

1 IN AMSTERDAM

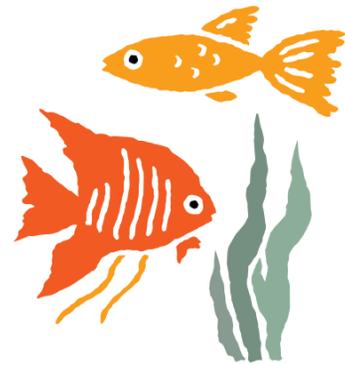
I'm a Swedish IT guy who arrived in Amsterdam in April 2011, only to find that I liked it so much that I wanted to stay. I simply didn't use my return ticket, instead I proceeded full speed into the Dutch culture, with all that it entailed.

This ebook is aimed towards foreigners coming to work and live in Amsterdam over a prolonged period of time. Due to the housing market with its high rental prices, it is common for expatriates to share apartments and to sublet rooms in apartments. This ebook will introduce you to how it works with renting rooms from apartment owners in Amsterdam.

When you arrive in Amsterdam everything is new and fresh. As you make your way into the city centre from the airport you have enough time to build up high expectations of Amsterdam. Anyone coming to Amsterdam should know that this is a global village, a city where thousands upon thousands arrive every year. Some come here for a sabbatical or temporary work, others are relocated here by their employers and remain for a longer term.

One thing that brings all these people together is the fact that the housing situation in Amsterdam is a peculiar one. Housing is scarce and renting an entire apartment is very expensive, so the natural choice is to share apartment with others. To conclude, the market for renting rooms is huge in Amsterdam.

When I wrote first edition of this ebook in 2011, I mentioned that one should expect to pay between 400 to 600€ in monthly rent. Now in 2014 the prices are higher and I suggest that you expect to pay at least 600€ for a reason-



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in Amsterdam in Netherlands.**





able room. With reasonable I am referring to rooms with at most two room mates, with electricity and water included. But beware, this is a minimum rent and not at all set in stone. It is solely based on experience and the fact that I take time to look for rooms that fit my budget and has the conveniences I expect (which includes Internet).

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Paul C Mainly

2 WHAT AMSTERDAM OFFERS

Remember that Amsterdam is one of the major international hubs in Europe with high numbers of

people arriving every year. Just like the social life the housing situation is vibrant. Most people who come to Amsterdam to stay for a limited time decide to share an apartment with others. It is a practical question since the rents are very high for most apartments in this city where space is scarce.

Perhaps you already decided before travelling to Amsterdam that you want to stay around for a while. Or you might just have fallen in love with the city, like so many others, during a visit, and decided in the spur of the moment to stay longer.

Regardless, you are looking for somewhere more permanent to stay than a hotel and this will most likely be a room to rent. You need to keep in mind that this is a city that is bustling with expats, students as well as an international workforce. To your advantage the Dutch speak good English and they are used to foreigners in their capital, so often that it is appreciated that the sub-

tenant want to stay a longer period.

Moving on... Although your first thought is 'I need a room', you need to take several things into account.

You can either choose to rent an apartment on your own and sublet to others, or to share an apartment with others.

To do the former, you will need to have a job or a substantial amount of money set aside. Many apartment owners and agencies require you to have a job however.

3 LANGUAGE AND TRENDS

Most people who visit Amsterdam are pleasantly surprised to find that the Dutch speak English effortlessly and that they will happily engage in an English conversation. It goes further than this since it means that when you look for rooms and negotiate with apartment owners you can use English as the preferred language. The

Dutch are more open than many other Europeans when it comes to using English during negotiations. Add to this that there are many expatriates living in Amsterdam, so there is a common understanding that foreigners renting rooms is in full swing. The market is so big that there are web sites that specialize in the market for rooms to rent (more about this later).

With this in mind you should always make sure that when you post ads or reply to ads, that you use correct English and do your spell-checking!

4 GETTING STARTED

Although I was not sure about staying in Amsterdam as I arrived, that will be the reference point for this ebook. So I presume that you arrive in Amsterdam knowing that you will live here for awhile. In case you have not researched the market for rooms in Amsterdam beforehand, or have friends or acquaintances that can help you, you have to consider that it is hard to find something earlier than a

month before the desired moving in date, as most apartment owners prefer to have a very short time period between the person moving out and the next tenant. This is logical enough as they do not want to have a month without a rent.

