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Travel Report: **Amsterdam**

Accommodations

Ambassade Hotel

The **Ambassade Hotel**, with 59 rooms, created from ten beautifully restored 17th century houses, is something of a scaled-down version of the Pulitzer, offering its own style of luxurious charm. It is tastefully decorated throughout with antiques, paintings and 18th century walnut clocks. Breakfasts are wonderful. Business facilities include computer usage and Internet access. Doubles from about \$230; suites from about \$320. Herengracht 341. Tel: 31-20-555-0222. www.ambassade-hotel.nl.

Amsterdam Wiechmann Hotel

Of the small hotels in the area, you'll get good value at the **Amsterdam Wiechmann Hotel** where 38 rooms are tucked into three restored canal houses. Antiques and period furniture adorn the lobby and bedrooms, and the buildings retain their typical steep, narrow stairways. Bathrooms are small but adequate. There's a pleasant lounge/bar but no restaurant. Doubles from \$155. 328-332 Prinsengracht. Tel: 31-20-626-3321. www.hotelwiechmann.nl.

Canal House

Another of our favorite Amsterdam hotels, the **Canal House**, is owned by an Irish couple, Brian and Mary Bennett. Even the chambermaids have thick Irish accents. The establishment occupies a narrow 17th century building on a canal in a residential neighborhood, not far from the Anne Frank house. There are 26 rooms with beamed ceilings, all nicely decorated in soft colors. Larger rooms are in the back, overlooking a quiet garden; the smaller, front-facing rooms are a bit noisier, but you have a view of the canal. No television or Internet access. Breakfast is served in a magnificent garden room. No children under 12. Doubles from about \$165, including breakfast. Keizersgracht 148. Tel: 31-20-622-5182.

Crowne Plaza Amsterdam-American

The **Crowne Plaza Amsterdam-American** is an architectural icon situated on the noisy Leidesplein, right in the heart of the city and all its action. It is a listed national monument with a striking Art Nouveau exterior and Art Deco interior. Rooms are large and have deep, comfortable armchairs. A spacious corner suite, No. 19, is particularly attractive with its soft ocher decor, king-size bed that sits between marble pillars, roomy bathroom, and canal view. The gorgeous **Café Américain**—with high arched ceilings, big windows, and frescoed walls—serves snacks, drinks, and full dinners. On Sundays, a jazz brunch for two, with beverage, costs about \$60. 188 rooms. Doubles from about \$420. Leidsekade 97. Tel: 31-20-624-5322. www.amsterdam-american.crowneplaza.com.

Grand Sofitel Demeure Amsterdam

The **Grand Amsterdam Sofitel Demeure** is a deluxe hotel in a historic building that once served as city hall. Its 166 rooms and 16 serviced apartments have unusual layouts, resulting from the fact that the landmark building, by law, cannot be basically altered. There is a spa, with pool and Turkish bath and two inner courtyards with gardens. Doubles from about \$500. Oudezjids Voorburgwal 197. Tel: 31-20-555-3111. www.thegrand.nl.

Hilton Amsterdam

The in-town Hilton (not the one at the airport) is a spacious, tastefully designed, 268-room hotel in the nice Oud Zuid area, a bit away from the center. Pleasant interiors and standard facilities. There are several excellent shopping streets nearby, as well as the Vondelpark, for runners. The most interesting secret about this rather run-of-the-mill property is that this is where John Lennon and Yoko Ono held their "love ins" during their honeymoon in March 1969. You can even stay in their room, #902, a corner suite complete with their graffiti on the windows and ceiling (about \$1,000 per night). Favored by

business travelers. Doubles from about \$300. Apollolaan 138. Tel: 31-20-710-6080. www.amsterdam.hilton.com.

Hotel de l'Europe

The 94-room **Hotel de l'Europe** was a "hobby" of the late Baron Freddy Heineken of the beer family, and he poured a fortune into it. It is situated on the Amstel, close to the heart of the city. French-style rooms are plush and luxuriously appointed. Some areas are a bit formal, even gloomy, but the hotel's great location and the service offered by the staff balance this slight quibble. The award-winning **Excelsior** dining room is rather stiff, but has a beautiful view of the Amstel canal and offers outdoor seating in summer. The wine cellar, under the management of sommelier Dannis Apeldoorn, is top of the line. Four course tasting menu for two, with wines, about \$230. Doubles from about \$415; suites from about \$540. Nieuwe Doelenstraat 2-8. Tel: 800-223-6800. www.leurope.nl.

InterContinental Amstel

The grandest of Amsterdam's hotels is the 79 room **Amstel**, an InterContinental property set beside the Amstel river just south of the city's busy center. The hotel, opened in 1867, is sumptuously decorated and offers a complete complement of modern electronic gadgetry. From its magnificent Grand Hall, where guests are received, to the gym and heated indoor pool, discreet service matches a high style. Doubles from about \$400.

The luxuriously appointed **La Rive**, a two-Michelin-star table, serves expensive food that's usually worth every penny. Try the Mariniere de Saint-Jacques with truffles; or the filet de boeuf grille. The room is beautiful, and the service impeccable, although somewhat more pressing than two-star prices should permit. But don't let that scare you away, this food ranks with the best anywhere. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$200. Professor Tulpplein 1. Tel: 31-20-622-6060. www.amsterdam.intercontinental.com.

Marriott Amsterdam Hotel

The **Marriott Amsterdam Hotel** has large halls, all amenities, and joyful room decor complete with all the expected gadgets. It also offers splendid views over the canals and house gables. Somewhat noisy, but service is good and complaints are taken seriously (at least ours was). 392 rooms. Doubles from \$300. Stadhouderskade 12. Tel: 31-20-607-5555. www.marriott.com.

