

ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

JOURNAL CONCIERGE: AN INSIDER'S GUIDE



Photographs by Herman van Housden for The Wall Street Journal



The Gourmet
Marjke Vogelzang
Food artist,
owner of Proef
restaurant and author of
"Eat Love"

Sweet Stuff: ⑨ De Bakkerswinkel. A bakery chain with three franchises in Amsterdam, including a location in one of the city's oldest districts. They serve delicious homemade scones, croissants, quiches and cheese cake. Zeedijk 37, debakkerswinkel.nl

Eco Events: Strawberry Earth. A very interesting group that organizes surprising events such as a film festival about "green" food, quiz nights and eco-fashion shows. Strawberry Earth inspires those interested in sustainable living and eco-friendly design. strawberryearth.com

Brew Crew: ⑧ Brouwerij 't IJ. Located in a former public bath house on the IJ River. The owner, Kaspar Peterson, is a former pop musician who mastered brewing in Belgium. The beers are organic and top-fermented, which is why we serve them in our restaurant. Funenkade 7, brouwerijhetij.nl

Cookbookery: De Kookboekhandel. In this store you can find cookbooks from all over the world—they even import from places like Egypt and Iran. It's where we go whenever we need to buy a present for our staff. Haarlemmerdijk 133, kookboekhandel.com

Foodie's Delight: De Pure Markt. The spot for artisanal food, in particular local produce such as farmer's cheese. Open most Sundays, it "travels" to different locations. Puremarkt.nl



AMSTERDAM

DOUBLE DUTCH

BETTER BROKE in Amsterdam than a millionaire in Paris—or so warbled Johnny Jordaan, a Dutch folk singer who was a national icon in the 1950s. Whether or not you agree is irrelevant; the point is that Amsterdam natives are a highly opinionated bunch. And that fits this slightly peculiar city just fine.

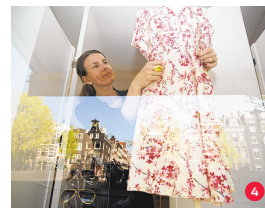
Amsterdam lacks the size of London and the grandeur of Paris. It doesn't tower like New York or buzz like Rome. Its glory days, when the city was the center of global trade, arts and science, are 300 years gone. Yet every year, millions come to the Low Country for a piece of Amsterdam's special vibe, which might best be summed up as a spirit of contented contradiction.

Amsterdam is cosmopolitan but relaxed, a big city that feels like a small town, criss-crossed by its famously charming canals, the narrow streets commonly navigated by bike. It's a contemporary design hotbed that can seem conventional at a glance. The seedy red-light district is a short stroll from the mighty Royal Palace at Dam Square. (One of its alleys leads to upscale eatery Blauw aan de Wal.) The infamous coffee shops that peddle cannabis are scattered through the city's centuries-old historic center.

While all the elements of classic Amsterdam are alive and well, this town is far from frozen in time—its neighborhoods continue to evolve in intriguing ways. Over the past couple of decades, the Jordaan district has gone from a ragged working-class area to a pedestrian heaven packed with designer shops, coffee houses and bars. The Eastern Docklands, abandoned by shipping companies in the '70s, is now the go-to locale for fans of contemporary architecture. Even the red-light district is undergoing a gradual transformation, as the city council now discourages brothels and encourages designers and artists to set up shop.

This weekend, red isn't the color that will be most associated with the city—hundreds of thousands of orange-clad revelers will invade Amsterdam on Saturday for Queen's Day, a national celebration of the monarch's birthday. (True to quirky Dutch form, Queen Beatrix, who was born on Jan. 31, celebrates on a predecessor's birthday because it's warmer.) The city turns into a combination open-air theater and concert hall—and garage sale, with locals all over town trying to sell off their unwanted goods. Wear orange and bring an open mind.

—Maarten van Tartwijk



PLUS, DON'T MISS...

• **Floating Flower Market:** ⑤ Amsterdam has several flower markets, but this is the only floating one in the world. Open Monday through Saturday, on Singel canal

• **Moooi Gallery:** ⑧ The international design brand's flagship store is in the colorful Jordaan neighborhood. moooi-gallery.com

• **Nine Streets:** An enclave of narrow streets in the city center, packed with vintage shops, shoe purveyors and designer stores. theninestreets.com

► See more photos of favorite destinations in Amsterdam at WSJ.com/Travel.



