



AMSTERDAM - THE BEST PARTS

I am a southern European at heart but if I had to live in one northern Europe city then it would be Amsterdam. It has everything that I could possibly want, a wonderful walking city, lovely warm bars, loads of good places to eat, full of great small individual shops, design and style by the bucket load and of course one or two rather good galleries.

I can see why some people do not like it because I suspect they come out of central station walk straight ahead and probably do not see anything but the very tacky shops and dozens of tour boats and at the moment the construction of a metro. This part the Old Centre does contain some gems but you have to seek them out, so persevere.



Typical canal view - Amsterdam



Room Mate Aitana - Amsterdam



De Reiger - Amsterdam - Meal



De Reiger - Amsterdam - Dinner





Canal & Bicycle –
Amsterdam

Cafe Hoppe –
Amsterdam

Bar Wynard Focking –
Amsterdam

Bar T'Smalle –
Amsterdam

The secret is to exit central station and go right then head towards the western canal belt of the Herengracht, Kaizersgracht and Prinsengracht and into the Jordaan, or left and along Zeedijk towards the Nieuwmarkt. True the latter does lead almost towards the Red Light District but on the way it passes some great traditional bars, and lots of good eating places particularly Chinese. Once you have exhausted these areas you can explore the delights of the southern canal belt near Utrechtstraat, and then move to the Pijp for its market, great restaurants and bars. Things are also changing around the harbour area with large amounts of new construction and in the North where previously there was very little to interest visitors there is now the EYE film institute and in the area called NDSM lots of galleries and creative happenings.

Amsterdam is not cheap for accommodation and a lot is disappointing and room sizes small, think New York. However a new building on reclaimed land in the harbour has seen the opening of theRoom Mate Aitana, IjDock 6, www.aitana.room-matehotels.com owned by the Spanish chain Room Mate, it is only ten minutes walk from Central Station and handy for the buzzy Haarlemmerstraat with lots of small independent shops, restaurants and bars. Rooms are large, the staff young, friendly and enthusiastic.

Eating out in Amsterdam offers a huge variety of places, with loads of Indonesian, Chinese, Spanish and other cuisines along with more traditional restaurants and up to ones with Michelin stars. They will suit all pockets and at lunchtime in the winter have a bowl of Dutch pea soup usually accompanied by ham on rye bread, delicious.

Some new and old favourites are listed below.

De Reiger Nieuwe Leliestraat 34 Jordaan area excellent brown bar and restaurant no reservations and no credit cards, this used to be a locals secret but it now gets a mix of regulars and visitors. At the weekend you may have to wait at the bar for a table, but during the week you should be able to get a table. The blackboard of meat, fish and vegetarian daily specials always has a great choice and on our last visit the two fish specials were both excellent. The prices are average by Amsterdam standards and the quality never fails to impress.

Restaurant Vlaming, Prinsengracht 193, www.eetcafevlaming.nl this came highly recommended by locals and did not disappoint for a Saturday night dinner with local friends. Excellent service,

very good food and enjoyed the modern style of the design. If there are any small gripes it was the short menu and the fact that mains did not come with vegetables but all in all a great choice. They also have another less upmarket location at Lindengracht 95.

Seasons, Herenstraat 16, www.seasonsrestaurant.nl we came upon by chance and had an excellent meal, we only had main courses but the quality and service shone through. They have a set menu and for early evening diners they do an offer of 2 for 1 on the set menu - a bargain ! Check out the exact times on their web site, booking is recommended.

Sluizer Utrechtsestraat 41 - 45 www.sluizer.nl two restaurants one specialising in meat, the other fish (but both do have both meat & fish choices) they have a modern and stylish appeal and there is also a beautiful conservatory upstairs above the meat one. Excellent menu, great quality food and good service

Tempo Doeloe Utrechtsestraat 75 Tel 625 6718 very smart Indonesian restaurant supposed to be the best in Amsterdam booking essential, very helpful service and an upmarket wine list but quite happy if people stick to beer. They now have a cheaper version next door which is less formal.

New King Zeedijk 115 this Chinese restaurant has a great reputation and does not disappoint. A more modern setting than the nearby Nam Kee the roast meats are top notch and it is reasonable priced, very popular !

BurgerMeester, Albert Cuypstraat 48 has excellent burgers, it is a very small place, with soft drinks only but the quality and variety is fantastic however there is now competition nearby.

The Butcher, Albert Cuypstraat 129, in the heart of the market only has seats for a about a dozen people but worth waiting to try their top notch burgers, again they only serve soft drinks. There is a very exclusive cocktail bar in the premises only for those who have booked - personally I will stick to the burgers and go to one of the lovely bars nearby.

So neatly moving on to bars there are all sorts but the traditional brown bars, so called because of the brown walls from the days when there was smoking are the heart of Amsterdam. There are lots of other bars including some very smart cocktail bars but for the real experience have a small beer and some bitterballen (breadcrumb covered meatballs). Some of the favourite brown bars are listed below.

Café Chris Bloemstraat 42, reputedly Amsterdam's oldest bar in the heart of the Jordaan area is a very local bar, but welcoming to the visitors who drop in.

Café T'Smalle, Eglantiersgracht 12 on the edge of the Jordaan is one of the most lovely bars, it has a good selection of food and in the warm weather seating on a deck area by the canal.

Lokaal 't Loosje Nieumarkt 32-34 another great local brown café with good beers and a good range of wines by the glass at a very reasonable price, this bar always makes you feel at home.

There is a good lunch menu available..

Het Molenpad Prinsengracht 653 one of the nicest brown cafes along the canals, it has been given a facelift but has lost none of it's atmosphere and the menu has been increased with a number of specials. The soup and sandwich choices at lunchtime are and good, top quality and decent sized portions.

In de Wildeman Kolksteeg 3 Central towards Central Station has one of the best ranges of draught beers in Amsterdam, and is located in what used to be a distillery. Very popular particularly around early evening if it is not too busy seek out Simon who has worked there for 18 years and is a fount of knowledge on all things connected with beer.

Wynand Focking - Pijlsteeg 31 is an old bar and tasting house specialising in Genever gin, it is just off Dam Square behind the Krasnapolsky Hotel, seek it out and if you like the liqueurs then you can buy them by the bottle at the shop next door. It is only open from 3pm to 9pm.

De Pisener Club - Begijnensteeg 4 - make your way behind the leather curtain for one of the original unspolit bars- near the Beginhof. This is a classic Amsterdam bar and the staff are knowledgeable about the various beers that they sell.

In 't Aepjen (The Monkey) , Zeedijk 1, a lovely brown bar, rated as one of the best traditional bars in the city, can be very crowded but if you are lucky and get a seat at the bar you will find it difficult to drag yourself away, The staff are always friendly and welcoming.

Check out www.cityhaunts.co.uk for the Amsterdam page for more tips and enjoy the city as much as I always do.

