

Amsterdam



Amsterdam's always been a liberal place, ever since the Golden Age, when it led European art and trade. Centuries later, in the 1960s, it again led the pack – this time in the principles of tolerance, with broad-minded views on drugs and same-sex relationships taking centre stage. Today the cannabis coffeeshops and the Red Light District are still the city's top drawcards, even if that can sometimes wear thin for the locals. But Amsterdam's more than just an X-rated theme park for weekend warriors.

Quite simply, it's among the most distinctive of all European cities (it's certainly one of the most eccentric). And it may well be the most beautiful, with its breathtakingly scenic, heritage-protected 17th-century housing and ubiquitous canals. Other cities in Europe's premier league are nothing if not monumental, but Amsterdam by contrast is irreverent, intimate and accessible: you can walk across the city centre in around 30 minutes, less by bike, and the place has enough sensory delights to keep the shortest attention spans occupied. All of the major sights are found in or near the city centre: some of the continent's best museums and galleries nestle among attractions that are just plain quirky or silly – but always fun.

Walk or bike around the canal grid, down the historic lanes of the Jordaan district or through the Plantage and bask in the many worlds-within-worlds that make Amsterdam so thoroughly addictive.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Do a time-honoured circuit of the lush **Vondelpark** (p107)
- Hail the power of art at the world-class **Rijksmuseum** (p106)
- Breathe in the smoky atmospherics of the **Jordaan** (p100)
- Immerse yourself in the extraordinary output of the eponymous Vincent at the **Van Gogh Museum** (p106)
- Lose yourself in a sea of humanity at the **Albert Cuypmarkt** (p107), where the diversity of the city comes together



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 020

■ POPULATION: 743,000

HISTORY

A small fishing town named Aemstelredamme emerged in around 1200. The community was freed by the count of Holland from paying tolls on its locks and bridges, and 'Amsterdam' developed into a major seaport.

Calvinist brigands captured Amsterdam in 1578, and the seven northern provinces, led by Holland and Zeeland, declared themselves a republic. The stage was set for the Golden Age, when merchants and artisans flocked to Amsterdam and a new class of moneyed intellectuals was born.

By the late 17th century Holland couldn't match the might of France and England, but when the country's first railway opened in 1839 the city was revitalised in a stroke.

During the latter part of that century, Amsterdammers were certainly buoyant and in feisty mood – as the Eel Riot of 25 July 1886 proves. At the time, the sport of eel pulling was very popular throughout the city. The rules were very simple: a rope would be suspended over a canal, with a live eel attached to it. Underneath, competitors in boats would try to grab the poor creature, with the ever-present threat of landing in the water adding a frisson to the proceedings.

When the authorities made the game illegal – denouncing it as a 'cruel, popular amusement' – the Jordaan erupted in riots so intense and pitched that 25 people died from gunshot wounds inflicted by the police.

The first part of the 20th century was characterised by more trouble, as unemployment, depression and WWI took their toll. After WWII, growth resumed with US aid (the Marshall Plan).

However, in 1955 the French philosopher Albert Camus wrote, 'Have you noticed that Amsterdam's concentric canals resemble the circles of hell? The middle-class hell, of course, peopled with bad dreams'.

How incredible, then, to see the next few decades unfold.

In the 1960s students occupied the administrative centre of the University of Amsterdam, and the women's movement began a campaign that fuelled the abortion debate throughout the next decade. Meanwhile, pranksters, anarchists and radicals began a systematic programme to derail conservative attitudes – with a peculiarly Amsterdammer dose of absurdism. Nowhere was this more evident than in the antics of the Provos, whose

members included poet Johnny the Selfkicker and Bart Huges, an 'open-minded' fellow who drilled a hole in his forehead to achieve enlightenment (see the boxed text, p31).

During that decade, Amsterdam was known as Europe's 'Magic Centre', the crux of a utopian dream where people believed anything could happen. Although the days of excess have been somewhat neutered, much of that famous swagger is still evident (and in some cases, institutionalised and parodied, as in the Red Light District; in fact, if you arrive here on Koningsdag – see p117 – you might think it never went away).

In the '70s city planners proposed a metro line through the Nieuwmarkt neighbourhood, earmarking a large portion of the derelict district to be razed. When the inhabitants turned to squatting, the area was violently cleared on 24 March 1975, a day fixed in history as 'Blue Monday'.

In the '60s families and small manufacturers dominated inner-city neighbourhoods; by the early '90s they'd been replaced by professionals and a service industry of pubs, coffeeshops, restaurants and hotels. Non-Dutch nationalities made up 45% of the population and the city's success in attracting large foreign businesses resulted in an influx of higher-income expatriates.

ORIENTATION

Centraal Station is the city's hub. From the station the streets radiate outward across the network of canals. The Dam is the heart, a 10-minute walk southwest of the station. Leidseplein is the centre of (mainstream) Amsterdam nightlife, and Nieuwmarkt (southeast of the station) is a vast cobblestone square with open-air markets and popular pubs. The Red Light District (south of the station and east of the Dam) is bounded by Zeedijk, Nieuwmarkt and Kloveniersburgwal in the east; Damstraat, Oude Doelenstraat and Oude Hoogstraat in the south; and Warmoesstraat in the west.

Lush, 17th-century homes occupy the western canals Prinsengracht, Keizersgracht and Herengracht. The Jordaan is filled with quirky shops, bohemian bars and art galleries. Outside the canal belt is ethnic-influenced De Pijp; posh and residential Oud Zuid, east of the Damrak-Rokin axis; and Nieuw Zuid, to the west of the axis, with its 20th-century housing projects. The Eastern Docklands is a showcase of modern Dutch architecture.

AMSTERDAM IN...

Two Days

Begin at the **Anne Frank Huis** (p102), then scoot across town to the **Rijksmuseum** (p106) and the **Van Gogh Museum** (p106). Dive into the **Albert Cuypmarkt** (p107), before coming up for air (and lunch) at **Bazar** (p126). In the afternoon, stop off for a smoke at **Siberië** (p129), then follow the conga line to the **Red Light District** (p85). When the dope's worn off, order a *mojito* at **Café Cuba** (p127), before dining at the sumptuous **Blauw aan de Wal** (p122). On the second day, hire a **bike** (p111) and see where you end up – it's all good, and well you know it.

Four Days

Take in the two-day itinerary, but allow yourself time to explore in greater depth. For example, after the Van Gogh Museum, take a walk around the **Vondelpark** (p107) and indulge in a spot of people-watching. Follow this by enjoying some classical music at the **Concertgebouw** (p107). At night, drink at **Lime** (p127) and eat at **Nomads** (p123).

Maps

The maps in this book will probably be sufficient. Lonely Planet's handy *Amsterdam City Map* has a street index (in rain-proof lamination) that covers most parts of town in detail. The tourist offices also sell maps of the city centre.

INFORMATION**Bookshops**

American Book Center (Map pp92-3; ☎ 625 55 37; www.abc.nl; Kalverstraat 185) English-language books, travel guides, newspapers and magazines.

Architectura & Natura (Map pp88-9; ☎ 623 61 86; www.architectura.nl; Leliegracht 22; ☹ Mon-Sat) Charming canal-side shop with art, architecture, design, landscape and coffee-table books.

Athenaeum Bookshop & Newsagency (Map pp92-3; ☎ 622 62 48; Spui 14-16) Enormous multilevel store with a vast assortment of unusual titles.

Book Exchange (Map pp88-9; ☎ 626 62 66; Kloveniersburgwal 58) Second-hand books, many in English.

Galerie Lambiek (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 75 43; www.lambiek.nl; Kerkstraat 78; ☹ daily) Tens of thousands of titles of Dutch and worldwide comic-book art.

Scheltema (Map pp92-3; ☎ 523 14 11; Koningsplein 20) Largest bookshop in town, with many foreign titles.

Waterstone's (Map pp92-3; ☎ 638 38 21; Kalverstraat 152) English-language travel guides, maps and novels.

Cultural Centres

British Council (Map pp92-3; ☎ 550 60 60; www.britishcouncil.nl; Weteringschans 85a) Manages educational and cultural exchanges between the UK and the Netherlands.

De Balie (Map pp92-3; ☎ 553 51 00; www.debalie.nl; Kleine Gartmanplantsoen 10) Theatre, seminars, political debates and lectures.

Maison Descartes (Map pp92-3; ☎ 531 95 00; www.maisondescartes.com; Vijzelgracht 2A; ☹ 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, library 1-6pm Tue & Thu) Extension of the French consulate offering films, lectures and exhibitions.

Discount Card

I Amsterdam Card (per 24/36/72hr €33/43/53) Available at VVV offices and some hotels. Includes admission to most museums, canal boat trips, and discounts and freebies at shops, attractions and restaurants. Also includes a GVB transit pass.

Emergency

Emergency (☎ 112) Police, ambulance, fire brigade.
Police headquarters (☎ 09008844; Elandsgracht 117)
Sexual assault (☎ 613 02 45) De Eerste Lijn (The First Line) is a hotline for victims of sexual violence.

Internet Access

Centrale Bibliotheek (Map pp92-3; ☎ 523 09 00; Prinsengracht 587; ☹ 1-9pm Mon, 10am-9pm Tue-Thu, 10am-5pm Fri & Sat, 1-5pm Sun) The main library. Has free Internet.

easyInternetcafé (Map pp88-9; www.easyeverything.com/map/ams; Damrak 33; ☹ 9am-10pm)
Internet City (Map pp88-9; ☎ 620 12 92; Nieuwendijk 76; ☹ 10am-midnight)

Internet Resources

www.amsterdamhotspots.nl Select the hottest spots to eat, drink, smoke, sleep and party down.

www.channels.nl Virtual tour of 'Dam with hotel and restaurant reviews.

www.underwateramsterdam.com The site for *Shark*, the monthly underground events 'zine.

www.visitamsterdam.nl Official Netherlands Board of Tourism site.

Laundry

Clean Brothers (Map pp92-3; ☎ 622 02 73; Kerkstraat 56)

Happy Inn (Map pp92-3; ☎ 624 84 64; Warmoesstraat 30; ☹ closed Sun)

Wasserette Rozengracht (Map p91; ☎ 638 59 75; Rozengracht 59)

Left Luggage

At Centraal Station there's a left-luggage desk downstairs from track 2, near the southeastern corner of the station. Storage costs €3 for 24 hours.

Libraries

Centrale Bibliotheek (Map pp92-3; ☎ 523 09 00; Prinsengracht 587; ☹ 1-9pm Mon, 10am-9pm Tue-Thu, 10am-5pm Fri & Sat, 1-5pm Sun) Wide range of English-language newspapers and magazines. Free Internet.

Media

For details of national newspapers and magazines, see p37.

Amsterdam Times Mainstream local news. In English.
Amsterdam Weekly (www.amsterdamweekly.nl) Outstanding English-language paper, free every Wednesday. Offers creative, personal articles on life in Amsterdam plus useful classifieds.

Het Parool (www.parool.nl) The lowdown on the capital's culture and politics.

Medical Services

Centrale Doktersdienst (Central Doctors' Service; ☎ 592 33 33; ☹ 24hr) Doctor, dentist or pharmacy referrals.

Onze Lieve Vrouwe Gasthuis (Map pp86-7; ☎ 599 91 11; Oosterpark 9) Hospital open 24 hours.

Money

American Express (Map pp88-9; ☎ 504 87 77; Damrak 66; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat)

GWK (Map pp88-9; ☎ 09000566; Centraal Station; ☹ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-10pm Sun) Converts travellers cheques and books hotel reservations; also at Schiphol.

Thomas Cook Dam (Map pp88-9; ☎ 625 09 22; Dam 23-25; ☹ 9am-7pm); Damrak (Map pp88-9; ☎ 620 32 36; Damrak 1-5; ☹ 8am-8pm); Leidseplein (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 70 00; Leidseplein 31A; ☹ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7.30pm Sun)

Post

Main post office (Map pp88-9; ☎ 330 0555; Singel 250; ☹ 9am-6pm Mon-Wed & Fri, to 8pm Thu, 10am-1.30pm Sat)

Telephone

For information about mobile phones, phone codes, public telephones and phonecards, see p295.

Toilets

There are no public toilets in Amsterdam. Your best bet is to slip into a department store, where you'll pay the toilet attendants around €0.50.

Tourist Information

Tourist Office (VVV; ☎ 09004004040; www.vvv.amsterdam.nl); Centraal Station track 2 (Map pp88-9; Centraal Station; ☹ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun); Leidseplein 1 (Map pp92-3; ☹ 9.15am-5pm Sun-Thu, to 7pm Fri & Sat); Stationsplein 10 (Map pp88-9; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Travel Agencies

Kilroy Travels (Map pp92-3; ☎ 524 51 00; www.kilroytravels.com; Singel 413-415; ☹ noon-6pm Mon, 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 11.30am-4.30pm Sat).
lastminute.com (☎ 09004050607; www.nl.lastminute.com; per min €0.15)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Theft is rare in hotel rooms, but it's always wise to deposit valuables for safekeeping at the reception desk or, where available, in your in-room safe. Theft is more common at hostels; bring your own lock for your locker.

Watch out for pickpockets in crowded markets and on trams. Violent crime is rare, especially involving foreigners.

Cars with foreign registration are popular targets for smash-and-grab theft. Don't leave valuable items in the car; remove registration and ID papers and the radio/stereo if possible. If something is stolen, get a police report for insurance purposes, but don't expect the police to retrieve your property or apprehend the thief.

There are occasionally some junkie types around the Zeedijk and Gelderskade, and also on the Nieuwendijk near Centraal Station. Generally, they won't bother you if you don't bother them.

DOG SHIT

It's everywhere. The Netherlands doesn't appear to have a 'pooper-scooper' policy, and Amsterdam's streets are full of it.

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

Simon Sellars

Steve Korver is the editor of the super periodical *Amsterdam Weekly*. 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, p32) 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'?

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

What film or book set in Amsterdam would you recommend for first-timers?

Books: *Amsterdam: A Brief Life of the City* by Geert Mak, *The Embarrassment of Riches* by Simon Schama, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Blue Mondays* by Arnon Grunberg, *Brilliant Orange: The Neurotic Genius of Dutch Football* by David Winners.

Films: *Diamonds Are Forever*, *Simon* by Eddy Terstall, *The Northerners* by Alex van Warmerdam.

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

Bicycles are numerous (see p111) and can be dangerous for pedestrians. When crossing the street look for speeding bikes as well as cars; please don't stray into a bike lane without looking both ways. Cyclists, meanwhile, should take care to watch out for unwitting foreign tourists, and to lock up their bikes.

Drugs

Don't light up joints just anywhere without asking permission. In general, stick to coffeshops. Drugs are technically illegal but tolerated. See p293 for laws relating to hard and soft drugs.

Scams

Beware of thieves masquerading as police in plain clothes. Usually these fraudsters address tourists in English, flash a false ID and demand to see money and credit cards for 'verification' or some other nonsense. They might also go through the victim's pockets and pretend to look for drugs. Dutch police rarely conduct this kind of search. To foil the

crooks, ask to see their police identity card (note that Dutch police don't have badges as ID). Then call the real cops at ☎ 09008844.

SIGHTS

The canal belt (p101) is Amsterdam at its most seductive: Golden Age façades, brown cafés, hidden courtyards. The Dam (p96) is the city's heart; throbbing Leidseplein (p102) is a Dutch Times Square; Rembrandtplein (p102) is a brash clubber's mecca; while the ever-popular Nieuwmarkt (p98) hums with markets, cafés and pubs. You don't need us to tell you about the Red Light District (p85).

Outside the canal belt, there's multicultural De Pijp (p107) and the Oud Zuid (p105), posh and residential.

If you want top-line attractions, Amsterdam delivers. The classical art circuit is an obvious route: with the world-class Van Gogh Museum and Rijksmuseum within easy reach, you'll be spoilt for choice. Then there are the theatres, the pubs, the coffeshops, the cafés, the churches – we could tailor itineraries for you until the cows come home. But, ultimately,

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 coffeshops, 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 (see p111). 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 are 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 weekend 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 are the voice of the grassroots, the subcultures that are always busy bubbling up towards the foreground.

take our tip and just wander (see the boxed text, p85).

Medieval Centre**DAMRAK & OUDE ZIJDE**

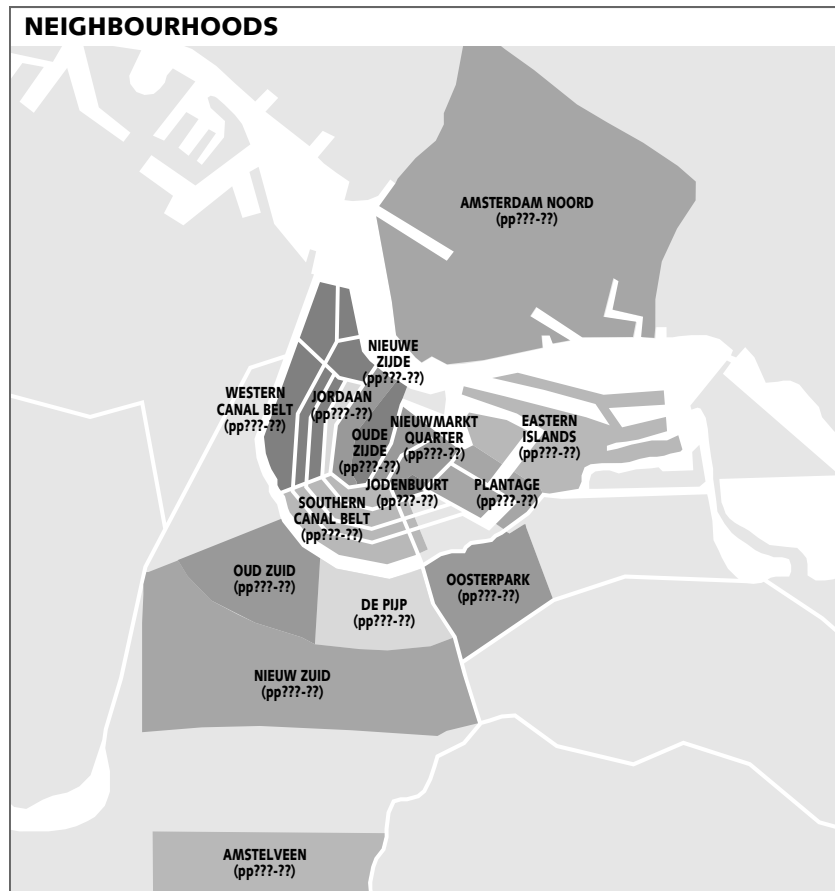
Once part of the old harbour, Damrak today is an endless stretch of souvenir shops, beebling bicycles, exchange bureaux and dodgy hotels. East of the Damrak-Rokin axis is the Oude Zijde (Old Side) of the medieval city. It's a misnomer: the Nieuwe Zijde (New Side) to the west is actually older, though the Oude Zijde absorbed the Red Light District in the 14th century. Originally, the city didn't extend further south than Grimburgwal, where the filled-in parts of the Rokin end today.

The gleaming, turreted marvel that is **Centraal Station** (Map pp88–9) dates from 1889 and was the work of AL Ghent and Pierre Cuyper, the master architects who also designed the Rijksmuseum and the Concertgebouw. Centraal's resemblance to the Rijksmuseum is easy to spot: a central section with Gothic towers and wings.

Sint Nicolaaskerk (Map pp88–9; ☎ 624 87 49; Prins Hendrikkade 73; ☎ 11am–4pm Tue–Sat, noon–3pm Mon, services 10.30am & 1pm Sun, 12.30pm Mon–Sat), built in 1887, is the city's main Catholic church. The impressive interior features black marble pillars and an ethereal bluish aura in the soaring dome. The high altar is unusual for its depiction of Maximilian's bulging yellow crown.

The innovative **News Photo** (Map pp88–9; ☎ 330 84 00; www.newsphoto.nl; Prins Hendrikkade 33; admission €5; ☎ 10am–6pm) displays enormous blow-ups (up to 60m long) of headlining photos from around the world. Themed exhibitions (terrorism, the Tour de France etc) change every few weeks, and as news is made the curators use giant printers to print out the latest photos, which are then affixed to the magnetic walls. If you see a photo you like in the main gallery, you can buy it right off the wall (at €100 per sq metre while the exhibition is running, half-price thereafter).

At the **Sexmuseum Amsterdam** (Map pp88–9; ☎ 622 83 76; Damrak 18; admission €2.50; ☎ 10am–11.30pm), which lurks furtively behind a façade



reminiscent of a sweaty 'swords-and-sandals' film, there are some mildly interesting artefacts: 14th-century Viennese erotica, for example, and Pompeian porn. But with plastic derrières farting at passers-by and an animatronic flasher, it's more like a tribute to Benny Hill. A sign warns, 'You could be shocked'. Pull the other one.

The **Beurs van Berlage** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 530 41 41; www.beursvanberlage.net; Damrak 243; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun) is the old stock and commodities exchange designed by renowned architect HP Berlage. The functional lines and chunky square clock tower are landmarks of Dutch urban architecture, and today the one-time Bourse is a cultural centre and home to the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra. Visi-

tors can roam the premises. The large central hall with its steel-and-glass roof was the Victorian-style trading floor for commodities and colonial merchandise. The rich decorations here include three Art Deco tile mosaics by Jan Toorop; stockbrokers distrusted these works because of their anti-capitalist flavour. Be sure to check out the basement vaults, where discreet patrons used to store their stock certificates, money and jewellery. The clock tower affords a view of the old town, and there are more Art Deco features in the café on the Beursplein side.

One of the original dykes on the Amstel river ran along **Warmoesstraat** (Map pp88-9), where the city's wealthiest merchants used to live (it up). Today it's an outgrowth of the Red

DIY AMSTERDAM

Follow the canals, the crowds or that deserted side street. Or the colour; that sweet smell in the air. You're bound to trip over something that tickles you pink – a museum devoted to bending light, say, or a guy on his back playing keepy uppy with a football for hours on end. Perhaps you'll see a group of subversives reviving the banned sport of eel pulling (see p79).

You'll more likely find an ancient building tucked away out of sight, redolent with atmosphere and begging to be read as a 'secret history' of the city. Quite possibly, it won't be in this guide. Let us know if it isn't. Or keep it to yourself – we'll understand.

Above all, Amsterdam's a unique template for city life that feels different for each individual – it's a personalised urban 'psychogeography' just waiting to be decoded.

Light District, with rough-edged bars, hotels and sex shops luridly rubbing shoulders with some great old architecture.

East off Warmoesstraat is the city's oldest surviving building (built in 1306), the mighty **Oude Kerk** (Old Church; Map pp88-9; ☎ 625 82 84; www.oudekerk.nl; Oudekerksplein 23; adult/child €4.50/3.50; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun), built to honour the city's patron saint, St Nicholas (the inspiration for red-suited Saint Nick). In one of Europe's great moral contradictions, the tower, arguably Amsterdam's most beautiful, commands a magnificent view – one that includes the Red Light District. Get closer to heaven on a **tower tour** (☎ 689 25 65; admission €40, up to 25 people). But maybe the view's no contradiction at all: some of the 15th-century carvings on the choir stalls are downright naughty. There's also a stunning Müller organ, gilded oak vaults and stained-glass windows from 1555. As in the Nieuwe Kerk, many famous Amsterdammers are buried under worn tombstones, including Rembrandt's first wife, Saskia van Uylenburgh.

The **Allard Pierson Museum** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 525 25 56; www.uba.uva.nl/apm; Oude Turfmarkt 127; adult/child €5/2.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 1-5pm Sat & Sun), run by the University of Amsterdam, has one of the world's richest university-owned archaeological collections, including an actual mummy, ancient Greek and Mesopotamian vases, a wagon from the royal tombs at Salamis (Cyprus), and galleries stuffed with the wainscoting with fascinating items providing real insight into daily life in ancient times.

Red Light District

Amsterdam's famous Red Light District retains the power to bewilder, even if near-naked prostitutes propositioning passers-by from black-lit windows is the oldest Amsterdam cliché. If you feel a twinge of desire, it's around €50 for 20 minutes.

The district, known locally as De Wallen, has for centuries been the undoing of countless sailors with its houses of ill repute and distilleries. The clientele has changed, but the script hasn't, because business never stops: all day and night prostitutes give their come-hither looks from big windows that line the canal. Some sections are in stereo with windows on two floors.

