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From Wetlands To Canals And Dams: Amsterdam Is Alive

By Frank Johnson

There are not many cities that have experienced such social and political extremes in recent history

as Amsterdam. In the 20th century alone, Amsterdam faced the atrocities of war for the first time in 400 years, became the radical center of 1960s social movements and witnessed a complete about-face in its core economy. Amsterdam's progressive, multicultural, conscientious and contentious attitude wipes out images of a more docile past and ranks this capital city among the top 5 for European travel destinations.

Precariously positioned on the banks of both the IJ Bay and the Amstel River headwaters, Amsterdam made an early mark on the world with its dominant seafaring fleet and colonial aspirations in the 17th and 18th centuries. Amsterdam's economy turned inward once England emerged as the seafaring superpower. Consequently, most of the enchantingly crooked mansions and townhouses along the canals are now inhabited by eclectic stores, businesses and engaging galleries and the majority of Amsterdammers live outside of the canal belt.

Museums, Music and a Barrage of Culture

To gain a better understanding of how such a metropolitan city emerged from bogs, swamps and floodplains, visit the Amsterdams Historisch Museum. Extensive documentation covering centuries of growth spans the walls of the exhibits and a detailed segment is dedicated to modern day issues, conflicts and controversies surrounding Amsterdam's path to becoming a free and tolerant society. Then, explore Amsterdam's historic relationship with water aboard the Nederlands Scheepvaart Museum, a dry-docked ship from the East India Company. For a more refined jaunt into the past, a trip to the colossal Rijksmuseum will indulge the senses with fine art from Dutch masters throughout history.

As evening approaches, leave your museum voice behind and dive dancing and drinking into Amsterdam's edgy and rowdy nightlife. The pubs and coffee shops that line the canals are a vibrant mix of locals and visitors, and the perfect place to begin your evening. Enjoy an extensive array of domestic ale or have a taste of the unique Dutch gin. Musically, Amsterdam has something for everyone. Visit Mulligans Pub for authentic Irish entertainment, kick back to some jazz in Dylan's

stylish lobby bar or go electro at the famed mega-club, Ministry.

For a moment of contemplation or a summer picnic, Amsterdam offers some of the best urban park spaces among European cities. Bikes are available for rental to take in the scenery at a faster pace, just beware of the tram tracks that crisscross most roadways and footpaths.

Of European cities, Amsterdam is most likely to surprise, excite and intrigue its visitors in a most unexpected fashion. Travel to Amsterdam to enjoy the perfect balance of open spaces, a lively urban pulse and a gracefully multiethnic ambiance.

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The Amsterdam Red-Light District

By Burt Cotton

Probably you have heard about the Amsterdam Red-Light District as this is a very famous section in the Netherlands. Much to your surprise, what you may have heard is true! Here are some facts about the Amsterdam Red-Light District, a place unlike any place else.

The famous Amsterdam Red-Light District covers a large area in the oldest part of the city. It has been servicing the personal needs and desires of locals and visitors for five centuries, and thanks to the old buildings leaning at odd angles overlooking the tree-enshrouded canals that a certain charm tempts you to linger longer in the area. In this district, music of every genre can be heard along the streets from a dozen or more places late at night. And, it is the classier restaurants, redone streets, and revamped facades that transform what once dark and dingy into one of the most attractive parts of town - the Amsterdam Red-Light District.

Prostitution in the District

Did you know that prostitution is legal in the Netherlands? Yes, it is! It is most concentrated in the Amsterdam Red-Light District where it has enjoyed a long tradition of tolerance. It has been reported that since October 2000, window prostitutes have been allowed to legally ply their trade. Much to your surprise, the prostitutes in the Netherlands are also taxpayers. However, discrimination is still very much part and parcel in this kind of trade as a number of the prostitutes reported that some banks even refuse to grant mortgages for instance.

Now, as a legal profession, the government ensures that all prostitutes are able to access medical care and work in better conditions by way of regulating and monitoring working practices and standards. Also, it is worth noting that contrary to the popular belief, the Amsterdam Red-Light District is actually the safest area in the city as clusters of policemen and private bodyguards employed by the girls themselves are always on duty.

The Chinatown

The Amsterdam Red–Light District is one of the few places on earth where you can find authentic and really tasty Chinese food. The restaurants in this district are easy to find as cooked Duck is typically hung in the front window. However, Chinatown in itself is misleading as there are also dozens of Malaysian, Indonesian and Thai restaurants and cafés scattered along the beautiful canals. Besides the restaurants, there are other Chinese businesses in the Amsterdam Red–Light District, including a well stocked supermarket across from the Waag, near the Nieuwemarkt.

The Red–Light District Today

Amsterdam now prides itself on its wholly liberal and tolerant attitude. The city embraces, with the Amsterdam Red–Light District, the fact that people may be into prostitution, pornography and soft drugs. So, instead of criminalizing everything, Amsterdam wears its heart on its sleeve. What you see is generally what you get. So, how do you get to it? The answer basically lies on which Amsterdam Red–Light District you are looking for. There are actually three Red–Light Districts in the city: the main area is in the Walletjes area, the Singel, and de Pijp.

Burt Cotton

<http://www.visit-amsterdam.org>

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