NH Barbizon Palace

The 274-room **NH Barbizon Palace**, across from Amsterdam's Central Station, was assembled from 19 17th century houses and has incorporated the neighboring 13th century St. Olaf's Chapel as its convention center. Many of the rooms have beamed ceilings above enormous beds and are equipped with up-to-date facilities. Preferred rooms are on the top floor where you have an excellent view of the city. The **Vermeer** restaurant, occupying three of the patrician houses, has earned a second Michelin star. Chef Pascal Jalhajj's short, imaginative menu includes seasonal market finds. Best appetizers are the goat-cheese souffle, truffle sausages with arugula and raw oysters, and a terrine of sauteed foie gras and potatoes. Melon drizzled with honey is an intermezzo. Then comes the standout sirloin baked in sea salt. Other good bets: rack of lamb with gratin of white beans and tomatoes, and potato-scampi cakes in basil oil. Dinner for two, without wine, is about \$180. Doubles from about \$190. Prins Hendrikkade 59-72 Tel: 31-20-556-4564. www.nh-hotels.com.

NH Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky

The services of its business center make the **NH Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky** especially attractive to business travelers. The lobby area provides wireless internet connectivity, and all rooms are equipped with modems. Located on Dam square, the hotel is handy to canals, museums, and shops - including the top department store, **De Bijenkorf**. The hotel's rooms and amenities make for a pleasant stay, and a glorious, glass-roofed **Winter Garden** with palms and wicker furniture is a marvelous spot to enjoy breakfast and buffet lunch. Sunday Champagne brunch with music runs about \$75 for two. 415 rooms. Doubles from about \$200. Dam Square 9. Tel: 31-20-554-9111. www.nh-hotels.com.

Private Apartment Rental in Amsterdam

On your next trip to Amsterdam, consider staying in a private apartment rather than a hotel. There are a goodly number throughout the city and several rental agencies handle them. We were very pleased with our experience on our last visit, when we used the services of Kathryn Wentzel, an American who's lived in Amsterdam for many years and who operates a company called **Pied a Terre Properties**. Her two-bedroom apartments on the Prinsengracht are bright, tastefully

furnished and fully equipped with bedding, kitchenware and utensils and even some food staples. Tel: 31-20-625-5195. www.piedaterreproperties.com.

Radisson SAS Hotel

The **Radisson SAS Hotel** is a highly successful blending of 18th century merchant houses, a paper factory and an old vicarage with new construction to produce a thoroughly modern accommodation. The 242 large rooms are decorated in a variety of styles—Dutch, Scandinavian, Oriental and Art Deco. There's a fitness center and high-speed Internet connectivity, and pets are welcome. A tree-dotted atrium houses the **Pastoriebar**, a very popular watering spot for media and entertainment people. If you are traveling on SAS and have only hand luggage, you can check in for your flight at the hotel. Doubles from about \$200. Rusland 17. Tel: 31-20-623-1231. www.radissonsas.com.

Renaissance Amsterdam Hotel

The **Renaissance Amsterdam Hotel**, near to the neo-Renaissance vastness of Central Station, is a well-run blend of American efficiency and Dutch friendliness. The establishment offers comfortable rooms, a cafe, a nightclub/disco, and a restaurant. 405 rooms. Next door are some private apartments, sparsely furnished but reasonably comfortable and certainly a good value for a large accommodation in the city center, especially for families. Apartments from about \$160; hotel doubles from about \$235. Kattengat 1. Tel: 31-20-621-2223. www.marriott.com.

Seven One Seven

Seven One Seven is Amsterdam's best kept secret and our choice for the city's finest accommodation. It is so discreet that no exterior sign admits to it being a hotel. Only eight rooms (two per floor via a circular staircase), but what rooms they are, with their burgundy colors, Murano glass and Belgian linen. Best is the Picasso suite, about 650 square feet, with high ceilings and five windows and furnished with an exquisite mix of antiques and contemporary pieces. Just about as special is the Schubert suite. The relaxed atmosphere of the downstairs lounges and patios is reminiscent of a well-run country house. This is the kind of place where guests leave clothes for their next visit. The service matches the surroundings. The Picasso and Schubert suites are about \$760; doubles from about \$450. Prinsengracht 717. Tel: 31-20-427-0717. www.717hotel.nl.

Sheraton Hotel Pulitzer

The **Hotel Pulitzer**, following a massive \$33 million facelift by Starwood Hotels, has regained its rank as the city's most romantic hotel. Its 230 rooms ramble from one restored 17th century canal house to another (25 in all) between two main canals—the Prinsengracht and the Keizersgracht. The result is stunning, with sumptuous rooms either overlooking canals or three interior gardens. Bars and restaurants combine classical, Dutch, Art Deco and modern styles. There's a surprise around every corner of the art-filled interior. This is a very classy establishment. Each evening they offer a cruise on the canals in their classic wooden canal boat, which holds only ten people—an excellent alternative to the huge tourist boats. The cost of the cruise is about \$40 per person, plus drinks and you can hire the entire boat with captain for about \$300 per hour. When the sun shines, it's difficult to find a more appealing spot for lunch than the Pulitzer Hotel terrace. The food is middle-of-the-road French, the service is all you could ask for and the setting, a picture postcard. Lunch for two before wine, about \$70. And on any of Amsterdam's many rainy afternoons, the Pulitzer Bar is the ultimate in refined coziness. Hotel doubles from about \$400. Prinsengracht 315-331. Tel: 800-325-3535. www.starwood.com.

Spaarne 8

Spaarne 8 is a quiet yet luxurious hotel in Haarlem, about 15 minutes from Amsterdam's Central Station and about 20 minutes from Schiphol Airport by car. You might even want to consider staying here even if you plan to spend most of your time in Amsterdam. There are only two guest rooms, yet it was voted the Best Hotel in the Netherlands in 2004. Guests have the run of the entire house, including the kitchen and comfortable sitting room. Most guests reserve both rooms for complete privacy. Best of all, unlike so many so-called designer hotels, Spaarne 8 was designed by owners Peter Schoenmaker and Janneke Muileboom to be comfortable, as well as stylish. The artwork is real, but not bolted down; the glasses are antiques, but you're encouraged to use them. The price includes everything, from a cooked-to-order breakfast to a nightcap or two of single malt scotch. It is close to both the Teylers and Frans Hals museums, and Haarlem is regularly voted the best shopping city in the Netherlands. Double room from \$350. Tel: 31-235-511-544. www.spaarne8.com.