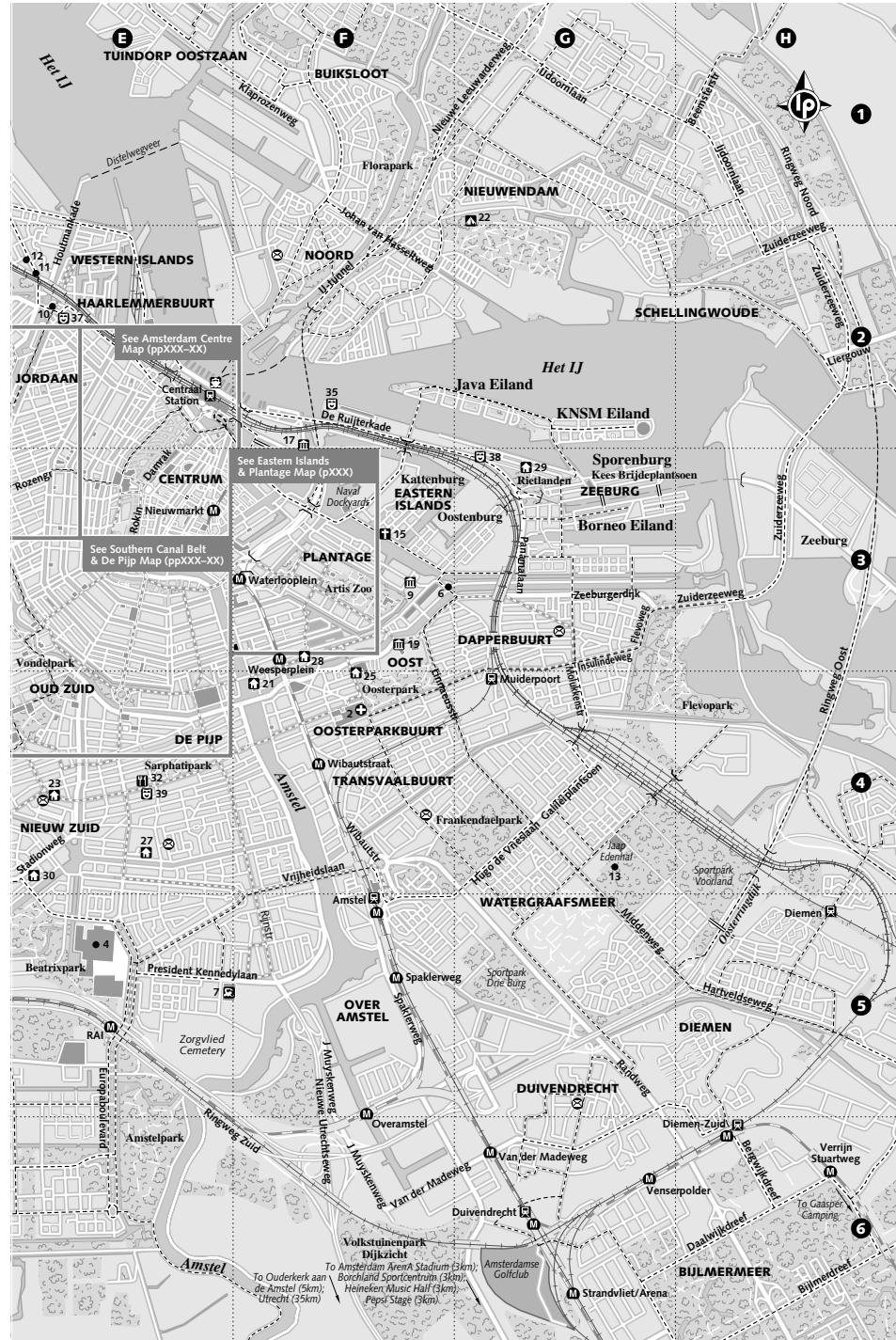
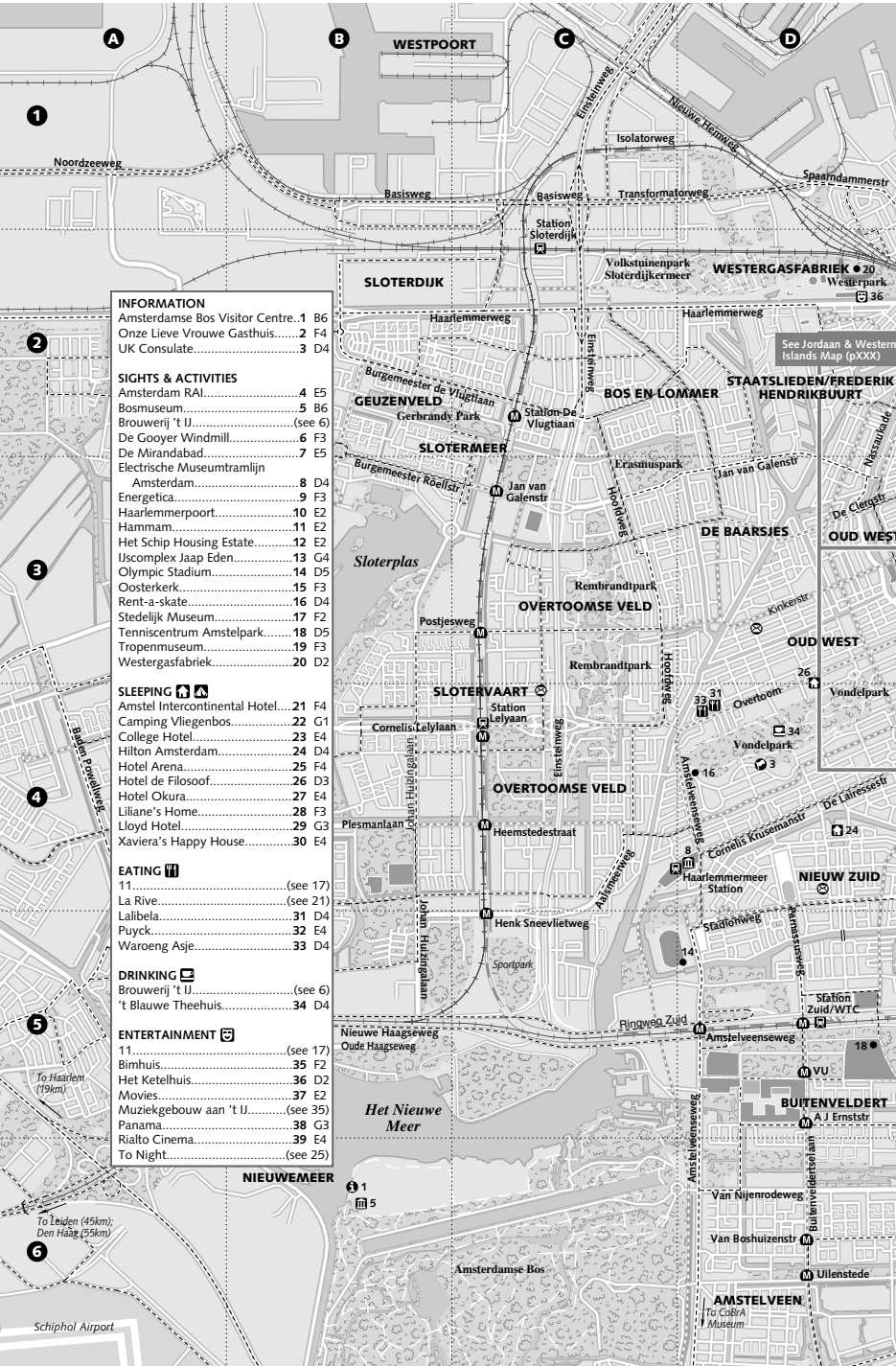
It's seamy for sure, but the ambience is far less threatening than in sex districts elsewhere. Pimps, drunks, weirdos, the fuzz, Salvation Army volunteers, nice girls and boys, and respectable old-age pensioners all rub shoulders and nothing else. Female sightseers are not assumed to be soliciting and tend to be left alone as long as they exercise a modicum of street sense.

Unless you want to end up in a canal along with your camera, don't take photos. And if you hear some guy whispering 'coke, acieeeeeed, ecstasy, speed, china white, mother of pearl – what you need', then just walk on by. If want to look but not touch, try the live-sex club **Casa Rosso** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 627 89 54; Oudezijds Achterburgwal 106-108), with its marble penis fountain and rotating balls out front. It's far less threatening than other places: in the audience, grannies might mix with groovers, although more likely it will be like a cheery football crowd. Don't expect to be turned on: the actual show is as mechanical as the English football team.

The **Hash, Marijuana & Hemp Museum** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 623 59 61; admission €5.70; Oudezijds Achterburgwal 148; ☎ 11am-11pm) features exhibits that cover dope botany; bongos, hookahs and pipes of the world; the relationship between cannabis and religion; and the history of Amsterdam coffeshops. Queen Victoria used marijuana for menstrual cramps, it says here...

(Continued on page 96)

GREATER AMSTERDAM



AMSTERDAM CENTRE



INFORMATION

American Express.....	1	C6
Architectura & Natura Bookshop.....	2	A5
Book Exchange.....	3	D8
easyInternetcafé.....	4	D5
Happy Inn Laundry.....	5	E5
Internale.....	6	B7
Internet City.....	7	D4
Main Post Office.....	8	A6
Mantrav.....	9	E7
Thomas Cook.....	10	C7
Thomas Cook.....	11	E4
Tourist Office.....	12	E4
Vrolijk.....	13	B7
Winston International.....	(see 67)	

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Amsterdams Historisch Museum.....	14	B8
Bartolothuis.....	15	A6
Begijnhof.....	16	B8
Beurs van Berlage.....	17	D5
Canal Bus Dock.....	18	E4
Casa Rosso.....	19	D7
Civic Guard Gallery.....	20	B8
Clandestine Church.....	21	B8
Erotic Museum.....	22	E6
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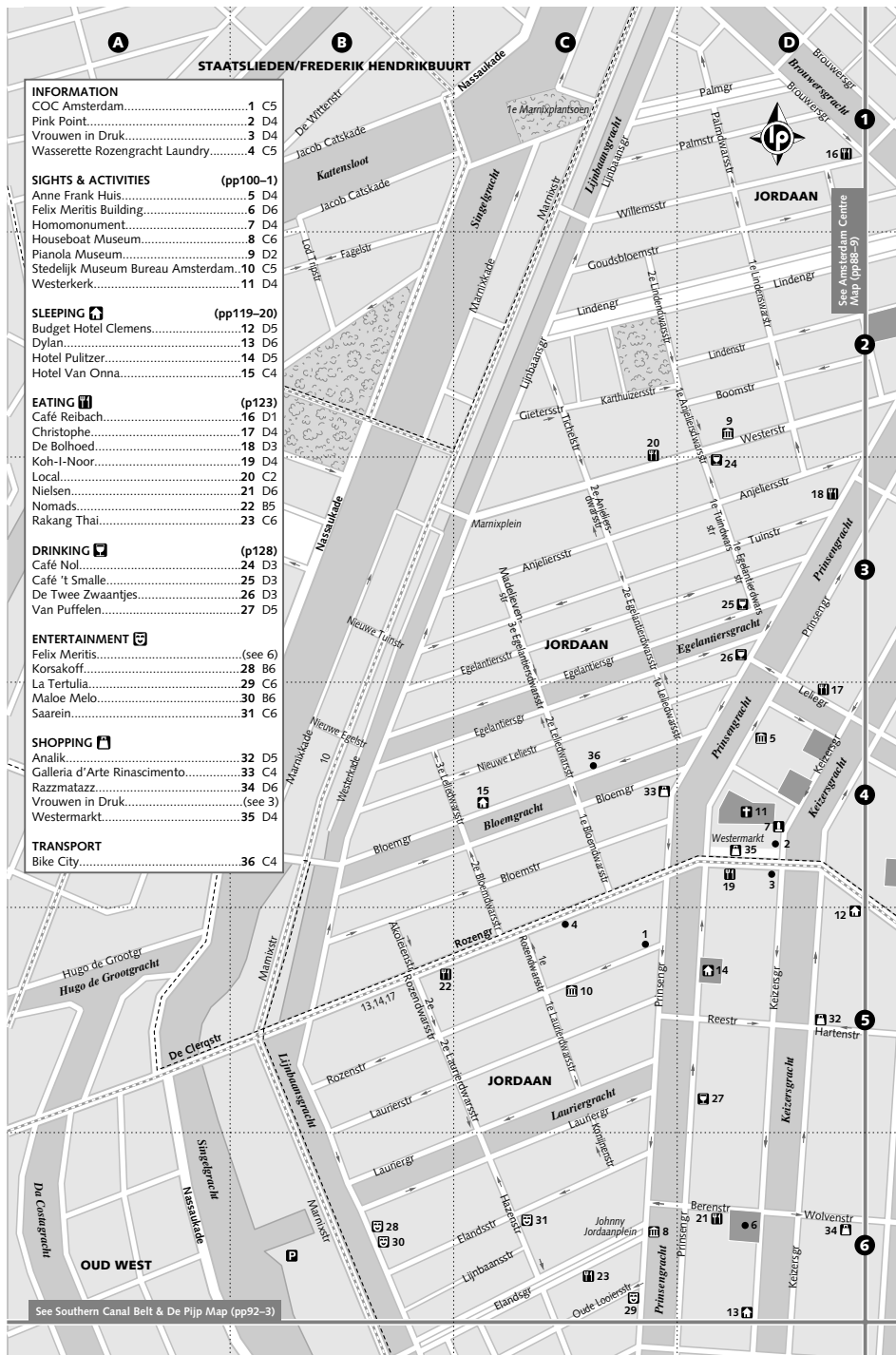
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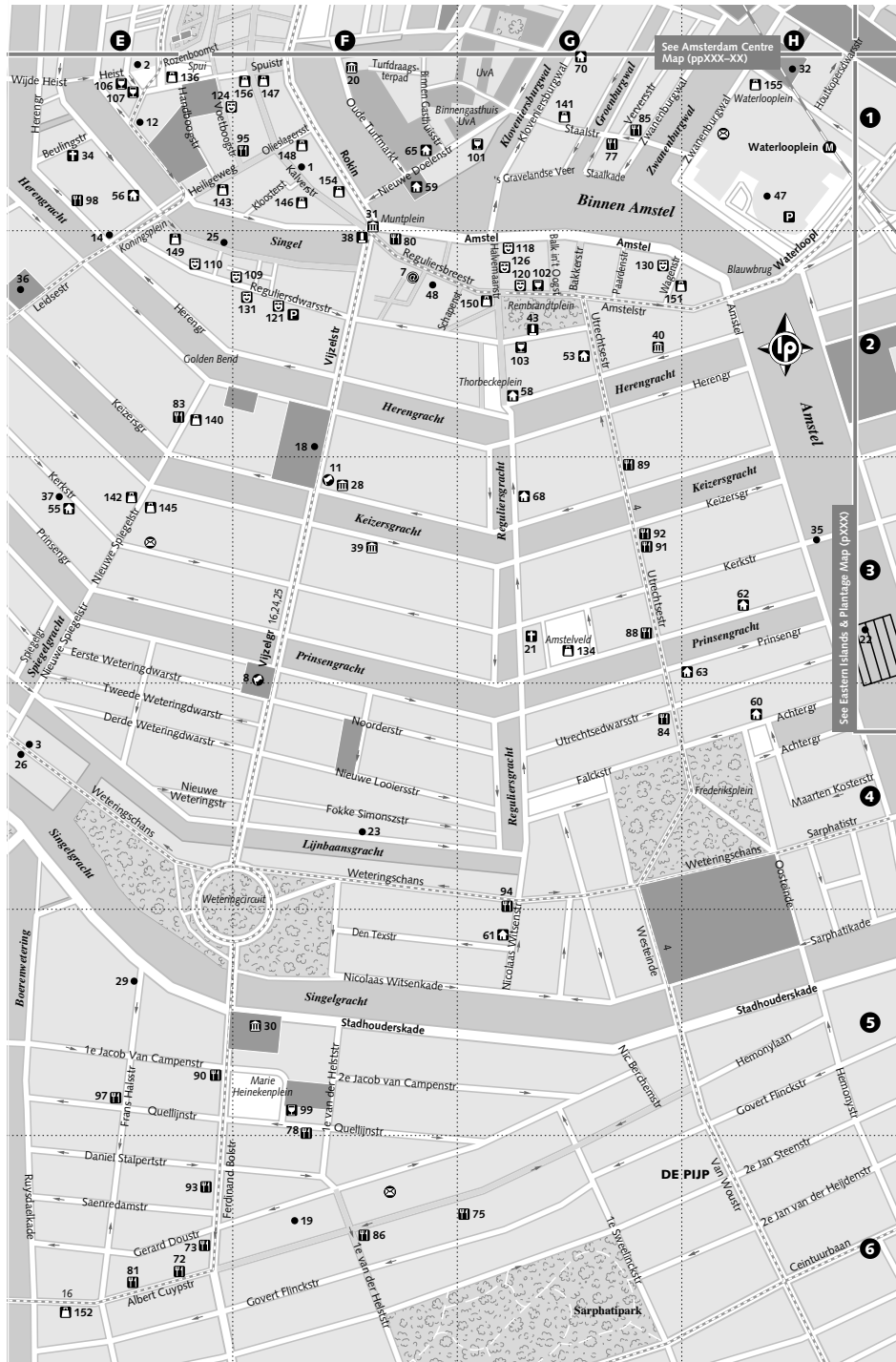
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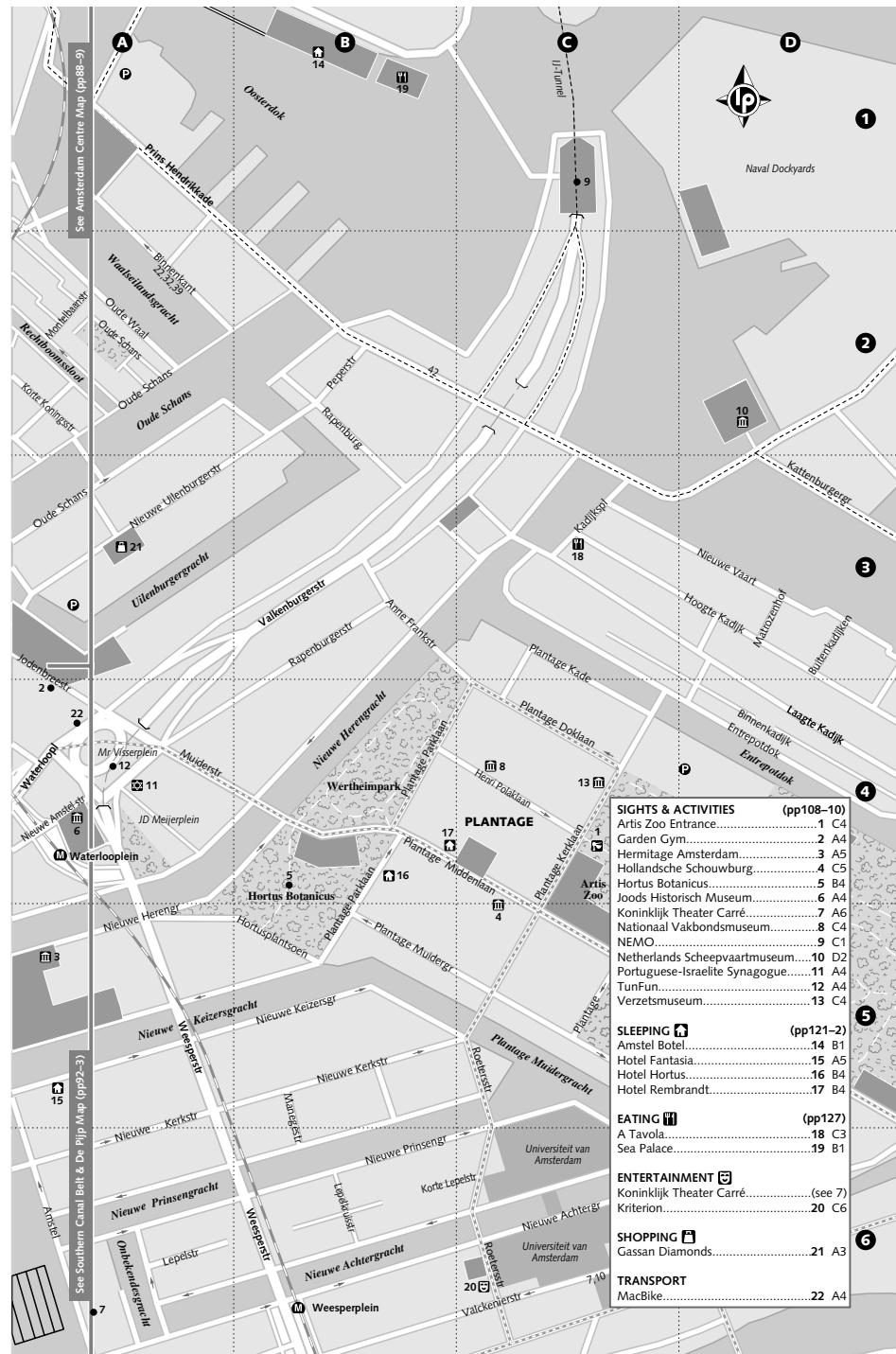
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The **Prostitution Information Centre** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 420 73 28; www.pic-amsterdam.com; Enge Kerksteeg 3; ☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Sat or by appointment), established by a former prostitute and staffed by sex workers, organises evening Red Light walks and sells a map of the district along with 'naughty' souvenirs. For a donation, you can browse a re-creation of a prostitute's working quarters, historical photos of the Red Light District and some enlightening reading material.

And now for something completely different: the **Museum Amstelkring** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 624 66 04; Oudezjids Voorburgwal 40; adult/child €7/1; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun), the Red Light District's – and Amsterdam's – holiest place. The highlight is the 'secret' church, Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder (Our Dear Lord in the Attic), a Catholic chapel set up after the Calvinists seized power that remained in use through the 1880s. Curious horizontal steel poles at balcony level provide extra support, unwittingly emphasising the claustrophobic air – as do the chaplain's amazingly cramped quarters.

THE DAM & NEW SIDE (NIEUWE ZIJDE)

On the Singel, tied up at No 40, is the **Poezenboot** (Cat Boat; Map pp88-9; ☎ 625 87 94; www.poezenboot.nl; Singel 40; ☎ 1-3pm), one of Amsterdam's more unusual 'flea markets'. This barge began life as a shelter for hundreds of homeless cats in the 1960s. It's now a registered charity – pat and pet the current feline inhabitants for a small donation.

Further along the Singel is **Torenslui** (Map pp88-9), one of the widest bridges in the city. The big moustachioed bust is of **Multatuli**, the pen name of the brilliant 19th-century author Eduard Douwes Dekker, who exposed colonial narrow-mindedness in a novel about a coffee merchant. The nearby **Multatuli Museum** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 638 19 38; Korsjespoortsteeg 20; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue, noon-5pm Sat & Sun, closed Sat Jul & Aug) tells the story.

To the east is the **Dam**, the very spot where a barrier giving the city its name was built across the Amstel river. Today it's besieged by thousands of pigeons, tourists and the occasional fun fair.

Facing the Dam, the **Koninklijk Paleis** (Royal Palace; Map pp88-9; ☎ 620 40 60; www.koninklijkhuis.nl; Dam) is the official residence of Queen Beatrix, although she actually lives in Den Haag. Built as a grand city hall in 1665, it later became

the palace of Napoleon's fairly incompetent brother, Louis. The interior (particularly the chandeliered Civic Hall) is more lavish than the sober façade suggests, but unfortunately it's closed until 2008. Ring or check the website for updates.

Behind the palace stands the **Nieuwe Kerk** (New Church; Map pp88-9; ☎ 638 69 09; www.nieuwekerk.nl; Dam; adult/6-15yr/under 6yr €5/4/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Fri-Wed, to 10pm Thu), which is the coronation church of Dutch royalty. Crown Prince Willem Alexander and Máxima also took their vows here in 2002. This Gothic basilica from the 15th century is only 'new' in relation to the Oude Kerk. A few monumental items dominate the otherwise spartan interior – a magnificent carved oak chancel, a bronze choir screen, a massive organ and enormous stained-glass windows. Exhibitions and organ concerts are held, but church services are no more. Opening times and admission fees vary, depending on the exhibition.

The magnificent orange-and-white façade of **Magna Plaza** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 626 91 99; Nieuwezjids Voorburgwal 182; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon, 10am-7pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat, 10am-9pm Thu, noon-7pm Sun) was built in the late 19th century as the main post office. The complex has since been converted into a multi-level shopping centre, with columned galleries and dozens of upmarket clothing shops.

North of the Dam, the oldest dyke in the city, **Nieuwendijk** (Map pp88-9) used to link up with the road to Haarlem, and its businesses 'served' (read: 'fleeced') travellers on their way to market. Today this pedestrianised shopping street is a mix of souvenir shops, coffeshops and cheap hostels, although some of the narrow medieval streets leading to the west are pretty.

The **Nationaal Monument** (Map pp88-9) on the eastern side of the Dam commemorates those who died during WWII; the fallen are honoured in a Remembrance Day ceremony here every 4 May. The statues around the phallic white obelisk stand for war, peace and resistance. In the 1960s hippies used to camp out here before being shoed away by police.

South of the Dam is **Kalverstraat**, the shopping mecca where consumers lather themselves into a fever pitch over the latest sales. Beware of pickpockets.

Parallel to Kalversstraat, Damrak becomes **Rokin** and begins to show the business side of Amsterdam with office buildings and art dealers. At Grimburgwal stands a **statue of**

WINDOW SHOPPING

You're not fooling anyone – you know you'll end up here. Everyone does at some stage, even if they think they're too hip, too moral, too conscientious, too prudish, too impotent, too old...the curiosity value is just too strong. But it's not just rubberneckers and pleasure seekers who flock to the Red Light District: Amsterdam's approach to prostitution has generated reams of socio-economic analysis, along with a raft of facts and figures – and some contradictions.

Prostitution was legalised in the Netherlands in 1815 (although brothels were only legalised in 2000). Unsurprisingly, less than 5% of Dutch prostitutes work illegally in the Netherlands. Dutch 'working girls' pay taxes and have their own union. Pimping is technically against the law, but the women are not on their own: their quarters are fitted with panic buttons in case of trouble. Should the button be pressed, it won't be the cops who come running.

An estimated 5% of Amsterdam prostitutes are born in the Netherlands, and around 1000 to 1200 work approximately 380 windows daily, in day, evening and night shifts. The women must rent their window at a cost of between €40 and €100 per day, depending on location. Do the maths: the typical base cost for 'oral favours' or a 'quickie' is €30; the average base cost for both is €50. Encounters typically last 15 minutes.

Dutch customers are most likely to visit on a Monday morning – that's when many businesses and most shops are closed. Of the international clientele, almost half are British – we don't dare speculate why.

A few years back, three chaps installed themselves behind windows as prostitutes, a sociological experiment – and maybe a little bit of performance art – that generated frothing mass debate in the media. In the end, the guys were warned not to give up their day job: no women took the bait (we're not sure if any blokes did). Rubbing salt into the wound, one female prostitute dismissed the whole incident as 'filthy'.

Now that's harsh.

Queen Wilhelmina (Map pp88-9) on horseback, a reminder of the monarch's trots through Amsterdam during official processions.

Rokin ends at Muntplein, a busy intersection dominated by the **Munttoren** (Mint Tower; Map pp92-3). When the French occupied the country in the 19th century the national mint was transferred here from Dordrecht for safekeeping. The French got the mint later anyway when they took Amsterdam.

Here you'll find out why, for many Dutch, football isn't a matter of life or death: it's more important than that. The **Het Oranje Voetbal Museum** (Orange Football Museum; Map pp92-3; ☎ 589 89 89; www.supportersclub-oranje.nl; Kalverstraat 236; ☎ 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) tells the story of orange maestros including Cruyff, Van Basten and Gullit, and the revolution that was Total Football. Hup, Holland, hup!

To the west of the Damrak-Rokin axis is the 'New Side' of the medieval city. It was actually settled earlier than the Oude Zijde – the names date from the construction of the Nieuwe Kerk and the division of the city into two parishes. Amsterdam's first houses were built in this neighbourhood. Some of the first residents were Jewish refugees from Germany

and Austria, including writers and artists who settled around Beethovenstraat.

AROUND THE SPUI

The square called Spui (Map pp92-3) was water until 1882. The name means 'sluice' and is pronounced 'spow' (not 'spew' – that's reserved for the effects of Amsterdam hash). The statuette of an Amsterdam street brat, **Het Lieverdje** (Little Darling), was the favoured setting for Provo protests in the 1960s.

The Spui is now a popular meeting spot, with its pubs and bookshops nearby. It holds a book market on Friday, followed by an art market on Sunday.

The extensive **Amsterdams Historisch Museum** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 523 18 22; www.ahm.nl; Kalverstraat 92; adult/child €6/3; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) is housed in the former civic orphanage (which was here till 1960). Begin with the large-screen TV depicting an aerial view of Amsterdam's evolution from the tiny settlement on the mouth of the Amstel. Exhibits include models of old homes, religious objects, silver, porcelain, a detailed history of Dutch trading, the popularity of bicycles, WWII, gay rights, civic projects and the city's drug policies.

From the orphanage's courtyard (note the cupboards where the orphans used to store their possessions), walk through to the **Civic Guard Gallery** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 523 18 22; Kalverstraat 92; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun), where the static group portraits of medieval guards are in stark contrast to the more dynamic treatment in Rembrandt's *Night-watch*, the most famous of the group-portrait subgenre of Dutch painting. Combined with the Rijksmuseum's, this is the world's largest collection of its type, and, given the renovations on the former over the next few years, the Civic Guard Gallery should be the best place to view a large number at once.

