

HOW to settle in Amsterdam

This ebook attempts to help you with answers to common questions when relocating to Amsterdam in The Netherlands.

What should you think about when wanting to settle down in Amsterdam?

What kind of social life can you expect to take part of in Amsterdam?

What is the social life like in Amsterdam?

My First and Only Tropical Summer in Amsterdam

It was late April in 2011. I had decided to give Amsterdam an honest try since it felt like the right place to settle down in. I arrived in Amsterdam with my 40 litre backpack and a camera bag. A Couchsurfing friend offered me a floor to sleep on and the next day I started making serious preparations for staying. This included considering what administration had to be done in order to settle officially in Netherlands. My first room was a one month long contract, giving me a roof over my head for May.

In 2011 Amsterdam was struck by a heatwave. It was absolutely tropical in the city, so warm that one had to stay out of the sun in midday to save some energy for the afternoon. For those who are familiar with the Mediterranean climate this is a common summer.

I can't say that I minded that suitable welcoming for me, warm weather and sunshine every day brings out the best in most people. This could give you the impression that summer weather in Amsterdam is always super. But you have surely heard that Amsterdam is not known for its warm summers, instead the city and Netherlands as a whole is more known for the frequent rainfalls. The two following summers proved this to be right. I can recount many days with drizzle, heavy rainfalls, short showers or full blown rainstorms. All the more interesting is the fact that the weather changes rapidly, often several times throughout day. It is not uncommon to have beaming sunshine followed by dark looming clouds and heavy rain, only to leave over again to a warm sun.

In summer 2011 the city was bubbling with joviality. I'm sure that every newcomer in Amsterdam sees adventure in every street corner, street and pub. Except for the fact that I really did have the awesome weather that summer. Tourists, expats and natives all alike thrive on the great weather when it does show up.

In Amsterdam you can expect reasonably warm summers but not necessarily sunny ones. The umbrella is certainly one of your most prized possessions in this city!

During the summer in 2011 I explored the nightlife of the city as much as possible. Judging by experience, as an expat who is staying longterm, the first area for discovery is the tourist area, namely everything within the canal rings ("Grachtengordel" as it is called in Dutch and that translates to "canal belt"). That is where you will find Leidseplein, Rembrandtplein, Spui, Jordaan and the Dam, which are some of the most famous locations in the city. Unfortunately most short term visitors do not venture further away than these locations. It is a common phenomenon that tourists stay in a fairly limited area. Nevertheless, because Amsterdam is such a small city it is still interesting to see that so few visitors venture

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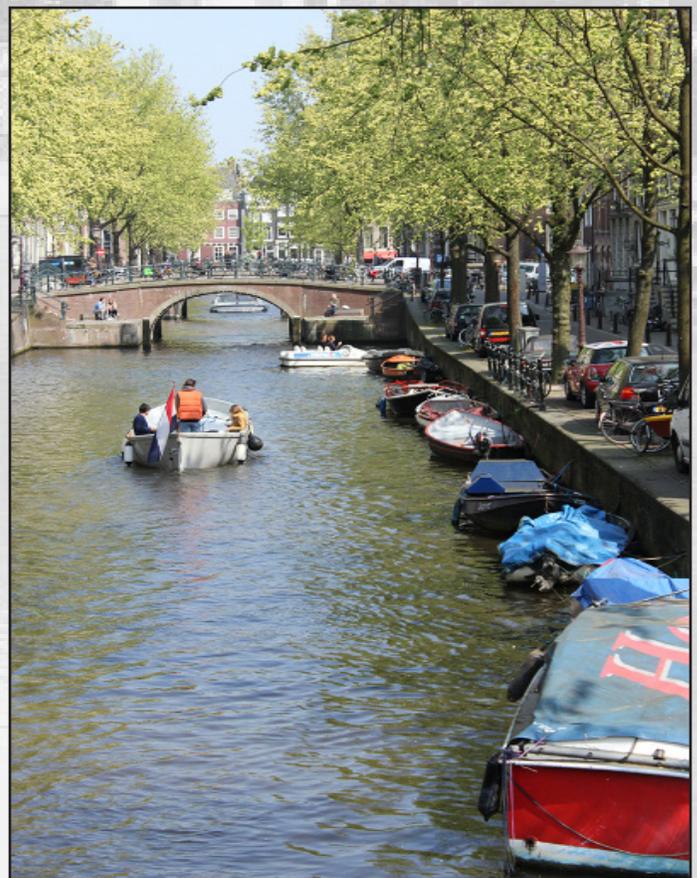
further away.