The Dylan

The Dylan Hotel in Amsterdam, which for many years was Blakes, has built a reputation as one of the city's most stylish accommodations, has almost doubled in size after having been bought by David Stein, a California property developer. Stein also bought the adjoining building where he installed 16 large rooms and suites, all in the striking design style of Lady Anouska Hempel, who was the original owner and who had the management contract until the Dylan Group took it over. There are now 41 rooms and suites in all. Hempel's idea of chic is explained as a mix of East and West—feng shui principles and Japanese and Indonesian motifs applied with western overstatement. The result would keep some people awake at night, but if you don't mind being drenched in "style," you'll enjoy this modernist version of it. Amenities are au courant too. Rooms are supplied with bottled oxygen to be used to overcome jet lag, and Internet connections are everywhere—even in some of the bathrooms. The interior garden is used for both breakfast and dinner, weather permitting (which, of course, it frequently does not in Amsterdam). Stein owns chic boutique hotels in Majorca, Barcelona and Eze on the French Riviera, and he plans to extend his mini-chain to 25 properties in Europe and around the Mediterranean. Doubles from about \$400. Keizergracht 384. Tel: 31-20-530-2010. www.blakes-amsterdam.com.

Restaurants

Arti Choc

Arti Choc (pronounced "arti-chalk") is really a candy shop, but they do have a small area for desserts and coffee. Their chocolates and sweets come in seasonal shapes--acorns and leaves in the fall, for example. And their hollow chocolate shapes, such as pumpkins, are just right for filling with even more chocolate. 141, Zuid, Amsterdam. Tel: 31-20-470-9805.

Balthazar's Keuken

Balthazar's Keuken is a quirky bistro at the edge of the Jordaan district. The set menu includes a starter selection served tapas style (perhaps sardines, hummus, tabouli and shrimp); a fish or meat main course and a light dessert. On our last visit, we had a delicious tuna steak with risotto and a tender rib-eye on sauerkraut as main courses and for dessert, quark (an unripened, soft cheese resembling sour cream) and pears. There are only 24 seats in this busy little place, with distressed murals on the cement walls and an open kitchen. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$60. Open only Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights. Elandsgracht 108. Tel: 31-20-420-2114. www.balthazarskeuken.nl.

Blauw aan de Wal

In a secluded corner within the city's red light district, **Blauw aan de Wal** is an elegant table serving French food that shows traces of several other international cuisines, all very good and stylishly presented. The wine list is excellent and reasonably priced. Dinner for two, without wine, about \$90. Closed Sundays. Oudezijds Achterburgwal 99. Tel: 31-20-330-2257.

Bordewijk

Bordewijk, in the trendy Jordaan district, lives up to its reputation for excellent service and interesting food. Its stagy décor could use some freshening up, however, and table linens would cut down on the noise. Nevertheless, it's airy and always dependable for an interesting crowd of neighborhood regulars. Dine on salmon carpaccio with oysters served on lambs' lettuce; sea bass in basil cream; and lamb loin with three beans and garlic. Chef Wil Demandt's cooking follows his principle that "three ingredients are more than enough. Beyond that, you press people to think about the food, and that's not good." His prix fixe menus run from about \$45 to \$60 per person, and an à la carte menu offers selections such as osso buco with risotto. Pass up the tired cheese cart in favor of a sweet. Closed on Monday. Noordermarkt 7, Jordaan. Tel: 31-20-624-3899.

Brasserie Van Baerle

Brasserie Van Baerle is a great favorite for pre-concert dinners and lengthy Sunday brunches. Created and managed by three former KLM cabin crew, its success led them to open four other popular restaurants in Amsterdam. The brasserie is located near the Concertgebouw, in an attractive room with brass fittings, parquet floor, wicker chairs and a garden beyond. Beef carpaccio, monkfish filet and crème brûlée make a delightful meal. Dinner for two, without wine, about \$80. Dinner served until 11 p.m. Van Baerlestraat 158, Zuid. Tel: 31-20-679-1532.

Cafe Nielsen

Lasse and Wenche Nielsen (siblings) created **Cafe Nielsen** to be a place where you can linger over breakfast or lunch,

reading your newspaper and enjoying the friendly atmosphere. Be sure to order the *Wentelteeffjes*--Dutch (not French) toast-- and try the wonderful fruit drinks. Sit downstairs next to the kitchen to minimize smoke. Closed Monday. Berenstraat 19, Nine Straatjes. Tel: 31-20-330-6006.

Chez Georges

Georges and Betsie Roorda, proprietors of **Chez Georges**, serve innovative Belgian cuisine in a restrained, romantic setting. Everything about dining here is intimate, from the refined service to the tiny tables tucked onto balconies and into corners. The wine list can double the price of your dinner, but it's worth it to pair the perfect wine with the kitchen's fantastic creations. Try the five-course gastronomic meal, well priced at about \$40 per person. Book well ahead. Closed Wednesdays and Sundays. Herenstraat 3, Nine Straatjes. Tel: 31-20-626-3332.

Christophe

Christophe is another intimate affair, with no bright lights or colors to distract you from the fine food. It's located in a quiet canal neighborhood, just right for an after-dinner walk. Try the foie gras and braised duck breast with white cabbage and truffles. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$150. Closed Sundays and Mondays. Leliegracht 46, Jordaan. Tel: 31-20-625-0807.

Cobra Cafe

The **Cobra Cafe**, in the Museumkwartier, is a good alternative to the cafés you'll find inside the city's museums. It has a nice terrace in the summer, and inside, its walls pay homage to the COBRA school artists, a post-World War II group that took its name from the three cities of its founders--**C**openhagen, **B**russels and **A**msterdam. Good noodle salads and light lunches, including sushi cut to order. Also open for dinner. Lunch for two, before beverage, about \$35. On the Museumplein, Hobbemastraat 18. Tel: 31-20-470-0111.

