rapp.

6 Barcelonaplein Head around the inlet at Levantplein, and you'll see Bruno Albert's **Barcelonaplein** with its wrought-iron 'gate' spanning the entire height of the façade. This 'superblock' (170m long) is built in neoclassical style and has a round plaza at its centre. The harbour views are quite sought-after by young professionals.

7 Venetië Continue on Levantkade to the end and the **Venetië** housing complex (1996). This giant ring of white single-family homes bristles with balconies, loggias and voids in between to create a feeling of space and comfortable asymmetry.

8 Azartplein From Venetië, head west along KNSM-Laan. The apartment buildings on the right are named for Greek philosophers, giving a whole new meaning to 'neoclassical'. The broad artery of KNSM-Laan will take you to

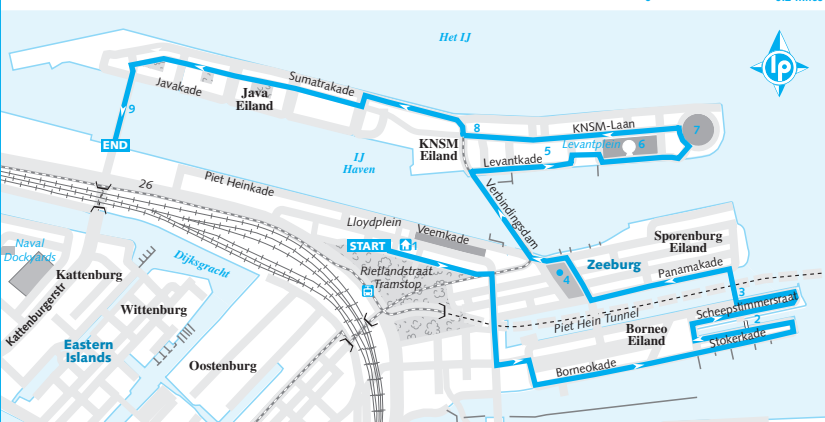
Azartplein, where you can catch a path through the residential neighbourhood that runs next to Sumatrakade. This route gives a good impression of what it's like to live in these communities, with kids playing and locals localising.

9 Jan Schaeferbrug The path ends near the **Jan Schaeferbrug**, the bridge named for an activist city councillor who famously said 'You can't live in clappertrap'. You can take the bridge back toward Piet Heinkade (turn right and it eventually drops you at Centraal Station).

CYCLE FACTS

Start Lloyd Hotel
End Jan Schaeferbrug
Distance 6km
Duration 2½ hours

ARCHITECTURE OF THE EASTERN DOCKLANDS



OOSTERPARK & AROUND

Drinking & Smoking p194; Eating p174; Sleeping p224

Named after the lush English-style landscape park at its centre, the southeastern district of Oosterpark was built in the 1880s. The large eponymous park was the first laid out in Amsterdam.

At the time, the city's diamond workers suddenly found they had money to spare, thanks to the discovery of the gems in South Africa. About a third of Jewish families worked in the diamond industry, and many of them could finally afford to leave the Jewish quarter for this new district beyond the Plantage (the delectable parklands where only the wealthiest could afford to live). Signs of the lower-middle-class heritage have long since disappeared and now it's similar to the other 19th-century slums that arose around the Canal Belt. Much of the real estate in this area is owned by the University of Amsterdam.

On the northern fringe you'll find the acclaimed Tropenmuseum (below), which gives insights into Dutch colonial activities in the East Indies. The park has a large pond and several monuments, including a memorial to murdered filmmaker Theo van Gogh (see p44). This 4.5m-high work of curved steel is named the **Scream**. The park also host numerous events such as main stages for the annual Holland Festival and the Roots Festival.

To the south lies the Amstelstation, a key metro and railway station of use to some 50,000 travellers daily. The reason to visit is the several intriguing wall murals by artist Peter Alma (1886–1969), including an idealised depiction of trains converging on an almighty wheel in an unlikely landscape of mountains and cities.

TROPENMUSEUM Map p129

☎ 568 82 15; www.kit.nl; Linnaeusstraat 2; adult/child under 6yr/child 6-17yr/senior or student €7.50/free/3.75/5; 🕒 10am-5pm

Completed in 1926 to house the Royal Institute of the Tropics, and still a leading research institute for tropical hygiene and agriculture, this fascinating museum houses a large collection of colonial artefacts, presented with insight, imagination and a fair amount of multimedia.

