

Amsterdam: The Dutch capital

Posted on [April 7, 2013](#) by [Sunniva Davies-Rommetveit](#)



I have been lucky enough to visit the Dutch capital twice. I went for the first time at New Year's in 2012, and then went more or less one month later, having decided that my initial visit hadn't been the most informative – that is there was quite a lot of partying, and not very much exploration. I'm very glad that I did this, because both visits could not have been more different; it taught me that it is down to you to get below a city's surface.

The first time I went was to celebrate the incoming new year with a group of friends. As can be imagined, the first of our four day-break was spent wandering around Amsterdam and chatting. Even then I could see that this was a beautiful city; one with straight canals, ancient canal houses, biking lanes galore and many haunts for tourists like ourselves. The second visit was a longer affair, I stayed for 5 nights, and planned what I wanted to see beforehand.

The coffee shops: Describing the coffee shops in Amsterdam is a necessity, given that this is what the city is famed for in the rest of Europe; though incoming laws will fortunately change this. I must say that, if given the choice, I'd avoid talking about them altogether; I feel like you hear enough hype about them anyway. Many Brits go to Amsterdam only to take drugs; something which is a real shame, given the beauty of the city. I cannot deny that going into one of them was, indeed, an exotic experience for an uptight Brit like myself. One of my friends was a bit of a regular, and knew exactly what to order. I on the other hand remained open-mouthed and wide-eyed as the loud music and garish lighting made me feel even more uncomfortable. The sticking-out-like-a-sore-thumb feeling didn't subside when we sat down. For me, the whole thing became a bit of an ordeal. I began to count the minutes when we could go out into the fresh air again. Generally-speaking, this was just one of the many differing types of coffee shops in the city; but in my opinion, once

you've seen one, you've seen them all.

Anne Frank museum: I highly recommend the Anne Frank Museum. When hiding in Nazi-occupied Holland with her family, Anne Frank wrote her world-renowned diary. In it, she describes with heart-wrenching detail the ordeal that her family were put through when hiding in a secret annex, whose entrance was hidden by a bookcase. This hidden annex is now on public display, with an audio tour guiding visitors around the building. The place remains unchanged from the days of the occupation, and it is incredible to see how small the annex was. The tour is, as can be imagined, incredibly sad. But it is also an inspirational museum; the fact that the family were helped by people who risked their lives when concealing them, and their attempted maintenance of an ordinary day-to-day life in spite of the circumstances, says a great deal about the human spirit. An absolute must-see.

Van Gogh: The Vincent Van Gogh museum is a large, bright and modern building, and this contrasts notably with the personality of the artist to whom it is dedicated. Van Gogh was a great artist, as can be seen by the many works on display, and the knowledge that he shot himself in 1890 is even sadder when you are brought face-to-face with his talent. It is definitely worth a visit.

The red light district: Going to the Red Light District was something which I didn't enjoy at all. It was sickening to be faced with half-naked women competing for "customers", and I ended up staring at the ground for the majority of our walk. The district is, in reality, only about two streets, but that in itself is too much if you ask me. This seedy side to an otherwise lovely city is, for me, a real shame.

Vondelpark: We had a long walk in the Vondelpark on a crisp February afternoon, just after it had snowed the day before. The Vondelpark is one of the biggest in Amsterdam, with 120 acres of open space. It boasts a rose garden and an open-air theatre. The latter is open in the summer months, and puts on an array of musical and theatrical performances. It was a lovely afternoon retreat from a bustling city, and I hope to visit it again in the summer months, to see some open-air performances.



Top tips: Wrap up warm if you go in January! I was surprised that the temperatures plunged to a chilly minus ten degrees on occasion. Before travelling, always check the weather, because you really don't want to be caught out.

Go to an alternative cinema! We decided that it was only right to see something as alternative as *The Artist*, in a cinema with a difference. It was a small, privately-owned cinema which allowed you to take glasses of beer and wine into the viewing, and which had an array of snacks on offer. It was great fun!