De Bakkerswinkel van Nineties

De Bakkerswinkel van Nineties is a very good bakery and then some. It offers daily changing quiche and soups as well as a selection of small sandwiches, and, in the afternoon, high tea (try the hot chai). There are two locations--Amsterdam Zuid (Roelofhartstraat 68) is a bit cramped, and you might find the friendly cat, Rose, walking across your table or making herself at home on your lap; Centrum (Warmoesstraat 69) is larger and near Dam Square, a nice oasis amidst the area's seedier offerings. No credit cards. Tel: 31-20-662-3594.

De Kersentuin

De Kersentuin, in the Garden Hotel across the street from the Hilton, has a most attractive setting and serves excellent food. Reservations are essential. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$90. Dijkshofplantsoen 7, Zuid. Tel: 31-20-664-2121.

De Silveren Spiegel

De Silveren Spiegel, located across the street from the Renaissance Amsterdam Hotel, has a delightful wood-and-tile ambiance. If you're fond of fish, you might want to try the steamed fillets of sole, the turbot, or the grilled monkfish. Outstanding among the very special desserts is the delicious cinnamon "sabayonne." Dinner for two, without wine, about \$175. Kattengat 4-6. Tel: 31-20-624-6589.

De Taart van m'n Tante

The décor at **De Taart van m'n Tante** is high kitsch and will stop you in your tracks when you pass by on a gray afternoon. A great place for a pick-me-up piece of cake and cup of coffee. Most of the menu consists of sweets, but there are a few light things as well. Closed Mondays. Ferdinand Bolstraat 10, De Pijp. Tel: 31-20-776-4600.

De Witte Uyl

De Witte Uyl (The White Owl) is one of our favorites. Tucked into the exciting Pijp neighborhood, the flowers, 1920s and '30s furniture, recorded jazz and wide-open feel make this a comfortable room whether you're part of a large group or dining tête-à-tête. This is a good place to satisfy a beef craving, as the meat is either free-range or organic. There also are good choices for vegetarians (we were enchanted with a tart of kohlrabi and cardamom served with a ravioli filled with goat's cheese, walnuts and dates). Anything on the menu can be ordered as a starter or a main course. Ten wines are

available by the glass, in addition to an excellent choice of bottles. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$90. Closed Monday. Frans Halsstraat 26, De Pijp. Tel: 31-20-670-0458.

Dorrius

Dorrius is known for its modern versions of potato-based *stampot* dishes and such local specialties as Alkmaar cheese soup, well-simmered mutton and Dutch bouillabaisse with gray shrimp. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$80. Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 5, Centrum. Tel: 31-20-420-2224.

d'Vijff Vlieghen

Dutch cuisine has come a long way from reliance on national dishes such as *boerenkool* (farmer's cabbage). An excellent example of the inventiveness of a growing number of young Dutch chefs is the cooking of Rene Cramer at the 400-year-old **d'Vijff Vlieghen** (The Five Flies), where the menu includes such memorable dishes as shrimp mousse wrapped in eel; roulade of veal with a touch of ginger; mullet and North Sea crab; filet of suckling pig; and a scrumptious blackberry soufflé. The restaurant's décor is a striking mélange of ancient leather wallpaper, exquisite tiles, antique glassware, paintings and even armor. But unlike other restaurants where the surroundings are more interesting than the meal, here, the food's the thing. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$80. Spuistraat 294, Centrum. Tel: 31-20-624-8369.

Dylan (Blakes)

The Dylan (Blakes) restaurant is popular year-round, but especially so for summer dining in the stylish courtyard. Its menu offers Asian-style fusion dishes seldom found in Amsterdam--foie gras soup with sweet Thai basil; lime chicken Fabergé with lobster and ginger-lemon grass sauce; and chili-seared scallops. There are prix fixe menus from about \$75 per person, without wine, also an à la carte menu that will amount to about \$180 for two, before wine. Dinner Monday through Saturday, lunch weekdays and brunch on Sunday. Closed for dinner on Sunday. Keizersgracht 384, Jordaan. Tel: 31-20-530-2010.

Het Tuynhuys

Het Tuynhuys (The Garden House) is known for its stunning décor, as well as its stylish garden. The wittily contemporary café serves such fare as lobster roasted with leeks, potatoes and truffles; salmon in pesto over tagliatelle; and grilled veal rib with vegetable ravioli. Most of the dishes can be ordered either as starters or mains. The chocolate torte with poached pear, hazelnut sauce and ice cream is heavenly. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$110. Reguliersdwarsstraat 28, Centrum. Tel: 31-20-627-6603.

Inez

Inez, occupying an unmarked, second-story site along the Amstel, and offering a terrific view of the river, is the latest hot ticket in Amsterdam restaurants. It's filled with black-garbed, thirty-somethings who have discovered that the kitchen turns out terrific vanguard food, albeit at a snail's pace. The celery soup with a huge lobe of foie gras and the shellfish in Noilly Prat are terrific starters and are well-complemented by poussin served with sauerkraut and roasted vegetables alongside a mammoth nest of frizzled grass, or skate over sage polenta with pancetta gravy. Equally strange sweets, such as ginger cookie dough ravioli stuffed with mandarin oranges, round out the menu. Three-course, prix fixe dinner for two, without wine, about \$80. 2 Amstel. Tel: 31-20-639-2899.

Jean Jean

Jean Jean resides on a lively street in the Jordaan. It's decorated in subdued whites and rust, a sophisticated palette that sets the tone for equally sophisticated palates. The French-leaning fare is excellent. Try the surprise menu, which is also available in a vegetarian version. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$70. Closed Mondays. Eerst Anjeliersdwarsstraat 14, Jordaan. Tel: 020-627-7153.

Kantjil ende Tijger

Rijstafel, the Indonesian tradition of serving many small plates of various native foods, is a distinct cuisine that visitors and locals alike enjoy. The popular **Kantjil ende Tijger** serves an inauthentic version of the food, but because it is noisy and the atmosphere casual, it's a good place to take children. Rijstafel for two, before beverage, about \$80. Spuistraat 291, Centrum, Amsterdam. Tel: 31-20-620-0994.