A huge central hall, with galleries over three floors, seeks to re-create daily life in several tropical countries. You can visit an African market, a Mexican-style cantina and a life-sized *yurta* (traditional felt hut) and hear push-button recordings of native musical instruments. An absorbing part of the exhibit is the Cabinet of Curiosities, the fascinating display of exotica (found in every good colonialist's home) containing ritual masks, long dug-out canoes and dead butterflies.

There's a great giftshop, and the pleasant Soeterijn Café and the **Ekeko Restaurant** (☎ 568 86 44) serve food that relates to current exhibits and performances.

The **Tropeninstituut Theater** (☎ 568 82 15; 📺 box office noon-4pm Mon-Sat) has a separate entrance and screens films as well as hosting music, dance, plays and other performances by visiting artists.

OOSTERPARK Map p129

📍 s'-Gravesandestraat; 🕒 dawn-dusk

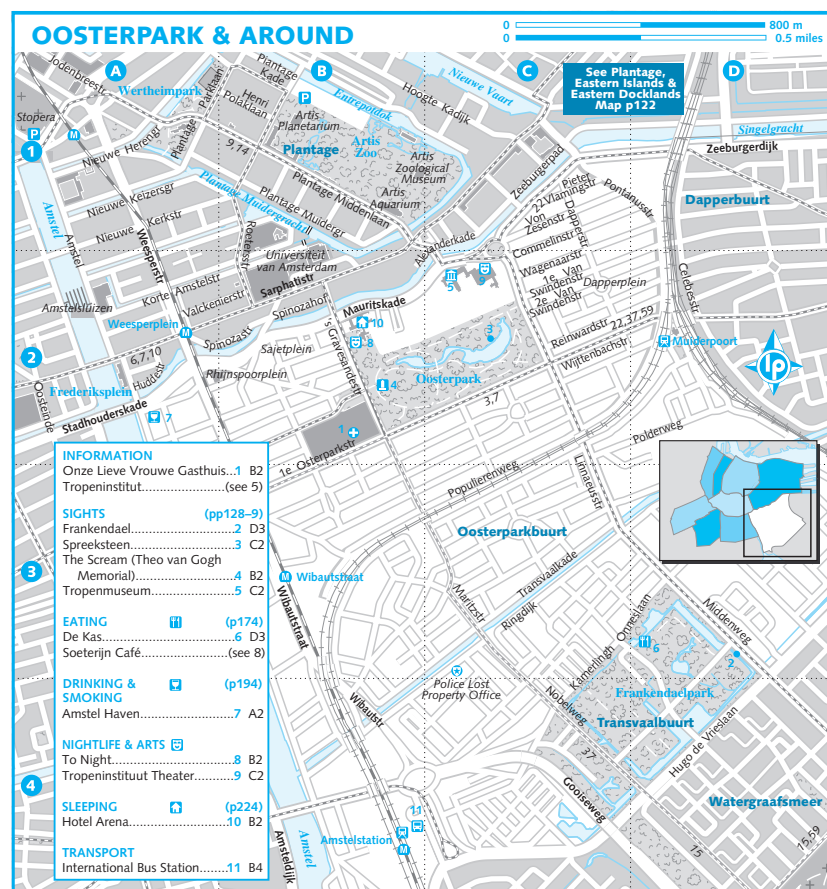
This sprawling park was laid out in the 1880s to accommodate the nouveaux rich of the city's diamond traders who benefited from the South African diamond boom.

The park makes a fine diversion if you're heading to the nearby **Tropenmuseum** (left). Between the museum and the large pond stands the **Spreeksteen**, a little Hyde Park Corner where orators of every ilk can have their say; see www.spreeksteen.nl for the erratic schedule.

FRANKENDAELE Map p129

☎ 774 43 99; Middenweg 72; free admission; 🕒 gardens dawn till dusk

As early as the 18th century, wealthy Amsterdammers would spend their summers in plush country retreats south of Plantage on a tract of drained land called Watergraafsmeer. The last survivor of this era is Frankendael, an elegant Louis XIV-style mansion; at the time of writing it was due to reopen in mid-2008 after a sweeping restoration. The house backs onto a formal garden that's open to the public, but be sure to view the forecourt with gushing fountain and statues of Bacchus and Ceres. The property is swathed in a larger landscape garden with walking paths, decorative bridges and the remains of follies.