Hidden behind the walls north of the Spui is the **Begijnhof** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 622 19 18; www.begijnhofamsterdam.nl; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm), a former convent from the early 14th century. Rows of tiny houses and postage-stamp gardens overlook a well-kept courtyard. The house at No 34 dates from around 1465, giving it claim to being the oldest maintained wooden house in the country. The Beguines who give the Begijnhof its name were a Catholic order of unmarried or widowed women who cared for the elderly. After the Calvinists seized their Gothic church, the Beguines worshipped in the **clandestine church** (Map pp88-9) opposite. The paintings and stained-glass windows here commemorate the Miracle of Amsterdam, and De Stijl artist Piet Mondrian designed some of the pulpit panels. The Gothic church today serves as a **Presbyterian church** (Map pp88-9) and is booked months in advance for weddings.

NIUWMARKT

Nieuwmarkt (New Market) quarter used to be the heart of Jewish Amsterdam, an industrious community that traded in diamonds, tobacco and clothes. In the 1970s the area was embroiled in a squatters' dispute; hairy activists and long-time residents united in waves of protest against the construction of modern housing estates and a new metro line. The city prevailed and much of the area was razed and rebuilt, with dubious results.

Golden Age ships loaded and unloaded produce at the **Nieuwmarkt** (Map pp88-9) square. The imposing **Waag** (Weigh-house) originally formed part of the city's fortifications but served a variety of functions later, including a spot for public executions. Today it's a café-restaurant with beautifully restored

IN A TIGHT SPOT

Amsterdam is chock-full of slender homes because property used to be taxed on frontage – the narrower your façade, the less you paid.

Witness the narrow house at Oude Hoogstraat 22 (Map pp88-9), east of the Dam. It's 2.02m wide, 6m deep and several storeys tall, occupying a mere 12 sq metres per storey. This could well be the tiniest (self-contained) house in Europe.

The Kleine Trippenhuus (Map pp88-9) at Kloveniersburgwal 26 is 2.44m wide. It stands opposite the mansion once owned by the wealthy Trip brothers and, so the story goes, their coachman exclaimed: 'If only I could have a house as wide as my masters' door!'

interiors that have a distinctly medieval feel – candles on round chandeliers provide the only source of light.

The **Guan Yin Shrine** (Fo Guang Shan He Hua Temple; Map pp88-9; ☎ 420 23 57; www.ibps.nl; Zeedijk 106-118; admission free; ☎ noon-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) is Europe's first Chinese Imperial-style Buddhist temple (completed in 2000). It is dedicated to Guan Yin, the Buddhist goddess of mercy. Some images on the many-armed, long-eared statue include a prayer bell and a lotus flower.

Zeedijk (Map pp88-9) was once the first stop for wine, women and song (in the 1950s the world's best jazz musicians played in pubs such as the Casablanca), but now it's more harmless than the Red Light District to the southwest. Zeedijk's southern end is a little Chinatown with rows of cheap eateries, and the street turns to entertainment with a mixed bag of gay and straight bars further north. Stop briefly at the house at No 1, one of just two half-timbered façades in the city (the other is in the Begijnhof; see left).

East of the Zeedijk is the wide, forlorn and rather stinky Geldersekeade. The small brick tower at the tip of this canal is the **Schreierstoren** (Map pp88-9), where English captain Henry Hudson set sail to find a northern passage to the East Indies (and ended up buying Manhattan instead).

South of Nieuwmarkt, the **Pintohuis** (Openbare Bibliotheek; Map pp88-9; ☎ 624 31 84; www.oba.nl; St Antoniesbreestraat 69; admission free; ☎ 2-8pm Mon

& Wed, 2-5pm Fri, 11am-4pm Sat) used to belong to a wealthy Sephardi, Isaac de Pinto, who had it remodelled with Italianate pilasters in the 1680s. Locals used to mutter how someone was 'as rich as Pinto'. It's now a library, so you can peek inside at the beautiful ceilings.

A passageway in the modern housing estate across St Antoniesbreestraat leads to the **Zuiderkerk** (Southern Church; Map pp88-9; ☎ 552 79 87; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, noon-4pm Sat). Built in the early 1600s, this was the first custom-built Protestant church in Amsterdam (based on a Catholic design). At the end of WWII it served as a morgue. It now houses the city's planning centre for public housing, as well as Amsterdam's urban blueprints.

The heart of the **Jodenbuurt** (Jewish Quarter) lies in and around the wide Jodenbreestraat, a remnant of a controversial freeway that was never completed. At one time the squares and cramped alleys around here used to echo with the sounds of morning prayer on the Sabbath.

The wonderfully restored **Museum het Rembrandthuis** (Rembrandt House Museum; Map pp88-9; ☎ 520 04 00; www.rembrandthuis.nl; Jodenbreestraat 4-6; adult/child €7.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11-5pm Sun) is where Rembrandt van Rijn ran the Netherlands' largest painting studio, only to lose the lot when profligacy set in, enemies swooped and bankruptcy came a-knocking. The museum has almost every etching he made (around 250) and holds daily etching demonstrations. Expect to see between 20 and 100 etchings on display at any one time, depending on the exhibit. Shows change a few times per year, often incorporating works by Rembrandt's peers, or contemporary paintings that somehow comment on Rembrandt's own pieces. The collection also includes several drawings and paintings by his pupils and his teacher, Pieter Lastman, and an etching by Albrecht Dürer. There's also an impressive collection of Rembrandt's possessions: seashells, weaponry, musical instruments, a Roman bust and military helmets from as far away as Japan.

Land from the Amstel was reclaimed in the 16th century, creating the island of Vlooienburg. *Vlooiën* means 'to flow' or 'fleas', an apt label for the present-day wares hawked at **Waterlooplein** (Map pp92-3). Once lined with the homes of Jewish traders, the square today hosts a daily flea market.

The hulking **Stopera** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 551 81 17; Waterlooplein) complex – the city hall and the

music theatre – opened in 1986 after nearly two decades of controversy. One critic remarked that the building 'has all the charm of an Ikea chair' and the theatre has been plagued by logistical problems: the acoustics aren't great, and the ballet practice room has low ceilings. Facing the Amstel is the **muziektheater** (☎ 625 54 55; www.hetmuziektheater.nl; Amstel 3; ☎ advance tickets 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-6pm Sun), while the city hall is closer to Waterlooplein. Opera, music and dance performances take place in the theatre; there are usually free lunchtime concerts on Tuesdays. Tickets for performances are available at the theatre, at tourist information offices and online.

On the eastern side of the Mr Visserplein traffic circle stands the majestic **Portuguese-Israelite Synagogue** (Map p95; ☎ 624 53 51; www.esnoga.com; Mr Visserplein 3; adult/child €6.50/5; ☎ 10am-4pm Sun-Fri Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Sun-Thu, 10am-3pm Fri Nov-Mar). Built for the Sephardic community in the 17th century, the synagogue was Europe's largest at the time and was based on the Temple of Solomon. The large *chuppah* (Jewish wedding canopy) is made from jacaranda wood, and services are still held beneath large lit candelabra. The Ets Haim seminary contains one of the most important Jewish libraries in Europe.

Under the traffic circle, **TunFun** (Map p95; ☎ 689 43 00; Mr Visserplein 7; adult/under 12 free/€7.50; ☎ 10am-6pm) is a kids' playground built in an old underpass. It has slides, ball pools, trampolines, a mini-cinema, a soccer field and a snack bar – even a children's disco. An adult must accompany children.

South of the synagogue is the **Joods Historisch Museum** (Jewish Historical Museum; Map p95; ☎ 626 99 45; www.jhm.nl; Jonas Daniel Meijerplein 2-4; adult/child €6.50/3; ☎ 11am-5pm), a beautifully restored complex of four Ashkenazic synagogues linked by glass-covered walkways. These synagogues include the Grote Sjoel (Great Synagogue, 1671), the first public synagogue in Western Europe; the Obbene Sjoel (Upstairs Synagogue, 1686); the Driit Sjoel (Third Synagogue, 1700 with a 19th-century façade); and the Neie Sjoel (New Synagogue, 1752), the largest in the complex.

The Grote Sjoel contains religious objects as well as displays showing the rise of Jewish enterprise and its role in the Dutch economy; displays tend to be on the academic side. The Neie Sjoel focuses on aspects of Jewish identity and the history of Jews in the Netherlands. A kosher café serves Jewish specialities.

Jordaan & Western Islands

JORDAAN

Originally a stronghold of the working class, the Jordaan (Map p91) is now probably the most desirable area to live in Amsterdam. The district is a pastiche of modest old residences and a few modern carbuncles, all squashed together into a skewed grid of tiny lanes and peppered with bite-sized cafés and shops. Its intimacy is contagious, and nowadays the average Jordaan dweller is more likely to be a gallery owner than a blue-collar labourer.

The name Jordaan may be a corruption of the French *jardin* (garden), as many French Huguenots settled here in what used to be the market gardens. But some historians point to *joden*, the Dutch word for Jews, or even a biblical connection to the river Jordan.

Jordaan dwellers have a rebellious streak. Dozens died in the Eel Riot of 1886 (see p79) and 1934 saw unrest over a cut in unemployment benefits.

Many of the Jordaan's narrow canals have been filled in, though the old labels remain: **Lindengracht**, **Rozengracht** and **Palmgracht**. Pretty **Bloemgracht** was spared a similar fate, thanks to lobbying by artisans who owned smart canalside homes.

The Jordaan also has many *hofjes* – private courtyards surrounded by old almshouses. Some have beautiful restored houses and stunning gardens; if the entrance is unlocked, you can usually take a discreet peek.

The **Noorderkerk** (Map pp88–9; ☎ 626 6436; Noordermarkt 48; admission free; 🕒 10.30am–3pm Mon, Wed & Thu, 11am–1pm Sat, 10am–noon & 7–8.30pm Sun) was a Calvinist church for the Jordaan's 'common' people. It's shaped like a Greek cross – four arms of equal length – around a central pulpit. A sculpture near the entrance commemorates the bloody Jordaan riots of July 1934, when five people died in protests over government austerity measures.

The **Noordermarkt** (Map pp88–9) on the edge of the Jordaan hosts a flea market on Monday morning and a *boerenmarkt* (farmers' market) on Saturday morning.

At the **Pianola Museum** (Map p91; ☎ 627 96 24; www.pianola.nl; Westerstraat 106; adult/child €5/3; 🕒 2–5pm Sun) you can hear concerts of player pianos from the early 1900s, with rare classical or jazz tunes composed especially for the instrument. The curator gives demonstrations with great zest.

Blink and you might walk right past the unobtrusive **Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam** (Map p91; ☎ 422 0471; www.smba.nl; Rozenstraat 59; admission free; 🕒 11am–5pm Tue–Sun), a 'project space' of the Stedelijk Museum (p109). Once a clothing workshop, it now holds exhibits that mix contemporary artists who have Amsterdam connections with some 'international context'. The programme is creative and innovative, ranging from painting and sculpture to new media and installation pieces. A recent show displayed visual art inspired by Amsterdam musical duo Arling and Cameron.

WESTERN ISLANDS

The Western Islands were raised from the riverbed to accommodate warehouses for Dutch colonial goods. **Prinseneiland** and **Realeineiland** are the prettiest of this tiny archipelago. A narrow bridge linking the two, the **Drieharigenbrug**, replaced a pontoon bridge that used to be pulled aside to let ships through.

The landmark **Westindisch Huis** (Map pp88–9) on Herenmarkt is the former head office of the West India Company. When Admiral Piet Heyn captured the Spanish silver fleet off Cuba in 1628, the booty was stored here.

The busy road to Haarlem led through the **Haarlemmerpoort** (Haarlem Gate; Map pp86–7) on Haarlemmerplein, where travellers heading into town had to leave their horses and carts. The gateway was built for King Willem II to pass through on the way to his coronation.

Over the past decade the **Haarlemmerbuurt** (Map pp86–7) has evolved into one of Amsterdam's quirkiest districts. New Age shops, wacky boutiques and ethnic gift emporiums line the main **Haarlemmerstraat** (Map pp88–9).

Several minutes' walk northwest of the Haarlemmerbuurt (cross under the railway tracks), the **Het Schip Housing Estate** (Map pp86–7; ☎ 418 28 85; www.hetschip.nl; Spaarndammerplantsoen 140; adult/senior/student €5/2.75/2; 🕒 1–5pm Thu–Sun), dating from 1920, is one of the signature buildings of the Amsterdam School of architecture (see p57). This triangular block, loosely resembling a ship, has been very well preserved and it welcomes visitors; Michel de Klerk designed it for a housing corporation of railway employees. There are several other Amsterdam School–designed housing blocks in this area. The complex has just expanded to show workers' apartments, one as it would have been in the workers' days, complete with period furniture.

Outside on the pavement is a small collection of typical Amsterdam School street fixtures (letterbox, fire alarm etc). On the other side of the post office entrance, walk into the attractive courtyard through the arch – the fairy-tale garden house with its sculpted roof was intended as a meeting room.

Along busy Haarlemmerweg, **Westergasfabriek** (Map pp86–7; ☎ 586 07 10; www.westergasfabriek.nl; Haarlemmerweg 8–10), a late-19th-century Dutch Renaissance complex, was the city gas-works until it was all but abandoned in the 1960s, its soil contaminated. Now the soil has been replaced with lawns, a long pool suitable for wading (bring the kids), sports facilities and even child care. As you move west away from town, reedy wilderness, with marshes and shallow waterfalls, begins to take over. The site is surrounded by the long and varied Westerpark; bike on in and stay a while. Inside the main buildings are cinemas, cafés, restaurants, nightclubs and office space.

Canal Belt

WESTERN CANAL BELT

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 filled with elegant homes, refined museums and cafés, restaurants and speciality shops.

The area was formed in 1613 when the authorities embarked on an ambitious project to expand Amsterdam's area with semicircular and radial canals on the western and southern sides, with bridges and connecting roads. Parcels of land were sold along the way to finance the project, buildings arose gradually, and the western canal belt was completed by 1625.

With its humpback bridges, shiny shutters and tree-lined towpaths, the **Brouwersgracht** is exceedingly picturesque. The dozens of breweries and warehouses that used to operate here have been converted to apartments; houseboats lining the quays add to the lazy residential character.

The **Herengracht** (Gentlemen's Canal) was named after the '17 Gentlemen' of the United East India Company. The first section south from Brouwersgracht shows that these big-wigs sunk some of their profits into show-piece residences.

The **Theater Instituut Nederland** (Map pp88–9; ☎ 551 33 00; www.tin.nl; Herengracht 168; adult/child €4.50/2.25; 🕒 11am–5pm Mon–Fri, 1–5pm Sat & Sun) fea-

tures exhibits that cover the history of Dutch theatre through dioramas, costume displays, sepia-toned 19th-century photos, and film of modern-day productions. Major exhibits change annually, covering such topics as Rembrandt and WWII theatre. The sumptuous interior was completely restyled in the 1730s with intricate plasterwork, extensive wall and ceiling paintings, and a grand spiral staircase. The façade dates back to 1620, and in summer the garden out the back is perfect.

The institute spills over into the **Bartolotti-huis** (Map pp88–9) at No 172, one of the most captivating façades in the city – a red brick Renaissance job that follows the bend of the canal. It was built in 1615 for a brewer.

Just beyond, Herengracht is crossed by Raadhuisstraat, which links the Jordaan with the Dam. Note the **shopping arcade** on the far side (west): designed for an insurance company, the façade bears sculptures of vicious animals to stress the dangers of life without insurance.

The **Bijbels Museum** (Biblical Museum; Map pp92–3; ☎ 624 24 36; www.bijbelsmuseum.nl; Herengracht 366–368; adult/child €6/3; 🕒 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, 1–5pm Sun) has a large number of model temples, freshly restored 18th-century ceiling frescos by Jacob de Wit, and several centuries of the good book, including the Delft bible, printed in 1477. There's even a 'scent cabinet', where visitors can smell odours mentioned in the bible. The pretty back garden focuses on a wistful sculpture called *Apocalypse*.

Keizersgracht (the 'Emperor's Canal') was named in honour of Maximilian I, ruler of Habsburg and later the Holy Roman Empire.

The pink granite triangles of the unique **Homomonument** (Map p91; nr Keizersgracht & Raadhuisstraat), at Westermarkt, commemorate gays and lesbians who were persecuted by the Nazis; flowers are laid out on Liberation Day (4 May).

Further south along Keizersgracht stands the **Felix Meritis building** (Map p91; ☎ 623 13 11; www.felix.meritis.nl; Keizersgracht 324; ☎ box office 9am–7pm), built in 1787 by Jacob Otten Husly for the Felix Meritis organisation (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. Composers such as Brahms, Grieg and Saint-Saëns performed in its oval concert hall, and today the Felix Meritis Foundation stages European performing-arts events.

Prinsengracht, named after Prince Willem van Oranje, is the least showy of the main

ANNE FRANK

The Anne Frank Huis is where the Jewish Frank family hid to escape deportation during WWII. As the German occupiers tightened the noose around the Amsterdam's Jewish inhabitants, Otto Frank – together with his wife, two daughters and several friends – moved into the rear annex in July 1942, and the entrance was concealed behind a revolving bookcase.

The Franks were betrayed to the Gestapo in August 1944 and deported; Anne died in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in March 1945, just weeks before it was liberated. Her father Otto was the only one of their group to survive. After the war Anne's diary was found among the litter in the annex, and her father published it. The diary, which gives a moving account of wartime horrors seen through a young girl's eyes, has sold 25 million copies and has been translated into 60 languages.

Addressed to the fictitious Kitty, the diary, written in Dutch, traces the teenager's development through puberty and persecution, and displays all the signs of a gifted writer in the making.

canals. It's peppered with cafés and shops rather than stately offices and banks, and the houses are smaller and narrower. Houseboats line the quays.

Although few of its original furnishings remain, the **Anne Frank Huis** (Anne Frank House; Map p91; ☎ 556 71 05; www.annefrank.org; Prinsengracht 267; adult/child/under 10yr €7.50/3.50/free; ☎ 9am–9pm Apr–Aug, 9am–7pm Sep–Mar), where Anne wrote her famous diary, lures almost a million visitors annually. With its reconstruction of Anne's melancholy bedroom and her actual diary – sitting alone in its glass case, filled with sunnily optimistic writing tempered by quiet despair – it's a powerful experience. The focus of the museum is the *achterhuis* (rear house), also known as the secret annexe, a dark and airless space where the Franks and others observed complete silence during the daytimes, outgrew their clothes, pasted photos of Hollywood stars on the walls and read Dickens, before being mysteriously betrayed and sent to their deaths. The modern extension of the museum is for contemporary exhibitions. Queues can be brutally long, so consider going in the early morning or evening, when crowds are lightest.

The **Westerkerk** (☎ 624 77 66; Prinsengracht 281; church/tower free/€5; ☎ 11am–3pm Mon–Fri, Easter–mid-Sep, tower 10am–5pm Mon–Sat Apr–Sep) is the main gathering place for Amsterdam's Dutch Reformed Church community. Rembrandt, who died bankrupt in 1669 at nearby Rozengracht, is buried somewhere in the church – perhaps near the grave of his son Titus, where there's a commemorative plaque. A highlight is the bell tower, Amsterdam's highest church tower at 85m. It's topped by the imperial crown that Habsburg emperor Maximilian I bestowed to the city's coat of arms in 1489. The climb

during the 60-minute tour is steep (186 steps) and claustrophobic, but there are periodic landings where you can rest while the guide describes the bells and other workings of the massive carillon. Of the 50 bells, the largest weighs some 7500kg. You can also see the chamber where the night watchmen slept between keeping a lookout for fires.

The **Houseboat Museum** (Map p91; ☎ 427 07 50; www.houseboatmuseum.nl; Prinsengracht; adult/child under 152cm €3/2.25; ☎ 11am–5pm Tue–Sun Mar–Oct, 11am–5pm Fri–Sun Nov–Feb, closed most of Jan) is south along the canal from Elandsgracht, at Johnny Jordaanplein, opposite No 296 Prinsengracht. The sailing barge (23m long by 4m wide) was built in 1914, and the collection itself is rather minimal, although you can view the iron hull up close, watch a slide show of pretty houseboats, and see sleeping, living, cooking and dining quarters with all mod cons. Fact: houseboat toilets, until this century, could drain directly into the canals, but they now must hook up to the city sewerage system.

SOUTHERN CANAL BELT

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 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 and the city's gay nightlife centre around Reguliersdwarstraat.

This wealthy residential area was the soul of discretion, and you'll see that the 17th- and 18th-century façades are less ostentatious than those to the north. The corner of Herengracht

and Leidsegracht is a particularly tranquil spot, despite its proximity to the heady action at Leidseplein.

On the southwestern side of Singel are the soaring turrets of the **Krijtberg** (Chalk Mountain; Map pp92–3; Singel 446; ☎ mass 12.30pm & 5.45pm Mon–Fri, 5.15pm Sat, 9am, 11am, 12.30pm & 5.15pm Sun). It's one of the city's most beautiful Gothic churches (built 1883), thanks largely to its colourful interior – a stark contrast to the rather spartan Calvinist churches. A house here belonged to a chalk merchant, hence the name.

Amsterdam has specialised in flower markets since the 17th century, so if they interest you, make your way to the southern side of the Singel between Koningsplein and Vijzelstraat for the **Bloemenmarkt** (Flower Market; Map pp92–3; ☎ 9am–5pm, closed Sun in winter). See p134 for more details.

South down Leidsestraat, at the corner of Keizersgracht, is department store **Metz & Co** (Map pp92–3; ☎ 520 70 36; Keizersgracht 455), built in 1891 for a life insurance company. The functionalist architect Gerrit Rietveld added the top-floor gallery, where you can have lunch with a panoramic view over the canals.

Further southwest along Leidsestraat is **Leidseplein**, one of the liveliest squares in the city. This was once the gateway for travellers heading south towards Leiden; the oil-lamps have given way to screaming neon signs, but street musicians and artists are still drawn to the cobblestone square. There's something for everyone here: cinemas, cafés, pubs and night-clubs, and a smorgasbord of restaurants.

Like so many public buildings, the **Stadsschouwburg** (City Theatre; Map pp92–3; ☎ 624 23 11; Leidseplein 26; ☎ advance ticket sales 10am–6pm Mon–Sat) had a difficult birth. Public criticism of the 1894 edifice stopped funding for the striking façade-cum-arcade, and the architect, Jan Springer, promptly retired. The theatre is used for large-scale plays, operettas and festivals such as Julidans (p117).

South across Marnixstraat, the **American Hotel** (Map pp92–3) is an Art Nouveau landmark from 1902. Have a coffee in its stylish **Café Américain** see (p128).

Leidsestraat's northern end intersects with the southern stretch of the **Herengracht**, where the buildings are noticeably larger than in the western section. By the mid-17th century many Amsterdam merchants had amassed huge fortunes, and they saw to it that restrictions on the size of canalside plots were relaxed.

The Herengracht between Leidsestraat and Vijzelstraat, known as the **Golden Bend** (Map pp92–3), had some of the largest private mansions in the city during the Golden Age. Most of them now belong to bankers, lawyers and financial advisers. French culture was all the rage among the city's wealthy class, so most styles are Gallic with a Dutch twist.

Nieuwe Spiegelstraat, lined with swish antique shops and art galleries, begins at the Herengracht. The extension of this street, the pretty **Spiegelgracht**, leads past more antiques and paintings to the Rijksmuseum.

The corner of Herengracht and Vijzelstraat is dominated by the colossal **ABN-AMRO bank building** (Map pp92–3). It was completed in 1923 as head office for the Netherlands Trading Society, a Dutch overseas bank. Its successor teamed up with a competitor to form ABN-AMRO, the largest bank in the country. This vast edifice continues all the way to Keizersgracht.

Near the bank building's southeast corner is **FOAM** (Fotografie Museum Amsterdam; Map pp92–3; ☎ 551 65 00; www.foam.nl; Keizersgracht 609; adult/child €6/free; ☎ 10am–5pm Sat–Wed, to 9pm Thu & Fri), an impressive museum devoted to photography. Two storeys of changing exhibition feature world-renowned photographers such as Sir Cecil Beaton, Annie Leibovitz and Henri Cartier-Bresson. Simple, functionalist and large galleries, some with skylights or grand windows for natural light, provide the setting for this impressive museum – accessible and inspiring, yet always critical.

Further along the other side of Keizersgracht is **Museum Van Loon** (Map pp92–3; ☎ 624 52 55; www.museumvanloon.nl; Keizersgracht 672; adult/child €5/4; ☎ 11am–5pm Jul & Aug, to 5pm Fri–Mon Sep–Jun), built in 1672 for a wealthy arms dealer. The house recalls canalside living in Amsterdam when money was no object for the wealthy. The rococo rose garden is especially fetching. There are some important paintings, including the *Wedding Portrait* by Jan Miense Molenaer and a collection of some 150 portraits of the Van Loon family.

Northeast of here, at the corner of Herengracht and **Reguliersgracht**, canal tour boats halt for photos at the beautiful 'canal of the seven bridges', cut in 1664. The arches are illuminated at night and reflect dreamily on the rippling water.

Across Herengracht towards the centre of town is **Thorbeckeplein**, with a statue of Jan

GAY & LESBIAN AMSTERDAM

Information

The **Gay & Lesbian Switchboard** (☎ 623 65 65; www.switchboard.nl) is a comprehensive info source, while **COC Amsterdam** (Map pp91; ☎ 626 30 87; www.cocamsterdam.nl; Rozenstraat 8) is Amsterdam's gay and lesbian social centre, with a café and a nightclub.

Pick up the *Bent Guide*, published in English, stuffed with gayness, at the **Pink Point** (Map pp91; ☎ noon-6pm Mar-Aug, limited hr Sep-Feb), an info kiosk near the Homomonument (p101).

The **Gay News Amsterdam** (www.gayamsterdam.nl) is a free paper and the *Gaymap Amsterdam* is a free map. Gay radio station **MVS** broadcasts 7pm to 8pm nightly on 106.8FM (cable 88.1FM), with a Sunday English programme.

Mantrav (Map pp88-9; ☎ 638 83 63; Kloveniersburgwal 40) specialises in gay resort and tour travel.

For gay books, try **Intermale** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 625 00 09; www.intermale.nl; Spuistraat 251), with 1½ floors of photo books, sexy mags, videos and porno postcards.

Vrolijk (Map pp88-9; ☎ 623 51 42; www.vrolijk.nl; Paleisstraat 135; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon, 10am-6pm Tue, Wed & Fri, 10am-7pm Thu, 10am-5pm Sat, 1-5pm Sun, closed Sun Oct-Dec) stocks major gay and lesbian magazines, as well as novels, guidebooks, postcards, art, poetry and DVDs.

Vrouwen In Druk (Map pp91; Women in Print; ☎ 624 50 03; Westermarkt 5; ☎ Tue-Sat) specialises in secondhand women's titles.

Accommodation

Most hotels in town are lesbian and gay friendly, but some cater specifically to queer clientele:

Aero Hotel (Map pp92-3; ☎ 622 77 28; www.aerohotel.nl; Kerkstraat 45-49; d with/without bathroom from €85/70; 📺) Steps away from Amsterdam's gay action, with cosy rooms. Inevitably, a TV in the café streams *Ab Fab 24/7*.