La Rive

The Amstel Hotel's luxuriously appointed **La Rive**, a two-Michelin-star table, serves expensive food that's usually worth every penny. Try the Mariniere de Saint-Jacques with truffles; or the filet de boeuf grille. The room is beautiful, and the service impeccable, although a bit more pressing than two-star prices should permit. But don't let that scare you away, this food ranks with the best anywhere. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$200. Professor Tulpplein 1. Tel: 31-20-622-6060.

Le Garage

Joop Braakhekke's **Le Garage**, a trendy spot that attracts a chic crowd, is more than just hype. His food blends Asian elements with Dutch and international standards, in many selections incorporating unexpected ingredients, as, for example, in his foie gras enriched meatballs, a very popular dish with the regulars. His flair is particularly visible in marvelous desserts. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$90. Ruysdaelstraat 54, Zuid. Tel: 31-20-679-7176.

Luden

Luden, a favorite for power business dining, is an up-tempo brasserie where you'll have to wait even with a reservation. Start with the unusual half-warm salmon over sauerkraut (it works), or a salad of stewed rabbit in cider vinaigrette, or pastrami on white cabbage (again, better than it sounds). Among the main courses, the lamb fillet with French beans and rosemary-garlic potatoes; fish stew over Chinese noodles and wild spinach; and chicken breast stuffed with sweetbreads are all terrific. For dessert, ask for the combo--a Belgian waffle, warm goat cheese sauced with thyme and honey, and a semolina mousse. The restaurant is part of a respected national chain that is known for good food at reasonable prices. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$60. Spuistraat 304, Centrum. Tel: 31-20-622-8979.

Pompadour Tearoom

Pompadour Tearoom, serves sandwiches and wonderful chocolate desserts. In season, they also offer a selection of chocolate Christmas tree ornaments. Huidenstraat 12, Nine Straatjes. Tel: 31-20-623-9554.

Pygma-Lion

Pygma-Lion is a small and funky South African restaurant with an unusual menu. If you have a hankering for zebra, springbok or crocodile, you'll find them here. Among the less exotic offerings are an unexpectedly tasty pumpkin and feta salad and delicious curries. Lunch for two, without beverage, about \$35. There's a no-smoking section. Closed Monday. Nieuwe Spiegelstraat 5a, Spiegelkwartier. Tel: 31-20-420-7022.

Raden Mas

Raden Mas is part of a chain of Indonesian restaurants located in tourist areas and serving pretty good rijstafel. If you must try this specialty, you'll get a good selection of the near-traditional version here. Dinner for two, without beverage, runs about \$65. Stadhouderskade 6, Centrum. Tel: 31-20-685-4041.

Restaurant De Groene Lanterne

The charming **Restaurant De Groene Lanterne** is a well-kept secret, unknown to most visitors. It has an excellent wine list and an ambitious menu that includes sautéed foie gras; spicy lobster with goose liver in beurre-blanc; tartare of langoustines with a truffle crème; and forest duck with figs and tomato chutney. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$100. This is a tiny spot, so try to reserve. Closed Sundays. Haarlemmerstraat 43, Centrum. Tel: 31-20-624-1952.

Restaurant de Luwte

Walking into a restaurant in Amsterdam and being asked, "Smoking or non?" is still a rare occurrence. That alone would almost be worthy of a recommendation for **Restaurant de Luwte**. But the cozy little neighborhood bistro on the Leliegracht canal also offers noteworthy food and service. The short menu concentrates on Mediterranean-style food—staples such as giant shrimp with polenta, well-aged meats, at least one vegetarian offering and delicious salads with duck's breast and cranberries or Parma ham that can be ordered as a starter or main course. The well-priced wine list is mostly Spanish. Dinner for two, with wine, about \$90. Leliegracht 26-28, Jordaan. Tel: 31-20-625-8548.

Restaurant en Kwekerij De Kas

Restaurant en Kwekerij De Kas (Kas's Garden), which everyone calls De Kas, on the outskirts of Amsterdam, is not the kind of place where you ask who the chef is (Ronald Kunis), but who the gardener is. The friendly servers explain the

origin of each ingredient, whether straight from the fisherman's boat, the organic farm or the restaurant's own greenhouse. Vegetarian dishes are particularly fine. The restaurant is housed in the city's former works buildings, including hothouses, in a serene park area. Décor is sparse, with a mellow light show on the ceiling that blends surprisingly well with the eco-chic environment. Five-course set menu, about \$50 per person, before wine. Book well ahead. Kamerlingh Onneslaan 3, Watergraafsmeer. Tel: 31-20-462-4562.

Soup en Zo

For fresh take-away soup and made-to-order salads, stop by any of the **Soup en Zo** locations. Their fruit shakes are refreshing, as well, and they also have a sit-down restaurant near the Waterlooplein. Spiegelkwartier location: Spiegelstraat 54. Tel: 31-20-330-7781. Waterlooplein location: Jodenbreestraat 94a. Tel: 31-20-422-2243.

't Jagershuis

About 15 minutes outside of Amsterdam, **'t Jagershuis** is located in the small village of Ouderkerk aan de Amstel. The views of the Amstel canal is exceptional, and the service is even better. Chef Dimitry Mulder's menu attracts a considerable number of business groups for lunch or dinner, sometimes quite large groups. But, don't discount the place for a very personal dinner, as well. There also are 12 bedrooms if you want to spend the night and explore the small village. Dinner for two, without wine, about \$100. Amstelzijde 2-4, Ouderkerk aan de Amstel. Tel: 31-20-496-2020.

Tempo Doeloe

Tempo Doeloe (Old Days) is an Indonesian restaurant situated on the city's most interesting shopping street. Connoisseurs of this cuisine say the food served here is completely authentic, but be careful as the dishes, particularly the young goat satay, are very spicy. Try pancakes filled with beef and giant prawns with coconut sauce. Dinner for two, before beverage, about \$70. Utrechtsestraat 75. Tel: 31-20-625-6718.