OUTER DISTRICTS

North of the Jordaan, the wharves and warehouses of the **Western Islands** (Westelijke Eilanden) were abuzz with activity in the early 17th century. The Golden Age was taking off, the Dutch still dominated the sea trade, and money flowed into this old harbour like beer from the barrel. The wealthy Bicker Brothers, both mayors of Amsterdam, even built their own Bickerseiland here to cater for their ships.

Few tourists make it out here, partly because the district is shielded from view by a railway line, but it's a wonderful area to explore, with cute drawbridges and handsome old warehouses nestled in quiet lanes. Many addresses have been converted to charming homes and artists studios. The Prinseneiland and Realeineiland (named after the 17th-century merchant Reynier Reael) are the prettiest of the isles. The narrow bridge linking the two, the Drieharingenbrug ('Three Herrings Bridge'; [Map pp58–9](#)), is a quaint replacement for the pontoon that used to be pulled aside to let ships through.

By all means visit the Zandhoek ([Map pp58–9](#)), a photogenic stretch of waterfront. Now a modern yacht harbour, back in the 17th century it was a 'sand market', where ships would purchase bags of the stuff for ballast. Many a VOC skipper lived hereabouts, carousing in local bars and enjoying the view over the IJ between voyages. The street south of Zandhoek is the Galgenstraat (Gallows St), which on a clear day afforded a look at the executions in Amsterdam-Noord. In those days it was called entertainment.

The sights become more scattered as you move away from Amsterdam's lovely old centre, but the nuggets you'll find out here are definitely worth the trip: top-rated art museums, stylish architecture and lush greenery in recreation areas, just for starters.

WESTERGASFABRIEK [Map pp58–9](#)

☎ 586 07 10; [www.westergasfabriek.nl](#); Haarlemmerweg 8-10

A stone's throw northwest of the Jordaan, this late-19th-century Dutch Renaissance complex was the city gasworks until it was all but abandoned in the 1960s, its soil contaminated. The *fabriek* has re-emerged, thankfully, as a new cultural and recreational park, with lush lawns and a long pool suitable for wading, sports facilities and even child care. The aesthetic of surrounding **Westerpark** goes from urban plan to reedy wilderness, with marshes and shallow waterfalls.

Inside the main buildings you'll find cinemas, cafés, restaurants, nightspots and creative office spaces. Watch for events in the **Westergasterras** (p197), a slick, postindustrial party venue.

HET SCHIP HOUSING ESTATE

[Map pp58-9](#)

☎ 418 28 85; [www.hetschip.nl](#); Spaarndammerplantsoen 140; adult/student/senior €5/2/2.75;

🕒 1-5pm Thu-Sun

This remarkable housing estate (1920) is a flagship of the Amsterdam School of architecture (p51), and is located west of Amsterdam harbour. The triangular block, loosely resembling a ship, was designed by Michel de Klerk for railway employees.

The rocket-like tower has no purpose apart from linking the wings of the complex. The museum shows workers apartments and the ex-post office at the 'bow' of the 'ship' with the original interior. It is now home to the Documentation Centre for Social Housing, with a permanent display of architecture called *Poste Restante*. Look out for the yellow *telefooncel* where workers would dial the telephone numbers for customers.

AMSTELPARK [Map pp58-9](#)

Europaboulevard; 🕒 8am-dusk

South of the ringway, in the suburb of Buitenveldert, lies the vast Amstelpark, grounds of an international flower show in 1972. The park is a paradise for kids, with a petting zoo, minigolf, pony rides and a playground. In summer a miniature train chugs its way around the park. Other attractions include rose and rhododendron gardens, and art exhibitions are held in the Glazen Huis (Glass House), the Orangerie and the Papillon Gallery.

Just outside the south edge of the park you'll see the **Riekermolén**. In a field southwest of the mill you'll find a statue of a sitting Rembrandt, who made sketches here along the riverbank.

To get there, take the metro to Amsterdam RAI or tram 4.