As you spend more time in Amsterdam there are several factors that stand out as unique compared with other European capital cities. It is also apparent that the longer you stay in Amsterdam, the more you notice how small a part the Red Light and the coffee shops actually play in the Amsterdam way of living. I'd wager to say that in the beginning we all check out the highlights of the nightlife, sprinkled with nocturnal walks through Red Light (often to amuse friends who come to visit from abroad). But Amsterdam is small and as the months turns into years the limitations of the small city center pushes more people to move into other neighbourhoods with thriving nightlife. These other neighbourhoods are not as known by the weekend tourists who rarely venture as far as De Pijp, Oosterpark, Westergasfabriek, Amsterdam-Noord, and more.

Expats in Amsterdam – A Background Glimpse

Amsterdam is one of the busiest cities in Europe and if you look at the Schiphol Airport it is in the top list of the busiest airports in the world. In 2015 it was one of the 30 busiest airports on a list compiled by the Airports Council International (ACI). It is clear that Amsterdam is one of the major European hubs and many curious foreigners take their belongings and move there to try their luck. As a consequence the expat community in Amsterdam is very strong these days. Being an expat in Amsterdam is very comfortable since the country is used to a thriving expat community. Over the years the expatriates have come to understand their shared situation and there are plenty of sources for information and assistance for newcomers in Amsterdam. It is easy to get help and advice from people who arrived in Amsterdam earlier. Simply go out and you will stumble upon foreigners like yourself in every bar, restaurant and café. Online communities such as Meetup, Internations and Couchsurfing also play a vital part in connecting foreigners with each other.

When it comes to the social life you might feel as if the center of the city has been tailored for international visitors. This is partially true, with the restaurants, coffee shops and of course Red Light district. However, the center of the city is mainly tailored to the interests of the stream of short term tourists that pass through the city. Let's take a closer look at how the presence of foreign nationalities has changed over the years. According to the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (www.cbs.



nl), between 1990 and 2014 the percentage of foreigners throughout Netherlands has increased from 4.31% to 4.84%, not that large rate of change for 25 years you may argue. However, most foreigners live in Amsterdam so you can expect an even higher percentage here.

The Expat Density in Amsterdam

The CBS also prepared statistics in August 2014 for the origin of the population. The numbers tell a pretty clear story. The study found that internationals from Western countries made out a staggering 9.4% of the population in Netherlands in 2014. Since 2005 this is an increase of circa 0.7% or about 20170 people. That alone should give you an idea of the popularity of this city in the global community. A comparison goes a long way to illustrate. 20170 people between 2005 and 2014 means an average increase of 2241 new internationals in Netherlands every year!

If we broaden the analysis we find that internationals from non-western countries in 2014 make out 11.8% of the population. This means that both groups together make out 21.2% of the population in Netherlands.

That's a fifth dear reader! And most people with international background will be found in Amsterdam, The Hague, and Rotterdam. Think about that as you walk around in Amsterdam.

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Exploring Amsterdam

I think it is safe to say that as a newcomer in this active city most people start their exploration of the city in the center and gradually move outward. As you find your daily rhythm in Amsterdam you are sure to discover more areas in Amsterdam, for example De Pijp, Oud Zuid, and Amsterdam Noord. All have their particular charm and characteristics. This also makes the city such a versatile competitor for the attention of internationals - Simply put, it is difficult to get bored in a city with such a range of cultural settings, nightlife, and activities.

With over four years to date in Amsterdam I can only recommend all neighbourhoods for exploration. The underlying reasons for this statement is the atmosphere of a city that has seen tremendous changes over the centuries, ranging from a major trading hub during the golden age of sail to the hippie decades and later on to become a financial center in Europe and the world. All of these remarkable historical periods have left traces in the city, be it the old buildings along the canals that used to be storage facilities but now have people living



in them. Or how about the De Pijp with its huge number of bars and cafés, a reminder of the 60s. Looking eastward and southwest in the city you will see the neighbourhoods that have developed thanks to a rich immigration over the years.

Even more interesting is how the subcultures have developed in Amsterdam. With the varying ethnical and national backgrounds, mixed with hippie eras, a society determined to follow the path of tolerance, you are bound to encounter some cool people.

In this city people have mixed over the centuries, the last two decades saw an enormous influx of western internationals that came for lucrative job opportunities. Whether they choose to stay longer or leave after a few years, they all help creating what Amsterdam is today - A melting pot of cultures and a city of fun!