Utrechtsedwarstafel

To enjoy dining at **Utrechtsedwarstafel**, you must be willing to put aside any innate distrust of culinary gimmicks, for while the take here is undoubtedly gimmicky, the food is superb. You select only the *type* of meal you prefer (number of courses and complexity of preparation), also specifying any ingredients you cannot or will not eat. Choose three, four or five courses at the simple, complex or gastronomic level. Prices range from about \$55 to about \$120 per person, with an additional charge for more than one glass of wine per course. It may sound terribly contrived, but in the exceedingly competent hands of partners Hans Verbeek (wine guy) and Igor Sens (chef) it succeeds beautifully, and the result is a culinary triumph. Hans and Igor personally present each course and every wine in a very engagingly unpretentious manner. Dinner only, Tuesday through Saturday. Reservations are essential. Utrechtsedwarsstraat 107-109. Tel: 31-20-625-4189. www.utrechtsedwarstafel.com.

Van Vlaanderen

The French/Flemish food served at **Van Vlaanderen** has earned its one Michelin star. The room is small and the décor a bit sparse, but the food and service are outstanding. Try for a terrace table in summer. Dinner for two, before wine, about \$100. Closed Sundays and Mondays. Weteringschans 175, Amsterdam. Tel: 31-20-622-8292.

Vermeer

The elegant **Vermeer**, which occupies three patrician houses at the Barbizon Palace Hotel, has earned its second Michelin star. Young chef Pascal Jalhajj's short, imaginative menu includes seasonal market finds. We dined exceptionally on starters of goat-cheese soufflé, truffle sausages with arugula and raw oysters, and a terrine of sautéed foie gras and potatoes. Then, after a refresher of melon drizzled with honey, we tucked into a sirloin baked in sea salt; rack of lamb with gratin of white beans and tomatoes; and potato-scampi cakes in basil oil. Dinner for two, before wine, is about \$180, or try the Menu Pascal consisting of six set courses, for about \$100 per person. Prins Hendrikkade 59-72. Tel: 31-20-556-4564. .

Shopping

Shopping in Amsterdam

Amsterdam has so many good and reputable diamond merchants, it's impossible to recommend a specific one. Diamond cutting is open to public view, and you can ask to see any merchant's "for sale" selection. Foreign visitors are exempt from

the Dutch tax on diamonds.

Your best buy in Amsterdam is porcelain. One of several shops specializing in old and new is at Prinsengracht 170. Handpainted tiles cost about \$20-\$30; tulip vases go for about \$300. You can find a small vase of exquisite Royal Delft for about \$275. And porcelain tree ornaments make valued gifts.

S.H. Metz is a Liberty's-style store on Leidesstraat. Its topmost floor offers afternoon tea (about \$20 for two) and great views of the city. **De Bijenkorf**, on Dam square, is the best all-round department store. And the **Amsterdam Diamond Centre** is a convenient place to see one of the city's specialties.

Magna Plaza, a four-story shopping mall in the magnificent Old Post Office in Nieuwe Zijds Voorburgwal, has numerous international specialty shops ranging from **The Leading Edge** (for gifts and gadgets) to **Speeldozenhuis** (for music boxes). And the Plaza is one of the few places open Sunday afternoon, 12:00-6:00 p.m.

Kalverstraat, a popular shopping street, is really too crowded to be comfortable. And much of the merchandise offered there is not in the latest styles and is overpriced.

You'll find interesting antiques at **De Looier** (Elandsgracht 109), and the Sunday **Fleamarket in Waterlooplein** holds many surprises among the collected junk on display.

The ultimate in confections in Amsterdam is to be found at **Puccini**, a shop where the dangerously luscious chocolates are weighed out for you as if they were diamonds (and they're almost as costly.) 17 Staalstraat. www.puccinibomboni.com.

Travel Tips

Amsterdam Walks

Amsterdam is a city made for walking. It appears small enough to walk from one end to the other, but it's packed with so many distractions, it can be difficult to get as far as you intended, regardless of where you're heading. Here are descriptions of the city's several sections and destinations where a tour via shank's mare will pay dividends of discovery and enjoyment.

Museumkwartier. Despite the fact that most of the Rijksmuseum is closed for renovation, there is still much to enjoy in the area. The **Concertgebouw** orchestra (Museumplein 1) presents free concerts every Wednesday at 12:30. Get there early for a seat. Amsterdam's most elegant shopping street, **PC Hooftstraat**, is lined with the boutiques of many of the country's best brands along with the local outlets of upscale international retailers. Grab a seat at any of the cafés along the way for an ongoing parade of New Dutch and Russian money. **Cobra Café**, right on the Museumplein, is another interesting hangout, and if you've arrived here by car to begin your walk, there's a "Dutch clean" parking lot under the *plein* (plaza). The entrance to parking is on Van Baerlestraat, and from the lot, you can get to an **Albert Heijn** supermarket that's open until 10 p.m. most evenings, including Sunday.

Amsterdam Zuid (South) is where you'll find some of the best of the Amsterdam School architecture, yet it's overlooked by many guidebooks. It was here in the 1920s that architect Hendrik Petrus Berlage implemented his planned community know as "Plan Zuid." Elsewhere in the district, **Vincent Nelis Antiques** (Roelof Hartstraat 30) has a wonderful cabinet of curiosities with antique scientific instruments and ethnographic items. Try **De Bakkerswinkel van Nineties** (Roelof Hartstraat 68) for breakfast, lunch or tea; or book in for an extra long lunch or dinner at **Brasserie van Baerle** (van Baerlestraat 58) where, on our last visit, Crown Prince Willem and his wife, Crown Princess Maxima, popped in for a low-key, after-theater dinner. Beethovenstraat has upscale stores, including the classic clothing staple for tall, chic Dutch women, **Pauw** (#68 and locations throughout the country). Villas and mansions separate the Beethovenstraat from the open green of the **Vondelpark**. Walk down the posh Cornelis Schuytstraat where the Amsterdam branch of auctioneer **Christie's** (#57) is located as well as high-end greengrocer **Chris Nugteren** (#35).