Amistad (Map pp92-3; ☎ 624 80 74; www.amistad.nl; Kerkstraat 42; s/d from €69/85) Rooms feature designer flourishes such as Philippe Starck chairs, CD players and chic soft furnishings. Take breakfast in the kitchen-dining room with its communal tables and ruby-red walls.

Black Tulip Hotel (Map pp88-9; ☎ 427 09 33; www.blacktulip.nl; Geldersekdijk 16; s €115, d from €145; 📺) The nine rooms feature full bondage equipment: slings, cages, hooks, chairs, black leather, latex.

Liliane's Home (Map pp86-7; ☎ 627 40 06; l.meisen@zonnet.nl; Sarphatistraat 119; d from €80) Once Amsterdam's sole women-only inn, this place now admits male visitors. Rooms have huge windows (some have balconies too) and personality.

Orfeo Hotel (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 13 47; www.hotelorfeo.com; Leidsekruisstraat 14; s with bathroom €50, d with/without bathroom €115/75; 📺) Simple wood-panelled rooms and the flirtiest breakfast room

Rudolf Thorbecke, the liberal politician who created the Dutch parliamentary system in 1848. A modern art market is held here on Sunday in spring and summer.

Beyond Thorbeckeplein is the raucous (or 'tacky', if you like) **Rembrandtplein**, focused around the statue of the *Nightwatch* artist (Map pp92-3). The grassy square is lined with pubs, grand cafés and restaurants, and is usually buzzing with good-time guys 'n' gals looking for high times and potent toxins.

A night out on Rembrandtplein is best preceded by a meander down **Utrechtsestraat**. It's relaxed, as shopping streets go, with the occasional tram going past cosy restaurants and unique stores.

East of Utrechtsestraat, along the Herengracht, is the **Museum Willet-Holthuisen** (Map pp92-3;

☎ 523 18 22; www.willetholthuisen.nl; Herengracht 605; adult/child €4/2; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun), a beautiful house museum with a sumptuous interior that was bequeathed to the city a century ago. Highlights include paintings by Jacob de Wit, the *place de milieu* (centrepiece) that was part of the family's Meissen table service, and the intimate garden with sundial. The top-floor galleries hold special exhibitions.

The street running west from Rembrandtplein to Muntplein is **Reguliersbreestraat**, home to strange bedfellows: an art gallery, fast-food joints and a glorious Art Deco cinema, the **Tuschinskiheater** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 26 33; Reguliersbreestraat 26-28). Built in the roaring '20s and fully renovated in 2001, this cinema is a tribute to glorious design inside and out – the lobby alone is worth a visit.

Entertainment

Close to 100 gay bars, clubs, hotels and restaurants are dotted all over town. Many popular gay places are along Reguliersdwarstraat (see Map pp92-3) – it's as camp as a row of tents. Kinky Amsterdam congregates over on Warmoesstraat in the Red Light District.

Some possibilities:

April (Map pp92-3; ☎ 625 95 72; Reguliersdwarstraat 37) Famous for its happy hour, relaxed atmosphere and flirtatious pretty boys. There's a revolving bar out the back.

ARC (Map pp92-3; ☎ 689 70 70; www.bararc.com; Reguliersdwarstraat 44) Classy, well-regarded restaurant-bar with minimalist interior and a fashionable crowd (predominantly gay, though also lesbian and straight).

Argos (Map pp88-9; ☎ 622 65 95; www.argosbar.com; Warmoesstraat 95) Amsterdam's oldest leather bar. Dress code for the regular 'SOS' (Sex On Sunday) party: nude or seminude.

Cockring (Map pp88-9; ☎ 623 96 04; www.clubcockring.com; Warmoesstraat 96) Techno and trance downstairs, cruising leather boys upstairs. Occasionally features live strip shows and 'shoes only' nude parties.

Gay Super Bingo (Map pp92-3; ☎ 776 46 00; Ferdinand Bolstraat 10; ☎ 8pm first Wed of month) Yes, bingo. With a theme: all-American radio.

Montmartre (Map pp92-3; ☎ 620 76 22; Halvemaansteeg 17) Beneath outrageous ceiling decorations, patrons sing loudly to Dutch ballads and top-40 songs. Like a gay Eurovision – minus the Finnish monster mash.

Saarein (Map pp91; ☎ 623 49 01; Elandsstraat 119) Saarein was the focal point of the '70s Dutch feminist movement; today it's a favoured meeting place for lesbians. There's a small menu with tapas and soups. Bar staff can advise on Sapphic nightlife.

Soho (Map pp92-3; ☎ 616 13 12; Reguliersdwarstraat 36) Kitsch, huge, two-storey bar throbbing with a young, friendly, pretty clientele.

Thermos Day Sauna (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 91 58; www.thermos.nl; Raamstraat 33; admission €18; ☎ noon-11pm Mon-Fri, noon-10pm Sat, 11am-10pm Sun) Sprawling, popular place for sexual contact: porn movies, darkrooms, roof deck, hair salon, restaurant.

Thermos Night Sauna (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 49 36; www.thermos.nl; Kerkstraat 58-60; admission €18; ☎ 11pm-8am Sun-Fri, to 10am Sat) Like the day sauna, except no restaurant, roof deck or hair salon.

Festivals

The biggest single party is the **Roze Wester** thrown at the Homomonument on Queen's Day on 30 April, with bands and street dancing. The **Gay Pride Canal Parade** (First Saturday in August; http://www.amsterdamgaypride.nl) is the only water-borne gay parade in the world, with lots of pride showing on the outlandish floats.

South of Rembrandtplein, almost to the intersection of Prinsengracht and Reguliersgracht, stands the wooden **Amstelkerk** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 520 00 70; Amstelveld 10; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm). The city planners had envisaged four new Protestant churches in the southern canal belt, but the only one that materialised was the **Oosterkerk** (Map pp86-7). The Amstelkerk (built 1670) was meant to be a temporary house of worship, but when funds for a grander structure were lacking it became permanent.

Continue to the Amstel and you'll see the **Amstelsluisen** (Map pp92-3). These sluices allowed the canals to be flushed with fresh river water, and they were still operated by hand until a few years ago. Across the river stands the **Koninklijk Theater Carré** (p131), originally built as a circus but now the city's largest theatre.

To your left is the **Magere Brug** (Map pp92-3), the most photographed drawbridge in the city. Often mistranslated as the 'Skinny Bridge', it was actually named after the Mager sisters, who lived on opposite sides of the canal. As the sweet tale goes, the sisters had a footbridge built so that they could visit with ease.

Old South (Oud Zuid)

This genteel, wedge-shaped neighbourhood features many fine examples of the Amsterdam School of architecture, with porthole windows, mock prows and other maritime motifs gracing the façades of weighty apartment complexes. The area is subdivided into the Museum Quarter, the Concertgebouw area and Vondelpark, names that also appear on street signs.

MUSEUM QUARTER

To paraphrase Arnold Schwarzenegger, 'Get your ass to Rijks'. With a collection valued in the billions, the **Rijksmuseum** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 674 70 00; www.rijksmuseum.nl; Stadhouderskade 42; adult/under 18yr €9/free; ☎ 10am-5pm) is the *ne plus ultra* of Dutch classical art, but until renovations finish in 2008 only 400 masterpieces will be on display.

Previously, there were some 5000 paintings and other artworks displayed in several hundred exhibition galleries. But the mega renovation project (cost: around €300 million) will hopefully create more accessible exhibition halls, as well as the underground gallery that PJ Cuypers, its talented 19th-century architect, laid down in his blueprints. If all goes well, the entire building will be returned to its original 1885 glory.

Never mind the building dust, the much-loved Dutch and Flemish paintings from the Golden Age will remain on display. The museum's crowning glory is here too: Rembrandt's mesmerising *Nightwatch* (1650), the artist's breathtaking group portrait of an Amsterdam civil militia led by Frans Banning Cocq, a future mayor and apparently not the brightest of lights. The painting only acquired its name in later years after grime darkened the oils, long after Rembrandt painted the scene in a hotel near Muntplein. Warning: at any time, *Nightwatch* will likely be 20 deep with flashbulb-popping, focus-beam-directing rubberneckers.

Other household names still on display include Johannes Vermeer (*The Kitchen Maid* and *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*), Frans Hals (*The Merry Drinker*) and Jan Steen (*The Merry Family*). Other must-sees are in Sculpture & Applied Art (Delftware, beautiful doll houses, porcelain, furniture) and Asiatic Art (including the famous 12th-century *Dancing Shiva*), as well as highlights from the museum's store of 800,000 prints and drawings.

Rather than being returned to storage, many other gems will be put on display in grateful venues around the country. Check the schedules for Amsterdam's Nieuwe Kerk (p96), Maastricht's Bonnefantenmuseum (p278), and the Dordrechts Museum (p222). There's also an annexe at Schiphol Airport.

The exterior of the Rijksmuseum remains a feast for the eye, with tiled murals, faux-Gothic towers and glints of gold harking back to the fortunes of the Golden Age. It wasn't popular with everyone: as the finishing touches were being laid, King Willem III dubbed the Rijksmuseum 'the archbishop's palace' because of the Catholic influence on Cuypers' designs. The magnificent underpass with its dreamy acoustics will be closed for the face-lift, to the chagrin of local buskers.

Behind the Rijksmuseum, the sprawling square known as **Museumplein** hosted the World Exhibition of 1883. It has only recently been transformed into a huge park, with an underground Albert Heijn supermarket

under the slanting 'donkey's ear' near the Concertgebouw.

The neo-Renaissance gem that is the **Concertgebouw** (Concert Building; Map pp92-3; ☎ 671 83 45; www.concertgebouw.nl; Concertgebouwplein 2-6; ☎ box office 10am-7pm) attracts 840,000 visitors a year, making it the busiest concert hall in the world.

Under the 50-year guidance of composer and conductor Willem Mengelberg (1871-1951), the Koninklijk Concertgebouw Orkest (Royal Concert Building Orchestra) developed into one of the world's finest. Dozens of landmark performances have been recorded here; the lure of playing in the venue is so strong that local musicians accept pay that's lower than that in many other countries.

The Grote Zaal has near-perfect acoustics. The layout is surprisingly free of divisions, with a simple flat viewing area and a balcony around the perimeter. Weighty inscriptions show who the world's leading composers were in 1888, the year of its construction. Recitals take place in the Kleine Zaal, a replica of the hall in the Felix Meritis building (p101).

Free lunchtime concerts are held on Wednesday at noon.

VONDELPARK

With its ponds, lawns, thickets and winding footpaths, this **park** (Map pp92-3; www.vondelpark.nl) is indisputably in the English style. Laid out in the 1860s and 1870s for the bourgeoisie, it was named after poet and playwright Joost van den Vondel, whom the Dutch celebrate as their Shakespeare.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s the authorities turned the park into an open-air dormitory to alleviate the lack of accommodation for the hordes of hippies who descended on Amsterdam.

Today, the park is popular with joggers, in-line skaters, buskers, lovers, families, miniature Cruyffs - everyone. Free concerts are held in summer at the open-air theatre, and musicians are always performing throughout the park. There's a charming tea-house as well (see p129). A stand at the Vondelplein Cafeteria, near the Amstelveenseweg entrance (Map, pp86-7), rents out in-line skates and gear.

The **Nederlands Filmmuseum** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 589 14 00; www.filmmuseum.nl; Vondelpark 3) isn't a museum per se but presides over a price-less archive of films screened in its two theatres, sometimes with live music. One theatre

contains the Art Deco interior of Cinema Parisien, an early Amsterdam cinema. The museum's charming Café Vertigo is a popular meeting place and an ideal spot to people-watch; on summer evenings films are shown on the outdoor terrace. Adjoining the museum is an impressive **information centre** (☎ 589 14 35; Vondelstraat 69-71; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat), with books and videotapes that can be viewed in booths.

Built in 1882, the **Hollandse Manege** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 618 09 42; Vondelstraat 140) is an indoor riding school inspired by the famous Spanish Riding School in Vienna. Through the passage to the rear door and up the stairs is a café where you can sip a beer or coffee while watching the instructor put the horses through their paces. Opening times vary, so ring ahead.

The **Electrische Museumtramlijn Amsterdam** (Tram Museum Amsterdam; Map pp86-7; ☎ 673 75 38; www.museumtram.nl; Amstelveenseweg 264; adult/child return €3.50/1.80; ☎ 11am-5pm Sun mid-Apr-Oct, 1pm & 3pm Wed Jul & Aug) isn't really a museum but a starting point for historic trams that clang from here to the Amsterdams Bos recreation area - a worthwhile 1¼-hour outing. The museum is just southwest of Vondelpark in the former Haarlemmermeer train station.

De Pijp

This district, lying south of the broad Stadhouderskade, probably got its name from its straight, narrow streets that are said to resemble the stems of old clay pipes. This was the city's first 19th-century slum, but it's now undergoing a determined gentrification. De Pijp is still often called the Quartier Latin, thanks to its lively mix of people: labourers, intellectuals, new immigrants, prostitutes, young urban professionals, gays, lesbians - the whole kit and caboodle, really.

The locals are best viewed at the **Albert Cuypmarkt** (Albert Cuypstraat; Map pp92-3; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat), Amsterdam's largest and busiest market, which celebrated its 100th birthday in 2005. Here you'll find food, clothes and other general goods of every description and origin, often cheaper than anywhere else, as well as quite a bit of plain junk. This is Amsterdam at its multicultural best. The crowds will be jam-packed, so be wary of pickpockets pressing up close.

The area's other draw is the **Heineken Experience** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 523 96 66; www.heinekenexperience.com; Stadhouderskade 78; admission €10; ☎ 10am-6pm

LUST FOR VINCENT

The outstanding **Van Gogh Museum** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 570 52 00; www.vangoghmuseum.nl; Paulus Potterstraat 7; adult/child €10/2.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Sun-Thu, to 10pm Fri) houses the world's largest Van Gogh collection. Quite simply, it's one of the greatest Impressionist galleries on earth. The museum opened in 1973 to house the collection of Vincent's younger brother Theo, and it consists of about 200 paintings and 500 drawings by Vincent and his friends and contemporaries, including Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec, Monet and Bernard.

Trace Van Gogh's life from his tentative start through to his Japanese phase, and on to depression and the black cloud that descended over him and his work: his paintings are shown in chronological order on the 1st floor, from his moody Brabant canvases (*The Potato Eaters*) to the famous works from his French period (*The Yellow House in Arles*, *The Bedroom at Arles* and several self-portraits). Sunflowers and other blossoms display his knack for using Mediterranean light and colour. *Wheatfield with Crows* is an ominous work that he painted shortly before committing suicide.

Designed by Gerrit Rietveld, the exhibition spaces are generous enough to accommodate insane crowds without obscuring the paintings. The sleek rear annex hosts changing exhibitions and is an attraction in its own right, looking very much like an enormous clam (it's nicknamed 'the mussel'). The library opens on weekdays only.

Tue-Sun), where you can peer inside the malt silos and at Heinie memorabilia. Admission includes three glasses of the brew, after which you might be tempted to follow in Freddie Heineken's footsteps. Freddie was reputed to be a bit of a 'pants man': stationing himself at bars, when he overheard attractive lasses uttering the incantation, 'I'd like a Heineken, please', he'd offer 'I'm right here'. But, then again, he's supposed to have also said that 'death is about becoming a worm cookie', so leave us out of it.

South of Albert Cuypstraat is the **Sarphatipark**, an English-style park named after shrewd 19th-century Jewish doctor, chemist and businessman Samuel Sarphati. With its ponds, fountains and abundant bird life, it's an eminently agreeable spot for a picnic lunch.

Plantage & Oosterpark

PLANTAGE

In the 19th century the Jewish elite began to move from the city's centre into the area called Plantage (Plantation), where they built imposing villas. Until then Plantage had been a district of parks and gardens.

The **Hortus Botanicus** (Botanical Garden; Map p95; ☎ 625 90 21; 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) was founded in 1638 as a herb garden for the city's doctors. It quickly became a repository for tropical seeds and plants brought by Dutch ships from the East and West Indies, and coffee, pineapple, cinnamon and oil palm were distributed from here throughout the world. Guided tours are given on Sunday at 2pm. The wonderful mixture of colonial and modern structures includes a restored octagonal seed house; a modern, three-climate glasshouse with subtropical, tropical and desert plants; and a monumental palm house. The 400-year-old cycad here is the world's oldest potted plant, while the Hortus Medicus is a medicinal herb garden that attracts students from around the globe. The Hortus' café, the Orangery, recently reopened after refurbishment and is deservedly popular, especially for its terrace. Jazz and world music evenings take place here on Friday evening in July and August. Note that a combination admission ticket (€9) is available for the Hortus and the Hermitage Amsterdam, about five minutes' walk away.

St Petersburg's Hermitage collection is so massive it has had to expand abroad, with

permanent annexes in London and Las Vegas, and the latest, **Hermitage Amsterdam** (Map p95; ☎ 530 87 51; www.hermitage.nl; Nieuwe Herengracht 14; adult/child €6/free; ☞ 10am-5pm). There are six galleries housing exhibitions twice yearly, and they are as stately and as well curated as you would expect.

The **Nationaal Vakbondsmuseum** (National Trade Union Museum; Map p95; ☎ 624 11 66; Henri Polaklaan 9; adult/child €2.50/1.25; ☞ 11am-5pm Tue-Fri, 1-5pm Sun) used to house a powerful diamond workers' union. Visiting union members will be in their element, but most people come just to see the fanciful design, an Art Deco showcase designed by HP Berlage, who considered it his most successful work. It's a splendid spectacle, from the diamond-shaped pinnacle to the magnificent hall with its brick arches; the murals, ceramics and leadlight windows are by famous artists of the day. The soaring, atrium-style staircase is graced with a three-storey-tall chandelier.

Around the corner, the **Verzetsmuseum** (Resistance Museum; Map p95; ☎ 620 25 35; Plantage Kerklaan 61; adult/child €5/2.75; ☞ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, noon-5pm Sat-Mon) describes the daily realities of the Dutch resistance during WWII. Fascinating tales of active and passive resistance are told through photos, documents and sound fragments. There's also a library in the Plancius building, built in 1876 as the social club for a Jewish choir.

The **Hollandsche Schouwburg** (Holland Theatre; Map p95; ☎ 626 99 45; www.hollandscheschouwburg.nl; Plantage Middenlaan 24; admission free; ☞ 11am-4pm) played a tragic role during WWII. After 1942 the theatre became a detention centre for Jews awaiting deportation. Little more than the façade is left standing today, and there are a memorial room and an exhibition room with videos and documents on the building's history.

The oldest zoo on the European continent, **Artis** (Map p95; ☎ 523 34 00; www.artis.nl; Plantage Kerklaan 38-40; adult/child €16/12.50; ☞ 9am-5pm, to 6pm summer) has an alphabet soup of wildlife: alligators, birds, chimps and so on up to zebras. The layout is full of delightful ponds, statues, and leafy, winding pathways. Themed habitats such as African savannah and tropical rainforest are pretty convincing. For many, the aquarium complex is the highlight, featuring coral reefs, shark tanks and an Amsterdam canal displayed from a fish's point of view. There are also a planetarium and a kiddie petting zoo.

OOSTERPARK

The Oosterpark district (Map pp86-7), named after the lush park at its core, was built in the 1880s for diamond-industry workers. Many of them were Jewish families who had the means to leave the cramped centre.

A visit to the anthropological **Tropenmuseum** (Tropics Museum; Map pp86-7; ☎ 568 82 15; www.tropenmuseum.nl; Linnaeusstraat 2; adult/child €7.50/3.75; ☞ 10am-5pm) is a pleasant and easy way to dip your toes into exotic cultures. You can stroll through an African market or a Mexican-style cantina, or listen to recordings of exotic musical instruments. The **children's section** (☎ 568 82 23) offers guides for six- to 12-year-olds if you book ahead. There's an extensive library, a shop selling books, gifts and CDs, and the Ekeko café, serving exotic snacks and meals. The Tropeninstituut Theater screens films and hosts music, dance and plays by visiting international artists. It's a grand place to spend a lazy Monday, when most other museums are closed.

Eastern Islands

East of Centraal Station and north of the medieval centre, Nieuwmarkt and the Plantage area, the islands of **Kattenburg**, **Wittenburg** and **Oostenburg** were constructed in the 1650s to handle the rapidly expanding seaborne trade.

Nowadays the area is all about modern housing, but some splendid façades of old gabled homes remain along Wittenburgergracht, while the ex-islands are seamlessly linked to central Amsterdam. Kattenburg used to be the seat of the Dutch admiralty, and its dockyards here once fitted men-of-war for the royal navy.

East of Artis zoo stands an 18th-century grain mill known as **De Gooyer** (Map pp86-7), the sole survivor of five windmills from this corner of the city. The former public baths alongside now house the **Brouwerij 't IJ** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 622 83 25; Funenkade 7; ☞ 3-7.45pm Wed-Sun), a small brewery producing potent but tasty beers under the distinctive ostrich label. Apart from De Bekeerde Suster (p128), off Nieuwmarkt, it's the only brewery in town. There's a tour on Friday at 4pm.

'Steampunks' will love **Energetica** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 422 12 27; Hoogte Kadijk 400; adult/under 12yr €3/free; ☞ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri), one of Amsterdam's more unusual – and appealing – museums. Housed in a former power station, it showcases centuries of technological advances. Galleries

are named after groundbreaking scientists, including Marconi, and are filled with steamship engines, antique toasters, early washing machines, electric lights and even gas street-lamps, antique elevators and high-voltage generators.

Once the headquarters of the Dutch navy, the imposing pile on Amsterdam harbour is now home to the **Nederlands Scheepvaartmuseum** (Netherlands Shipping Museum; Map p95; ☎ 523 22 22; www.scheepvaartmuseum.nl; Kattenburgerplein 1; adult/child €9/4.50; ☞ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-Sep-mid-Jun, 10am-5pm daily mid-Jun-mid-Sep). You won't find better displays on the topic, as the heyday of Dutch seafaring comes alive with scores of magnificent paintings: horizons crowded with three-masted merchant schooners, or naval ships engaged in fiery cannon battles. Model ships abound, but there are also a few full-sized vessels, such as the swanky sloop built for King Willem I in the early 1800s. The cinema shows a vivid re-enactment of a voyage to the East Indies.

The *pièce de résistance* is the replica of the *Amsterdam*, a beautiful historic square-rigger moored alongside the museum. The stern bears the three crosses of Amsterdam's emblem as well as the brightly painted statues of Mercurius (god of trade) and Neptune (god of the sea). Apparently the gods weren't watching over the *Amsterdam* on its maiden voyage in 1749: it became stranded off the English coast and was stripped of all valuables, including its iron nails. Climb on board, peruse the captain's quarters and watch actors recreate life at sea.

The **Stedelijk Museum** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 573 29 11; www.stedelijk.nl; 2nd & 3rd fl, Post CS Bldg, Oosterdokskade 5; adult/7-16yr & senior/under 7yr €9/5/free; ☞ 10am-6pm) features around 100,000 pieces including Impressionist works by Monet, Picasso and Chagall; sculptures by Rodin and Moore; De Stijl landmarks by Mondrian; and pop art by Warhol and Lichtenstein. The Post CS building is a temporary home – the original is undergoing renovation until 2008. The 2nd, 3rd and 11th floors at Post CS will be occupied by permanent and temporary exhibitions until 2007. In the meantime the Stedelijk's former home on Museumplein (next to the Van Gogh Museum; Map pp92-3) is undergoing a vigorous face-lift. The responsibility rests heavily on the guardians of Amsterdam's art heritage: 600,000 visitors per year are expected after a spanking new museum is unveiled. Like the

Rijksmuseum, the Stedelijk is presenting some of its works around the country throughout the renovation period.

The green, shiplike building on the eastern harbour is **NEMO** (Map p95; ☎ 09009191000; www.e-nemo.nl; Oosterdok 2; admission €11; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, plus Mon Jul & Aug), an interactive science museum with hands-on displays aimed at children and school groups. There are loads of interactive exhibits: drawing with a laser, 'antigravity' trick mirrors, and a 'lab' where you can answer questions such as 'How black is black?' and 'How do you make cheese?'

Normally free, the rooftop plaza is transformed in summer into **Nemo Beach**, (admission €2.50, free with NEMO admission), in reality an elaborate sandbox occupying just a small section of the roof. Further up, DJs spin, and there's a bar, a convivial atmosphere and nice views.

Amstelveen

This quiet dormitory town is next to the **Amsterdamse Bos** (Amsterdam Woods; Map pp86-7; www.amsterdamsebos.nl; Bosbaanweg 5; admission free), the result of a 1930s job-creation scheme. A vast tract of lakes, woods and meadows, the *bos* draws many Amsterdammers looking for a leafy good time. Its only drawback is the background noise from nearby Schiphol Airport. The **visitors centre** (☎ 545 61 00; 🕒 8.30am-5pm) has leaflets on walking and cycling paths.

You'll also find an animal enclosure with bison, a goat farm, and a rowing course with watercraft for hire. The **Bosmuseum** (Forestry Museum; Map pp86-7; ☎ 676 21 52; Koenenkade 56; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm) has displays about flora and fauna. There's bike hire at the main entrance at Van Nijenrodedweg. Take the historic tram from Haarlemmermeer station (p107) or bus 170, 171 or 172 from Centraal Station.

Nearby is the **CoBRA Museum** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 547 50 50; www.cobra-museum.nl; Sandbergplein 1; adult/senior & student/child 6-16yr/under 6yr €7/4/2.50/free; 🕒 11am-5pm Tue-Sun). Formed by artists from Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam after WWII, the CoBRA movement (p41) vented the fury of abstract expressionism. The modern paintings, ceramics and statues on display here still polarise audiences today. With the temporary relocation of the Stedelijk Museum, this contemporary, two-storey building is your best bet to see the work of this fascinating group. The museum is opposite the Amstelveen bus terminal (bus 170, 171 or 172 from Centraal Station in Amsterdam).

The **Amsterdam RAI** (☎ 549 12 12; www.rai.nl; Europaplein 22), an exhibition and conference centre, is the largest complex of its kind in the country. From boats and caravans to fashion shows, few events are beyond its reach.

ACTIVITIES

Cycling

Pedal power rules in the Netherlands: that's a Dutch truism, simply a fact of life. Bicycles, known in Dutch as *fiets*, are everywhere, and especially in Amsterdam, where they outnumber cars. But visitors are often surprised at the nature of Dutch bikes: it's rare to find fancy mountain bikes in the city's dedicated bike lanes – virtually everyone rides sturdy, heavy two- or three-gear (often no gear) granny rattlers (Gazelle or Sparta brands). There's no need for the fancy stuff in a land that's as flat as a pancake. Also, a 21-speed racer will probably be stolen within an hour of being parked: 150,000 bikes are nicked in Amsterdam per year. See the boxed text, opposite, for more information and tips on hiring a bike.

Gyms

Barry's Health Centre (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 10 36; www.barryshealthcentre.nl; Lijnbaansgracht 350; day/week pass €15/28; 🕒 7am-11pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun) Latest machines and classes, sauna, steam, tanning beds and a 'cardio theatre'.

