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## Holland / Amsterdam

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Amsterdam offers many possibilities for sightseeing, but it is the characteristic atmosphere of the city that makes it so worthwhile. This atmosphere is best experienced on foot or even better by bike (one of the things cyclist can do in Amsterdam is to whiz past cars stuck in traffic along the narrow canals, it is a marvellous feeling). Once in the centre of Amsterdam most sights are within walking distance. The four largest and most historic canals (Singel, Herengracht, Keizersgracht and Prinsengracht), form concentric circles enclosing the old centre. These canals and the buildings that line them were the heart of Holland's thriving trade for centuries. On the Singel near the Munt tower you will find the Flower Market, and on the Herengracht the most beautiful old merchant houses. Though quite a few of the buildings in the centre are on the protected list, they are not museums and monuments as such.

### Telephone and time difference

Access code to USA: 001 (dial tone). To phone the Netherlands: 31; time difference (Eastern Daylight) plus 6 hrs.

### Climate

The influence of the surrounding North sea results in a temperate, if damp, climate. Winters tend to be mild with the minimum average temperature in the coldest months of January and February at about 31°F (0°C). The sunniest month is June and peak average temperature throughout the summer is about 70°F (21°C).

### Sights and Museums

The national museum is the Rijksmuseum. Here you will find the masterpieces of the Dutch painters of the Golden Age, among them Rembrandt's Nightwatch. **In 2004 a huge renovation will start, but the museum will remain open to the public.** Just around the corner is the Van Gogh museum which hosted the popular Van Gogh exhibition in 1990. In the Jordaan an old quarter of Amsterdam near the "Westertoren", a church with a crown on top, you will find the Anne Frank House, where Anne Frank wrote her diary and together with her family and some friends spent several years of the war before being deported to a German concentration camp. On Kalverstraat, the pedestrian shopping street, leading to Dam Square you will find Madame Tussaud's, the wax work museum.

### Theatre and Nightlife

The nicest cafes in Amsterdam are the old dark wood-panelled "bruine Kroegen" (brown cafes) to be found all over the place but especially in The area called the Jordaan. Most cafes stay open until 1 am during the week, 2 am on weekends. There is a concentration of clubs on Leidseplein and Rembrandtsplein; most are open later than the cafes. Most nightclubs charge a membership fee in addition to entrance, which may make them a bit expensive for just a one time visit. There are many discos on Prinsengracht near the Leidsestraat and on the Lange Leidse dwarsstraat. But these, too, tend to be expensive.

### Shopping

Shops are generally open from 8.30 or 9 am to 5.30 or 6 pm. With one late night shopping a week usually Thursdays or Fridays till 9 pm. (The Hague and Amsterdam, Thursdays; Rotterdam, Fridays) **They are open 7 days a week.** Things to look for are chocolates (Droste and Van Houten), the long-lasting whole (unsectioned) Gouda and Edam cheeses, art prints, Blue Delftware (Delfts Blauw), handicrafts, tulip bulbs and antiques. Amsterdam has a long history as centre of the diamond cutting industry, and a number of old firms are happy to show you around, whether you can afford to buy diamonds or not. The Leidsestraat and pedestrian-only Kalverstraat are busy shopping districts. The daily market is at the Albert Cuypstraat.

### Excursions

The best way to get the feel of the city is to make a boat tour on the canals. In this way you get to see places that cannot be reached by bus and are too far to walk. From April to October the canals are lit by thousands of little lights and it is possible to make a so-called candle-light tour of the canals. You will be shown romantic places while enjoying cheese and wine. Boat trips start from Central station and Leidseplein.

Volendam and Zaanse Schans are to be found north of Amsterdam. This excursions will give you an idea of what Dutch houses and towns looked like a couple of centuries ago. Volendam and the peninsula of Marken are typically Dutch fishermen's villages where traditions and buildings have been preserved with care. From Marken you can cross by boat to Volendam ( about 30 mins). The

rest of the trip will take you through polders (reclaimed land) to the Zaanse Schans just outside the town of Zaandam. It is a village constructed in 1948 from threatened historic mills and houses that were transported to the site and painstakingly reassembled. It is now a living museum occupied by families, but the wind-mills, the antique clock museum and the old bakery are open to the public.

As Holland's four major cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht) are all very close together, the greatest distance being only 47 miles (75 km) between Amsterdam and Rotterdam, it is possible to make day or even half-day excursions to them all. Moreover, within the area bounded by these four cities you will find other attractive towns like Haarlem, Delft, Leiden, and Gouda.

Leiden and Delft are two other historic towns to the south of Amsterdam. Leiden dating from Roman times is one of Holland's oldest towns and the site of the first Dutch University. The Pilgrim fathers took refuge here from 1608 to 1620. There is a Pilgrim Father Document centre, Boisoekade 2a. Delft dating from 1246 is best known outside Holland for the famous pottery it produces. The Porceleynse fles, Rotterdamseweg 196) is the only factory that still makes Delft Blue in the traditional way. You can watch the company's 300 artist painting the entirely handmade Delftware.