

Eating and Drinking

Amsterdam has the most Indonesian restaurant outside of Indonesia itself. But if you're not in the mood for Indonesian cuisine, don't worry; the city offers a plethora of other foods to satisfy your palate, from American to Argentinian, including fast food restaurants. However, while in Amsterdam, you need to try Dutch pancakes. The best place is Pannekoeken (www.pancake.nl), with over 70 varieties. For more information on restaurants, as well as online menus, visit www.dinnersite.nl.

The Dutch are not only known for their chocolate and cheese, beer is popular as well. In fact, Amstel and Heineken beers are Dutch exports. You can tour an old Heineken brewery (www.heinekenexperience.com) to learn about how the beer is brewed. Or visit the brown cafés, which are like pubs, where you can try some jenever (gin) or drink beer, and enjoy snacks.

Coffee is also very popular in Amsterdam and enjoyed at outdoor cafés across the city. A word of warning though, the Dutch like their coffee black, strong and served in small cups. However, you can order it with milk added – what the Dutch refer to as the “wrong way.”

Cafés should not be confused with another kind of coffee shop, in which coffee is served, but cannabis is sold and smoked there as well. The selling of “soft” drugs is legal at these coffee shops, which have guidelines and regulations to follow. If you want to avoid these particular establishments, refer to guidebooks on Amsterdam or inquire at your hotel.

One vice leads into the next..

Ah, yes, the Red Light District. Referred to as the Walljets or Rossebuurt, (Dutch for red neighborhood), the infamous Red Light District gets its name from the glow of the red and pink lights from the windows where scantily clad women display their “wares” – prostitution is legal here, but confined to the district. It gives new meaning to the term window shopping and can be an eye-opener to even the most openminded traveler. Guided tours are offered, or you can explore this area on your own. A word of caution: taking photos of the women is prohibited.

One surprising thing about the Red Light District is its location, in the oldest and prettiest part of the city, with the narrow, cobblestone streets. Even more unusual is that in the center of the area is the Old Church (Oude Kerk; www.oudekerk.nl), the oldest church in Amsterdam. Dating back to about the early 1300s, this magnificent edifice was not completed until the mid-1500s. Rembrandt's daughters were baptized there, and his wife was buried in the church's graveyard – briefly, before he sold his plot when he was in debt, and her remains moved to another cemetery.

Before you go

For more information about Amsterdam or Holland, visit <http://www.visitamsterdam.nl>, or www.holland.com. Any time is a good time to visit Amsterdam, but the peak tourist season is July and August, when the weather is warmer. April – May is tulip season, peak time in May. The weather is also comfortable in September and October.