De Pijp is a fascinating commercial district, but no one has more than a guess at why it is so named. Some say it comes from the gas company locals called "the Pipe," whose pipes used to supply gas to the area. **Albert Cuyp Markt** is the largest open-air market in Amsterdam, and close-by is **Duikelman BV** (Ferdinand Bolstraat 68), an impressive kitchen store for professional and aspiring cooks. Down the street is **De Taart van m'n Tante** (#10), for kitschy cake and coffee, and a few blocks away is the best eating place in Amsterdam for imaginative, organic cooking, **De Witte Uyl** (Frans

Halsstraat 26). While you're in the neighborhood, check out the Dutch obsession with all things having to do with bicycles at **De Fietsfabriek** (corner of Frans Halsstraat and Eerst Johan van Campenstraat).

Centrum is a district for people who want to indulge their vices. If you are a fan of the Danish shoe company **Ecco** (Leidsestraat 4), you'll be pleased with the prices at this location. For cigars, **PGC Hajenius** (Rokin 92-96), founded in 1826, is one of the country's top tobacconists. If art is your passion, visit **Galerie Mokum** (Oudezijdes Voorburgwal 334), where 20th century Dutch Magical Realism holds sway. **The American Book Store** (185 Kalverstraat) has four floors of titles in English. But the real vices are in **De Wallin**, the notorious "Red Light District." Regardless of your interests, a reason to visit the neighborhood is the elegant **Blauw aan de Wal** restaurant (Oudezijds Achterburgwal 99).

Nico Bax (Tel: 31-20-330-1910) can arrange a private party on an elegant canal boat. For a less exclusive evening on the canals, contact the **Pulitzer Hotel** (Tel: 31-20-535-5235) for spaces on their evening cruises. For a livelier evening's ride, book the **Disco Taxi** (Tel: 31-6-54-69-81-87).

Spiegelkwartier--The Rijksmuseum looms at the end of the cozy Nieuwe Spiegelstraat. A century ago, this was the lane that housed the best butchers and grocers in the city. (Notice the words "Comestibles" and "Fijne Vleeschwaren" at the corner of the Prinsengracht.) Since then, it's become the location of some of the best and priciest art and antiques shops in the country. Dig through thousands of Dutch tiles at **Eduard Kramer** (#64) and check out **MC Gasseling Antiekhandel** (#66) for Delftware (remember, old is often less expensive than new). The crowded basement of **Dr. Philip M. Silberberg** (#46), dealer in medical antiques, usually holds some surprises, as does the **Gallery Lieve Hemel** (#3). For a meal or snack, you can try zebra at the South African restaurant **Pygma-Lion** (#5a), and to take away fresh soup or salad, the food at **Soup en Zo** (#54) is terrific. **De Bres** (Kerkstraat 179) features contemporary Dutch artist Bazuin along with many others. **Thom and Lenny Nelis** (Keizersgracht 541) specialize in antique medical instruments, spectacles and pharmacy items in their fascinating tiny, historical shop.

Jordaan is the location of the **Anne Frank House** (in the busy summer season, visit in the early evening to avoid the crowds) and the **Noordermarkt**, great for organic foods on Saturdays, if you're cooking). One of the continent's top used bookstores (80 percent of the titles are in English) is **Book Traffic** (Leliegracht 50). If you'd rather buy new, **The English Bookshop** (Lauriergracht 71) will serve you a cappuccino while you peruse the stock or just gaze out the window at the canal and picturesque bridge. There are some tempting restaurants tucked into the neighborhood. **Restaurant Jean Jean** (Eerst Anjeliersdwarstraat 14) serves slightly French-inspired fare for dinner. For the best apple gebak (pie) in Amsterdam, stop by **Winkel** (Noordermarkt 43). Across the square is one of the city's top restaurants, **Bordewijk** (Noordermarkt 7) and nearby is the quirky bistro **Balthazar's Keuken** (Elandsgracht 108).

De Negen Straatjes--The Nine Little Streets are on the canal ring between Reestraat and Wijde Heisteeg. Each of the *negen* is only a block or so long and is home to many of Amsterdam's most interesting businesses. **Antonia by Yvette** has an entire shop devoted to slippers (Gasthuis Molensteeg 16-20). A wide range of used and new quality watches is available at the **Amsterdam Watch Company** (5 Hartenstraat) or visit **Gort Goldsmith and Jewelry** (Herenstraat 11) for modern or estate jewelry. **The Frozen Fountain** shows the best in Dutch contemporary furniture design (Prinsengracht 645), and nearby, **VOF Prinsheerlijk Antiek** (Prinsengracht 579) specializes in Scandinavian antiques. For serious relaxation, try the isolation tanks at **Koan Float** (Herengracht 321), but book well ahead. You can have an elegant Belgian dinner at tiny **Chez Georges** (Herenstraat 3), but again, book ahead. **Pulitzer's** is a great stop for a rainy day drink (inside) or a sunny lunch in their quiet courtyard even if you're not staying at the hotel (Reestraat 8). Try **Pompadour Tearoom** (Huidenstraat 12) for a dessert or light lunch or stop for brunch at **Café Nielsen's** (Berenstraat 19).

Utrechtsestraat--Few people other than local residents know about the **Van Vlaanderen** restaurant (Weteringschans 175) with its well-deserved Michelin star. Nearby is **Bebob Design** (Prinsengracht 764), for collectors of 20th century furniture and plastic. Worth taking a look.

Art Historian Guide in Amsterdam

Rene Dassing is a leading art historian who has a team of a dozen guides and a network of contacts that opens doors of the big houses--or at least to their inner gardens. Tel: 31-20-620-8112. www.artifex-travel.nl.

Boat Dinner Cruises in Amsterdam

Nico Bax organizes classic boat dinner cruises along the Amsterdam canals. The unusual element is that he picks up

different courses at several top restaurants along the way. Tel: 31-20-330-1910.