How We Come To Be In Amsterdam

You either arrive prepared for a longer stay or you wing it. I did the latter although when I made my decision to stay I already knew some of the practical basics as for what is required to settle down in Amsterdam (more about this later). Many people travel to Amsterdam as an experiment, as part of an attempt to spread one's wings, to try something entirely different from back home.

Some arrive from their home country with a job contract and an apartment ready for them to move into. In those cases an employer has relocated them to Amsterdam. Others decided to try their luck with some savings in the bank and without any organised housing. Regardless which of these categories a fresh arrival belongs to I have heard from most people that they come to live in Amsterdam because of the city's reputation as a fun and happening place to be. The city has so much to offer that most other cities cannot compare. Amsterdam's reputation stretches all around the world. If Amsterdam was a movie star it would certainly be a Hollywood star, nominated several times for an Oscar and with a streak of eye-catching accomplishments (the golden age of sail and trading, the hippie era..) Speaking of movie stars, many of them have come to Amsterdam for a period of exploration.

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Reasons To Move To Amsterdam

What makes Amsterdam such a popular city for expatriates? The answer really depends on who you ask, but some answers are more common than others..

- It's the 30% tax ruling, some will say.
- It's the relaxed attitude to drugs, says others.
- It's the rich social life, states others.
- It's the availability of jobs, says some.

What Amsterdam Offers

Neighbourhoods such as De Pijp, Amsterdam West, Amsterdam Oost and Oud Zuid all have their unique character and are well worth discovering. Since restaurants, cafes and bars are widespread in the city, you will always be able to take a break and have some food and drink wherever you have ended up going with your bike. I suggest that you explore the city by bike as it is by far the most popular means of transportation in Amsterdam!

My claim is that Amsterdam is one of the few cities in Europe that can entertain visitors for months even if you stay in the absolute center of the city which is also the touristy area. All in all I must have had amazing nights out throughout the center that if counted as weekends would amount to at least

a year's worth. But there is a risk of simplifying the impressions of Amsterdam's inhabitants and wide array of cultures if you do not venture further away from the tourist traps. In short you will be missing out! I think that the sooner you start exploring different parts of the city other than the tourist traps, the better. Not only will you see different aspects of this bubbling capital but you will also appreciate the tourist traps more when you see how they are a part of a very rich cultural diversity. Amsterdam is one of the few places in the world where thousands of people go every year to settle down, coming from all corners of the world. The city has a huge reputation as a city for urban explorers, restless travellers and of course funloving creatures.

Rich social spheres to tap into

As previously mentioned, Amsterdam attracts people from all over the world. They come for work and

they come for fun. Some will stay for a weekend, those are the typical tourists. Others will come for a longer haul, ranging from months to years. These are the internationals you definitely will run into during your escapades in the city. And like yourself they will look for people to hang out with using online communities such as Meetup and Internations and Couchsurfing. Taken together, the fact that so many people come to live in Amsterdam and that online communities have grown in maturity, it is easier than ever before to meet people like yourself who are also eager to explore Amsterdam with an international's perspective. The bottom line is that you should make use of these online communities to meet new people. They are all free and are great aggregators for events and activities.

Open atmosphere and high tolerance

You have no doubt heard of the drugs and prostitution in Amsterdam. But is it really limited to a small area in the city with red neon lights and coffee shops scattered throughout? Of course not! This open atmosphere is a symptom of the Dutch culture which is permeated with a sense of tolerance. This stems from the Dutch expression *Gedogen* which roughly translates to "tolerated". It is used to describe something that is illegal, but not illegal. Complicated? Well, this culture of permitting drugs and prostitution is also called *gedoogcultuur* and can be compared with the *poldermodel*. The latter signifies the attempt to achieve national consensus on larger societal issues. Let us take a look at history and religion in particular. Some two hundred years ago the religious tolerance saw Catholicism and Judaism being tolerated while the Dutch Reformed Church existed as the state religion. Fast forward to the 20th century and the era of the hippies during the 1960ies. The effect of this period was the creation of the consensus decision making on a political level. That and a whole bunch of good music and fun parties, of course..

Yes, Amsterdam changes - Continuously

Plenty of people mention how Amsterdam has changed. But has it? Let's look at the supposed changes of the city from a few perspectives, I have here



picked nightlife, work, and economy.

Nightlife

Most of the nightlife in Amsterdam is centered around a few well known areas. These are Leidseplein, Rembrandtplein, Red Light District, De Pijp, and Westerpark. In these locations there are a handful of clubs and bars that are constantly referred to when discussing nightlife. Remember that Amsterdam is a very small city in comparison with other European capitals. Less space equals less venues. But Amsterdam has definitely made the most of it. In the mentioned areas you will find a range of night clubs, jazz bars, old style Dutch bars, discos and live music venues.