Fitness First (Map pp88-9; ☎ 530 03 40; www.fitnessfirst.nl; Nieuwezijds Kolk 15; day pass €16, month pass from €29; 🕒 7am-11pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun) Cardio and weightlifting equipment, group classes, sauna, steam and aroma rooms, sun beds, beauty treatments and free video loans for members.

Garden Gym (Map p95; ☎ 626 87 72; www.the.garden.nl; Jodenbreestraat 158; day pass €9-12.50, month pass €40-61; 🕒 9am-11pm Mon, Wed & Fri, noon-11pm Tue, noon-10pm Thu, 9am-4pm Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) Recently rated Amsterdam's best gym for women, with aerobics, sauna, massage, physiotherapy and dietary advice.

Saunas

Saunas are mixed affairs and most saunas are like to sweat it out in the raw, so check your modesty at the front desk – or rent a towel. For information about gay saunas, see the boxed text, p104.

Hammam (Map pp86-7; ☎ 681 48 18; www.hammamamsterdam.nl; Zaanstraat 88; adult/2-5yr/6-12yr €15/4/11; 🕒 noon-10pm Tue-Fri, to 8pm Sat & Sun, last entry 2½hr before closing) Attractive, women-only, Turkish-style place.

BICYCLES: THE MAN-MACHINE RULES

When researching this book, here are some of the sights we saw on Amsterdam 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 (see opposite).

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 **Frame Fiets Gallery** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 672 75 88; Frans Halsstraat 26A) for custom bicycles.
- Combine two Dutch passions, beer and bicycles: hire a **Fietscafé** (☎ 0653864090; www.fietscafe.nl), 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. Then you all swap around.
- See p136 for a list of bike-rental shops.

Koan Float (Map pp88-9; ☎ 555 00 33; www.koanfloat.nl; Herengracht 321; floating 45/60min €30/38; ☎ 9.30am-11pm) No sauna – saltwater flotation tanks and massages instead.

Sauna Deco (Map pp88-9; ☎ 623 82 15; www.saunadeco.nl; Herengracht 115; noon-3pm Mon-Fri €14, all other times €15; ☎ noon-11pm Mon-Sat, 1-6pm Sun)

Skating ICE

When the canals freeze over, Amsterdam resembles an old Dutch painting as skaters cut up tracks, scarves trailing in the headwind, bums and knees frozen solid from falling over. Beware, though: this oil painting bites – drownings happen each year. Stay away from the ice unless you see large groups of people, and be very careful at the edges and under bridges – areas with weak ice.

In winter you can also skate on the pond at Museumplein (Map pp92-3) for a modest fee.

IJscaplex Jaap Eden (Map pp86-7; ☎ 694 96 52; Radioweg 64; adult/child €5.10/3.20; ☎ Oct-mid-Mar) has indoor and outdoor rinks in the eastern suburb of Watergraafsmeer; ring for hours. Take tram 9 to Kruislaan/Middenweg.

IN-LINE

Amsterdammers are very keen on in-line skating. Check out **Friday Night Skate** (www.fridaynightskate.com), a 15km career through town in the company of hundreds of fellow skaters. You needn't be a pro, but braking skills and protective gear are essential. Assemble at 8pm near the Nederlands Filmmuseum in the Vondelpark for an 8.30pm departure. The skate is cancelled if the streets are wet.

Vondelpark itself is a good bet for a spot of Rollerblading. For skates and gear, try **Rent-a-Skate** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 664 50 91; Vondelpark 7; skate hire from €5; ☎ Mar-Oct), near the Amstelveenseweg entrance.

Swimming

Amsterdam has many indoor pools and outdoor pools (in summer). Ring ahead: hours can vary from day to day or season to season, few are open past 7pm, and there are often restricted sessions – nude (of course), Muslim, children, women, seniors, clubs, lap swimming etc.

De Mirandabad (Map pp86-7; ☎ 536 44 44; De Mirandalaan 9; admission €3.30) Indoor and outdoor pools, twisting slides, a beach, a wave machine, squash courts, fitness room. Ring for opening hours.

Zuiderbad (Map pp92-3; ☎ 678 13 90; Hobbemastraat 26; adult/child €3/2.70) Venerable indoor pool (built 1912) restored to original Art Deco splendour; it's a stone's throw from the Rijksmuseum. Ring for opening hours.

Tennis & Squash

Borchland Sportcentrum (☎ 563 33 33; Borchlandweg 8-12; per hr tennis 8am-4pm Mon-Fri €15.50, 4-10pm Mon-Fri, all day Sat & Sun €23, squash to 4pm Mon-Thu €8, after 4pm Mon-Thu €15, after 4pm Fri, all day Sat & Sun €10; ☎ 8am-11pm) Tennis, squash and badminton courts, bowling alleys, and a restaurant. It's next to the Amsterdam ArenA stadium, well south of town (metro: Strandvliet).

Squash City (Map pp88-9; ☎ 626 78 83; www.squashcity.com; Ketelmakerstraat 6; day pass €7-14, month pass €32-75; ☎ 8.45am-midnight Mon, 7am-midnight Tue-Thu, 7am-11.30pm Fri, 8.45am-7.30pm Sat & Sun) Closest squash option to the city centre. Also fitness centre and aerobics.

Tenniscentrum Amstelpark (Map pp86-7; ☎ 301 07 00; www.amstelpark.nl; Koenenkade 8; court hire per hr summer €20, per hr winter outdoor/indoor €20/25) Forty-two open and covered courts, plus 12 squash courts, sauna and pool.

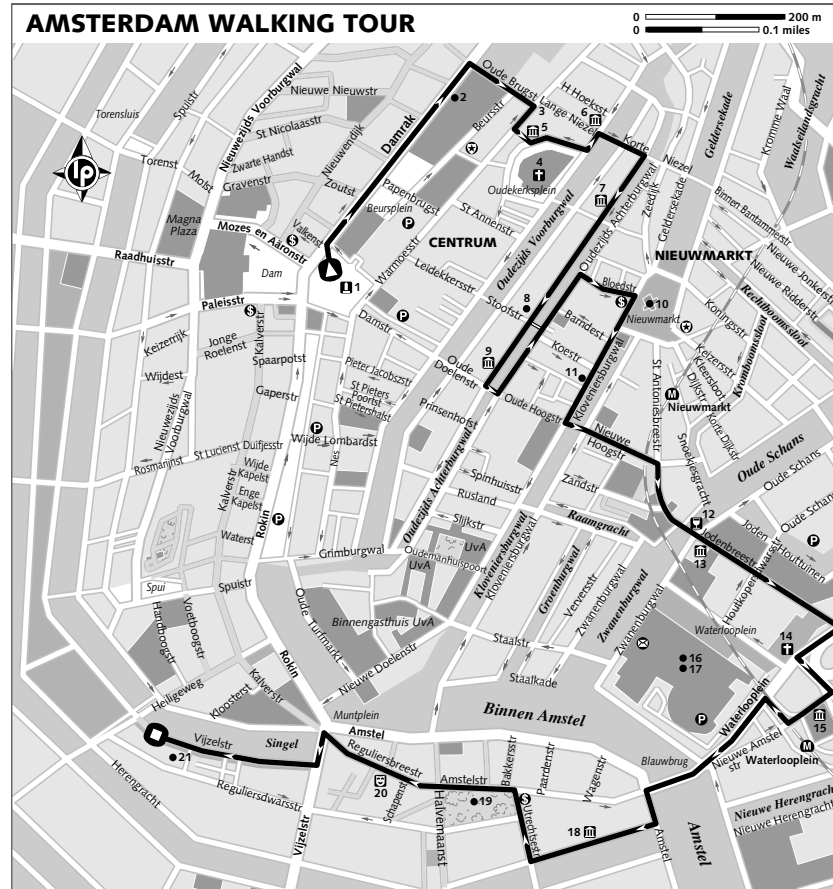
WALKING TOUR

WALK FACTS

Start The Dam
Finish Bloemenmarkt (Flower Market)
Duration Three hours

Begin at the **Nationaal Monument** (1; p96) and head northeast along the Damrak past the graceful **Beurs Van Berlage** (2; p84). Heading southeast along Oude Brugsteeg, you'll come across **Warmoesstraat** (3; p84). The revered **Oude Kerk** (4; p85) is the virtual entrance to red light action. Nearby is the **Prostitution Information Centre** (5; p96) – pick up a map of the Red Light District here. North is the clean-as-a-whistle **Museum Amstelkring** (6; p96). Walk over to the Oudezijds Achterburgwal and whisk past the underwhelming **Erotic Museum** (7; ☎ 624 73 03; Oudezijds Achterburgwal 54; admission €3; ☎ noon-midnight), the **Casa Rosso** (8; p85) erotic theatre, and the **Hash, Marihuana & Hemp Museum** (9; p85). Near this museum, cross the canal and head north along its opposite bank to Bloedstraat. From here, head east to the Nieuwmarkt, where the historic **Waag** (10; p98) commands attention. Heading south from Nieuwmarkt, along

AMSTERDAM WALKING TOUR



Kloveniersburgwal, note the narrow **Kleine Trippenhuys** (11; see the boxed text, p98). Cross the canal and head east along Nieuwe Hoogstraat, then southeast along St Antoniesbreestraat. Across the Oude Schans, have a beer at **Café de Sluyswacht** (12; p128); the **Museum het Rembrandthuis** (13; p99) is across the street. Walk down Jodenbreestraat past the **Mozen en Aäronkerk** (14); 100m southeast is the **Joods (Jewish) Historisch Museum** (15; p99). The **Waterlooplein market** (16; p134) faces the **Stopera** (17; p99); visit the market before crossing the Blauwbrug. Stop at the **Museum Willet-Holthuysen** (18; p104) on the Herengracht. Turn right onto Utrechtsestraat toward **Rembrandtplein** (19; p104) for cafés galore. Make your way north-west along Reguliersbreestraat, past the sump-

tuously Art Deco stylings of the **Tuschinski theater** (20; p104). The famous floating flower market, the **Bloemenmarkt** (21; p134) is on the other side of the Singel; reach it by heading south down Vijzelstraat.

AMSTERDAM FOR CHILDREN

Artis (p108) has a fantastic aquarium, and you can come face-to-face with bison at the children's farm in **Amsterdamse Bos** (p110), in the south of the city. But start with a canal cruise. Then climb the steeple of the **Westerkerk** (p102), with the wacky imperial crown on top.

The **Holland Experience 3D** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 422 22 33; www.holland-experience.nl; Waterlooplein 17; adult/child €8.50/7.25; ☎ 10am-6pm) is truly unbelievably tacky, but the film is interactive: when

the dam breaks, your kids will be sprinkled with water.

Science and technology centre **NEMO** (p110) is hands-on, while the **Scheepvaartmuseum** (p109) allows children to clamber on a replica of the *Amsterdam*, the ship that wrecked off the coast of England in 1749. Alternatively, ride a historic tram at the **Electrische Museum-tramlijn Amsterdam** (p107).

Your little companions will love **Madame Tussaud's** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 522 10 10; www.madame-tussauds.nl; Dam 20; adult/child €20/12; 🕒 10am-6.30pm Sep-Jun, 9.30am-8.30pm Jul & Aug) and will doubtless be filled with wonderment when they realise there's absolutely no difference between the wax David Beckham and the real thing (if the 2006 World Cup was any guide).

The **Amsterdams Marionetten Theater** (p131) near the Nieuwmarkt gives captivating shows such as Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, and over Christmas there's usually a circus in **Koninklijk Theater Carré** (p131).

Maybe you would like to instil some culture into their tiny brains. **Tropenmuseum** (p109) can deliver, with its separate children's section featuring activities focusing on exotic locations (although shows tend to be in Dutch). The **Joods Historisch Museum** (p99) also has a children's section about Jewish life in Amsterdam.

If the kids are hyper, dunk 'em in the swimming pools at **De Mirandabad** (p112), where there's a beach and a wave machine. The **IJ-complex Jaap Eden** (p112), with indoor and outdoor ice-skating rinks, is another good bet.

The **Oud Zuid** (p105) is a fine neighbourhood for cycling with the kids in tow – wide streets, parks and fine old residential areas. The **Vondelpark** (p107) is great for picnics and has ducks and a children's playground. You can put your kids to work making their own lunch at the park's Kinderkookkafé. The park is also large enough to effectively hide from them when you really need a break.

Finally, the underground **TunFun** (p99) playground is good for soaking up excess energy.

TOURS Bicycle Tours

Mike's Bike Tours (Map pp92-3; ☎ 622 79 70; www.mikesbikeamsterdam.com; Kerkstraat 134; bike tour incl bike rental adult/child €22/15, bike & boat tour €29/20; 🕒 bike tour 12.30pm Mar–mid-May & Sep–Nov, 11am & 4pm mid-May–Aug, bike & boat tour noon Tue–Sun Jun–Aug) Highly recommended four-hour tours around the centre of town and into the countryside. Also offers 'bike and boat' tours (about five hours), including drinks on board and a visit to the Vondelpark. Meet at the reflecting pool on Museumplein behind the Rijksmuseum.

Yellow Bike Tours (Map pp88-9; ☎ 620 69 40; www.yellowbike.nl; Nieuwezijds Kolk 29; city/countryside tour per person €18.50/25; 🕒 city tour 9.30am & 1pm Sun–Fri, 9.30am & 2pm Sat Apr–1 Nov, countryside tour 11am daily Apr–1 Nov) Three-hour city tours or six-hour countryside tours through the waterland north of central Amsterdam.

Tours are a little less youth-oriented than Mike's, are limited to 12 tour participants per guide, and depart from the office. Reservations recommended.

Canal Tours

Several operators depart from moorings at Centraal Station, Damrak, Rokin and opposite the Rijksmuseum – just hop on board.

Canal Bus (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 98 86; www.canal.nl; Weteringschans 26; per adult/child €16/11) Hop-on, hop-off canal boats servicing most of the big destinations. At night, there's a 1½-hour jazz cruise (€43, runs 8pm and 10pm Saturdays from April to November). Pick up the canal bus at one of 14 stops around the city, including one opposite Centraal Station (Map pp88–9).

Holland International (Map pp88-9; ☎ 622 77 88; www.hir.nl; Prins Hendrikkade 33A; 1hr cruise adult/child €8.50/5) The one-hour canal cruise (every 15 minutes 9am to 6pm, every 30 minutes 6pm to 10pm) is very popular. There's also a roster

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 very popular venture 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; p117) – 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 *Amsterdammed* 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 Wetering's cop stories are pretty good, but Geert Mak's *Amsterdam* is the single best book about the city.

Your favourite Amsterdam bar and coffeshop?

Any brown café in the Jordaan is great – get a *jenever* and a beer and talk with the locals. The coffeshop De Rokerij has a super-cool 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 *enjara* 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 haaring* 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.

I once saw a respectable chap bicycling in Amsterdam with a blow-up sex doll strapped to his back. 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.

of candlelight lunch and dinner cruises (adults €25 to €69, children €16 to €45).

Lovers Museum Boat (Map pp88-9; ☎ 530 10 90; www.lovemuseum.nl; Prins Hendrikkade 25-27) Offers a number of night-time cruises, including the candlelight cruise (€24, 8.30pm nightly from spring to December, most nights January to spring) with wine and Dutch cheese.

Rederij Noord-Zuid (Map pp92-3; ☎ 679 13 70; www.canal-cruises.nl; Stadhouderskade 25; 75min canal cruises adult/child €9/5.50; ⚓ every 30min 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, every hr 10am-5pm Nov-Mar) The main tour clocks in at 75 minutes. Evening cruises (adult/child €13.50/9) are offered at least twice per night from April to October, and at 8pm only Thursday to Sunday throughout the rest of the year.

St Nicolaas Boat Club (Map pp92-3; ☎ 423 01 01; www.petermoskos.com/boat; donation €10) If you blanch at the thought of the foggy windows and stale commentary of the big glassed-in canal boats, do yourself a favour and try this not-for-profit venture (see the boxed text, p114), which takes small, old barges out onto the canals. Patrons are allowed to smoke dope and drink beer on board, while the captains amuse with stories about alternative Amsterdam. The trip will definitely show you a different side of the city – everything from the famous Mohawk Duck to the thinnest house in town. Departure times are according to numbers; inquire at Boom Chicago, Leidseplein 12.

Other Tours

Amsterdam Segway Tours (☎ 0641424344; www.glide.cc; per person €60; ⚓ 10am & 8pm spring-Christmas) Two daily tours on Dubya's favourite contraption, the Segway. The four-hour daytime tour covers the major sights; the three-hour night tour takes in lesser-known areas such as De Pijp. If you haven't been on a Segway before, they'll train you so you won't get bushwhacked. Up to seven people, by reservation. Meet at the Nieuwmarkt (Map pp88-9) by the metro exit.

Randy Roy's Red Light Tours (☎ 0641853288; www.randyroysredlighttours.com; per person incl a drink €12.50; ⚓ 8pm Sun-Thu, 8pm & 10pm Fri & Sat) Does exactly what it says on the tin. Over 90 minutes, visit Quentin Tarantino and Iron Mike Tyson's favourite Amsterdam haunts and learn about the business of sex, Amsterdam style. Departs from the Victoria Hotel, across from Centraal Station (Map pp88-9).

Red Light District Tour (☎ 623 63 02; www.zoomamsterdam.com; per person €15; ⚓ 5pm) This 2½-hour tour covers the history of the Red Light District. All questions answered. Meet at the café inside the Schreierstoren (Map pp88-9), across from Centraal Station.

Urban Home & Garden Tours (☎ 688 12 43; www.uhgt.nl; per person incl a drink €22.50; ⚓ 10.15am Fri, 11.15am Sat, 12.15pm Sun Apr-Oct) These well-regarded tours (2½ to three hours) look at Amsterdam dwellings from the perspective of home, garden and even gable. Visits include 18th-century, 19th-century and contemporary homes.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

February

Carnaval A Catholic tradition, best enjoyed in the south of the country, although Amsterdammers also don silly costumes and a party 'tude.

Commemoration of the February Strike (25 February) In memory of the 1941 anti-Nazi general strike.

March

Stille Omgang (Silent Procession; Sunday closest to 15 March) Catholics walk along the Holy Way to commemorate the 1345 Miracle of Amsterdam.

April

Koninginnedag (Queen's Day; 30 April) Celebrated countrywide, but especially in Amsterdam (see the boxed text, opposite).

Amsterdam Fantastic Film Festival (www.aff.nl) European and international fantasy, horror and science-fiction movies.

May

Remembrance Day (4 May) For the fallen of WWII. Queen Beatrix lays a wreath on the Dam and the city observes two minutes' silence at 8pm.

Liberation Day (5 May) The end of German occupation in 1945 is commemorated with street parties, a free market and live music, especially in Vondelpark.

Oosterpark Festival (first week in May; www.oosterparkfestival.nl) Two-day multicultural festival.

Luilak (Lazy Bones) In the early hours on the Saturday before Whit Sunday, children go around ringing door bells, making noise and waking people up. Luilak is a remnant of a pre-Christian festival celebrating the awakening of spring.

Europerve (www.europerve.com) Three-day latex, PVC and rubber S&M party. 'Bring out the gimp...'

Amsterdam Literary Festival (Late May; www.amsterdamliteraryfestival.nl) International and local guests in a three-day wordfest.

June

Holland Festival (virtually all month; www.hollandfestival.nl) The country's biggest extravaganza for theatre, dance, film and pop music, with a justified claim to cutting-edge innovation.

Vondelpark Open-Air Theatre (until late August) Free events held 'for the people'. There's high drama and concerts across the genres from pop and world to classical and jazz.

ORANGE DAY

One Amsterdam event not to miss is Koninginnedag – or Queen's Day, or Orange Day – which is held in celebration of Queen Beatrix's birthday on April 30, when over a million revellers make the city seem like the freakiest place on the planet. People descend from all over the country, clogging and choking the train system to breaking point.

The whole shebang is basically an excuse for a gigantic piss-up and to wear ridiculous outfits, all in orange, the country's national colour. It's quite a sight to see the entire city awash in orange fake afros, orange beer, orange balloon animals, more orange beer, orange dope, yet more orange beer, orange leather boys, orange skater dykes, orange rollercoasters, orange clogs, orange fashion victims, orange grannies and grandpas, even more orange beer, orange Red Bull...Wear something orange.

There's also a free market throughout the city, where anyone can sell anything they like, as well as street parties and live music.

To get you in the mood for Koninginnedag, the website Expatica (www.expatica.com) supplies a helpful 'orange vocabulary', which you can bandy about on April 30 at your leisure. Try this on for size with the nearest reveller: say 'Hey man/woman, I've got...'

- *oranjegekte*: orange madness
- *oranjekoorts*: orange fever
- *oranjestemming*: orange mood
- *oranjeeuforie*: orange euphoria
- *oranjesfeer*: orange atmosphere
- *oranjemanía*: orange mania

Most likely they'll look at you with pity, replying, 'Man/woman, you've really got the *oranjeziekte* (orange sickness)'.

Roots Music Festival (last week of June; www.amsterdamroots.nl) World music and culture with performances, parades, workshops and a market, all in the Oosterpark.

Over het IJ Festival (www.overhetij.nl) From June or July, big performing-arts events (dance, theatre, music) take place for a week and a half around the former NDSM shipyards.

July

Robeco Zomerconcerten (until late August; www.robecozomerconcerten.nl) A quality line-up of 80-odd classical, jazz and world-music concerts at Amsterdam's top concert venue, the Concertgebouw.

5 Days Off (www.5daysoff.nl) Indoor electronica dance parties at various venues, including Paradiso and the Heineken Music Hall. Other events take place at the Netherlands Media Arts Institute.

Julidans (www.julidans.nl) Dance festival that gets some 20,000 visitors, remarkable given that it takes place in small venues.

August

De Parade (first two weeks of the month; www.deparade.nl) Carnavalesque outdoor theatre festival, held in the Martin Luther King Park, with unforgettable ambience.

Hartjesdag (mid-August; www.hartjesdagen.nl) Ancient medieval theatrical celebration involving loads of cross-dressing, revived recently by the city's trannies.

Grachtenfestival (Canal Festival; late August) Five days of free classical concerts in courtyards and private canalside homes, as well as on the canals themselves.

Hartjesdagen Zeedijk (third Monday and weekend leading up to it) Dating back to medieval times, this festival showcases street theatre; there's a parade and all kinds of music along the Zeedijk and in the Nieuwmarkt.

Uitmarkt (late August; www.uitmarkt.nl) The reopening of Amsterdam's cultural season, with three days of free concerts and information booths around the big museums and Leidseplein.

September

Bloemencorso (Flower Parade; first Saturday of the month; www.bloemencorso.com/aalsmeer) Spectacular procession of blossomy floats from Aalsmeer to the Dam and back again.

Jordaan Festival (second week of the month; www.jordaanfestival.nl) This street festival also sees hundreds of small boats take to the canals.

Monumentendag (www.bmz.amsterdam.nl) Registered historical buildings have open days on the second weekend of the month.

Chinese Festival (www.zeedijk.nl/chineefestival-eng.html) Along the Zeedijk, Amsterdam's Chinatown, you'll find food, cultural performances and, of course, the lion dance.

Dam Tot Dam Loop (www.damloop.nl) A 16km foot-race between the Dam in Amsterdam and the Dam in Zaandam, with around 30,000 runners and 200,000 spectators.

Robodock (late September; www.robodock.org) A full-on, extraordinary festival that blends technology and art. Experience humans and robots interacting and enacting mixed-media performance art and theatre events, accompanied by pyrotechnics, explosions, live music, projections – an audiovisual extravaganza that's sure to blow your mind (and a lot of machinery).

October

Amsterdam Marathon (mid-month; www.amsterdammarathon.nl) Thousands of runners loop through the city, starting and finishing at the Olympic Stadium (Map pp86–7), in a variety of races.

Bock Beer Festival (www.beursvanberlage.nl) Three-day fest celebrating German 'bock beer' in the Beurs van Berlage building.

November

Cannabis Cup (last half of the month; www.hightimes.com) Marijuana festival hosted by *High Times* magazine, with awards for best grass, biggest spliff and so on, plus there's a hemp expo and a fashion show.

Zeedijk Jazz & Blues Festival (Last weekend of the month; www.zeedijk.nl/jazzfestival-eng.html) Amsterdam's biggest jazz festival sees hundreds of jazz and blues acts out on the street and in the pubs along the Zeedijk, all free of charge.

SLEEPING

Amsterdam can get crazy with visitors at any time of year, so book well ahead. It's worth paying a bit extra for something central so you can enjoy the nightlife without resorting to night buses or taxis. Many visitors overlook the Museum Quarter and the Vondelpark area, which both offer quality digs only a short walk from the action at Leidseplein.

Amsterdam has no shortage of luxury accommodation, from intimate boutique hotels to towering modern complexes. Historic hotels in the old centre have been upgraded, but you'll still come across places without air-con or a lift. Be aware that hotels with steep staircases and without lifts are common, so reserve a room on the lower floors if you can't or won't climb stairs.

The tourist offices and the GWK exchange office at Centraal Station have hotel-booking services – see p81 for details. Reviews in this section are grouped according to the following price categories for a double room: budget, less than €70; midrange, €70 to €150; top end, more than €150.

Medieval Centre

BUDGET

Hotel Winston (Map pp88–9; ☎ 623 13 80; www.winston.nl; Warmoesstraat 129; dm/s/d from €22/45/56) How to make a lot out of a little: take some functional rooms and get local artists to theme them with motifs including Arabian typography, jigsaw puzzles and, fittingly for the red-light location, bizarre sex. There's a jolly 24-hour bar and the Winston's own club (p129) next door.

Aivengo Youth Hostel (Map pp88–9; ☎ 620 11 55; Spuistraat 6; dm from €18, d/tr with private bathroom €80/100; ☑) With friendly management, an inviting, respectful vibe and funky, Middle Eastern-style décor, Aivengo is a winner. Party animals take very careful note: there's a 4am curfew.

Flying Pig Downtown Hostel (Map pp88–9; ☎ 420 68 22; www.flyingpig.nl; Nieuwendijk 100; dm from €14; ☑) Multitudinous dope-smoking youngsters flock to this relaxed backpacker haven. It's got grungy charm, a throbbing lobby bar with pool table, cheap booze, DJs and a cushion-lined basement dubbed the Happy Room.

Other options:

Hotel Groenendaal (Map pp88–9; ☎ 624 48 22; www.hotelgroenendaal.com; Nieuwendijk 15; s/d/tr with shared bathroom €35/50/75) A bargain, although as bare bones as they come. Central location, friendly owners.

Stadsdoelen Youth Hostel (Map pp92–3; ☎ 624 68 32; www.stayokay.com; Kloveniersburgwal 97; dm from €24, d €61; ☒ ☑) Eleven nonsmoking, ultra-clean dorms, each with up to 17 beds plus free lockers. Single-sex and co-ed dorms and bathrooms, big TV room, bar with pool table, laundry.

MIDRANGE

Budget Hotel Clemens (Map p91; ☎ 624 60 89; www.clemenshotel.com; Raadhuisstraat 39; s €55, d €70–110, tr €125–150; ☑) The Clemens is a friendly place with eight warm, cosy rooms, some done up in creams and yellows, some in gold and red. Deluxe rooms have antique furniture and marble fireplaces, and all have mini fridges. Rooms at the front, though on a noisy street, make up for it with balconies that overlook the Westermarkt.