I learned this the hard way, that is, by trial and error. In addition to the '1 month' trend you will also need to consider the season when you moved to Amsterdam. There are several concerns. First off, there are plenty of students in Amsterdam and they tend to move in and out of rooms just before the semester start or end. So you can expect more available rooms on the market in end of summer as well as during Christmas times. The downside is of course that there are others thinking the same. The net effect that I have noticed from my own moving around is that it is more difficult to find something in the middle of summer and just before and after Christmas, because you then also have the added effect of holidays. Not many apartment owners are keen on using their holidays to interview new tenants.

To summarize: In end of summer (between August and September)

and in the beginning of the year (between January and February), it can be easier to find a room to rent. You should limit yourself to searching for a room in the months June, July or December!

IT IS ALWAYS BETTER TO ASK TOO MUCH THAN TOO LITTLE DURING THE DISCUSSION WITH YOUR POTENTIAL HOUSEMATES. OF COURSE YOU DO NOT HAVE TO MAKE IT TOO STRICT, BUT ENSURE THAT YOU COVER ALL OF THE ABOVE POINTS SO THERE WILL BE NO UNPLEASANT SURPRISES LATER ON.

5 BE ORGANISED

If you are not on location in Amsterdam you need to extra careful while establishing contact with apartment owners. Never ever pay a deposit before you actually move in and are handed the keys. Also never pay the security deposit in cash, always to a bank transfer stating in the description clearly what the transfer is for. If anyone asks you to put down a sum of money 'to show you are seriously interested', sim-



ply cut all contact and walk away. That is a hustle and yes, it does happen. I had the experience once and simply walked away saying I was not interested.

The best option is of course if you already have contacts in Amsterdam who can refer you to people renting out rooms. This is a luxury however and most people in Amsterdam are stuck with the one option to use various web sites to search for rooms. This means that there are a number of extra precautions to take, as follows:

Some web sites require you to pay a sum of money to be able to reply to classifieds and to send messages to other web site users. If you need to pay anything before

even viewing the classified ads, move on to the next web site. It is simple: You first need to know what you are buying, in this case, how many rooms are available on the site and what is the average turnover of new ads? So, avoid web sites that require you to pay just to get started.

Room ads should always contain the following elementary information:

Location (street address). Description of the neighbourhood.

Distance to a super market such as Albert Heijn or Dirk.

Size of room.

Monthly rent and costs for electricity and water. Method of payment (never accept cash method).

Deposit. The amount and when it should be repayed to you after moving out of the room.

Number of house mates you will share with as well as their gender.

The date you will move in.

The notice period (both for you and for the apartment owner).

Shared facilities such as kitchen and bathroom and shower/bathtub.

Availability of Internet.

Furniture available in the room, an inventory of everything available in the room as you move in. The inventory should take note of any damage to furniture.

Length of rental period or unlimited rental period.

For pet owners and smokers, you would of course need to ask whether it will be possible to have a pet indoors, as well as if you are allowed to smoke cigarettes.

6 THE PRICES

When I wrote first edition of this ebook in 2011, I mentioned that one should expect to pay between 400 to 600€ in monthly rent. Now in 2014 the prices are higher and I suggest that you expect to pay at least 600€ for a reasonable room.

With reasonable I am referring to rooms with at most two room mates, with electricity and water included. But beware, this is a minimum rent and not at all set in stone. It is solely based on experience and the fact that I take time to look for rooms that fit my budget and has the conveniences I expect.

7 DECIPHERING ROOM ADS

Think of renting rooms like online dating. Well, at least in the initial stage. In order to see if it worthwhile following up on an ad (think date), you want to know that the person is for real (avoiding scams), as well as have enough information to go on based on the ad, to see whether this is something that could suit you. Again, with the analogy of online dating, you can compare this with a well filled out profile which tells you enough to know if the person (room) might suit you.