As a new visitor some places stand out with the availability of restaurants, bars and clubs. These are Leidseplein, Rembrandtplein and of course Red Light District. I know of internationals who have not even ventured much farther than this although they have lived in the city for years. That is how rich the city's offering is in terms of nightlife. However, one key adjective to keep in mind regarding these areas: Touristy. They are definitely touristy and this is a given fact all year round. Thousands upon thousands of weekend tourists come to Amsterdam every year.

The longer your stay in Amsterdam, the more curious you will hopefully become of the surrounding areas. I'm thinking mainly of De Pijp, Baarsjes, Oost and Oud-Zuid. These areas have managed to retain some of the old Amsterdam spirit. Yes, you will see old Dutch canal houses in Jordaan, but how about checking out the areas around Amsterdam West or Oost, not to mention ship yards (there is one just a

few hundred meters away from the Ship Museum in the beginning of Amsterdam Oost). What I find remarkable about these neighbourhoods are the old bars, cafes and restaurants. There are some very cozy and cool social settings to explore. For instance, in Baarsjes you will find some bars that were still around when Andre Hazes was around singing his songs about life ("levensleid"). The bar where he became known as the singing bartender in the 1970s is still around and it is called Cafe de Krommert and can be found on Witte de Withstraat.

Work

The mentioning of the hotel industry brings us to work. With the thriving tourism sector in Amsterdam, there are plenty of opportunities for people to find temporary jobs and make a living for one or several seasons. Consider the fact that Amsterdam attracts thousands of expatriates yearly, that is, foreigners who are relocated for work. They are usually professionals in IT, economy or engineering. In addition to this, there are thousands more that come to the city without a job. These are the internationals who are willing to take simpler jobs in restaurants, bars and clubs. The net effect is that Amsterdam is a very welcoming place to relocate to. The reputation as a global village only adds to the effect and the sheer amount of foreigners there create job opportunities in the form of new startups and of course the word of mouth marketing of job opportunities between the foreigners themselves.

Economy

The economy in Amsterdam is very much centered on tourism and service industries, such as restaurants and cafés. According to figures by OIS Amsterdam ("City of Amsterdam", "Economy and port services", www.ois.amsterdam.nl), the city has started recovering from the recession in 2012-2013. This is in contrast with the rest of the country which has stagnated. The numbers in the report tell us that between 2010 and 2014, establishments and jobs in Amsterdam retail trade decreased by 3% to 7,900 establishments and 28,000 jobs in 2014. In total, since 2008 the number of establishments in the financial sector have decreased by 16%. Yet, as mentioned, Amsterdam is stronger than the rest of the country and let us glance over at some hotel statistics, also prepared by OIS Amsterdam. The number of hotel guests in 2013 alone reached 6 million people, that is an impressive number during a recession. As a

matter of fact, that was a 5% increase compared to 2012. One conclusion seems obvious, namely that the service industry remains strong. People come to visit Amsterdam and so hotels and restaurants continue to make revenue, and so there are jobs in the service industry.

The canal life and chill way of living

Amsterdam is a product of its canals. For what would it be without the constant passing of boats, large and small, peaceful and full of merriment during boat parties. As you walk through the center of the city you are surrounded by canals and you constantly cross bridges as you move in towards the center. Somehow these canals and all the boats create a small town feeling, the atmosphere is very much influenced by the canal life.

You may walk down a street and glance sideways only to see a couple sitting on the edge of the canal pier, dangling their feet, eating and drinking. Picnics along the canals are quite common and with the lack of noisy traffic you might imagine that you are in a small town close to nature.

Being an Expat in Amsterdam

People arrive and leave in a rapid succession. The rumour has it that there is an expat cycle which is a period about two years long and after which many internationals tend to leave and new crowds of internationals arrive. This is observed easily when first arriving and meeting people more randomly at first, forming friendships and then seeing many of them leave after a couple of years. Internationals in their 20s to 30s are attracted to Amsterdam much because of the active nightlife and the perceived freedom of choice.

I say perceived because Amsterdam and Dutch society is very well organised and it has changed a lot the past two decades. In many ways the city has changed into a more hip and classy city than it used to be. Gone are the days of squatting, abundance of drugs and rundown houses.