ELECTRISCHE MUSEUMTRAMLIJN AMSTERDAM [Map pp58-9](#)

Tram Museum Amsterdam; ☎ 673 75 38; [www.museumtram.nl](#); Amstelveenseweg 264; return ticket adult/senior & child €4/2; 🕒 11am-6pm Sun mid-Apr–Oct, plus 1pm & 3pm Wed Jul & Aug Beyond the southwestern extremities of the park, just north of the Olympic Stadium, is the former Haarlemmermeer Station, which houses the tram museum. Historic trams sourced from all over Europe run between here and Amstelveen, making a great outing for kids and adults alike. A return trip takes about 1¼ hours (see website for schedule) and skirts the large Amsterdamse Bos recreational area.

AMSTERDAM RAI [Map pp58-9](#)

☎ 549 12 12; [www.rai.nl](#); Europaplein 22

This exhibition and conference centre (featured, by the way, in Jacques Tati's 1971 film *Traffic*) is the largest such complex in the country. The building opened in 1961 and just keeps expanding, for the car, fashion, horse-jumping and 50-odd other shows held here every year. RAI stands for *Rijwiel en Automobiel Industrie*, the bicycle and auto association. To get there, take the metro to the Amsterdam RAI stop or tram 4.

OLYMPIC STADIUM [Map pp58-9](#)

☎ 305 44 00; Olympisch Stadion 21

The grand Olympic Stadium was designed by Jan Wils, a protégé of famous architect HP Berlage, and is functionalist in style. The arena was built for the 1928 summer Olympic Games, and has a soaring tower from which the Olympic Flame burned for the first time during competition. The stadium is classified as a national monument; today it hosts sporting events and concerts.

Much of the housing in southwest Amsterdam originates from the time of the 1928 Games. Many of the streets and squares in the area bear Greek names like Olympiaplein and Herculesstraat.

Trams 16 and 24 go from Centraal Station direct to the stadium.

AMSTERDAMSE BOS [Map pp58-9](#)

Amsterdam Woods; ☎ visitors centre 545 61 00; [www.amsterdamsebos.nl](#); Bosbaanweg 5; admission free; 🕒 visitors centre 8.30am-5pm The product of a 1930s make-work programme, this woody recreation area a few

kilometres southwest of Amsterdam is a boon for urban nature-lovers. You'll find a petting zoo, a sports park, a rowing course with hire craft, and a pancake house, not to mention the open-air **Amsterdamse Bos Theatre** (p202) that stages plays in summer. The **forestry museum** (☎ 676 21 52; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm) covers flora, fauna and the construction of the park. To get here, take bus 70, 171 or 172 from Centraal Station, or ride the **historic tram** (left) from the Haarlemmermeer Station.

COBRA MUSEUM

☎ 547 50 50; [www.cobra-museum.nl](#); Sandbergplein 1, Amstelveen; adult/child under 6yr/child 6-16yr/senior & student €7/free/2.50/4; 🕒 11am-5pm Tue-Sun

Artists from Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands formed the CoBrA movement after WWII. (The name is derived from their capital cities.) Members included Asger Jorn, Corneille, Constant and the great Karel Appel, but the group lasted for just three years (1948–51). Changing exhibits are on show as well; expect to see bold colours and busy designs. The art is less of a unified whole than a philosophy, inspired by Marxism, of using materials at hand to create painting, sculpture, even poetry.

Take bus 170 or 172 from Centraal Station or tram 5 to the end of the line in Amstelveen.

LIVING TOMORROW PAVILION

☎ 203 04 00; [www.livtom.com](#); De Entrée 300, Amsterdam-Zuidoost; adult/child under 10yr/student & child 10-12yr €11.50/free/9; 🕒 by reservation

A bathroom mirror that displays the latest news? Or a smart washing machine that keeps your red socks out of a white load? These are just a couple of the innovations on display at the Living Tomorrow Pavilion, a shoe-shaped home and office of the future. A spate of companies (among others, Phillips, 3M and HP) show off their applications in a living and working environment. The curiously beautiful shape of the building itself comes from the idea of an object turned inside-out. Visits are by reservation only, and 1½ hour tours in both English and Dutch take place on Saturday.