DOES THE PRICE SEEM TOO

GOOD TO BE TRUE? THEN IT MOST LIKELY IS. AVOID. DOES THE APARTMENT OWNER WANT YOU TO PAY AN AMOUNT OF MONEY IN ADVANCE TO SHOW THAT YOU ARE "SERIOUS"? AVOID. DOES THE APARTMENT OWNER LIVE "ABROAD" AND ASK YOU TO WALK TO THE APARTMENT AND LOOK IN THROUGH THE WINDOW BEFORE ARRANGING A CONTRACT (AND SO NO REAL LIFE MEETING OR HOUSE VIEWING)? AVOID.

YOU MAY THINK THAT THE ABOVE IS INCREDULOUS, BUT THEY ARE ALL EXAMPLES OF REAL SCAMS ONLINE.

8 PICKING THE RIGHT NEIGHBOURHOOD FOR YOU

The neighbourhoods in Amsterdam are:

Oud-West (Old West), slightly

west of Vondelpark.

Oud-Zuid (Old South), slightly south of Museumplein.

Nieuwmarkt, nearby the Red Light district.

De Baarsjes, located by Rembrandtpark and a short distance from the south of Vondelpark.

Jordaan, smack in the old central parts of Amsterdam.

Amsterdam Noord (north of the city).

Bijlmer.

Some of these areas very difficult to find rooms in so upon arrival many expatriates tend to move slightly further away from the center. Noord-Amsterdam and Bijlmer are two good examples of such neighbourhoods.

You will also live with apartment mates that do not do the dishes when they should, or who leave laundry lying around for you to stumble over. When you start



searching for a room in Amsterdam, you need to address the following questions:

Where do I want to live?

How many people am I prepared to share with?

How far from the center am I prepared to live?

Amsterdam is a small city in geographical terms but large when it comes to the cultural diversity. In a city so small, it can come as a surprise that there are so big differences between neighbourhoods. The vital tradeoff to consider when deciding on neighbourhood is Price – Area Charm – Room Comfort.

You should also consider accessibility. How easy is it to get in

and out of the apartment? Is it far to the nearest grocery store? How about the night life, is it busy during nights with plenty of noise? How old is the building and how well is it insulated? You want to know this as many buildings are old and lack proper heating which can be a real nuisance on a cold Dutch winter. What about mice, does the apartment have a lot of problems with mice? Amsterdam has plenty of mice and it can range from no problem at all in an apartment, to entire mice colonies that make plenty of noise during nights. I have seen it all, from no problem with mice at all, to basically living with mice so comfortable that they don't mind running around in middle of day. Face it, in Amsterdam, mice are aplenty.

As I moved between rooms I usually had to choose between cheap and far away from the center (usually less picturesque) or pleasant neighbourhoods closer to the center and more expensive. The further you go from the old center,



the more recently built houses you will see and this also means less of the atmosphere that many associate with Amsterdam. In general people tend to avoid the south of Amsterdam (Amsterdam Zuid). The old saying 'Location is everything' does not have to be 100% correct when renting rooms in Amsterdam. It is the sum of all factors and those that are most important to you that should put you on the right track to find a room that suits you.

9 DE PIJP - INCLUDING NIEUWE PIJP

This area is known for having the small and charming Sarphatipark and the street Eerste van der Helstraat with popular restaurants and

bars. This is one of the most crowded places in night time.

De Pijp is in the old south neighbourhood of Amsterdam and has a long tradition of being a hotspot for entertainment. There is also the daily market Albert Cuypmarkt, which sees as many tourists as Amsterdammers strawling around to make bargains.

South of Centuirbaan and Sarphatipark are many residential buildings with plenty of people renting. This is one of the most difficult areas to find a room to rent. My experience with De Pijp is limited to a two week stay in an entire apartment, a very welcome stay where I also took care of a cat and strawled on a daily basis to Sar-

phatipark less than 100 metres away for my brunch. It was in the middle of summer and with very high temperatures I had the opportunity to experience De Pijp in the best of conditions – Warm, sunny and with a lot of free time to check out the restaurants and bars there. I highly recommend the area around Centuirbaan and Sarphatipark.

10 OUD WEST - THE OLD WEST

This is one of the more fashionable neighbourhoods in Amsterdam. The homes here are very stately and the houses tall and sturdy, in contrast to those in the Jordaan.