Museums in Amsterdam

When it comes to museums, Amsterdam truly has something for everyone:

Amsterdam's **Rijksmuseum** is currently in the first stages of a \$325 million restoration and modernization. This will be the museum's first major renovation since it opened in 1885, and it is not expected to be completed until 2008. Pierre Cuypers' majestic exterior will remain intact, although given some much-needed conservation. Interiors will be redesigned to provide more light and space for the display of the collection. During the project, the Philips Wing of the museum will present a unique collection of the finest 17th century works of Dutch painting and drawing, sculpture, decorative arts and history under the title "Rijksmuseum, The Masterpieces." In addition, parts of the collection will be displayed in various other museums in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, including the Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht; Rijksmuseum Twente, Enschede; Drents Museum, Assen; The Hague Historical Museum and several others. A small selection of the museum's masterpieces will continue to be on exhibit at Schiphol Airport, as they have been since last year.
www.rijksmuseum.nl.

Municipal (Stedelijk) Museum offers a varied collection of modern art--Picasso, Chagall, Braque, etc.

The **Rembrandt House** houses an almost-complete collection of the great artist's etchings. and memorabilia.

The **Netherlands Maritime Museum** has interesting exhibits of the country's maritime history, including models, paintings, drawings, globes, instruments, etc.

The **Anne Frank House** is the place in which the young Jewish victim of the Nazis lived in hiding with her family while she wrote her famous diary.

The **Museum Van Loon** records the four-century history of the famous family plus a fascinating collection of portrait paintings, all housed in an interesting 17th century building with a pleasant garden court.

Two lesser-known museums:

Willet-Holthuijsen, on Herengracht, a charming private house on a canal; the **Cat Cabinet**, devoted to examining the role of cats in both art and society. Also on Herengracht at #47.

Walking Tour Guide in Amsterdam

Lucy Correll, an American who has lived in Amsterdam for 30 years, gives private tours for up to eight people. She specializes in walking tours of the city and can also lead tours by auto to Haarlem, Delft, Leiden (Pilgrim Fathers' history tour), Edam, the Aalsmeer Flower Auction (largest in world) and more. Her Amsterdam School of Architecture tour is outstanding. Tel: 31-20-623-7750. Email: LRC648@cs.com.

Wetlands Safari

One of the most interesting experiences for visitors to Amsterdam in summer is the **Wetlands Safari**. Traveling by canoe, you can get a close-up view of a watery landscape much like the one on which the city arose. You'll see native birds and plants, float through villages built on this watery expanse and walk through fascinating reedlands. Guides are English-speaking. www.wetlandssafari.nl.

What to Expect in Amsterdam

Amsterdam is in the midst of a Renaissance of sorts, enjoying an increase in foreign visitors that has positioned the city to challenge Rome as Europe's third most popular destination, after Paris and London. Municipal authorities and private developers are investing huge sums in renovation and new construction, all of it supervised by Monumentenzorg, the watchdog organization that ensures that no unapproved changes are made to the city's 7,000 listed buildings. An occasional, small office block is permitted, provided the façade's architectural style and colors blend with the 400-year-old surroundings. An unconventional doorknob can take years to be cleared, while contemporary signs and lighting are usually vetoed. However, even the preservationists don't want the city to be a static museum, and subtle change is underway, bringing many harmonious new touches.

The main squares—Museumplein, facing the imposing Rijksmuseum with its Rembrandts, the square next to the floating flower market, the once shabby Leidesplein and the Dam square with its enormous Royal Palace—have been resurfaced and carefully redesigned. The wonderfully peaceful Begijnhof square's converted almshouses near the Pilgrim Fathers Church has been spruced up without sacrificing its 17th century aspect. The Central Station, entry point for many of the 2.5 million annual foreign visitors is being given a facelift, and the port immediately behind it has new installations for cruise ships, housing and restaurants. Even the once seedy "coffee houses" are now bright, almost chic. So busy has the Dutch capital become that there is now a labor shortage, especially within the tourism industry.

Amsterdam's popularity is solidly based on its museums, its churches, its alluring marketplaces and its devotion to music. Where else do hundreds of people sit in boats while a concert pianist plays on a floating stage? Where else do you find a marketplace stallholder playing Italian opera throughout the day? The city's Concertgebouw orchestra is rated among the world's top ensembles and its modern ballet is similarly highly regarded. All of which leads to the obvious caveat—if you're planning a visit, book your hotel accommodations well ahead. Because of its proximity to other major European cities, it can be tempting to take a few days' break in Amsterdam from a longer visit elsewhere. But without pre-arranged reservations, you may not be able to find accommodation at the most desirable hotels, particularly over weekends (and during the rousing celebration of the Queen's birthday on April 30). Planning restrictions ban large new hotels in the city center, where only 600 new rooms are scheduled for the foreseeable future.

Amsterdam has many contradictions. On the one hand, it displays great openness, as visitors to the street markets and the pubs or "brown cafes" will testify. Many middle-class Dutch families deliberately leave curtains open and lights on for passers-by to admire the furnishings. Establishments in the Red Light district are members of the Chamber of Commerce. And just about everyone speaks English. But the richer burghers, descendants of those earlier citizens with their rubicund faces and ample figures featured in the Old Master paintings, tend to hide behind the tall windows of their canal mansions whose massive doors are firmly shut. There's also a different Amsterdam when the canals freeze and parties held on the ice resemble a Breughel painting.

A good way to get to know the people of Amsterdam is by having dinner with a local family. "**Dine With The Dutch**" is a service that will pair you up with a family who will invite you to have dinner with them in their home. The service asks you to fill out a brief questionnaire so they can pair you with an appropriate family. We recently dined with a couple who prepared a lovely meal for us. The conversation was lively; the host was an art consultant and his wife was a nurse. When booking make sure you get clear directions to your hosts' house, as Amsterdam can be a bit daunting once you're out of the center of the city. The price for the dinner is about \$70 per person. www.dinewiththedutch.com. Email: info@dinewiththedutch.nl.

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