Misc Eat Drink Sleep (Map pp88–9; ☎ 330 62 41; www.hotelmisc.com; Kloveniersburgwal 20; s/d/tr €120/145/167; ☑) Book the lovely 'baroque' room for romantic times. The 'Africa' room is like its name, while the 'room of wonders' is a modern Moroccan escapee. A fresh-cooked breakfast (included in the rate) is served until noon, and massage services can be arranged. It's just near the Nieuwmarkt.

Hotel Résidence Le Coin (Map pp92–3; ☎ 524 68 00; www.lecoin.nl; Nieuwe Doelenstraat 5; s €110, d from €130, q €248) This shiny new inn, owned by the University of Amsterdam, features 42 high-class apartments spread over seven historical buildings, all equipped with designer furniture and kitchenettes – and all reachable by lift. Breakfast (€9) is served in a nearby café.

Hotel Brouwer (Map pp88–9; ☎ 624 63 58; www.hotelbrouwer.nl; Singel 83; s/d €50/85; ☒) This lovely building dates back to 1652. The eight rooms, named after Dutch painters, are simply furnished but all have canal views and private facilities. The staff are friendly. Note that credit cards are not accepted.

TOP END

Hotel de l'Europe (Map pp92–3; ☎ 531 17 77; www.leurope.nl; Nieuwe Doelenstraat 2–8; s/d €295/365; ☒ ☑) Oozing Victorian elegance, l'Europe has welcomed the likes of Arnold Schwarzenegger with its glam chandelier and cavernous marble lobby. The rooms are gloriously large and there's more marble in the bathrooms. The attached Excelsior Restaurant, chi-chi gym and swimming pool are equally impressive.

Jordaan & Western Islands

BUDGET

Hotel Van Onna (Map p91; ☎ 626 58 01; Bloemgracht 102–108; r per person €45; ☒) The rooms won't win any design awards, but they do have private facilities and breakfast is included. Plus you're in a gorgeous section of the Jordaan, within earshot of the Westerkerk bells (rooms out the back are quieter). The attic room, with its old wooden roof beams, has panoramic views over the Jordaan. No phone, TV or credit cards.

Western Canal Belt

MIDRANGE

Hampshire Classic Hotel Toren (Map pp88–9; ☎ 622 60 33; www.toren.nl; Keizersgracht 164; s/d from €125/145; ☒ ☑) A title-holder for price, room size and personal service, with communal areas

that are pure 17th century: gilded mirrors, fireplaces and magnificent chandeliers. The guest rooms are elegantly furnished with modern facilities. There's a room with two-person Jacuzzi and garden patio (from €270). Breakfast is €12.

Hotel Amsterdam Wiechmann (Map pp92–3; ☎ 626 33 21; www.hotelwiechmann.nl; Prinsengracht 328; s/d/tr/q from €75/125/175/190; ☑) This friendly family-run hotel, occupying three houses, has a marvellous canal-side location. The cosy but lovingly cared-for rooms are furnished like an antique shop, plus there are country quilts and lobby *tchotchkes* (knick-knacks) that have been there for some 50 years (including a suit of armour and a potbellied stove).

Canal House Hotel (Map pp88–9; ☎ 622 51 82; www.canalhouse.nl; Keizersgracht 148; r from €140) It's hard to know where to spend your time in this splendid boutique hotel. The 17th-century dining room with chandeliers, grand piano and garden views? Or perhaps the plush, burgundy-hued bar? The small but inviting guest rooms are filled with antiques.

't Hotel (Map pp88–9; ☎ 422 27 41; www.hotel.nl; Leliegracht 18; d from €145) Quiet, familiar and understated, 't Hotel is where Dutch modern furnishing meets a 17th-century canal-house setting. Be sure to book room 7, a sun-filled space with a gabled roof and large windows overlooking the canal.

TOP END

Seven One Seven (Map pp92–3; ☎ 427 07 17; www.717hotel.nl; Prinsengracht 717; d from €405; ☒ ☑) Amsterdam's most wonderful hotel. Its eight hyper-plush, deliciously appointed rooms come with that rare Dutch treat: space. Check into the splashy Picasso suite, with its soaring ceiling, commodious furniture, gorgeous contemporary and antique décor, and a bathroom as big as some European principalities.

Dylan (Map p91; ☎ 530 20 10; www.dylanamsterdam.com; Keizersgracht 384; s/d from €255/405) The Dylan is a true temple of style, from the 17th-century canal house's courtyard entrance, to the staff, to the restaurant, to the black-and-white lobby. The 41 sophisticated, individually decorated rooms might have Japanese or Indonesian motifs; fluffy towels, silk pillows piled high and spacious bathrooms make them serene and sumptuous. Plus, there's free health club access and a lounge par excellence.

our pick **Hotel Pulitzer** (Map p91; ☎ 523 52 35; www.pulitzer.nl; Prinsengracht 315–331; d €250; ☒ ☒) Oc-

cupying a row of 17th-century canal houses, Pulitzer combines big-hotel efficiency with boutique-hotel charm. Beautifully restored rooms feature mod cons galore, and there's a cigar bar, an art gallery, garden courtyards and a wonderful restaurant that's high on elegance and low on pomposity.

Ambassade Hotel (Map pp88-9; ☎ 555 02 22; www.ambassade-hotel.nl; Herengracht 341; s/d/tr from €165/185/195; ✕) Flick through the Ambassade's spiffy little library and you will find signed copies of works by Salman Rushdie and Umberto Eco. The antique furniture and fixtures are traditional without being cloying, but prepare for steep, winding stairwells. Breakfast costs €16.

Southern Canal Belt

BUDGET

Hotel Quentin (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 21 87; www.quentinhotels.com; Leidsekaade 89; s/d from €45/60) This 19th-century mansion has a nice lobby and rooms done up in bright murals and hand-made furniture, although singles tend to be small and functional. If you're lucky you might get a balcony and a canal view.

Hotel Prinsenhof (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 17 72; www.hotelprinsenhof.com; Prinsengracht 810; s/d €45/65, d with shower €85) Dating from the 17th century, the Prinsenhof is wonderfully preserved, with spacious rooms. The attic quarters (slanted ceiling and unbeatable canal views) are booked way in advance by honeymooners. The breakfast policy promises that 'no one's allowed to leave until he or she is completely satiated'.

Hotel Pax (Map pp88-9; ☎ 624 97 35; Raadhuisstraat 37; s/d from €25/35, d with private facilities from €55) The Pax, in hotel-lined Raadhuisstraat, is run by two friendly brothers. All eight rooms have a TV and each is individually decorated. The larger rooms face the busy street with noisy trams, so bring some earplugs. Rates don't include breakfast.

Hans Brinker Budget Hotel (Map pp92-3; ☎ 622 06 87; www.hans-brinker.com; Kerkstraat 136; dm from €21; tw/tr/q per person €35/30/24; ☎) There's a jacked up *Animal House* feel to the Brinker, with its bouncy bar and disco. Its website takes the art of self-mockery to uniquely Dutch extremes, offering Brinker Wallpaper: 'Your home will soon have the unmistakable feeling of the Hans Brinker Budget Hotel,' it says, 'without the tangy smell, strange gargling noises, and the moaning'. Or is that the Black Tulip?

MIDRANGE

Seven Bridges (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 13 29; Reguliersgracht 31; s/d from €80/100; ✕) Intimate and sophisticated, Seven Bridges is one of the city's loveliest little hotels on one of its loveliest canals, with eight tastefully decorated rooms, all with lush Oriental rugs and elegant antiques. Breakfast, served on fine china, is delivered to your room.

Hotel Orlando (Map pp92-3; ☎ 638 69 15; www.hotelorlando.nl; Prinsengracht 1099; s/d from €85/100; ✕ ☎ ☎) The plain entrance hall belies the joys that lie beyond: big canalside rooms and big views. Impeccably chic, boutique-style rooms with custom-made cabinetry and satin curtains. The hospitable host serves brekkie in bed.

Hotel de Munck (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 62 83; www.hoteldeemunck.com; Achtergracht 3; s/d/tr €75/95/145) De Munck is a sane choice in a quiet neighbourhood. The brilliant breakfast room looks like a replica of a 1960s diner with its working jukebox. The 16 spacious, renovated rooms feature comfy contemporary furnishings, and the flower-filled courtyard is as welcoming as the hosts.

Hotel Nicolaas Witsen (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 61 43; www.hotelnicolaaswitsen.nl; Nicolaas Witsenstraat 4; s/d from €65/89; ☎) Style aficionados may squirm at the bland pastel décor but there's no quibbling over the amenities. All 29 rooms are neat and come with phone, safe and in some cases even baths. In summer ask for the basement room that's as cool as air-con. There's a lift too.

Other options:

Hotel de Admiraal (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 21 50; de-admiraal-hotel@planet.nl; Herengracht 563; d with shared/private facilities €70/98) In the thick of the action near Rembrandtplein, with beautiful canal views. Breakfast costs €5.

City Hotel (Map pp92-3; ☎ 627 23 23; www.city-hotel.nl; Utrechtsestraat 2; d with shared/private facilities €70/90; ☎) Above the Old Bell pub, practically on Rembrandtplein. Clean, neat, well run.

Hotel Agora (Map pp92-3; ☎ 627 22 00; www.hotelagora.nl; Singel 462; s & d/tr/q from €103/158/175; ☎) Fifteen minutes' walk from everything, with smallish rooms, up-to-date bathrooms and a cheerful garden.

TOP END

Amstel Intercontinental Hotel (Map pp86-7; ☎ 622 60 60; www.amsterdam.intercontinental.com; Professor Tulpplein 1; r from €575; ☎ ☎ ☎) Everything about this five-star monument is simply spectacular, from its magnificent colonnaded lobby to its

hefty room prices and its royalty-and-rock-star clientele. It's a favourite of the Strolling Bones, and the lavishly decorated rooms overlook the Amstel, the river that (according to legend) Mick Jagger nearly fell into when Charlie Watts punched him out perilously close to a window.

Old South (Oud Zuid)

BUDGET

Stayokay Amsterdam Vondelpark (Map pp92-3; ☎ 589 89 96; www.stayokay.com/vondelpark; Zandpad 5; dm from €24, d €74; ☎ ☎) This modern, attractive 536-bed facility – with one section occupying a tall, half-timbered 19th-century school building – has the leafiest location, with views into the Vondelpark.

Flying Pig Uptown Hostel (Map pp92-3; ☎ 400 41 87; www.flyingpig.nl; Vossiusstraat 46; dm from €13; ☎) The uptown member of the Flying Pig backpacker chain, with almost as much dope, beer and grungy charm as its downtown cousin (see p118).

MIDRANGE

Owl Hotel (Map pp92-3; ☎ 618 94 84; www.owl-hotel.nl; Roemer Visscherstraat 1; s €75-92, d €98-125; ☎) Some guests love this place so much that they send in owl figurines from all over the world. Staff are warm and welcoming, and the dapper, bright and quiet rooms come with lots of facilities (hairdryers, laptop plug-ins, etc). The buffet breakfast (included in the price) is served in a serene, light-filled room overlooking a gorgeous garden.

Hotel de Filosoof (Map pp86-7; ☎ 683 30 13; www.hotelfilosoof.nl; Anna van den Vondelstraat 6; s/d €111/125) This stately hotel near leafy Vondelpark is owned by two sisters and has 38 rooms themed in honour of such philosophers as Aristotle, Wittgenstein and Spinoza. The furniture can be lush or Zen minimalist, depending on the room's honoree.

Xavier's Happy House (Map pp86-7; ☎ 673 39 34; www.xavierahollander.com/sleeper; Stadionweg 17; d from €120; ☎) This small B&B is run by the one and only Xaviera Hollander, author of *The Happy Hooker* (p45). The two house rooms aren't overly large, but they're colourful and cosy (one has a shared bathroom), while the garden chalet is a fairly simple affair and quite secluded. Xaviera herself is often on hand for a chat and a cup of tea, and can organise all manner of tours and activities in the city, regardless of your desires (within reason of

course). She also stages the occasional theatre performance in-house: they range from musical concerts to 'squirter' shows.

TOP END

Hilton Amsterdam (Map pp86-7; ☎ 710 60 00; www.hilton.com; Apollolaan 138-140; r from €202; ☎ ☎ ☎) It's an old-school hotel with lots of business guests, but the Hilton was flower-power central in 1969 when John Lennon and Yoko Ono staged their 'bed-in' for world peace here (you can rent the room). Less happily, Herman Brood, the infamous Dutch junkie-artist-musician, committed suicide in 2001 by jumping off the Hilton's roof (he used to frequent the hotel's popular bar carrying a parrot on his head). The building fronts a grassy park with a marina out the back. Rooms are international business standard, and service is crisp and professional. The health club features sauna and Turkish bath.

College Hotel (Map pp86-7; ☎ 571 15 11; www.thesteingroup.com/college; Roelof Hartstraat 1; s/d from €175/200; ☎ ☎) Originally a 19th-century school, this place has now been updated with tremendous style: flat-screen TVs, silk throw pillows, cordless phones, the occasional stained-glass window and exposed beams on the top floor. Continental breakfast costs €17.50.

De Pijp

TOP END

Hotel Okura (Map pp86-7; ☎ 678 71 11; www.okura.nl; Ferdinand Bolstraat 333; s/d from €240/275; ✕ ☎ ☎ ☎) This is the business traveller's choice, with close proximity to the RAI exhibition centre, private in-room fax lines, wi-fi for computers, and professional staff. Plus, it's got the Netherlands's largest hotel pool, an amazing health club, several fine restaurants (including two with Michelin stars – Yamazato and Ciel Bleu) and wonderfully panoramic views of Amsterdam.

Plantage & Oosterpark

BUDGET

Hotel Rembrandt (Map p95; ☎ 627 27 14; www.hotelrembrandt.nl; Plantage Middenlaan 17; s €73, d from €85; ☎) The hallways could stand a touch-up, but the Rembrandt shines where it matters. The spotless rooms have TV, phone and coffee maker, and some have hardwood floors and bathtubs. The wood-panelled breakfast room features chandeliers and 17th-century paintings on linen-covered walls.

Hotel Hortus (Map p95; ☎ 625 99 96; www.hotelhortus.com; Plantage Parklaan 8; dm €25, s/d €35/50) Facing the Botanical Garden, this comfy 20-room hotel has small doubles with or without showers (luck of the draw). The lounge will be chock-full of young, happy stoners transfixed by the big-screen TV. Large rooms sleep up to eight people.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Arena (Map pp86-7; ☎ 850 24 00; www.hotelarena.nl; 's Gravesandestraat 51; d/tr from €100/165; 📺) The Arena, next to lush Oosterpark, has been a chapel, an orphanage and a backpackers' hostel. Now it's a chic 121-room hotel with a stylish restaurant, a café and a well-regarded nightclub, To Night (p129). Rooms are an ode to minimalism, while the large, split-level doubles are sun drenched. Tip: sections A, B, E and F tend to be quieter.

Hotel Fantasia (Map p95; ☎ 623 82 59; www.fantasia-hotel.com; Nieuwe Keizersgracht 16; s/d €67/86; 📺) This one's perfect for moo-ching around. Pull the udder one. No, really – the owner grew up on a farm and has parlayed that into a workable obsession: this bovine-themed 18th-century house. Bucolic prints and cow motifs gleefully decorate the 19 rooms and breakfast area, complementing the peaceful canal-side location.

Eastern Islands

MIDRANGE

Lloyd Hotel (Map pp86-7; ☎ 561 36 36; www.lloydhotel.com; Oostelijke Handelskade 34; d €80-300; 📺) In 1921 this building was a hotel for migrants, and many of the original fixtures (tiles, cabinetry etc) still exist, now combined with triumphs of more contemporary Dutch design. This combination hotel, cultural centre and local gathering place boasts rooms that span one-star (facilities down the hall) to five-star (plush and huge).

Amstel Hotel (Map p95; ☎ 626 42 47; www.amstelhotel.com; Oosterdokskaade 2-4; s & d with land/water view €87/92, tr with land/water view €117/122; 📺) This floating hotel is packed with dazed, European-four-days bus groups and packs of Brit boys/girls celebrating bucks' or hens' nights. The sterile rooms have TV, phone and a tiny bathroom. Breakfast is €10.

Outer Districts

BUDGET

Gaaspercamping (☎ 696 73 26; www.gaaspercamping.nl; Loosdrechtreed 7, Gaasperdam; camp sites per adult/

under 12/car/caravan €4.75/2.25/4.25/6.25; 🚻) mid-Mar-Dec) Large park/recreation area with café, restaurant, bar, barbecues, supermarket, lake and beach. Take metro 53 from Centraal to Gaasperlaan, south of town.

Camping Vliegenbos (Map pp86-7; ☎ 636 88 55; www.vliegenbos.com; Meeuwenlaan 138; camp sites per person €7.60; 🚻) Apr-Sep) Well-equipped camping ground just a few minutes' bus ride from the city centre, with shop, laundry, hot showers, cabins and 25 hectares of woodland. From Centraal Station take bus 32 or 36 to Zamenhofstraat/Merelstraat.

EATING

Amsterdam's culinary scene has hundreds of restaurants and *etcafés* (pubs serving meals) catering to all tastes.

Utrechtsestraat is a terrific all-rounder, while Haarlemmerstraat has some of the latest hot spots. Try Leidseplein for quantity more than quality. West of Albert Cuypstraat is multicultural heaven with Cambodian, Kurdish and Surinamese cuisines and more.

Medieval Centre

Blauw aan de Wal (Map pp88-9; ☎ 330 22 57; Oudezijds Achterburgwal 99; mains €24-27; 🚻) dinner) Tucked away in a long, often graffiti-covered alley in the middle of the Red Light District, this charming 17th-century herb warehouse (complete with exposed brick and steel weights) is the setting for contemporary French- and Italian-inspired cooking. Service is friendly and knowledgeable. In summer, grab a table in the leafy courtyard that backs onto a monastery.

Lucius (Map pp88-9; ☎ 624 18 31; Spuistraat 247; mains €17.50-28, set menus €35; 🚻) dinner) Simple, delicious and simply delicious, this seafood place is known for fresh ingredients and for not overdoing the sauce and spice. The interior is all fish tanks and tiles, and service is thorough and efficient.

d'Vijff Vlieghen (Map pp88-9; ☎ 530 40 60; www.thefiveflies.com; Spuistraat 294-302; mains €20-28; 🚻) dinner) The second you set foot in this dining complex of five 17th-century canal houses, you know you're in for a treat. Ask to be seated in the Rembrandt Room (with four original etchings) and join splurging business groups being treated to silver service and contemporary Dutch dishes.

Hemelse Modder (Heavenly Mud; Map pp88-9; ☎ 624 32 03; Oude Waal 9; mains €16, set meals from €26; 🚻) dinner) A little hard to locate, but worth it. Extraordinary care goes into the contemporary Dutch dishes – you might find pot-au-feu

with chicken or polenta soufflé – and you may even find a sprig of mint in your carafe of water. Desserts are wonderful, including the chocolate mousse.

Nam Kee (Map pp88-9; ☎ 624 34 70; www.namkee.net; Zeedijk 113-116; mains €6-16.50; 🚻) lunch & dinner) It won't win any design awards, but Nam Kee is always the most popular Chinese spot in town. There's a new, fancier location at Geldersekaade 117 (Map pp88-9).

Supper Club (Map pp88-9; ☎ 638 05 13; www.supperclub.nl; Jonge Roelensteeg 21; 5-course menu €65; 🚻) dinner) Enter the theatrical, all-white room, snuggle up on enormous mattresses and snack on platters of contemporary Dutch victuals as DJs spin house music, then head upstairs later to dance. Well, it's a concept, even if the food and service are so-so. They also do this whole thing on a boat trip on the IJ: the Supper Club Cruise leaves from dock 14 behind Centraal Station.

QUICK EATS

Eat Mode (Map pp88-9; ☎ 330 08 06; www.eatmode.nl; Zeedijk 107; mains €4.50-12; 🚻) lunch & dinner) Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese and Japanese with casual ambience. Good vegetarian selection plus wi-fi.

Green Planet (Map pp88-9; ☎ 625 82 80; www.greenplanet.nl; Spuistraat 122; sandwiches & salads €6-10, mains €10-16.50; 🚻) dinner Tue-Sat) Veggie eatery selling burgers, crostini, wraps, fresh pastries, biscuits and home-made cakes – takeaway comes in biodegradable packaging.

Krua Thai (Map pp92-3; ☎ 622 95 33; Staalstraat 22; mains €6.75-25; 🚻) dinner Tue-Sun) Top-shelf (and popular) soups, duck or shrimp curries, and noodle dishes.

Pannenkoekenhuis Upstairs (Map pp88-9; ☎ 626 56 03; Grimburgwal 2; mains €4-10; 🚻) lunch & dinner) Climb some of Amsterdam's steepest stairs for flavour-some, filling pancakes – and vintage teapots hanging from the ceiling.

Puccini (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 54 74; www.puccini.nl; Staalstraat 21; mains €5.30-12.50; 🚻) lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Italian panini rolls and salads with sun-dried ingredients; the handmade chocolate and cake shop next door induces rapture.

Ralph's Asian Wonderfood (Map pp88-9; ☎ 427 62 62; Haarlemmerstraat 32; dishes €6-7; 🚻) lunch & dinner) Excellent, fresh Asian-fusion menu.

Vlaams Friteshuis (Map pp92-3; Voetboogstraat 31; fries €2.50) Amsterdam's best-loved fries joint. Remember the words of Vincent Vega, from *Pulp Fiction*: 'You know what they put on French fries in Holland? Mayonnaise. And I don't mean a little bit on the side – they fucken drown 'em in it.' It's true, but Vlaams also offers an arsenal of alternatives, including green peppercorn.

Jordaan & Western Islands

Bordewijk (Map pp88-9; ☎ 624 38 99; Noordermarkt 7; mains €24-29, set menus €37-52; 🚻) dinner Tue-Sun) Locals love Bordewijk; they don't come for the sparse interior, but for the super French/Italian cooking. Apparently lamb's testicles were once on the menu, but less adventurous customers needn't worry, and vegetarians are willingly catered for.

Local (Map p91; ☎ 423 40 39; Westerstraat 136; mains €7-19.50; 🚻) dinner) Contemporary and cool, with long, tall tables stretching its entire length; you won't be alone. The international mains are grilled on skewers, everything from *yakitori* to beef stroganoff (yes, really), all served with potatoes, salad and appropriate sauces.

Nomads (Map p91; ☎ 344 64 01; www.restaurantnomads.nl; Rozengracht 133; set menu €45; 🚻) dinner Tue-Sun) It's like a boudoir: eat your Middle Eastern food while taking it easy on stuffed cushions in a hall festooned with Moroccan curtains and oversized chandeliers. Belly dancers and DJs give it some late in the evening.

Rakung Thai (Map p91; ☎ 627 50 12; Elandsgracht 29; mains €17-21; 🚻) dinner) Kooky décor – chairs wrapped in straitjackets, bright art on the walls, neckties in the tables – blends with a relaxed atmosphere and super food. Try the crunchy, spicy duck salad.

QUICK EATS

Café Reibach (Map p91; ☎ 626 77 08; Brouwersgracht 139; mains €2.80-12.50; 🚻) breakfast & lunch) Magnificent, fresh-made breakfasts replete with Dutch cheese, pâté, smoked salmon, eggs, coffee and fresh juice.

Duende (Map pp88-9; ☎ 420 66 92; Lindengracht 62; tapas €3-10; 🚻) dinner) Tapas; flamenco on Saturday.

Western Canal Belt

ourpick **Christophe** (Map p91; ☎ 625 08 07; www.christophe.nl; Leliegracht 46; mains €31-53; 🚻) dinner Tue-Sat) Jean Christophe's subtly swanky French restaurant lives up to its two Michelin stars with its lobster dishes, duck-liver terrine and unusual elegance. The attentive service is also a cut above.

Zuid Zeeland (Map pp92-3; ☎ 624 31 54; Herengracht 413; mains €23-26; 🚻) lunch Mon-Fri, dinner nightly) Popular with artists and general Bohemian types, Zuid Zeeland gets props for French-international cuisine. We have it on very good authority that to finish with the port-infused Stilton is divine.

De Belhamel (Map pp88-9; ☎ 622 10 95; Brouwersgracht 60; mains €18-21; 🚻) dinner) Belhamel's gorgeous Art

Nouveau interior is a fitting backdrop for excellent French- and Italian-inspired dishes such as silky roast beef. This is a quality spot for a romantic evening, with its canal-side tables.

Grekas (Map pp88-9; ☎ 620 35 90; Singel 311; mains €8-10; 🍴 lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) One of the city's best-loved Greek restaurants, with high-quality, generous portions of Greek home cooking: moussaka, roasted artichokes, chicken in lemon sauce.

De Bolhoed (Map p91; ☎ 626 18 03; Prinsengracht 60-62; dishes lunch €3.50-12, dinner €9-15; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Amsterdam's best-known vegetarian restaurant has a prime canal-side location. The food is fresh, organic and often Mexican- and Italian-inspired: pancakes, salads, burritos, homemade breads, biological wines, organic beers and cakes.

Koh-I-Noor (Map p91; ☎ 623 31 33; Westermarkt 29; mains €10-19; 🍴 dinner) The interior is gaudy but the Indian food is consistently good, running the gamut from mild to palate-searing for curries, tandoori and biryani dishes.

QUICK EATS

Buffet van Odette & Yvette (Map pp88-9; ☎ 423 60 34; Herengracht 309; mains €3-12; 🍴 breakfast Mon-Sat, lunch daily) Creative, organic soups, sandwiches, pastas and quiches – and gorgeous canal views.

Foodism (Map pp88-9; ☎ 427 51 03; www.foodism.nl; Oude Leliestraat 8; mains €3-10; 🍴 lunch & dinner) All-day breakfasts, healthy filled sandwiches and salads, wild and wicked pasta dishes.

Nielsen (Map p91; ☎ 330 60 06; Berenstraat 19; dishes €4-10; 🍴 breakfast & lunch) Sunny café with a tasty set breakfast: eggs, toast, fruit, juice and coffee (€8). For lunch, a large variety of salads and sandwiches are served.

Pancake Bakery (Map pp88-9; ☎ 625 13 33; Prinsengracht 191; mains €5-12; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Delicious, filling Dutch pancakes – sweet (including chocolate) and savoury (including the 'Egyptian', topped with lamb, sweet peppers and garlic sauce). Also omelettes, soups and desserts.

Small World Catering (Map pp88-9; ☎ 420 27 74; Binnen Oranjestraat 14; sandwiches €5.45-7.50, mains €4-6; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch & dinner Sun) Gorgeous prepared vegetables and meat dishes, a variety of quiches and sandwiches, including fresh tuna, tapenade and artichoke hearts.

't Kuyltje (Map pp88-9; ☎ 620 10 45; Gasthuismolensteeg 9; sandwiches €1.75-3.10; 🍴 breakfast & lunch) Little sandwich shop with good pastрами.

