

When I was planning my recent visit to Europe, the capital of the Netherlands was top of my list. I had always been interested in visiting this city and exploring the winding canals and rich cultural history.

If you're planning your own visit to Amsterdam, then in this guide I talk you through everything I learned during my stay, so hopefully, it helps you with planning your own trip to this historic, beautiful, serene yet wild European metropolis.

If you want to know what it's like to visit Amsterdam, then read on.

The best way to get there from Europe

The great thing about Europe is that getting from one place to the next is relatively easy and affordable. You have a variety of options for transport including by bus, train, car hire or plane, depending on how quickly you want to arrive and how much money you want to spend.

I flew into Amsterdam direct from London with KLM (Royal Dutch Airlines) because the hour and 10-minute flight was just too tempting to pass up. I wanted to take advantage of my limited time exploring the city.

It's easy to fly into Amsterdam or catch a train from Europe.

The airport and customs

Amsterdam airport is very clean and the amenities are outstanding in my opinion, it definitely is a well-kept city. Upon arrival, you will need to go through customs and answer a few questions about your stay. It's a fairly straightforward process and the officers are friendly.

One thing you'll notice about this place is how clean and well kept it is.

Do i need a visa to visit the Netherlands?

A visa is not required if you are an Australian citizen, which is great news for Aussies. If you are not an Australian citizen, I'd suggest checking if your country is one of the 90 required to purchase a visa before arriving, which you can view on the list here.

For more on general advice about travelling to the Netherlands, I'd recommend checking out Smartraveller.

The best way to get to your hotel from the airport

I love using Uber but I found that catching the train to my hotel was a more convenient and affordable option. The trains in Amsterdam give you the option to buy tickets for the 1st class or 2nd class cabins. Not knowing how much room I needed with my luggage, I booked a 1st class ticket in the hope that I would have more space.

As soon as I boarded the train, I thought it wasn't worth the cost for the short travel time to get to my stop because there was plenty of room in the 2nd class cabins, even during peak

times.

Hotel Meininger is an option that's located right next to the Sloterdijk train station.

Where I stayed in Amsterdam

Amsterdam is a relatively expensive city, so I found that the cost of accommodation was quite high, particularly for a solo traveller. I opted to stay in the Meininger hotel because it is the perfect combination of a hotel and hostel, something that interested me as I didn't want to share a room.

For roughly A\$168.00 per night at the time of writing this, I was able to get a single room with a TV and my own private bathroom. I also had the option to cook my own meals and do my washing in the hotel. The added bonus was that I got to meet lots of other travellers from all over the world.

Oh, and it's located right next door to a convenience store and the Amsterdam Sloterdijk train station which can take you directly into Amsterdam Centraal Station – the heart of the city.

My accommodation was a great mix of a hotel and a hostel.

Other accommodation options in Amsterdam

There are multiple hotels around Amsterdam depending if you can afford to spend a little more and stay somewhere more luxurious and historic. A couple of popular hotels include the 19th-century Manor Amsterdam and Park Plaza Victoria Amsterdam which are both located quite close to the city centre.

Be aware though, that there is a city tax for accommodation which is an extra 5% per night that you must pay upfront upon check-in. Amsterdam uses this tax towards the upkeep and maintenance of the city, which is likely why it is so clean and beautiful there.

Park Plaza Victoria is a more luxurious accommodation option when in Amsterdam.

What is the best neighbourhood to stay at in Amsterdam?

There are many neighbourhoods in Amsterdam that offer a different experience of the city. I stayed west of the city just near Sloterdijk, because I wanted a relatively quiet and safe place to stay outside of the hustle and bustle, plus it was more affordable for me.

If you have a little bit more money and are looking to spend your nights out partying then you'll want to be closer to Amsterdam Centrum and the Red Light District (De Wallen). However, if you're looking for more of a serene and quieter experience with local markets, cafes and vintage shopping, I'd suggest staying in neighbourhoods like Jordaan and De Pijp. Alternatively, if you're into museums and luxury brands then you'll want to be closer to the Museum Quarter, otherwise known as Museumkwartier.

The good news is that it is very easy to get around in Amsterdam, as you have a multitude of



transport options, so you won't miss out on exploring a lot of the city even in a short period of time.



You can explore the neighbourhoods of the city with ease, even on a shorter trip.

Is Amsterdam safe for solo travellers?

As a solo female traveller, I want to mention that I felt pretty safe walking around during the day, even in the Red Light District. Amsterdam is a beautiful and touristy city, however, I didn't feel as comfortable walking around at night time on my own, although I tended to stay in.

I did pick up quickly that when the sun sets in Amsterdam, particularly around the Red Light District, it can get a bit wilder than during the day. But it's nothing too out of the ordinary compared with nightlife in Australia, aside from a few factors.



Even if you're on your own, you'll likely feel very safe when walking around.

What do I need to know before I go to Amsterdam?

Be aware of the bike lane

There are literally more bikes than people in Amsterdam due to the fact that cycling around the city centre is a faster and easier option.