FURTHER AFIELD

KRÖLLER-MÜLLER MUSEUM

☎ 0318-591 627; www.hogeveluwe.nl; De Hoge Veluwe National Park; park only adult/child €7/3.50, park & museum adult/child €14/7, car surcharge €6; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Nestled within the Netherlands' largest park, this delightful museum was once owned by Anton and Helene Kröller-Müller, a wealthy German-Dutch couple. He wanted hunting grounds, she wanted a museum site – they got both.

The museum has works by Picasso, Gris, Renoir, Sisley and Manet, but it's the Van Gogh collection that makes it world-class. It's about 10km into the park. There's also an evocative **sculpture garden** behind the museum.

Ticket booths at each of the three entrances (Hoenderloo, Otterlo and Rijzenburg) provide basic information and useful maps. By car, take the A10 ring road to the A1 towards Amersfoort and Apeldoorn. Exit at Exit 19 (N304) and follow the signs. Trains to Apeldoorn (single/return €13/23.10) take just over one hour, plus a 20-minute bus ride from the train station into the park.

VILLAGES OF THE AMSTEL

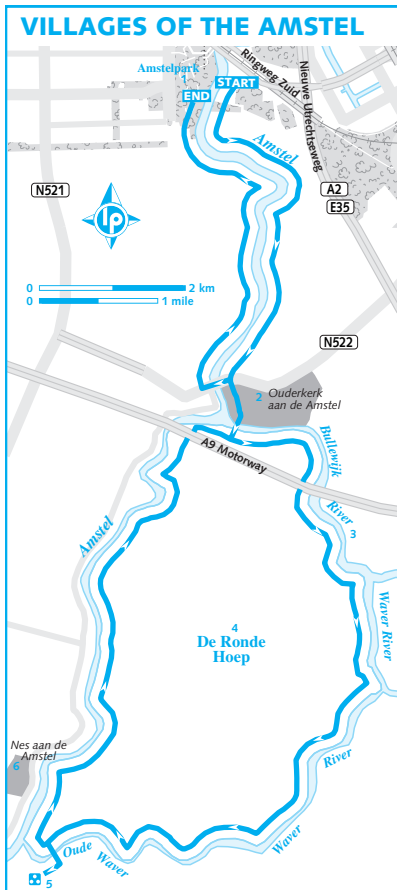
Cycling Tour

1 Amstelpark Leave from the **Amstelpark** (p130), a pretty municipal park about 300m south of the A10 motorway, which has a rose garden, an open-air theatre and several cafés. Note that cycling isn't allowed in the park.

2 Ouderkerk aan de Amstel A couple of kilometres south, along the quiet east bank of the Amstel, is **Ouderkerk aan de Amstel**, a pretty, affluent village (actually a few centuries older than Amsterdam) with plenty of riverside cafés and handsome houses.

3 Bullewijk River At Ouderkerk, cross the bridge over the **Bullewijk River** and turn left (east) opposite the ancient Jewish cemetery, following the right bank of the Bullewijk. You pass under the A9 motorway, and 1km further on, at a spot with a pleasant restaurant, the Waver River comes in from the right (south) – follow that.

4 De Ronde Hoep You'll have great views of **De Ronde Hoep**, a wild, sparsely populated peat



CYCLE FACTS

Start Amstelpark
End Amstelpark
Distance 30km
Duration Three to four hours

area drained by settlers about 1000 years ago. It attracts many birds, oblivious to Amsterdam's skyscrapers looming in the distance. The Waver narrows and becomes the Oude Waver, and when you come to the two hand-operated bridges, you'll clearly see that the land is below water level.

5 Bunker At the southern end of the route lies a squat riverside **bunker**, one of 38 defensive forts built around Amsterdam at the turn

of the 20th century (and outmoded by the 1920s). Here you rejoin the Amstel and turn right (north), following the bank back toward Amstelveen.

6 Nes aan de Amstel Just north of here, the village of **Nes aan de Amstel**, across the river, has some delightful café-filled wooden terraces – admire them from a distance, as there's no bridge close by.

7 Amstelpark Crossing north under the A9, the final leg of the journey provides a view of the modern skyline of Amsterdam-Zuidoost. An interesting diversion takes you across the bridge at Ouderkerk to the west bank and around the fringes of the green Amstelland area, with oodles of all-too-cute garden allotments. The Amstelpark lies just to the north.