The Fashionists
Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren
Designers behind the
Amsterdam-based
brand Viktor & Rolf

Secret Inn: Seven One Seven. A hidden jewel of a hotel with a lovely canal location. There are only eight rooms, and each one has a different, eccentric décor. Prinsengracht 717, 717hotel.nl

Red Light Restaurant: ② Blauw aan de Wal. Elegant fusion cuisine served in a surprising location—at the end of a gritty alley. The restaurant has a great host who knows a lot about wine. Oudezijds Achterwal 99, blauwaandewal.com

Vintage Bling: Kunsthandel Inez Stodel. A favorite jewelry dealer of ours, situated on the Nieuwe Spiegelstraat. They have the most beautiful and unusual old pieces, and are on a lovely road filled with quaint antique shops. You can find real gems there. Nieuwe Spiegelstraat 65, inezstodel.com

Curated Clothing: ④ Van Ravenstein. A designer fashion store on the Keizersgracht. Their buying is unique and they offer a thoughtful assortment from luxury designers. Keizersgracht 359, van-ravenstein.nl

Expiring Art: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. This is a very cool art space. They have been putting on contemporary shows that last for only a brief period. "Temporary Stedelijk" showed two interesting exhibitions: "Taking Place" and "Monumentalism." Now "Temporary Stedelijk 2" is on display. Paulus Potterstraat 13, stedelijk.nl



The Novelist
Arnon Grunberg
Author of more than a
dozen books, including
"The Jewish Messiah"
and "Tooth and Nail";
Amsterdam native

French Fare: Le Hollandais. Delicious food and very friendly waiters. The chef occasionally plays the organ. If I were to start a restaurant, it would be something like this, maybe without the organ. Amstelwijk 41, lehollandais.nl

Chocolate Shop: Patisserie Pompadour. The best place to have coffee and cake during daytime. For when you are in Amsterdam and want to catch the atmosphere of southern Germany or Vienna. Huidenstraat 12, 31-20-6239554

Urban Zen: ① Hotel Pulitzer. Has the most beautiful and quiet garden in the city center. The waiters are sometimes not around, the menu isn't very surprising but the garden compensates for all that. Prinsengracht 315-331, hotelpulitzeramsterdam.nl

City Swim: Amstel Amsterdam. A little expensive for what it has to offer, but the swimming pool is very pleasant. It has a view of the river, and you will never run into a big crowd. Worth it when you want to go swimming with your wife. Or with your lover. Herengracht 341, ambassade-hotel.nl

Rendezvous Spot: ⑥ Grand Café-Restaurant le Klas. A good place for a secret encounter. Also for a secret encounter with yourself. Or to have dinner before you take the night train to Milan. Well, okay, the night train to Milan doesn't really run anymore, but a few night trains still do. Amsterdam Central Station, near platform 2B, restaurantleklas.nl



The Night Owl
Isis van der Wel
DJ, music producer,
party organizer and
official promoter of
the city's nightlife

House of Rock: Paradiso. This is our pop music temple, a beautiful old church close to the Leidseplein where all types of bands, DJs, singer/songwriters come. An intimate concert place in the heart of the city. Weteringschans 6-8, paradiso.nl

It Club: Trouw. The hottest club in town, with two halls situated in an old newspaper printing facility. It has a restaurant and holds exhibitions and art gatherings. Wibautstraat 127, trouwamsterdam.nl

Perfect Park: Vondelpark. Amsterdam's biggest park, in the middle of the city and surrounded by beautiful houses. Along the park you will find terraces, playgrounds and restaurants. Best bet for a sunny moment. Main entrance at Stadhouderskade, vondelpark.nl

See and Be Seen: Café Noorderlicht. A glass restaurant on the shore of the IJ River. Cozy, colorful and a great place to watch the sunset. Take the free ferry at the back of central station to NDSM. It leaves every 15 minutes. On the other side, it's just a five-minute walk. Neverlatweg 33, noorderlichtcafe.nl

Sun and Sand: ⑦ Blijburg. This special city beach is just 20 minutes away by tram 26 from the central station. Breakfast place by day, restaurant and club at night. There are many special events, music and theater shows. Great for kids too. Muiderlaan 1001, blijburg.nl