Amsterdammers ride on the right-hand side of the road, which was an adjustment for me coming from London. Be aware that the bike lane is not only for cyclists but for scooters and even some smaller vehicles! So, you can imagine they can pick up speed quite quickly. Make sure you are always on the pedestrian crossing when walking around because the bike lane is further from the road and sometimes not obvious... well for a tourist anyway. Just make sure you aren't in the way because cyclists will resist moving for you!



Be aware of the bike lane when walking on the street!

Break your notes up before you go!

I exchanged my Aussie cash for a variety of different euro notes before leaving, but upon arrival, I found it very difficult to break up my one hundred euro notes if I was just buying dinner or something of small value. There were a few times I nearly had to beg them to take it because they were hesitant to give me large amounts of change.

It's worth having smaller notes with you, as locals can be a little bit suspicious of tourists paying with larger notes. Organise your money before leaving and request for notes no larger than fifty euros. Your stay will be a lot simpler if you do.



Try to carry smaller notes to make it easier to pay for things in shops.



Can you avoid brothels and cannabis cafes?

Soft drugs, such as Marijuana and magic mushrooms are legal in Amsterdam to purchase for recreation. Some shops and cafes are more explicit about selling their goods but some are hard to completely avoid because they will seem like your run-of-the-mill coffee shops upon entering.

Marijuana smoke in the air cannot be avoided either. Amsterdam is a holiday escape for a lot of Europeans so you will likely see people in groups here and there smoking, along with locals. It isn't overpowering but it is noticeable.

With regards to prostitution, areas such as the Red Light District will openly display women in shop windows as it is a legal activity. Thankfully, the Red Light District is a distance away from the main shopping area, so if you avoid this neighbourhood you will naturally avoid brothels and cannabis cafes a lot more.

How touristy is Amsterdam?

Amsterdam is a very touristy city, which I personally found quite comforting as a solo traveller. It made it easier to ask for help, such as when the next boat pickup was or where they purchased tickets from. Plus it's great for when you want to ask for someone to take your photo.



Amsterdam does have a lot of tourists, which is great if you're travelling solo.

Is WIFI readily available?

Free WIFI is quite common around the city and on the trains but it's not strong enough for you to stream or download apps. It is good, however, for instant messaging and uploading a few images to social media, particularly when taking a breather on public transport.

Do people speak English in Amsterdam?

As Amsterdam is a popular tourist destination, a lot of people will speak English. In fact, English is much more prevalent than I would have thought.

Apparently, Dutch people have the highest English speaking proficiency in the world – 9 out of 10 people speak English as a second language which is helpful for tourists like me.



If you need a helping hand, most Dutch people speak English which is comforting to know.

Should I pay for things in cash or by card?

Cash is my preference when I travel as I feel that it is a safer option than using my card. I did, however, use my debit card once when I purchased more than I expected in a department store. I had to sign rather than enter a pin, which was a little shocking to me. Basically, if I lost my card, thieves could go to town with it.

It's a personal choice really but like for me, it was a great backup in that scenario. I'd suggest



finding out a bit more about your card with your bank, including how to protect it and what fees you could be forking out if you do decide to use it.

Just use your common sense and avoid using it where you're less protected, like in the Red Light District.



A bike is a great way to see the city.

What are the top things I should do in Amsterdam?

1. Hop on hop off bus and boat

When I travel, the first thing I look for is what Hop On Hop Off tours are available in the city I'm visiting. They allow you to explore the city at your own leisure which is definitely worth it in Amsterdam. You can buy 24 or 48-hour tickets from the booth next to Amsterdam Centraal Station, where you can get a map of the routes and ask any questions you may have.

There are a few different tour companies in Amsterdam but I liked this particular one because it came with the option to travel on the bus or boat as much as I liked. You can get more information about the Hop On Hop Off boat [here](#) and the bus [here](#).



The Hop On Hop off tours gives you the choice to see the streets by bus or boat.

2. Anne Frank's House

If you are a bit of a history buff and appreciate learning about World War II, then Anne Frank's House is a must-visit while in Amsterdam.

If you don't have a copy of Anne Frank's diary, make sure to watch a [movie on YouTube](#) which is based on her experience. I'd recommend downloading it to watch before your tour to get a real understanding of what life would've been like in there cooped up. You certainly gain more of an appreciation from it.

At the end of the tour, you can pick up multiple editions of her diary in the gift shop, along with other collectibles.



Anne Frank's House is a must-visit when exploring the Netherlands.

Book your [Anne Frank House tickets ahead](#) and expect to wait before getting access to the website. It can often be overloaded with people but at least you will be told where you sit in the queue. Tickets for busier periods, such as in the warmer months, will be booked out sooner so get in early!

80% of tickets for any date are released exactly two months in advance. The remaining 20% are released on the website on the day. Tickets are currently between 10-15 euros (plus booking fee) depending on when you book. Read up on the rules of the tour, particularly on the bag size you can bring with you.