11 OUD ZUID - THE OLD SOUTH

This is next to the Vondelpark, the largest park in Amsterdam. It also includes the Museumkwartier where the Rijksmuseum, Van Gogh museum and Stedelijk museums are. The Old South could be said to be the

home of the high end cultural Amsterdam and is the opposite of the Red Light and drug tourism.

12 NIEUWMARKT

Nearby the Red Light district lies Nieuwmarkt, just south of the central station. The market with the same name is the center of the neighbourhood and it is a vibrant place with bars, restaurants and of course, tourists aplenty. Expensive to rent.

13 DE BAARSJES

Located by Rembrandtpark and a short distance from the south of Vondelpark. This is a quiet neighbourhood just south of Jordaan and to the east of Westerpark. This is considered hip these days and there are plenty of restaurants and bars, for instance around the square Mercatorplein.

14 JORDAAN

Smack in the old central parts of



Amsterdam this is the oldest area of the city. Tourists walk around here to see the old canal houses that are so typical for the Amsterdam image. There are not many apartments for rent here however, but it should be mentioned as it is by far one of the most scenic areas in the city. Similar to Nieuwmarkt, apartments are expensive to rent here.

15 AMSTERDAM NOORD

This neighbourhood is vastly underrated. It lies just across the Het IJ from the central station in Amsterdam. What many fail to realise is that there is an entirely free ferry going between central station and the other shore. It takes less than

five minutes to make it across the water with ferry and from there one can use a bicycle. As a matter of fact, many bicyclists bring their bike on the ferry.

Rents are also much lower in Amsterdam Noord, due to the neighbourhood not being as posh as several others in the city.

16 BIJLMER

Bijlmer, where the Arena is, used to be a troublesome neighbourhood, with robberies and violence. That has changed a lot the last decade and today it is an up and coming neighbourhood to live in.

Bijlmer is considered to be far out in the outskirts, and certainly there is not much to do there. There is a shopping street where one can pretty much all of the necessary shopping. But when it comes to night life there is the Ziggo Dome, Heineken Music Hall, AJAX Stadium and the largest cinema in Amsterdam. It is lacking in restau-

rants and pubs however, and cannot compete with that type of offering in other parts of the city.

17 LIVING WITH STRANGERS

To improve your chances of finding suitable apartment mates you should try to analyse your own personality first. Be brutally honest with yourself, what kind of personality are you? Which people do you tend to get along more with? We all have perks to our personalities that make us easier to deal with for some and harder for others. The key is to find out which people you are most compatible with when it comes to sharing an apartment. Take one extra step in your selfevaluation by asking friends and acquaintances how they see you as a person. Simply ask them: What kind of person do you think I could share an apartment with? Similarly, ask the more brutal question: What kind of person should I definitely not share an apartment with?

You will have to share facilities and will need to make compromises with other people. Adjectives such as politeness, easygoing and tolerant are important. It might sound cheesy but any of these adjectives (the lack of the trait) could very well be the thing that prevents you from getting a highly sought room to rent.

18 LIFESTYLE COMPATIBILITY

When you have scrutinized your personality, it is time to move forward and take a look at your lifestyle. Or rather, the lifestyle you intend to pursue when you live in Amsterdam. It is commonly known that when arriving in this bustling city, people tend to explore the social venues for some time, which includes an active night life. This being said, and in combination with the fact that you are looking to share an apartment with strangers, you should be completely aware of that it will be difficult to find isola-

tion. Even if you intend on spending your days and evenings looking at flowers and enjoying solitude with reading books, chances are that your housemates are not!

So, you will have to show some social aptitude in order to make your stay in Amsterdam and sharing apartment with strangers easier. It will be easier if you have an outgoing personality or can at least humour people when so necessary and join in on dinners with housemates etc. In short, prepare for intensive social interaction in Amsterdam, whether you will seek it out yourself in bars, parties and social groups, or let it come to you in form of housemates that you will share an apartment with.

Your lifestyle compatibility comes into question when you meet potential housemates. Try to find out if there are any larger obstacles in lifestyles. For example, if one person is a late night clubber working a part time job three days a week and focusing on clubbing and afterparties

in the apartment, you might want to think carefully (especially so if you are starting an ambitious 9-17 job five days a week that will require a lot of energy and concentration).

