



The Wayfarer

By Dawn M. Wayand

Amsterdam: It's Not Entirely What You Think...



To some, Amsterdam has been typically dubbed as Europe's "Sin City" due to the legal use of marijuana and prostitution, however, beyond the Red Light District and the scattered "coffee" shops of Amsterdam, I found a beautiful city as well as a lot of history to explore for thirty travelers.



Amsterdam is fourth in line for Europe's top tourism city behind London, Paris and Rome. Classified as the "Venice of the North", the

inner city of Amsterdam literally has a web of canals parting each row of apartments and businesses. I was not only able to use the street names on a map, but also the

canal names to help guide me, as I wandered around looking for specific places in the city. Amsterdam is full of voluptuous parks: some with mostly rocks and trees like the park in Museumplein (shown here), and others with green grass, ponds and running trails like Vondelpark and Rembrandt Park.

There are also many museums to visit in Amsterdam as the city is home to Heineken, Rembrandt, Van Gogh and Anne Frank - among others. The Anne Frank Haus is located at 265 Prinsengracht and definitely worth visiting. Historically the Netherlands tried to stay neutral during World War II, but Germany invaded the country in May of

1940 and forces terrorized Amsterdam's large Jewish population.

This landmark was home to a young girl and her family

where they hid from German forces in a secret attic apartment behind a bookcase for two years before being discovered and sentenced to concentration camps.



Another large museum to be sure to visit is the Rijksmuseum located in the Museum Quarter. This museum regularly exhibits Dutch art and history from the Middle Ages onward. During my visit this last December, the museum presented art influenced by the

Dutch War of Independence against the Spanish on exhibit.

Dam Square is one of the main focal points of the city. In the midst of the square is the National Monument, dedicated to the Dutch soldiers who died during World World II. For those who like to bar hop, Rembrandtplein is the major “entertainment” hub of the city full of bars and discos. For those who like to shop, Amsterdam’s most famous day market is located on Albert Cupy Street, a few blocks south of the Heineken Museum. It



features a street full of fresh seafood, clothing and other items.

The city really seemed to be a fun, livable place even though it was swamped with tourists flocking to see what the hype of the city was all about. As I pleasantly discovered, it wasn’t solely the “Sin City” I thought it would be, but a historical, artistic and fun city that I would definitely come back to again.

Destination Facts

Language: Dutch

Currency: Euro

Food Known For: Hot Pea Soup, Gouda Cheese

Travel Planning Tips - Europe Vacation Tips Series

Part I - Planning Where To Go

So you're ready to take that leap over the big pond to enjoy some new cultures and experiences? I can say it's been the best thing I have ever done in my life - and now I'm addicted! This year will be my fourth year in a row traveling to Europe.

This article, the first in a series of short articles for getting the most out of your vacation in Europe, will cover planning where to go in Europe prior to embarking on your journey. Each article will reflect things I am actually doing now in preparation for my trip in December of this year.

First, evaluate how many days you have for your vacation. From this, you can figure out how many days to allot to each city or town you are visiting. Next, make a list of cities and towns in countries you'd like to visit and experience. Inventory any foreign language familiarities you may have - no matter how basic. Although there are people in many countries that speak some degree of English, if you can speak even the basic necessities in another country, it is really helpful and the locals appreciate it.

If you are really limited with vacation time and want to see as much as possible in that time, look over a map of Europe and from your list of cities and towns, select places near each other. For instance, you wouldn't want to select a Western European city like Lisbon, Portugal; an Eastern European city like Prague, Czech Republic and then a Southern European city like Rome, Italy if you only have five days in Europe because you would end up spending nearly a day's worth of valuable sightseeing time traveling on a train from Lisbon to Prague! When allocating time to cities and towns, my general rule that's worked well for me in the past, is 3-5 days in big cities like Paris or Rome; and 2-4 days in smaller cities and towns like Venice or Zurich.

Next month, we'll continue with Part II of this series: **Booking Your Flight**

Restaurant Pick

Located between an offbeat coffeeshop alley and Nieuwendijk is the mariner-themed restaurant, *De Passage*, with food so good, it made it a second time around into my restaurant visit experiences in Amsterdam. The Nieuwendijk entrance houses a room full of smaller tables for their cafe while the back room with the alley entrance is for lunch and dinner patrons.

If you are looking for some of the tastiest sangria imaginable, this place rates an A+. It has an extremely fruity taste that goes down smooth with a nice finish.

For dinner, I highly recommend their Petto di Pollo al Gorgonzola. For the non-Dutch speaking folk, this is a pair of savory scalloped chicken breasts topped with a gorgonzola cream sauce. It is served with a side of the roasted vegetable of the day; French fries; and a small side salad of greens, tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers.

Service is a little on the slow side at times, but this is typical, like many other places in Europe, as dining is not always the “turn and burn” experience abroad that so many of us are accustomed to in the States.

De Passage
Nieuwendijk 224
1012 Amsterdam, Netherlands
02 06 24 84 39

Travel Q&A's

Q. When is the best time to purchase an airline ticket to Europe?

A. I typically purchase my ticket four (4) months in advance of my trip. You usually have more fare choices as well as seat preferences to choose from.

Q. What's the lesser expensive cities to fly into when going to Europe?

A. The larger cities, such as Paris and London in the U.K., usually get more flight traffic per day than smaller cities so this sometimes makes the ticket price less than smaller cities. You can also oftentimes get direct flights if you live near a big city in the States as well. Use flight comparison tools on the web. Keep “open-jaw” flights (flight into one European city and return to the States from another European city) in mind as an option too if you are traveling to more than one country. This can often save you money as well.