

ESCAPE



ODE to Amsterdam

Europe's current 'IT' city offers a multicultural mélange of pursuits

By Mary Murray

Walking along Amsterdam's curvaceous canals feels like stepping into a poem. Here, sights, sounds, and smells take on a lyrical life of their own. Buildings morph from piles of brick to old age personified, with tilting facades that reflect the passage of time. Bridges are not means of transportation but connective threads from one adventure to the next. Bountiful bikes erupt into a cacophony of bells and tire squeaks that perfectly captures the city's energy. Tulips coalesce into a kaleidoscope of colors, an olfactory overload of perfumes. Amsterdam is unlike any other place on earth, and it's fast becoming one of the most popular destinations of the twenty-first century.

Heralded as the next Venice, Amsterdam has similar aesthetic charms—with its maze of man-made canals—but boasts a singular rebellious spirit. While many of its 20 million annual tourists will partake in the Red Light District's nightlife, far more will find solace in a waterside stroll, visit world-class cultural attractions, dine at Dutch and global restaurants, and stay in stellar accommodations that merge Amsterdam's iconography with luxury amenities.

One such property is the Pulitzer Amsterdam (pulitzeramsterdam.com). Composed of 25 Golden Age houses, this stylish hotel is centrally located

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COURTESY OF PULITZER AMSTERDAM



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SCENES FROM THE PULITZER AMSTERDAM, CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: RELAX WITH A COCKTAIL AT THE HOTEL BAR; PLAY IN THE CENTRAL GARDEN; TOUR THE CANALS ABOARD THE HOTEL'S PRIVATE BOAT; STAY IN THE OPULENT BOOK COLLECTOR'S SUITE.



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within the city's Canal Ring, between Prinsengracht (the "Prince's Canal") and Keizersgracht (the "Emperor's Canal"). It's adjacent to the Nine Streets shopping district, is a block away from the Anne Frank House, and is walking distance from most must-see sights. But beyond its convenient locale, the Pulitzer Amsterdam's setting is truly magical. Guests can enjoy a latte or cocktail in the garden while listening to a symphony of chimes emanating from Westerkerk—the same church bells Anne Frank wrote about in her diary. You can also embark on a canal tour aboard the hotel's saloon boat, a circa-1909 vessel that sets sail daily for 75-minute, narrated excursions.

The Pulitzer Amsterdam's reverence for its hometown is apparent upon arrival. Step into its vestibule and gaze up at the piano suspended from the ceiling; it's a replica of the one used in the first Prinsengracht concert, which occurs every August atop

its eponymous canal. To the right is a flower shop that speaks to Amsterdam's indelible tie to all things floral. Dutch visuals continue in the lobby, where chiaroscuro-esque lighting gives way to check-in stations fashioned out of blue-and-white tiles.

This attention to detail extends to the well-appointed guestrooms. No two are exactly the same, but they do share commonalities, such as headboards that echo the shape of the ubiquitous gables. Guests will also love the *stropwafels*—two thin cookies joined by a wisp of syrup—left at turn-down service. Other accommodations include lavish Collector's Suites themed to hobbies like art, reading, and music.

Within its design philosophy, the Pulitzer Amsterdam celebrates each building's quirks and venerates their one-time occupants. While the suites take liberty in imagining the interests of bygone residents, the on-site restaurant, Jansz, sources decor cues from the main entrance's past life as a pharmacy, complete with an array of apothecary curiosities. The eatery was named for the structure's original owner, a coppersmith named Volkert Jansz, so copper elements appear throughout. The menu features familiar ingredients elevated to an artform, such as luscious lobster risotto and a delicate pea soup sprinkled with sausage. Prior to dinner, sip specialty drinks inspired by literary figures at the hip hotel bar.