When it comes to expatriates in Amsterdam there are plenty of observations to make. During my time in the city one observation is recurring and that is that internationals in Amsterdam seem to be on their way somewhere, usually undefined both in terms of place and time. This shared trait to be going somewhere often comes up in conversations with fellow interna-

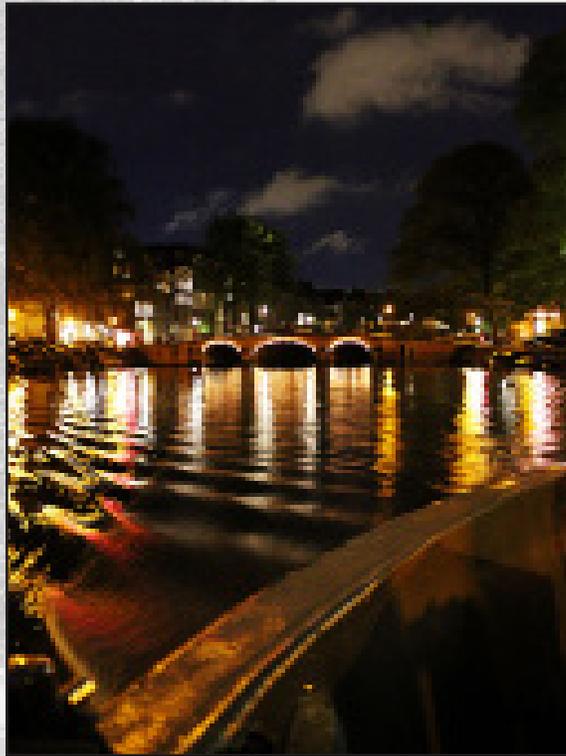
tionals. People come to Amsterdam perhaps drawn to the fact that they will meet like minded, also restless and curious personalities. At times they are eager to create a new life, start afresh in a vibrant and different environment which can certainly be found here. A place where people stop temporarily for fun, to meet like minded people and to experience freedom the way the Dutch have defined it and have seen it moulded according to people with varying cultural and ethnical backgrounds.

Others come to Amsterdam to build a career and with the taxation rules for expatriates (internationals who are relocated to Amsterdam for a job) coming to Amsterdam this is lucrative for many in senior positions.

The Question of Integration

For those that decide to stay the challenge of integration becomes apparent over the years. It is not only a question of language but also of culture. During my time here I have heard many anecdotes about life in Amsterdam but I think that some anecdotes are more common than others:

- Amsterdam feels like a small village but has the social setting of a huge city. The distances are short and you can get around with a bicycle with no problem. Amsterdam definitely qualifies as a global village.
- The nightlife is a great reason to come to Amsterdam. The city is full of bars and restaurants and internationals come to visit all the time so you have the people to meet and the venues to meet them in.
- Dutch people can be blunt. Some will say rude, but that is a matter of taste and your own cultural background and personality.
- Dutch customer service leaves much to be wanted.
- It is difficult to make Dutch friends. This really does depend on yourself. It is easy to strike up conversations with Dutch people, however to re-



ally get to know them may be more difficult. This bullet point is the focus of a lot of discussion. It is often mentioned that Dutch people tend to hang out in their own closed groups. I have noticed this tendency when mingling. That does not mean however that you should not try a bit harder. I have found that Dutch people are interested in foreigners although it may take just a bit more talking and persuasiveness to convince them that you are interested in their culture. I believe that is an unfortunate example of a Catch 22, namely that internationals tend to hang out in their own isolated groups and Dutch

people do the same. It then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that both Dutchies and expatriates seem uninterested in each other. It takes a bit of an effort to move between these groups but if you are genuinely curious and have an open attitude you will certainly make Dutch friends! Put in other words, Dutchies are way too tolerant and open to discourse to give up on a chance to get to know someone new to discuss with.

- The last bullet point relates a lot to the previous one. Amsterdam has such a rich expatriate social life that it is difficult to integrate into Dutch society – It is simply too much fun to hang out with other internationals than to try to penetrate the

Dutch social life. This is an interesting observation. The counterargument would be that it is really up to the person in question to search out other ways of socializing to explore unknown venues than to focus on the easy accessible international groupings.

As a guest in Netherlands it is a good idea to make a small effort to speak the language and respect the culture. Too many times have I noticed how longterm expats in Amsterdam always use English in restaurants and cafes. It really is not that difficult to learn the basics of the language, just enough to make small talk in shops, restaurants and with Dutch colleagues. At the same time it is understandable that many revert to English because many Dutch people speak English without trying to engage in a conversation in their mother tongue.

As soon as you are identified as an expat many Dutch people will simply take the simplest route to making themselves understood and that happens to be English.