Southern Canal Belt

La Rive (Map pp86-7; ☎ 622 60 60; Amstel Intercontinental Hotel, Professor Tulpplein 1; mains €38-58; 🍴 breakfast daily,

lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Two Michelin stars and a formal dining room with graciously spaced tables and views over the Amstel make La Rive a top-notch option. The French menu changes frequently, but standards include turbot and truffle in potato pasta, and a starter of caviar.

Tempo Doeloe (The Old Days; Map pp92-3; ☎ 625 67 18; www.tempodoeloerestaurant.nl; Utrechtsestraat 75; mains €18-22; 🍴 dinner) Ring a bell to gain entry to this Indonesian restaurant, where the spice levels range from mild to *very* hot. Yet all the subtle flavours remain intact – extraordinary. It does a top-notch version of the classic rijsttafel (rice table; see p60). Reservations are essential.

Segugio (Map pp92-3; ☎ 330 15 03; Utrechtsestraat 96; pastas €15-17, mains €23-27; 🍴 dinner Mon-Sat) This fashionably minimalist storefront with two levels of seating is known for risotto and high-quality ingredients combined with a sure hand. Book ahead – this is one Italian joint that's always busy.

Iguazu (Map pp92-3; ☎ 420 39 10; Prinsengracht 703; mains €14-35; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This Brazilian-Argentinean steakhouse serves cuts so tender they practically dissolve in your mouth, and everything tastes great with *chimichurri* (a spicy sauce), which sits in a small jar on every table. Relax on the canal terrace with your *feijoada* (a stew of rice, beans and various meats) and *caipirinhas* (Brazil's famous cocktail, made with *cachaça* – sugarcane brandy – lime, sugar and ice).

Tujuh Maret (Map pp92-3; ☎ 427 98 65; Utrechtsestraat 73; mains €14-20; 🍴 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner nightly) Well, well, here's a surprise: *Tujuh Maret*, next door to *Tempo Doeloe*, serves Indonesian food that's just as good but attitude-free. Grab a wicker chair and tuck into spicy Sulawesi-style dishes such as dried, fried beef or chicken in red pepper sauce. *Rijsttafel* is laid out according to spice intensity.

Pasta e Basta (Map pp92-3; ☎ 422 22 26; Nieuwe Spiegelstraat 8; set meals €35; 🍴 dinner) An Italian restaurant that's popular with large groups, thanks to its singing waiters, who perform opera, standards and more. Regulars swear by the antipasto buffet and grilled meats. Reserve well in advance.

Sluizer (Map pp92-3; ☎ 622 63 76; Utrechtsestraat 43-45; mains €14-25; 🍴 dinner) This lively Amsterdam institution, with a super-romantic, enclosed terrace, comprises two restaurants: a renowned house of fish at No 45 and a

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

Simon Sellars

Australian Sean Condon is the author of the bittersweet 'non-fiction 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 *Warmoesstraat*, 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 blow-up 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 Fockink* (p128), a *tiny never* 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* (p123) – 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.

Parisian-style 'meat' establishment at No 43, although both menus are offered in either. *Bouillabaisse* and spare ribs are the respective house specialities.

Pata Negra (Map pp92-3; ☎ 422 62 50; Utrechtsestraat 142; tapas €4-16; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This Spanish eatery is an eyeful of fun, with its alluringly tiled exterior and an equally exuberant crowd inside. Weekends are quite a scene with boisterous groups sharing sangria and tapas plates

(try the garlic-fried shrimps and grilled sardines).

QUICK EATS

Maoz (Map pp92-3; ☎ 420 74 35; www.maozveg.com; Muntplein 1; *felafel* €3.50) Offers *felafel* pita-bread sandwiches with 'bottomless' salad toppings and sauces. It's common for impecunious Dutch students to linger here for hours on end (possibly days, weeks, months) refilling their pita bread. Also at *Centraal Station*, *Leidsestraat* 85,

Ferdinand Bolstraat 67, Eerste van der Helststraat 43 and Oude Brugsteeg.

M Café (Map pp92-3; ☎ 520 78 48; Keizersgracht 455; mains €4-12; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Amazing views are the top draw high above the Keizersgracht in the top-floor gallery of the ritzy Metz & Co department store.

Pasta di Mamma (Map pp92-3; ☎ 664 83 14; Pieter Cornelisz Hooftstraat 52; sandwiches €3-5; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch & dinner Sun) Great for picnic supplies for Vondelpark. Dozens of antipasti, gorgeous salads and more substantial plates.

Uliveto (Map pp92-3; ☎ 423 00 99; Weteringschans 118; mains €5-8; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Mouth-watering fresh pastas, salads and creamy desserts. Buy takeaway or dine at the large marble table under designer milk urns.

Wagamama (Map pp92-3; ☎ 528 77 78; Max Euweplein 10; mains €8-13; ☺ lunch & dinner) Chicken ramen, Japanese curries and fried noodles or rice.

Old South (Oud Zuid)

Bark (Map pp92-3; ☎ 675 02 10; Van Baerlestraat 120; mains €14.50-22; ☺ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner nightly) Near the Concertgebouw, Bark serves seafood that's suitably genteel and old-school. For starters, choose from a long shellfish menu or try the blinis of smoked oilfish. For mains, the grilled tuna steak with bacon and balsamic sauce is recommended. Some dishes can be a little salty, so let them know if you're averse.

Mansion (Map pp92-3; ☎ 616 66 64; Hobbemastraat 2; mains €12-21; ☺ dinner Tue-Sun) There's no sign out the front, just black lacquered doors. Inside, the gauzy purple curtains and the chandeliers provide the backdrop to Asian fusion specialties such as soft-shell crab with chilli-garlic marinade and lobster in XO sauce. Reservations are essential.

Lalibela (Map pp86-7; ☎ 683 83 32; Eerste Helmersstraat 249; mains €8-12.50; ☺ dinner) This was the Netherlands' first Ethiopian restaurant, and it's still a good 'un. Drink Ethiopian beer from a half-gourd and eat your stews, egg and vegetable dishes with *enjara*, a spongy pancake, instead of utensils. The music's unique, too.

Sama Sebo (Map pp92-3; ☎ 662 81 46; www.samasebo.com; Pieter Cornelisz Hooftstraat 27; rijsttafel per person €27, lunch specials per person €14.50; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Another reliable old-timer, this Indonesian restaurant's got the ambience of a brown café. It's also got a wicked rijsttafel comprising 17 dishes (four to seven at lunch); order individual plates if that's too much.

Waroeng Asje (Map pp92-3; ☎ 616 65 89; Jan Pieter Heijestraat 180; mains €5-12, rijsttafel €28; ☺ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner nightly) This counter-service shop serves

rijsttafel, plus the *nasi rames* special (€9) – a heaped plate of roasted meats, on skewers or in spicy stews, with stir-fried or pickled vegetables, and a deep-fried hard-boiled egg.

De Pijp

Bazar Amsterdam (Map pp92-3; ☎ 675 05 44; www.bazaramsterdam.nl; Albert Cuyppstraat 182; mains €8-14; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Like its Rotterdam counterpart (p215), Bazar Amsterdam is a genuine high-flyer. In a glorious former Dutch Reformed Church, the light-filled, Middle Eastern-style décor and tangy, tantalising North African cuisine – mixed grills, kebabs, felafels, pitas, tabouli, Turkish pizza – sees to that.

Mamouche (Map pp92-3; ☎ 673 63 61; Quellijnstraat 104; mains €14.50-22; ☺ dinner Tue-Sun) 'Sexy' is a word that tends to get bandied about when people talk about Mamouche. The case for: the seriously good modern Moroccan food – think couscous, lamb and fish – and the serious minimalism of the décor, all exposed flooring, mottled walls and beamed ceilings. Reservations are essential.

Puyck (Map pp86-7; ☎ 676 76 77; Ceintuurbaan 147; set menus from €38.50; ☺ dinner Mon-Sat) This unpretentious place offers imaginative, sophisticated international cooking such as baby lobster with lettuce, duck breast in Chinese five spice, or a white wine-poached pear, all served with flair. And how about that Thai curry sorbet – your mind is boggling, right?

Nieuw Albina (Map pp92-3; ☎ 379 02 23; Albert Cuyppstraat 49; mains €4.50-11.50; ☺ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) Nieuw Albina's Surinamese food is more polished than that at Albert Cuypp 67 (see below), but the flavours are just as bold. The *moksi meti* (roast mixed meats over rice) is incredible.

QUICK EATS

Albert Cuypp 67 (Map pp92-3; ☎ 671 13 96; Albert Cuyppstraat 67; mains €3-9; ☺ lunch & dinner) Surinamese food, and colossal portions of *roti kip* (chicken curry, flaky roti bread, potatoes, egg and cabbage).

Bagels & Beans (Map pp92-3; www.bagelsbeans.nl; Ferdinand Bolstraat 70; bagels from €2.95) Tasty bagels, good coffee, wi-fi access. Also at Keizersgracht 504, Haarlemmerdijk 122, Van Baerlestraat 40, Kinkerstraat 110, Koningsplein 20, Waterlooplein 2, Raadhuisstraat 18 and Zeilstraat 64.

Ralph's Asian Wonderfood (Map pp92-3; ☎ 670 90 07; Eerste van der Helststraat 37; dishes €6-7; ☺ lunch & dinner) Excellent, fresh Asian-fusion menu.

Taart van m'n Tante (Map pp92-3; ☎ 776 46 00; Ferdinand Bolstraat 10; cakes per slice around €4;

☺ 10am-6pm) Very popular apple pies, pecan pies, and tarts with lush ingredients such as truffles and marzipan with strawberry liqueur. Savouries include the mozzarella-pesto quiche.

Turkiye (Map pp92-3; Ferdinand Bolstraat 48; mains €6.50-15.50; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Super Turkish food: grilled mains and small plates such as stuffed tomatoes and Turkish pizza (€1 to €3.50). Eat in or take away.

Zen (Map pp92-3; ☎ 627 06 07; Frans Halsstraat 38; mains €7-17; ☺ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Delicious Japanese food. Try the sushi or *donburi* (beef, chicken or salmon on rice). Takeaway available.

Eastern Islands

11 (Map pp86-7; ☎ 625 59 99; Oosterdokskade 3-5; lunch mains €4-8.50, 4-course menu €30; ☺ lunch & dinner) It's got the best views, from the top floor of the former post office tower. For lunch, tuck into sandwiches, pastas and focaccias, or try the changing four-course dinner menu. At night, 11 is variously a cultural centre with lectures on art and the like and a night club.

A Tavola (Map p95; ☎ 625 49 94; Kadijksplein 9; mains €12-21; ☺ dinner) This authentic Italian restaurant near the Scheepvaartmuseum serves mouth-wateringly tender meats and superb pastas that cry out for a selection from its excellent wine list. Reservations are a must.

Sea Palace (Map p95; ☎ 626 47 77; Oosterdokskade 8; mains €9.60-36, yum-cha courses €13.50-15; ☺ lunch & dinner) The three floors at this floating restaurant are always busy with Chinese and non-Chinese, who come not just for great views of the city but also for the super *yum cha*.

DRINKING

Medieval Centre

Lime (Map pp88-9; ☎ 639 30 20; Zeedijk 104) Lime is cool and hip but friendly and laid-back; you won't get the stink-eye in here. The décor comes on like a Stereolab album cover – all dots and loops and browns and oranges – and the cocktails are superb.

Hoppe (Map pp92-3; ☎ 420 44 20; Spuistraat 18-20) This gritty brown café has been luring drinkers for more than 300 years. It has one of Amsterdam's highest beer turnovers – some achievement in a city of hops freaks. In summer the energetic crowd spews from the dark interior out onto the Spui.

Pilsener Club (Map pp88-9; ☎ 623 17 77; Begijnsteeg 4) Also known as Engelse Reet (English Arse), this genuine brown café from 1893 is typical of the holes-in-the-wall around the Spui. Beer is served straight from the kegs via the 'short-

est pipes in Amsterdam' (most places have vats in a cellar or side room with long hoses to the bar) – our Man in the 'Dam says you can taste the difference.

Café de Jaren (Map pp92-3; ☎ 625 57 71; Nieuwe Doelenstraat 20) Watch the Amstel float by from the waterside terrace and balcony of this soaring, bright grand café. The great reading table has loads of foreign publications for whiling away hours over beers or the delectable light lunch of smoked-salmon rolls.

Café Cuba (Map pp88-9; ☎ 627 4919; Nieuwmarkt 3) This place maintains fidelity to Fidel, Che and '50s Cuba, with low lighting, indoor palms, faux faded elegance, rum posters, and cane chairs and tables. Try Papa Hemingway's favourite cocktail, the *caipirinha*, and the ubiquitous *mojito*. The outdoor seating is perched right on the Nieuwmarkt.

Absinthe (Map pp88-9; ☎ 320 6780; www.absinthe.nl; Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 171) Devoted to the brain-lesioning liquor popularly reputed to have been the cause of Van Gogh's self-mutilation. There's multi-ethnic décor with rather awkward seating arrangements, and the staff can teach you all about their signature drink. You'll leave with your ears intact – it's not as potent as in the old days.

Luxembourg (Map pp92-3; ☎ 620 62 64) This café occupies the best people-watching spot on the Spui. Our advice: grab a newspaper from the reading table, nab a terrace seat in the sun and order the 'Royale' snack platter (bread, cured meats, Dutch cheese and deep-fried croquettes). Inside are parquet floors, a marble bar and an Art Deco stained-glass skylight.

De Drie Fleschjes (Map pp88-9; ☎ 624 84 43; Gravenstraat 18) Behind the Nieuwe Kerk, the distiller Bootz's tasting room dates from 1650. It specialises in liqueurs (although you can also get *jenEVERS*) – the macaroon one is a treat. Check out the collection of *kalkoentjes*, small bottles with hand-painted portraits of former mayors.

Suite (Map pp88-9; ☎ 344 64 06; www.suite.nu; Sint Nicolaasstraat 43) From the crew behind Supper Club, this sedate 'rest-o-bar' is a rambling suite of rooms: a salon, a lounge room, and a chilled space with embroidered sofas, hassocks and still lifes. Dishes are eclectic small plates, from rib eye in tomato sauce to Vietnamese spring rolls and watermelon soup.

Other options:
Bar Bep (Map pp88-9; ☎ 626 56 49; Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 260) Olive-green vinyl couches and ruby-red walls – unashamedly kitsch.

De Bekeerde Suster (Map pp88-9; ☎ 423 01 12; Kloveniersburgwal 6-8) The magic ingredients: brew tanks, beautiful hardwood interior, and history (this 16th-century brewery-cloister was once run by nuns).

Prefoekaal Fockink (Map pp88-9; ☎ 639 26 95; www.wynand-fockink.nl; Pijlsteeg 31) This small tasting house (dating from 1679) has scores of *jenever*s and liqueurs – some quite potent.

Jordaan & Western Islands

Café Nol (Map p91; ☎ 624 53 80; Westerstraat 109) Hipsters may cringe, but Café Nol epitomises the old-style Jordaan café with a must-see kitsch interior. It's the sort of place where old-school Jordanees still sing oompah ballads with drunken abandon. Note: it doesn't open until 9pm.

De Twee Zwaantjes (The Two Swans; Map p91; ☎ 625 27 29; Prinsengracht 114) This small, authentic drinking house is at its hilarious best on weekend nights, when you can join some 100 people belting out torch songs and pop standards. Hours are erratic, so it's best to call first.

Café 't Smalle (Map p91; ☎ 623 96 17; Egelantiersgracht 12) Take your boat and dock right on the pretty terrace – you couldn't wish for a more convivial setting in the daytime or a more romantic one at night. It's equally charming inside – dating back to 1786 as a *jenever* distillery and tasting house, and restored during the 1970s with antique porcelain beer pumps and leadlight windows.

Other options:

Café de Sluyswacht (Map pp88-9; ☎ 625 76 11; Jodenbreestraat 1) Stoners beware: this tiny black building is built on foundations that lean dramatically.

Lokaal 't Loosje (Map pp88-9; ☎ 627 26 35; Nieuwmarkt 32-34) Beautiful etched-glass windows and tile tableaux; a venerable locale.

Western Canal Belt

Het Papeneiland (Papists' Island; Map pp88-9; ☎ 624 19 89; Prinsengracht 2) This popular 1642 gem of a place features Delft-blue tiles and a central stove. The name goes back to the Reformation, when there was a clandestine Catholic church across the canal, allegedly linked to the other side by a once-secret tunnel that's still visible from the top of the stairs.

Café de Vergulde Gaper (Golden Mortar Café; Map pp88-9; ☎ 624 89 75; Prinsengracht 30) Decorated with old chemists' bottles and vintage posters, this former pharmacy has amiable staff and a terrace that catches the sun (when it chooses to appear). It gets busy late afternoons, with

TOP FIVE 'DESIGNER' BARS

- Café Cuba (p127)
- Lime (p127)
- Absinthe (p127)
- Suzy Wong (below)
- Suite (p127)

all kinds of people meeting for after-work drinks and big plates of fried snacks or dinner salads.

De Pieper (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 47 75; Prinsengracht 424) Considered by many to be the king of the brown cafés, De Pieper is small, unassuming and unmistakably old (established 1665). The interior features stained-glass windows, fresh sand on the floors, antique Delft beer mugs hanging from the bar and a working Belgian beer pump (dating from 1875).

Other options:

Golle (Map pp88-9; ☎ 626 66 45; Raamsteeg 4) Pioneer of Amsterdam 'beer cafés' with 200 brews on offer.

Van Puffelen (Map p91; ☎ 624 62 70; Prinsengracht 377) Popular café-restaurant; lots of nooks and crannies; big, communal.

Southern Canal Belt

Suzy Wong (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 67 69; Korte Leidsedwarsstraat 45) This bar bustles with Dutch scenesters. It's like a retro-futurist Victorian drawing room, with red velveteen wallpaper and a bamboo garden; a photo of Andy Warhol observes. Fortify yourself here before heading over to Jimmy Woo's nightclub (opposite).

Café de Kroon (Map pp92-3; ☎ 625 20 11; www.dekroon.nl; Rembrandtplein 17) A popular venue, with its high ceilings, velvet chairs and the chance to wave at all the people below on the Rembrandtplein. Climb the two flights and be rewarded with an Art Deco tiled staircase.

Other options:

Eylders (Map pp92-3; ☎ 624 27 04; Korte Leidsedwarsstraat 47) Meeting place for dissident artists during WWII. Exhibits art.

Café Schiller (Map pp92-3; ☎ 624 98 46; Rembrandtplein 26) Has a stylish, Art Deco interior with portraits of Dutch actors and cabaret artists.

Café Américain (Map pp92-3; ☎ 556 32 32; Leidsekaade 97) Arguably Amsterdam's most stylish grand café, located in the American Hotel. This Art Deco monument attracts rafts of celebrities to its forecourt tables just off Leidseplein or for a tête-à-tête in the fashionable Nightwatch bar.

Old South (Oud Zuid)

't Blauwe Theehuis (Map pp86-7; ☎ 662 02 54; Vondelpark 5) This functionalist teahouse from 1936 is a wonderful multilevel building serving coffee, cake and alcohol, with a great terrace and balcony.

De Pijp

Bar Ça (Map pp92-3; ☎ 470 41 44; Marie Heinekenplein 30-31) Maybe the hottest café in town, this 'Barcelona in Amsterdam' themed club has brought real life to the area. Take it easy in the posh plush-red and darkwood interior, or spread out onto the terrace.

Eastern Islands

Brouwerij 't IJ (Map pp86-7; ☎ 622 83 25; Funenkade 7) This small brewery produces six regular and several seasonal beers, which can be tasted in the comfortably grungy interior or on the terrace at the foot of the windmill. See p109 for more information.

ENTERTAINMENT

Amsterdam does 'entertainment' better than many cities four times its size: everything from live sex shows to cavernous clubs to intimate bars to smoking dens to cinema to theatre and more. See p80 for some useful websites, or pick up Wednesday's free *Amsterdam Weekly* for tips and tricks galore.

Nightclubs

Jimmy Woo (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 3150; www.jimmywoo.nl; Korte Leidsedwarsstraat 18) With its uber-stylish, black-lacquered, Oriental décor, Jimmy Woo is as hip as the bony projection of a femur. Plus it has a big focus on hip hop and extracting cash from hip pockets. It's exclusive (no hippies allowed), so good luck getting in; try going with some locals.

Sinners in Heaven (Map pp92-3; ☎ 620 1375; www.sinners.nl; Wagenstraat 3-7) Along with Jimmy Woo, jet-set, celebrity-riddled Sinners heads the A-list of Amsterdam clubs. It serves up hip hop, funk, beats and breaks, and it's possibly harder than Woo to get into: there's always a 'guest list', and by all accounts the door bitch has quite the acid tongue. Try sleeping with a famous footballer for best results.

Winston International (Map pp88-9; ☎ 623 13 80; www.winston.nl; Warmoesstraat 125) Next to the Hotel Winston (p118), it has everything from electronica to spoken word to punk to graffiti art. On Sunday there's Club Vegas, where the

dress code is 'jet set' (sequins, suits, stilettoes, bow ties, tiaras) and the music is lounge. Kooky fun.

To Night (Map pp86-7; ☎ 694 74 44; www.hotelarena.nl; 's-Gravesandestraat 51) At the Hotel Arena (p122), each night is different – everything from dance classics to salsa. It's worth a visit just for the magnificent interior; the chapel of this one-time orphanage has been given a solid redo, including the toilets.

Panama (Map pp86-7; ☎ 311 86 86; www.panama.nl; Oostelijke Handelskade 4) This complex has a salsa-tango dance salon, a restaurant and a glam nightclub that programmes Cuban big bands, Brazilian circus acts and a soulful selection of DJ talent.

Other options:

Escape (Map pp92-3; ☎ 622 11 11; www.escape.nl; Rembrandtplein 11) A fixture of Amsterdam nightlife since 1987, it's all lights and video screens, a venue for special parties.

11 (Map pp86-7; ☎ 625 59 99; www.ilove11.nl; Oosterdokskade 3-5) Right by the IJ and at the top of the old post-office building – the only club in town with 360-degree city views.

Exit (Map pp92-3; ☎ 625 87 88; Reguliersdwarsstraat 42) Multistorey nightclub with a selection of theme bars, dance floors and a busy darkroom.

Melkweg (Milky Way; Map pp92-3; ☎ 531 81 81; www.melkweg.nl; Lijnbaansgracht 234A)

Paradiso (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 45 21; www.paradiso.nl; Weteringschans 6) See p131.

Coffeeshops

Siberië (Map pp88-9; ☎ 623 59 09; Brouwersgracht 111) With its lounge-room feel, canal views and ultra-casual atmosphere, this is an addictive place that draws smokers of all ages for the friendly staff, the wicked weed and the chance to play stoner chess with total strangers. 'Queen takes Bish...that castle thing. Ah, forget it. I resign.'

Barney's (Map pp88-9; ☎ 625 97 61; www.barneys.biz; Haarlemmerstraat 98 & 102) The very popular Barney's, with its trippy biomechanical décor, has beloved all-day breakfasts as well as quality smoke (100% organic).

La Tertulia (Map p91; Prinsengracht 312) A backpackers' favourite, this mother and daughter-run coffeeshop has a greenhouse feel. You can sit outside by the Van Gogh-inspired murals, play some board games or take in those Jurassic-sized crystals by the counter.

Abraxas (Map pp88-9; ☎ 626 57 63; Jonge Roelensteeg 12) Maybe the most beautiful coffeeshop in

town. Choose from southwest USA, Middle Eastern and other styles of décor spread over three floors. There are live DJs, extra-friendly staff and Internet usage with a drink purchase.

Grey Area (Map pp88-9; ☎ 420 43 01; www.greyarea.nl; Oude Leliestraat 2) Owned by a couple of laid-back American dudes, this tiny shop introduced the extra-sticky, flavourful 'Double Bubble Gum' weed to the city. The relaxed staff will advise on the lengthy menu.

Other options:

Bulldog (Map pp92-3; ☎ 627 19 08; www.bulldog.nl; Leidseplein 13-17) Amsterdam's most famous coffee-shop chain, with five branches around town.

Greenhouse (Map pp88-9; ☎ 627 17 39; www.greenhouse.org; Oudezijds Voorburgwal 191) Undersea mosaics; psychedelic stained-glass windows; high-quality weed and hash.

Homegrown Fantasy (Map pp88-9; ☎ 627 56 83; Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 87A) Pleasant staff, hydroponic weed, good tunes, 3m-long glass bong.

Cinemas

Cinecenter (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 66 15; Lijnbaansgracht 236) Euro and American art-house fare; last Monday of the month devoted to queer films. The hip bar has white padding.

De Uitkijk (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 74 60; www.uitkijk.nl; Prinsengracht 452) Amsterdam's oldest surviving cinema (1913), in an old canal house, attracting cineastes who know their Fuller from their Fellini.

Nederlands Filmmuseum (Map pp92-3; ☎ 589 14 00; www.filmmuseum.nl; Vondelpark 3) The esteemed Filmmuseum's programme appeals to a broad audience: shock-horror, cutting-edge foreign films, docs, Bollywood musicals.

Het Ketelhuis (Map pp86-7; ☎ 684 00 90; www.ketelhuis.nl; Westergasfabriek, Haarlemmerweg 8-10) In the old gas works, an atmospheric platform for art-house films.

Kriterion (Map p95; ☎ 623 17 08; www.kriterion.nl; Roeterstraat 170) Premieres, theme parties, cult movies, classics, kids' flicks and sneaks – all in a former diamond factory.

Movies (Map pp86-7; ☎ 638 60 16; www.themovies.nl; Haarlemmerdijk 161) Arty films, indie US and UK movies, and big studio releases in a beautiful Art Deco cinema.

Tuschinskitheater (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 15 10; www.pathe.nl/tuschinski; Reguliersbreestraat 26-34) Extensively refurbished, the theatre is a monument to sumptuous Art Deco/Amsterdam School interiors. It screens mainstream blockbusters.

Rialto Cinema (Map pp86-7; ☎ 676 87 00; www.rialfilm.nl; Ceintuurbaan 338) Great old cinema con-

centrating on premieres and art-house fare from around the globe.

Live Music

CLASSICAL & CONTEMPORARY

Concertgebouw (Concert Building; Map pp92-3; ☎ 671 83 45; www.concertgebouw.nl; Concertgebouwplein 2-6; ☎ box office 10am-5pm) Each year, this neo-Renaissance centre presents around 650 concerts attracting 840,000 visitors, making it the world's busiest concert hall (with reputedly the best acoustics). Classical musos consider the Concertgebouw a very prestigious gig indeed, as do some rock bands with classical pretensions (such as King Crimson). The venue holds free 'lunch concerts' on Wednesday at 12.30pm between September and June.

Beurs van Berlage (Map pp88-9; ☎ 627 04 66; Damrak 243) This former commodities exchange houses two small concert halls with comfortable seats but underwhelming acoustics. Resident companies, the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra and the Netherlands Philharmonic, play a varied menu of Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, Mahler and Wagner. The building itself is famous for its architecture.

Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ (Map pp86-7; ☎ 788 20 00; www.muziekgebouw.nl; Piet Heinkade 1; ☎ box office noon-7pm Mon-Sat) The Muziekgebouw is home to the long-standing music venues the IJsbreker (which changed its name to that of the new building) and the jazz house Bimhuis (below). The outside may be curiously clad in glass, but the core attraction is the concert halls; the Muziekgebouw has 735 seats, simple maple-slat walls, a flexible stage layout and great acoustics.

Other options:

Bethaniën klooster (Map pp88-9; ☎ 625 00 78; www.bethanienklooster.nl; Barndesteeg 6B) Small former monastery near Nieuwmarkt with a glorious ballroom, perfect for some Stravinsky or Indian sitar.

Conservatorium van Amsterdam (Map pp92-3; ☎ 527 75 50; www.cva.ahk.nl; Van Baerlestraat 27) Students at the Netherlands' largest conservatory of music offer recitals.

Muziektheater (Map pp92-3; ☎ 625 54 55; Waterlooplein 22; ☎ ticket office 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-6pm Sun) Large-scale ballet and opera. Free lunchtime concerts of 20th-century music on Tuesday.

JAZZ & BLUES

Bimhuis (Map pp86-7; ☎ 788 21 50; www.bimhuis.nl; Piet Heinkade 3) Amsterdam's main jazz venue for years, now in stylish new digs in the

Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ (opposite). The venue attracts Dutch and international jazz greats and offers workshops. The intimate auditorium has huge windows giving a view over the city, and a spiffy bar.

Casablanca (Map pp88-9; ☎ 625 56 85; www.casablanca-amsterdam.nl; Zeedijk 26) This jazz café has an illustrious history. Even if its glory days are over, it still books big bands four nights a week and other kinds of jazz the rest of the time. Wednesday to Saturday sees singing and dancing, including karaoke.

Bourbon Street Jazz & Blues Club (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 34 40; www.bourbonstreet.nl; Leidsekruisstraat 6-8) Catch blues, funk, soul and rock-and-roll performances in this intimate venue filled with local and international performers (Sting's been here, if that kind of thing floats your boat). There are weekly jam sessions and unplugged nights.

Jazz Café Alto (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 32 49; www.jazz-cafe-alto.nl; Korte Leidsedwardsstraat 115) A slightly older crowd of jazz lovers toe taps to serious jazz and blues at this small brown café; try to catch tenor saxophonist Hans Dulfer and band.

Maloe Melo (Map p91; ☎ 420 45 92; www.maloe-melo.com; Lijnbaansgracht 163) This small venue is home to the city's blues scene, with local and international musicians playing everything from Cajun zydeco and swing to Texas blues and rockabilly.

Other options:

Brasil Music Bar (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 15 00; www.brasilmusicbar.com; Lange Leidsedwardsstraat 68-70) Live Brazilian and Caribbean music three nights a week, R&B and Brazilian DJs at other times. Hot and steamy.

Cotton Club (Map pp88-9; ☎ 626 61 92; Nieuwmarkt 5) Dark, bustling brown café with live, vibrant jazz every Saturday (5pm to 8pm), plus salsa on Tuesday.

Meander (Map pp92-3; ☎ 625 84 30; www.cafe-meander.nl; Voetboogstraat 3) Live bands often followed up by DJs spinning funk, garage, soul and jazzy beats.

ROCK & POP

Paradiso (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 45 21; www.paradiso.nl; Weteringschans 6) This large former church has been the city's premier rock venue since the 1960s. Big-name acts like Bright Eyes, Jurassic 5, Wilco and Lucinda have all appeared recently, and its regular dance evenings like Paradiso and Paradisooul are legendary.

Melkweg (Map pp92-3; Milky Way; ☎ 531 81 81; www.melkweg.nl; Lijnbaansgracht 234A) This former milk factory off Leidseplein has been a top

cultural venue since the 1970s. It's an all-in-one entertainment complex with a café, a multimedia centre and top live music almost every night (everything from Afro-Celtic to thrash), plus nightclubs, a cinema, lounges and art galleries.

Other options (all except Korsakoff are well south of town):

Amsterdam Arena (☎ 311 13 33; Arena Blvd 11, Bijlmermeer) Stadium rock! Seats 52,000 for mega-acts like the Stones and 'Superman' himself, Mr Jon Bon Jovi.

Heineken Music Hall (☎ 09006874242; Arena Blvd 590, Bijlmermeer) Draws a steady stream of international acts with its high-class acoustics and light shows.

Korsakoff (Map p91; ☎ 625 78 54; www.korsakoff-famsterdam.nl; Lijnbaansgracht 161) Still grungy after all these years, with lashings of punk, metal and Goth acts.

Pepsi Stage (☎ 09007377478; www.pepsistage.nl; Arena Blvd 584, Bijlmermeer) This 1600-capacity hall stages midleague acts such as Elvis Costello and the Gipsy Kings.

Theatre & Comedy

Stadsschouwburg (Map pp92-3; ☎ 624 23 11; www.stadsschouwburgamsterdam.nl; Leidseplein 26) Amsterdam's most beautiful theatre was built in 1894 and refurbished in the 1990s. It features large-scale productions, operettas, dance and summer English-language productions and performances. Most major festivals also seem to have a presence here.

Amsterdams Marionetten Theater (Map pp88-9; ☎ 620 80 27; www.marionet.demon.nl; Nieuwe Jonkerstraat 8; adult/child from €12/6) In a former blacksmith's shop, this charming, intimate theatre features marionettes performing elaborate productions such as *The Magic Flute*. The skill of the puppeteers is something to see. Call or check the website for show times.

Nachttheater Sugar Factory (Map pp92-3; ☎ 626 5006; www.sugarfactory.nl; Lijnbaansgracht 238) This 'night theatre' showcases theatre, spoken word, exhibitions, poetry readings and live music, after which the space clears and it becomes a bangin' nightclub.

Koninklijk Theater Carré (Map p95; ☎ 09002525255; www.theatercarre.nl; Amstel 115-125) The largest theatre in town offers mainstream international shows, musicals, cabaret, opera, operetta, ballet and circuses. Backstage tours (€8/4 adult/child) are at 11am on Saturday and are also available by reservation; call ☎ 524 94 52.

De Balie (Map pp92-3; ☎ 553 51 51; Kleine Gartmanplantsoen 10) International productions spotlighting multicultural and political issues are

the focus here. De Balie also holds short-film festivals and political debates and has new-media facilities and a stylish bar.

Boom Chicago (Map pp92-3; ☎ 423 01 01; www.boomchicago.nl; Leidseplein 12) Now an institution of sorts, Boom Chicago performs English-language stand-up and improvised comedy all year round. You can see shows over dinner and a few drinks – the food here's decent.

Comedy Café Amsterdam (Map pp92-3; ☎ 638 39 71; www.comedycafé.nl; Max Euweplein 43-45) While Boom Chicago is improv, the Comedy Café books in Dutch and international stand-up comics (Sunday is regularly reserved for English-speaking acts).

Other options:

De Kleine Komedie (Map pp92-3; ☎ 624 05 34; www.dekleinekomede.nl; Amstel 56-58) This internationally renowned theatre, founded in 1786, focuses on concerts, dance, comedy and cabaret, sometimes in English.

Felix Meritis (Map p91; ☎ 623 13 11; www.felix.meritis.nl; Keizersgracht 324) A hub of experimental theatre, music and dance, with a bevy of coproductions between Eastern and Western European artists.

Openluchttheater (Open-Air Theatre; Map pp92-3; ☎ 673 14 99; www.openluchttheater.nl; Vondelpark) From June to August the park's intimate theatre hosts free

concerts, from classical to hip – world music, dance and children's performances.

Sport FOOTBALL

Local club Ajax is the Netherlands' most famous team: they've won the European Cup four times and they launched Johan Cruyff to stellar heights in the '70s. The red-and-white stormers play in the **Amsterdam Arena** (☎ 311 13 33; Arena Blvd 11, Bijlmermeer) south of town. Matches usually take place on Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon during the season (August to May). The ArenaA conducts a one-hour guided **stadium tour** (☎ 311 13 36; adult/child €10/8.50; ☎ 11am-4.30pm daily Apr-Sep, noon-4pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar, except on game days or during major events) that includes a walk on the hallowed turf and entry to the Ajax museum.

KORFBAL

A cross between netball, volleyball and basketball, this sport elicits giggles from foreigners, but it has a lively local club scene. For information, contact the **Amsterdam Sport Council** (☎ 552 24 90), who can also provide information on other sports in town.

BRILLIANT ORANGE

Here's one of the hottest tips in these pages: if you want the best, the funniest, the most insightful analysis of what makes Amsterdam tick, then read *Brilliant Orange: The Neurotic Genius of Dutch Football* by David Winner, a book about...football. But you don't have to especially like the sport to appreciate *Brilliant Orange*, for Winner's skill lies in setting up a history of modern-day Dutch football as a mirror – as in fact the driving force – of modern-day Dutch society and the Amsterdam we know and love today.

You'll be a believer when you read Winner describe, with humour and intelligence, how the Netherlands' obsession with orderly yet beautiful landscapes, sophisticated built space and innovative architecture is reflected in the fabulously free-flowing yet super-organised Dutch aesthetic of Total Football. According to Winner, this aesthetic was embodied in the great Ajax of Amsterdam side from the 1970s led by talismanic footballer Johan Cruyff, with an entire counterculture, reaching far beyond the game, finding inspiration in Cruyff's progressive attitude, intelligence, rebellion and prophecy.

Dutch football, like Dutch architecture, Dutch art, Dutch tolerance and even Dutch politics, is a trick of perspective: it's all about creating space, or even the illusion of space, out of absolutely nothing. As Winner adroitly demonstrates, nowhere is this more apparent than in 'Magic Centre Amsterdam' itself.

There are numerous illuminating insights, including Ajax's self-image as a de facto 'Jewish' side, and how this compares to Jews in WWII Amsterdam. Winner also dissects the very Dutch footballing tendency to stumble at the final hurdle, usually manifested in losing big-match finals due to too much showing off and arrogance, and he links this to the lingering, stifling influence of Dutch Calvinism.

It's a spectacular book.

SHOPPING

During the 17th century, Amsterdam was the warehouse of the world, stuffed with riches from neighbours and far-off colonies. But even if the Dutch empire has since crumbled, its capital remains a shopper's paradise.

The Damrak and the area around Leidseplein teem with tourist shops, while the busiest shopping streets are the down-to-mid-market Nieuwendijk and the more upscale Kalverstraat and Leidsestraat, with department stores and clothing boutiques serving large crowds, especially on Saturday and Sunday. Expensive shops line Pieter Cornelisz Hoofstraat, and there are chic boutiques and cafés in the Negen Straatjes (Nine Alleys) of the western canal belt. Antique and art outlets can be found in the Spiegel Quarter in the southern canal belt, and the Jordaan is full of galleries and quirky shops.

Art & Antiques

Decorativa (Map pp92-3; ☎ 420 50 66; Nieuwe Spiegelstraat 7) Amazing jumble of European antiques, collectables and weird vintage gifts.

EH Ariëns Kappers (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 53 56; Nieuwe Spiegelstraat 32) Original prints, etchings, engravings, lithographs, 17th- to 19th-century maps, Japanese woodblock prints.

Jaski (Map pp92-3; ☎ 620 39 39; Nieuwe Spiegelstraat 27-29) Large commercial gallery selling paintings, prints, ceramics and sculptures by famous CoBrA artists.

Prestige Art Gallery (Map pp92-3; ☎ 624 01 04; www.prestige-art-amsterdam.com; Reguliersbreestraat 46) Specialises in 17th- to 20th-century oil paintings and bronzes.

Books

For a list of bookshops, see p80 and p104; for book markets, see p134.

Boutiques

Analik (Map p91; ☎ 422 05 61; Hartenstraat 34-36) Amsterdam's pre-eminent fashion designer; stylish, very feminine pieces.

Cora Kemperman (Map pp92-3; ☎ 625 12 84; Leidsestraat 72) Successful Dutch designer specialising in floaty, layered separates and dresses in linen, cotton and wool.

Laundry Industry (Map pp92-3; ☎ 420 25 54; Spui 1) Well-cut, well-designed clothes by leading Dutch design house; soft leather coats, perfectly fitted suits. There's another branch at Magna Plaza (p96).

Razzmatazz (Map p91; ☎ 420 04 83; Wolvenstraat 19) Flamboyant, expensive designer outfits and avant-garde club clothes from labels including Vivienne Westwood, Frankie Morello and Andrew Mackenzie.

Van Ravenstein (Map pp92-3; ☎ 639 00 67; Keizersgracht 359) Upmarket Dutch and Belgian designers such as Dries Van Noten, Ann Demeulemeester, Dirk Bikkembergs, Martin Margiela and Viktor & Rolf.

Department Stores

Try the **Kalvertoren shopping centre** (Map p91; Singel 457) and Magna Plaza (p96) for upmarket fashion, gift and jewellery shops.

De Bijenkorf (Map pp88-9; ☎ 621 80 80; Dam 1) The city's most fashionable department store; quality clothing, toys, household accessories and books.

Hema (Map pp88-9; ☎ 638 99 63; Nieuwendijk 174) Once a Woolworths clone, now has wide-ranging stock including good-value wines and deli foods.

Maison de Bonneterie (Map pp92-3; ☎ 531 34 00; Rokin 140) Exclusive and classic lines of garments for the whole family. Features men's labels such as Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger and Armani, but lots for women too.

Metz & Co (Map pp92-3; ☎ 520 70 36; Keizersgracht 455) Boutique store with a fine line in luxury furnishings and homewares, upmarket designer clothes, and gifts.

Vroom & Dreesmann (Map pp92-3; ☎ 622 01 71; Kalverstraat 201) Popular for its clothing and cosmetics, but don't expect great flights of fantasy.

PAYMENTS ARE FOREVER

Amsterdam has been a major diamond centre since the 16th century, and about a dozen diamond-cutters still operate in the city today. Of the five offering free guided tours, Gassan Diamonds is probably the best. Caution is advised, for that glint in your eye could lead to a lengthy series of monthly instalments.

Amsterdam Diamond Center (Map pp88-9; ☎ 624 57 87; Rokin 1; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Mon-Wed & Fri-Sun, to 8.30pm Thu)

Coster Diamonds (Map pp92-3; ☎ 305 55 55; Paulus Potterstraat 2-6; ☎ 9am-5pm)

Gassan Diamonds (Map p95; ☎ 622 53 33; Nieuwe Uilenburgerstraat 173-175; ☎ 9am-5pm)

Stoeltje Diamonds (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 76 01; Wagenstraat 13-17; ☎ 8.30am-5pm)

Van Moppes & Zoon (Map pp92-3; ☎ 676 12 42; Albert Cuyppstraat 2-6; ☎ 9am-5pm)

AMSTERDAM MARKETS

Markets mean crowds: beware of pickpockets.

Albert Cuypmarkt (Map pp92-3; Albert Cuypstraat; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) General market with food, clothing, hardware and household goods at rock-bottom prices. Wide multicultural mix of wares, vendors and clientele.

Antiques market Amstelveeld (Map pp92-3; ☎ 9am-6pm last Fri of month in warmer months); Nieuwmarkt (Map pp88-9; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun May-Sep) You can peruse many genuine articles and loads of books and bric-a-brac. There's also the De Looier antiques market (below).

Bloemenmarkt (Map pp92-3; Singel; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed Sun winter) 'Floating' flower market that's actually on pilings. Traders can advise on import regulations. The market is notorious for pickpockets.

Boerenmarkt (farmers' market) Nieuwmarkt (Map pp88-9; ☎ 10am-3pm Sat); Noordermarkt (Map pp88-9; ☎ 10am-3pm Sat) Home-grown produce, organic foods and picnic provisions.

Book market Oudemanhuispoort (Map pp88-9; ☎ 11am-4pm Mon-Fri); Spui (Map pp92-3; ☎ 8am-6pm Fri) Oudemanhuispoort, the old arcade between Oudezijds Achterburgwal and Kloveniersburgwal (blink and you'll miss it), is the location of a market selling rare and old books plus newer books and art prints. The Spui also hosts a book market one day a week.

De Looier antiques market (Map pp92-3; ☎ 624 90 38; Elandsgracht 109; ☎ 11am-5pm Sat-Thu) Indoor stalls selling jewellery, furniture, art and collectibles.

Lindengracht market (Lindengracht; ☎ 11am-4pm Sat) General market.

Noordermarkt (Map pp88-9; Noorderkerkstraat; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon, 10am-3pm Sat) Antiques, fabrics and secondhand bric-a-brac.

Plant market (Map pp92-3; Amstelveeld; ☎ 3-6pm Mon Easter-Christmas) All sorts of plants, pots and vases.

Stamp & coin market (Map pp88-9; Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 276; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed & Sat) Little streetside market selling stamps, coins and medals.

Waterlooplein flea market (Map pp92-3; Waterlooplein; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5.30pm Sat) Amsterdam's most famous flea market – curios, secondhand clothing, music, electronic gear, hardware, cheap New Age gifts.

Westermarkt (Map p91; Westerstraat; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon) Cheapish clothes and textiles; some real bargains.

Smart Drugs

Remember that taking drugs out of the country is illegal.

Chills & Thrills (Map pp88-9; ☎ 638 00 15; Nieuwendijk 17) Herbal trips, mushrooms, psychoactive cacti, novelty bongos and life-sized alien sculptures. Packed with tourists.

Innerspace (Map pp88-9; ☎ 624 33 38; Spuistraat 108) Known for good service and information, this large shop started as a supplier to large parties.

Magic Mushroom Gallery (Map pp88-9; ☎ 427 57 65; Spuistraat 249) Fresh and dried shrooms, growing kits, herbal ecstasy and smart drinks.

Speciality Shops

Art Multiples (Map pp92-3; ☎ 624 84 19; Keizersgracht 510) Thousands of postcards on unusual topics, including raunchy 3D ones (popular), plus beautiful art posters and museum-shop gifts.

Condomerie het Gulden Vlies (Map pp88-9; ☎ 627 41 74; www.condomerie.nl; Warmoesstraat 141) Hundreds of kinky condoms plus lubricants and saucy gifts.

Droog Design (Map pp92-3; ☎ 523 50 59; www.droogdesign.nl; Staalstraat 78; ☎ noon-6pm Tue-Sun) Leading design firm with inventions such as the 85-lamp chandelier, the cow chair and curtains with dress patterns.

Fair Trade Shop (Map pp92-3; ☎ 625 22 45; Heiligeweg 45) Charity shop with quality, stylish goods from developing countries: clothes, gifts, CDs and ceramics. The shop works directly with producers and provides ongoing business training.

Himalaya (Map pp88-9; ☎ 626 08 99; Warmoesstraat 56) A peaceful New Age oasis in the middle of the Red Light District, this is the place to stock up on crystals, ambient CDs and books on the healing arts. More good karma is available in the tea room.

Marañon Hangmatten (Map pp92-3; ☎ 420 71 21; Singel 488) Europe's largest selection of hammocks, made by many producers from indigenous weavers to large manufacturers.

Santa Jet (Map pp88-9; ☎ 427 20 70; Prinsstraat 7) Mexican shrines, religious icons, *Day of the Dead* paraphernalia, candles and love potions.

Traditional Souvenirs

Galleria d'Arte Rinascimento (Map p91; ☎ 622 75 09; Prinsengracht 170) Royal Delftware, vases, platters, brooches, Christmas ornaments, 19th-century wall tiles and plaques.

Heinen (Map pp92-3; ☎ 627 82 99; Prinsengracht 440) Four floors of Delftware; all the major factories are

represented and all budgets are catered for (the 17th-century tulip vases cost thousands).

De Klompenboer (Map pp88-9; ☎ 623 06 32; St Antoniesbreestraat 51) Bruno, the eccentric owner, gets his mum to hand-paint all the wooden shoes. The shop displays samples of miniature wooden shoes and a 700-year-old pair.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Amsterdam is well connected to the rest of the world. If you're looking for cheap deals, advice or shared rides, you're in the right place.

Air

Most major airlines fly directly to **Schiphol** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 09000141; www.schiphol.nl), 18km south-west of the city centre. For information about getting to and from the Netherlands, including Amsterdam airline offices, see p298.

Boat

Fast Flying Ferries (☎ 639 22 47; adult/child return €7.45/4.35) runs a hydrofoil from pier 7 behind Amsterdam Centraal Station (hourly on the hour, half-hourly during peak times). The 25-minute trip drops you in Velsen, 3km short of IJmuiden, where you can catch Connexxion bus 82 or 83 into IJmuiden. For travellers to the UK and beyond, Scandinavian Seaways sails from IJmuiden to Newcastle (see p303).

Bus

For details of regional buses in the Netherlands, call the **transport information service** (☎ 09009292, per min €0.50). Fares and travel durations are covered under towns in the regional chapters.

Amsterdam has good long-distance bus links with the rest of Europe and North Africa.

Eurolines (Map pp88-9; ☎ 560 87 87; www.eurolines.nl; Rokin 10) tickets can be bought at its office near the Dam, at most travel agencies and at NS Reisburo (Netherlands Railways Travel Bureau) in Centraal Station. Fares are consistently lower than those for the train, and departures are from the **bus station** (☎ 694 56 31) next to Amstelstation.

Busabout (www.busabout.com) tickets can be bought through the company's London office – in the UK, call ☎ 020-7950 1661 – or on the coaches themselves. Coaches stop at the Hans Brinker Budget Hotel (p120) on Kerkstraat, smack in the middle of the city.

For further details of Eurolines, Busabout and other coach services, see p301.

Car & Motorcycle

Motorways link Amsterdam to Den Haag and Rotterdam in the south, and to Utrecht and Amersfoort in the southeast. Amsterdam is about 480km from Paris, 840km from Munich, 680km from Berlin and 730km from Copenhagen. The Hoek van Holland ferry port is 80km away; IJmuiden is just up the road along the Noordzeekanaal.

The Dutch automobile association, **ANWB** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 673 08 44; Museumplein 5), provides information and services if you prove membership of your own association.

Train

Amsterdam's main train station is Centraal Station. See p302 for information about international trains.

Destination	Price (€)	Duration (min)	Frequency (per hr)
Den Haag	9.50	50	4
Groningen	26.70	140	2
Haarlem	3.80	15	8
Maastricht	26.70	155	2
Rotterdam	11.20	62	4
Schiphol Airport	3.60	20	6
Utrecht	6.30	35	5

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

A taxi into Amsterdam from Schiphol Airport takes 20 to 45 minutes and costs about €40. Trains to Centraal Station leave every 15 minutes, take 15 to 20 minutes, and cost €3.60/6.20 per single/return. Train-ticket counters are in the central court of Schiphol Plaza; buy your ticket before taking the escalator down to the platforms. Buy a *strip-penkaart* here while you're at it (see the boxed text, p307).

Another way to the airport is by **Schiphol Travel Taxi** (☎ 09008876; www.schiphol.nl). This minivan service takes up to eight people from anywhere in the country to the departure terminal, provided you book a day ahead. From central Amsterdam the fare is fixed at €22 per person, one way.

By car, take the A4 freeway to/from the A10 ring road around Amsterdam. A short stretch of A9 connects to the A4 close to Schiphol. The car-hire offices at the airport are in the right corner of the complex, near the central exits of Schiphol Plaza.

PARKING

The airport's short-term parking garages charge €1.90 per half-hour for the first three hours, then €2.70 per hour. The charge is €24 a day for the first three days, €12.50 a day thereafter. The long-term parking area charges a minimum €50 for up to three days and €5 for each day thereafter – a reasonable alternative to parking in the city (see also right).

Bicycle

Amsterdam is an urban cyclist's dream: flat, beautiful and crammed full of dedicated bike paths. Local cyclists have a liberal interpretation of traffic rules, but almost everyone catches on quick. About 80,000 bicycles are stolen each year in Amsterdam alone – it's no surprise that many bikes carry locks worth more than the thing itself.

The Dutch automobile association, **ANWB** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 673 08 44; Museumplein 5), provides cycling maps and information. For details on bicycling laws, tours and more, see p69.

HIRE

Prices listed below are for standard coaster-brake bikes; models with gears cost a bit more. There's also the *bakfiets* (a carrier tricycle that looks like an ice cream vendor's), which is perfect for carting around kids (or drinking buddies). All companies listed here require a passport or ID and a credit-card imprint or cash deposit.

Bike City (Map p91; ☎ 626 37 21; www.bikecity.nl; Bloemgracht 68-70; per day/week €8.50/41) No advertising on the bikes, so you blend in better with the locals.

Holland Rent-a-Bike (Map pp88-9; ☎ 622 32 07; Damrak 247; per day/week €6.50/34.50)

MacBike (www.macbike.nl; per day/week €8.50/29.75); Centraal Station (Map pp88-9; ☎ 624 83 91); Mr Visserplein (Map p95; ☎ 620 09 85; Mr Visserplein 2); Weteringschans (Map pp92-3; ☎ 528 76 88; Weteringschans 2) Bikes come complete with an absolutely ENORMOUS logo. You will stand out.

Mike's Bike Tours (Map pp92-3; ☎ 622 79 70; www.mikesbiketours.com; Kerkstraat 134; per half day/full day/additional day €5/7/5)

**Boat
FERRIES**

There are free ferries from behind Centraal Station to destinations around the IJ, notably Amsterdam Noord (Map pp88-9). Ferries to the eastern docklands cost €1.

CANAL BOAT, BUS & BIKE

The **Canal Bus** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 623 98 86; www.canalbus.nl; day pass per adult/under 13yr €17/11) does several circuits, beginning at its stop near Centraal Station (Map pp88-9) and ending at the Rijksmuseum, between 9.50am and 8pm. The day pass is valid until noon the next day. The same company rents canal bikes (pedal boats) for €9 per person per hour (€7 if more than two people per canal bike). Docks are by Leidseplein and near the Anne Frank Huis.

Every 30 or 45 minutes the **Lovers Museum Boat** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 622 21 81; www.loverson.nl; day pass from €8.50) leaves from the Lovers terminal in front of Centraal Station. There are discounts after 1pm.

Car & Motorcycle

Honestly – why on earth would you drive around Amsterdam when you can either bike it or take advantage of the superb public-transport system? Added to that, parking is far from cheap and there are dire penalties for nonconformists: a wheel clamp and a €91 fine.

Try the **Transferium parking garage** (☎ 400 17 21) at Amsterdam Arena stadium. Parking costs €5.50 per day including two return metro tickets to the city centre.

Public Transport

When the masses need to move, Amsterdam's public transport – tram, *snelttram* (fast tram), bus and metro – gets them there with startling efficiency. Most tram and bus lines, as well as the metro, converge at Centraal Station.

Amsterdam transport authority **GVB** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 09008011; www.gvb.nl; Stationsplein 10; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-9pm Sat & Sun) has an information office across the tram tracks from Centraal Station's main entrance. Here you can get tickets, maps and the like. The website has lots of useful information, including details of how to reach key sights.

TICKETS & PASSES

The best deal is the *strippenkaart*: a multifare 'strip ticket' that's valid on all buses, trams and metro routes (see the boxed text, p307).

Taxi

Amsterdam taxis are expensive, even over short journeys. Try **Taxicentrale Amsterdam** (☎ 677 77 77).

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