Make sure to print your ticket out. I prefer displaying purchased tickets on my phone because it saves printing, but it really is one of those times you'll benefit by printing it out to show security.





The lines can get quite long in the busy periods.

The best way to get to the Anne Frank Museum

The best way to get there is by [Hop On Hop Off boat tour](#) because it takes you directly out the front. Make sure to give yourself plenty of time to get there because the boat ride is pretty cruisy.

You may only enter the house within your 15-minute interval, which is accessible around to the right side of the building. Depending on your pace, I'd allow 60-80 minutes to complete the tour. You begin with an audio tour, entering the museum, which eventually leads up the stairs towards the secret annexe.

Make sure to get to the line early because if you miss your window, you miss out.



The best way to get to Anne Frank's House is via the Hop On Hop Off Tour.

Out of respect, you cannot take images on the tour and you will not be allowed access into the attic. They have mirrors on the stairs positioned so that you can get an understanding of what it looks like up there, but that is as far as you can go. Anne Frank's Dad, Otto, wanted to preserve it which is the main reason why it cannot be accessed.

If you ever saw the scene from the movie *The Fault in Our Stars*, it was actually a reconstructed attic the actors went through for the take. Although disappointing to not have access, it is still a very worthwhile tour.

The truth is, it'll be slightly crowded and you'll have to take one step at a time while walking through the secret annexe. In saying that, it has been set up so that you can read and view preserved personal artefacts as you move through, which is a surreal experience.

3. Heineken experience

If you're a beer drinker, then the original [Heineken brewery experience](#) located in the city centre should be top of your list! Here you can go on a tour of the former brewery, get an insight into the history of the company and of course do a tasting... two perfectly chilled beers to be exact!



For beer lovers, you can visit the original Heineken brewery.

4. Van Gogh Museum

If you're more interested in art, the Van Gogh Museum is worth checking out. Here you can see the world's largest collection of the legendary Dutch artist's work, including *Sunflowers*, *The Potato Eaters* and *The Yellow House (The Street)*. Plus, other work from his friends and other contemporaries.

The museum is open daily but book tickets ahead of time because they are only available to purchase [online](#).



Grab your ticket for the Van Gogh Museum online before you get there.

5. Moco Museum - Banksy

They have a range of works from the infamous street artist Banksy on display here, along with signature merchandise you can buy in the gift shop.

Most of the pieces are remakes of his work but there are a few original pieces that they rescued from the rubble of torn down buildings, which is worth a visit if you are a fan.

Tickets can be purchased at the door but if you purchase online prior, you receive a discount.

 *You can see some of Banksy's work on display at the Moco Museum.*

Should I visit the red light district?

The activity that goes on in the Red Light District is a kind of self-expression that is very much welcomed in Amsterdam.

There are numerous sex shops and shows, and women standing in windows encouraging customers to say hello. I found it to be a little awkward walking past, but I was fascinated to see how freely they were about their bodies, particularly during the day.

I was too curious not to visit but I'm glad I did because it wasn't as seedy as I originally thought it would be. But, It is certainly not for everyone.

 *The infamous Red Light District in the city.*

Is there Uber in Amsterdam?

You can use Uber when in Amsterdam, but the public transport system is far quicker and cheaper. Most times, catching a boat or hiring a bike is actually the best way to get around.

I spent most of my time riding on the boats, especially because I could sit back and admire the beautiful surroundings along my journey.

 *You can catch Uber, but the train system is a lot more efficient and affordable.*

What should I eat in Amsterdam?

There is a range of different foods to snack on in the city like ice cream, pizza slices, and fries which are very popular there to eat whilst on the go. And, of course, many cuisines of cafes to choose from.

If you're after a real Amsterdam experience, try delicacies such as bitterballen (ground meat croquettes), herring (fish) and stroopwafel (a sweet treat), to name a few.

I visited Amsterdam in the summertime and I always found locals to be sitting on the canal banks sipping alcohol and having a picnic with a variety of Dutch cheeses, deli meats and breads as they watched the sun go down. An experience I will be sure to have next time I visit.

 *You can easily grab some food and have a picnic instead of eating in a cafe.*



What's the best time of the year to visit Amsterdam?

I visited Amsterdam in the middle of July, which is the peak of summer and the most common time for tourists to visit. On average the warmer months are around 17°C and the colder months are around 3°C.

Whenever I travel, I weigh up how much I need to bring, how easily it will be to get around and what events are on during that time. The majority of the time, I like to visit cities during the warmer months, but as Amsterdam doesn't get too cold, it is a city you can travel to comfortably all year round.



The European summer months are a great time to explore this city.

Those are all of my tips!

There is so much to see and do in Amsterdam that I have only just covered the tip of the iceberg on what you can experience there.

In the future, I plan to spend more time exploring the windmills and flower beds, including other areas of the Netherlands, but certainly not without another visit to the capital wondering the streets and soaking up the atmosphere.

So, I hope you get to experience this amazing city one day. It certainly has a culture that you won't find anywhere else.

What do you plan to experience whilst in Amsterdam? Let us know in the comments.