Social Scenes for Expats

Much of the social life for expatriates in Amsterdam is centered around online communities such as Meetup, Internations and CouchSurfing. They serve as simple aggregators for events and are excellent when it comes to meeting fellow internationals. When I arrived in Amsterdam I was completely taken in by the fact that there were so many foreigners everywhere in the city. It is practically impossible to walk around in Amsterdam without seeing foreigners everywhere. This goes further than spotting tourists because if you wander away from the absolute city center you will hear foreign languages spoken everywhere. Whether you are having lunch or a coffee somewhere in a cafe, you will be surprised to find that being surrounded by non-Dutch people is part of the daily scene! This makes Amsterdam a very exciting place to live in since you have an abundance of people with different backgrounds around you. It is simply not possible to get bored because of a lack of people to meet or new activities to try out. Which again brings me to the advantages with online communities such as Couchsurfing, Meetup and Internations. Like I already mentioned, these serve as natural aggregators to bring expatriates together. This means that not only do you have all these exciting people but you also have places to go where to meet them. Whether you fancy a pub crawl, a visit to a museum, a game of volleyball, etc., you will always have possibilities to meet up and do things together. The existence of online communities to bring together people for activities does however have a flipside, which is the division of social spheres that internationals and Dutch people move around in. More on this in the following section.

How Social Life Is Divided

The social life in Amsterdam can be said to be divided. There are the events where expats go, organised by themselves and often coordinated using an online community. Then there is the Dutch social life, an expression I am sure many will object against, but still, these are social settings where mostly Dutch people go

and expats are rarely seen. This can be certain bars or sport clubs. As a social experiment, To counter this I encourage you to constantly go to new areas and try new bars and restaurants. You will soon notice that there are places which are mainly frequented by Dutch people.

Amsterdam Seen From Boats

The canals and their peculiar layout are probably the most known geographical landmark in Amsterdam. The circular canals that the old Dutch houses huddle along are teeming with life in the summer months, with boats going back and forth. The boating in Amsterdam is also a serious business. The tourist boats can be seen zigzagging through the canals all year round. The canals that are carved into the city center also define the social life to a great extent. Whether you go boating with friends or sit in a bar or restaurant next to a canal they are

always present and create an atmosphere that is, well, Amsterdammish. Boating events are one of the most common ways of organising events that are not dinners, BBQs or picnics.

In the beginning of my time in Amsterdam I would just go bicycling along the canals, taking random turns to see what interesting alleys lay ahead. With the semicircular layout of the canals this becomes all the more enjoyable as it creates a maze of alleys and bridges to cross. During any given Friday or Saturday evening you will see internationals and locals zigzagging around the canals with their bicycles to get to the goal, which is usually a bar or restaurant in evenings. I don't think it comes as a big surprise that my biking around the center was more exciting in the beginning of my time in Amsterdam. As always when you know a city fairly well, the excitement diminishes and you start taking the shortest route to go from A to B.

Anecdote about buying a boat

During my four odd years in Amsterdam, I have heard one idea repeated by scores of internationals. "Why don't we buy a boat together?!" comes the suggestion with excited voice, usually with the friends and acquaintances chiming in and thinking the idea is great. To this day, having met and gotten to know

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at least a few hundred internationals I only know a few that took the plunge and bought a boat. The rest of us just rent a boat instead in one of the many boat rentals available.

Expats Who Stay and Why They Do It

As already mentioned there is an expat cycle. Many come to Amsterdam for a brief stint, a job opportunity that is limited in time (project or contract-based work). Add to this that Amsterdam is geared for a younger crowd, at least if you consider the center of the city. The clubs, bars and other entertainment attracts plenty of 20-30 year olds whereas you will not see that many internationals in their 50ies walking around the streets. Considering that the city is known for the nightlife, as a consequence mainly younger people are attracted to this range of entertainment.

Who then decides to stay for years to come? In many cases an international who finds a Dutch partner. But what about settling down in the city just because it feels like home? Sure, that happens. But an interesting fact about Dutch people is that they as well move out from Amsterdam as they settle with a partner and build a family. Amsterdam is an expensive city to live in and space is scarce so it is easier to move to a neighbouring city. For many internationals this is conflicting with the reason to go to Amsterdam in the first place – it's like a country in a country and not many want to live in other Dutch cities. Other cities are very different. All of them are much calmer and social life in them is not at all like what you can find in Amsterdam. Those that I have met that do choose to stay, be it in Amsterdam or another Dutch city, do so mostly for the sake of being with a Dutch partner. With that being said, let's digress and talk about dating Dutchies.