A DAM GOOD BIKE RIDE

Cycling Tour

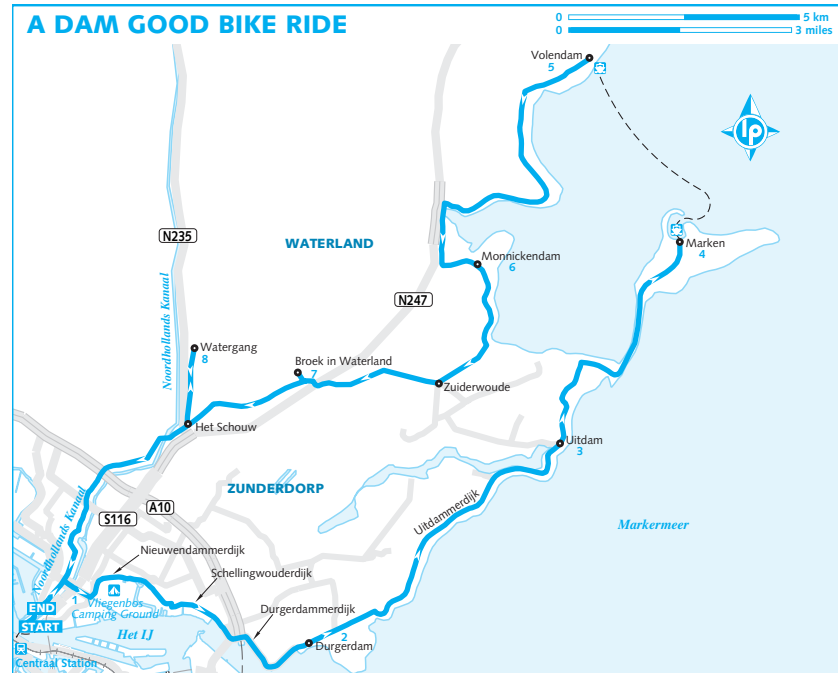
1 Noordhollands Kanaal Take the free Buiksloterweg ferry from behind Centraal Station across the IJ, then continue 1km along the

west bank of the **Noordhollands Kanaal**. Do a loop onto and over the second bridge, continue along the east bank for a few hundred metres and turn right under the freeway and along Nieuwendammerdijk past the Vliegenbos camping ground. Follow Schellingwouderdijk under the two major road bridges, when it becomes Durgerdammerdijk, and you're on your way.

2 Durgerdam The pretty town of **Durgerdam**, spread along the dyke, looks out across the water to IJburg, a major land-reclamation project with thousands of new homes. Further north, the dyke road passes several lakes and former sea inlets – low-lying, drained peat lands that are now key breeding sides for birds, among them plovers, spoonbills and herons. Climb the dyke at one of the vantage points for sweeping views to both sides.

CYCLE FACTS

Start Noordhollands Kanaal
End Noordhollands Kanaal
Distance 55km
Duration Seven to 10 hours



3 Uitdam The road – now called Uitdammerdijk – passes the town of **Uitdam**, whose 160 inhabitants can usually be found near the yacht harbour, the campground or the swimming pool, as there's not much else goin' down.

4 Marken Take the road leading right (east) and proceed along the causeway to the former island of **Marken**, a one-time fishing community in a startlingly isolate setting, with houses on piles.

5 Volendam From Marken, take the summer ferry (one-way adult/child €4.25/3.25, 30 minutes, 11am to 6pm, every 30 to 45 minutes mid-March through October) to **Volendam**. This picturesque fishing port has reinvented itself as a tourist town, but the back streets behind the harbour hold the most charm.

6 Monnickendam Head south along the sea dyke towards **Monnickendam**, with its many old fishing homes and 15th-century church. About 1.5km south of Monnickendam, turn right (southwest) towards Zuiderwode.

7 Broek in Waterland Continue to **Broek in Waterland**, a pretty hamlet with homes painted a particular shade of grey, 'Broeker grijs', after the landscapes painted here by Claude Monet and others. Then cycle along the south bank of the Broekervaart canal towards Het Schouw on the Noordhollands Kanaal.

8 Watergang Bird-watchers may want to head up the east bank towards **Watergang** and its bird sanctuary. Otherwise, cross the Noordhollands Kanaal (the bridge is slightly to the north) and follow the west bank back down to Amsterdam Noord; it's straight pedalling all the way to the ferry that takes you back to Centraal Station.

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