Amsterdam as a whole provides a window into the Netherlands' gastronomic past and present. Venture down the block to arrive at Restaurant 't Zwaantje (zwaantje-restaurant.nl), which began as a traditional Dutch brown café where locals could unwind with a libation and a small meal. Not much has changed across its selection of home-style favorites like chicken in the pot, a hearty tomato-based stew.



KRISTEN VANSANTEN / THE REMBRANDT HOUSE MUSEUM



JAN KEEB STEENMAN / VAN GOGH MUSEUM



COURTESY OF MOCO MUSEUM



MARY MURRAY

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: STUDIO AND SALON AT THE REMBRANDT HOUSE MUSEUM; LICHTENSTEIN'S VAN GOGH ROOM AT MOCO MUSEUM; INTERIOR OF THE VAN GOGH MUSEUM; FLOATING FLOWER MARKET ON SINGEL CANAL.

For another slice of the city's culinary heritage, savor an Indonesian *rijsttafel*, or "rice table." Indonesia was once a Dutch colony, so its cuisine is commonplace in Amsterdam. This particular feast stars rice accompanied by a dozen or so small dishes plus pickled condiments, and it's the best way to try a range of delicacies. Sampurna (sampurna.com) serves a handful of rice table options, all of which require at least two people to consume.

To gain insight into what's new and now, check out Foodhallen (foodhallen.nl). Envisioned as an open-concept industrial marketplace, this amalgam of food stalls runs the gamut from tacos to banh mi and all the dim sum in between. It's the ideal place to kick back with a craft beer and let the day slip away as you sample one delicious bite after another.

In step with its dining scene, Amsterdam abounds in outstanding attractions. Three of its most impactful sights revolve around a few of the Netherlands' most famous former residents. Make reservations for the Anne Frank House (annefrank.org), where the Frank family hid for two years during the Nazi occupation of Amsterdam. An audio guide tells Anne's story—and those of so many others who suffered and perished in the Holocaust—as you weave through the cramped annex. Clippings of movie stars glued to the walls reveal Anne as a typical teenager, one who longed to return to normalcy. Her diary, also on display, hints at her budding writing abilities and her dreams of a better, brighter tomorrow.

Head over to Jodenbreestraat ("Jewish Broad Street") to tour the home of one of history's greatest artists. In the seventeenth century, Amsterdam became a hub for industry and trade, resulting in an era of unprecedented prosperity and growth known as the Dutch Golden Age. Within this milieu, the arts thrived as wealthy individuals commissioned portraits and other fine works. Born in

1606, Rembrandt was poised to take advantage of this boom—and he had the talent to back it up. The Rembrandt House Museum (rembrandthuis.nl) provides a picture of his life at the height of his success, to include period-accurate furnishings and demonstrations of his etching and paint-making processes. Visitors can walk through the studio where Rembrandt produced such legendary compositions as *The Night Watch*, and bask in the same sunbeams in which the master worked.

Fast-forward 250 years, and another native son demands the spotlight. Vincent van Gogh turned to painting in his late 20s and created the majority of his oeuvre—some 2,100 pieces—over the course of a decade, before committing suicide at age 37. An impressive cross section of his output and personal effects are on view at Amsterdam's Van Gogh Museum (vangoghmuseum.nl). The artist's letters illuminate his innermost thoughts, while works such as *Almond Blossom*, *Sunflowers*, and numerous self-portraits showcase his knack for channeling inner turmoil into transcendent art. To further experience van Gogh's lasting influence, make a beeline to the nearby Moco Museum (mocomuseum.com) to enter Roy Lichtenstein's immersive 3-D interpretation of van Gogh's *Bedroom in Arles*.

Regardless of how you spend your days in Amsterdam, save plenty of time for simple meandering. To the floating flower market, where fixed barges bloom with rainbow hues. To a coffee shop, where rich chocolate milk and herbal refreshments form the ultimate Dutch duo. And to the quaint neighborhood nooks, where strawberry-blond cats roam the same cobblestone streets that have long intoxicated generations of artists, storytellers, and travelers. ◀