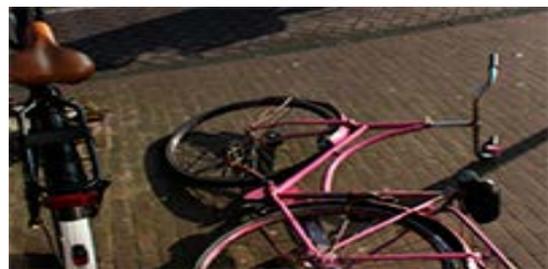
To find the best possible housemates you must start with a healthy dose of self-analysis. By knowing your own strengths and weaknesses and identifying the lifestyle you enjoy, you will realise which types of personalities you are most likely to get along with when living together.

19 THE RENTAL AGREEMENT

Before you even consider signing a sublet agreement you should make sure of the following:

Is the owner or person you are in contact with allowed to sublet the room? As a matter of fact, a written permission by the Town Hall is required to rent out a room.

The rent stipulated need to be within a certain range, adjusted for the



room's living space and a price index. This is recalculated every year.

As you check in at the beginning of your rental period, you need to document the state of all furniture and artifacts in the room. This should be signed by both parties.

During my own stay in Amsterdam I have seen the positive effects of being overly clear when it comes to the subletting agreement. Although oral agreements are legally binding, I would not suggest you enter such an agreement, for the obvious reason of security and trustworthiness. Yes, if the person you will rent from is a friend of friend, I understand you may have doubts about a written rental agreement. But the old adage separate friendship from

business has a lot of value in it and to avoid controversy (who said what etc.) I strongly advise you to use a written rental agreement. You might actually see it as a way of safeguarding the friendship so there is no room for interpretation.

The housing market in Netherlands has many inns and outs and it is important for you to be familiar with the most important aspects when drafting a subletting agreement. Let us look closer at these aspects.

Your name and the landlord's name.

The address and description of the apartment, especially the room with any furniture left for your disposal and any shared spaces how they can be used. A clear and distinct inventory list is useful in this case.

The agreed monthly rent and method of payment.

Extra costs (gas, water, Internet etc.)

Starting date and ending date.

Using shared spaces such as kitchen and bathroom.

House rules, for instance third party housing, pets, smoking policy and so on.

Notice period for terminating the contract.

Landlord's duties (maintenance, repairs etc.)

20 THE OBLIGATIONS

You should ensure that the following is clarified on behalf of the landlord's obligations: Costs and reasonable time for doing repairs.

Problems regarding electricity, plumbing, and Internet should be solved by the landlord. The notice should be 1-3 months and be handed over in writing. The room should be prepared for you as a tenant. This means it should be clean and everything in working order.

On the other hand, you must do a reciprocal performance according to

the rules for notice period and allowing for repairs.

What is the moving in date?

What is the notice period?

What does the rent include? Water, heat, trash?

Security Deposit (bank guarantee)?

Furniture?

Cleaning services?

21 HOUSE RULES?

When you meet your potential housemates the first time, you should bring up the topic of house rules soon. This is to gauge whether their lifestyles are compatible with your own. If you are not keen on late nights and cannot fall asleep easily with plenty of noise around, then it might not be the best fit to live with a group of partying guys in their midtwenties.

Will you have access to the common areas in the apartment?

What about inviting friends or throwing parties? What are the rules for this?

Can you bring home a partner or friend to stay over night?

What about the utilities in the kitchen, can you use those?

Is there Internet access?

Always use a written rental agreement. Better to ask too many questions than too few when being interviewed by your potential housemates.

22 IN RETROSPECT

I moved to Amsterdam in 2011 and have been living in several rooms (11 so far) and with a variety of personalities.

I've seen mice in all but one place I lived in. This is over a period of three years. You get used to it, although you might think you will not. Mice are frequent in apartments in Amsterdam, even the very luxurious ones, so mice do not equal

shabby and old apartment. You will see mice in apartments in Amsterdam. Period.

My time in Amsterdam has by far been one of the most revealing learning experiences for me and I recommend adults past their student years to try it as well when they come to live in Amsterdam. It is a good way to get to know people and to get out of your own comfort zone. Sharing apartments with people in Amsterdam is a unique experience which will certainly introduce you to people from all over the world as this is a global village with many newcomers every year.