Going Dutch – Or Not

Republished from an article I published in 2014.

So how do you do it? How do you keep the good humour while good heartedly paying for a drink or two, with the mere intent of showing appreciation of the lady's company? Ah, but there are ways my dear fellow.

Don't dodge the topic with her, instead plunge into it as any other interesting topic. As one of the first explanations you can expect Calvinism and frugality.

The logic goes as such: Since Dutch people are prudent when it comes to money and do enjoy saving, why not apply that to the people they meet, to show their dates that they have no intention of letting you spend more than you should. Slightly backwards, you think? After you all you decide what and who to spend on? Fair enough, fair enough mister. Alas, do not forget that the equality of genders does play a huge role in Netherlands. It is not only a question of equal pay for equal work or the ability to have the same career, it includes the equality of gender gameplay. A murky statement to say the least. You want to charm a lady, with style of course. But can you do that while counting the euros and cents when the cheque comes? Are you really willing to make sure you are not paying more than your date? The opinions are as many as opposing.

I have met many people in their 20ies who decided to give Amsterdam and Netherlands a try for the heck of it. They pack their bags and simply improvise on location.

Chivalry and Modern Times – Dating in Amsterdam

Fair enough, we live in modern times and it is common to split the bill. But chivalry is still alive, albeit not to such a great extent in the lands of the Dutch. The stories are as colourful as they are diverse, but one thing is clear; Being chivalrous is not expected by default by Dutch ladies. Add to this that the complaints abound when it comes to dating Dutch guys, who are perhaps less inclined on chivalry in the nightlife of Amsterdam. Whoa, says you, doesn't that mean that you have a terrific chance of moving in on that spectacularly gorgeous tall Dutch girl who is (seemingly) bored senseless by the Dutch guy next to her? At times, yes, but Dutch guys also have the advantage of being straight enough to be very clear about what they



offer to the Dutch girls. Senseless charming will not get you far. And they know it. Another factor to consider is that Dutch people are quite used to expats so don't expect any bonus points as a foreigner in Amsterdam. Taken together these facts make for some interesting dating grounds in Amsterdam as an expat. Expect longwinded conversations on the topic with ladies you encounter, and as such, taken with the right amount of selfdistance and a good portion of humour, you might just get to ask her out for a second drink.

Straight Talk

As mentioned, shallow compliments will most likely not get you far (you may argue if they ever do, but less so in Amsterdam), so your best bet is just to be downright straight, although you might want to sprinkle that with a healthy dose of charm and humour. Dutch ladies want straight talk, think John Wayne but preferably with some knowledge of the Dutch language (a bonus).



Some will say that Dutch people are blunt, but hey, that is a matter of perspective, and they expect the same of you. But don't forget yourself, finding that proper middleground is key and middleground is something that the Dutch are very good at. My hat off to them!

With the spark in your eyes and a winning smile and a mind starving for knowledge about Dutch culture, you are well on your way to learn the ways of the Dutch in the vibrant nightlife.

The Naughtiness of Amsterdam – How Seedy Is (Was) It Really?

Is it really that naughty in Amsterdam? In any conversation about Amsterdam, prostitution and drugs soon become the hot topics and the attitudes range from very wary to overly enthusiastic about the open Dutch culture. It is either seen as a city full of sin or as the perfect place to let loose and do things you cannot do at home. Most people who have been in Amsterdam for a longer period of time start noticing that indeed, Amsterdam's reputation as a city of sin is not an entirely correct picture. The reason is that everything is very controlled and legislated. Both prostitution and drugs are allowed in moderation. The Dutch judicial system allow for some indulgence in some areas where other countries exercise total prohibition, for instance when it comes to prostitution and drugs. An interesting observation is that drugs are legislated even to the point of locations where you can use them, in the famous coffeeshops, as well as how prostitution is organised as a business (a specific registration number is assigned to brothels to identify them as being legal).

So although Amsterdam has a reputation for being seedy, the matter of fact is that street junkies are not lining the streets. As an example, about a decade ago, the Sarphatipark was a place that most people avoided because of the drug addicts that would hang out there. That park is now one of the most picturesque and cozy locations to chill out in during summer. It attracts plenty of locals on sunny days. The Sarphatipark is in the neighbourhood De Pijp which was also known as a more seedy area a decade ago. So things have changed. Nowadays this is one of the trendiest areas to live in and has a very well known range of upscale bars and restaurants. As a whole Amsterdam has undergone a transition from seedy to trendy and

hip. Where dark and dinghy pubs used to be more common, the city now has plenty of classy winebars and cocktail parties and other refined events are hosted by several expatriate communities on a monthly basis. Not very seedy at all.

Work in Amsterdam

As I already mentioned, many internationals in Amsterdam were relocated there by their employer. Their professions are usually within IT or finance and it is not uncommon that expatriates have some previous family ties with Netherlands. Remember that Amsterdam is one of the financial hubs in the world and many large international corporations are based in the country. This means that finance and IT jobs are readily available with lucrative salaries and challenging job positions.

In addition to this there are the thousands of jobs in the service sector thanks to the thriving tourism industry. Restaurants and hotels are everywhere in

Amsterdam and they are also used to internationals working temporary jobs. This is another perk of Amsterdam for the curious traveller without a solid career. I have met many people in their 20s who decided to give Amsterdam and Netherlands a try for the heck of it. They pack their bags and simply improvise on location. The thriving service industry in Amsterdam make life so much easier for an improvising free mover.

Tax Ruling to Help Expats

Known as the 30% ruling this enables expatriates to pay less income tax than the locals. This is only offered in certain circumstances, as follows:

- You must work for an employer.
- The employee must have been relocated from abroad to a Dutch employer, alternatively the employee must have been recruited from abroad by a Dutch recruiter.
- The employee's taxable salary must be at least 51,000€ per annum or 38800€ if the employee has a Master's degree and is younger than 30 years.
- The employee must have expertise that is not readily available in the Netherlands.

As you can see from these rules the 30% tax ruling is only valid for those that move to Netherlands with a job ready and waiting for them. With this in mind

you should bring up questions about details with your Dutch employer or the Dutch recruiter. To learn more about the 30% ruling, you should consult a tax advisor in Netherlands.

The Living Quarters' Challenge

The challenge to find a place to live in Amsterdam is a mighty one. Due to the high rents for apartments many tend to rent a room in an apartment. This goes for both expats and Dutch people. The market for renting rooms in Amsterdam is huge and tumultuous. I have heard many stories of people with problems in their shared apartment. Many have to move between several short term rentals before finding a room (or apartment) where they can stay a longer time period.

I did the same in the beginning and lived in a wide range of neighbourhoods with rental periods as short as two weeks. This does not really help when trying to settle down. There are a few key rules to keep in mind when looking for housing in Amsterdam, as follows:

- Agencies charge insane fees to help you, usually in the range 1-3000 Euro. That is just a fee for providing the service of acting as middle man to find you an apartment.
- Since so many people share apartments in Amsterdam you will find a plethora of markets online where people advertise rooms for rent. One is RentRoomAmsterdam.com, a completely free market for rooms in Amsterdam.
- Most apartment owners ask for a proof of income, so it is better to be prepared with a job waiting for you in Amsterdam when starting to look for a room or apartment.
- Rents in central Amsterdam are ridiculously high and if you are willing to live say 5-10 kilometres outside of Amsterdam you can lower your rent with hundreds of Euro.

Random Weather

You can only count on the Dutch weather to change, often and abruptly. This might be discomforting to many, especially to those who come from the Mediterranean climate or the tropics. I find it exhilarating to observe the Dutch agility with this rain though. You will see them on bicycles and the special type bakfiets, umbrella in hand and usually with one to three kids placed on the bike while speeding along the bike lanes in the middle of a heavy downpour. As I'm usually noticing this while huddling over a warm cup of tea in a cozy cafe, watch-

ing these folks through the window, I consider myself a lucky man. It is a true spectacle to watch and you definitely have to try it if you come to Amsterdam.

The weather in Amsterdam and Netherlands as a whole makes it difficult to plan for outdoor activities. But I have found that although rainfalls may come unexpectedly (all year round), they usually do not last very long and are usually not too heavy. So with an umbrella and a spare shirt you are usually fine. A word of advice though: You may want to go elsewhere for vacations that involve sunbathing and swimming in the ocean! Netherlands has several beaches but the water is cold and with the unsteady weather, well, you cannot really count on endless hours on a sunlit beach working on your suntan with a drink in your hand..



Wrapping Up

This guide is meant to be a first introduction to Amsterdam for the curious international who is considering to move here. With some insights into the social life, work, economy and housing, this should give you plenty of leads to follow up. Every international in Amsterdam as a unique background and I'm sure that you will have questions.

Useful Web Sites

RentRoomAmsterdam.com. Find a room to rent for limited period of time.

Belastingdienst.nl. The tax authorities in Netherlands.

Amsterdam.nl. The city council in Amsterdam. Where you need to go in order to get your social security number, which is necessary when working in Netherlands.