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PRESS FEATURE

Haarlem: an atmospheric city full of art, shops and sidewalk cafés

Haarlem has been a city of artists for centuries. Combine a day full of culture with a walk through the historic city centre, shopping, a drink at an outdoor café and a tasty meal out. Wherever you walk, you're surrounded by rich history, with medieval churches, canals, the town hall on the Grote Markt (Market Square), windmills, museums and the famous Haarlemse hofjes (almshouses), which today are quaint, relaxing oases in the heart of the city. Embark on a journey of discovery through this atmospheric city.

With a population of 150,000, Haarlem is the largest city in North Holland after Amsterdam. Haarlem was first mentioned in a historical document dating from the 10th century, and was granted town privileges in 1245. At the end of the Middle Ages, Haarlem was one of the largest cities in Holland and was bigger than Amsterdam. It is no coincidence that Haarlem is the capital of the province of North Holland. You can still feel the medieval ambience in the lively streets surrounding the Grote Markt, which is dominated by the St Bavokerk (St Bavo's Church) built between 1370 and 1520. The Town Hall, with its battlements and tower, part of which dates back to the 13th century, can also be found on the Grote Markt. The 17th-century Vleeshal (Meat Hall) and Vishal (Fish Hall) are now used for exhibitions.

Jugendstil train station

If you travel by train to Haarlem – only 15 minutes from Amsterdam Central Station – the history lesson begins the moment you arrive. Built in 1906, Haarlem Station is considered to be one of the most beautiful in the Netherlands, constructed in the Dutch Jugendstil (art nouveau style). It is a popular location for film shoots, and features in the Hollywood blockbuster Ocean's Twelve and Dutch filmmaker Paul Verhoeven's Black Book.

Church bells, almshouses and a windmill

The Amsterdamse Poort, a city gate built in 1355, is one of Haarlem's oldest monuments. Imagine the countless battles and wars that this proud construction has withstood. Other buildings that have stood the test of time on the Grote Markt include the Town Hall built in 1250 and Haarlem's largest church, the St Bavokerk, whose tower can be seen

from many miles away. The Damiaatjes bells in the tower of the St Bavokerk still ring out every evening between 21:30 and 22:00 to commemorate the conquering of the Egyptian city Damietta. Other historical churches in Haarlem include the Janskerk with its adjoining convent and the Bakenesserkerk with its striking white tower. The latter church closely resembles the St Bavokerk. Haarlem incidentally has two "Bavo" churches. The other one is the Cathedral of Saint Bavo, which is the seat of the Diocese of Haarlem. It was built between 1895 and 1930 and is situated at the edge of the city centre.

Haarlem has 22 hofjes (courtyards of almshouses), which were built primarily in the 16th and 17th centuries as a form of charity. The destitute elderly could enjoy their old age in these simple homes. Most hofjes are now open to visitors on the condition that they respect the residents' right to peace and quiet. The oldest hofje in Haarlem – and in the Netherlands, for that matter – is the Hofje van Bakenes, which dates back to 1395.

Haarlem's Waag (weighing house) is situated on the banks of the Spaarne River, which winds through Haarlem. The Waag dates from 1599 and is where merchants used to weigh their cheese and butter. Another attraction alongside the Spaarne River is the De Adriaan windmill. Thanks to its great height, this tower mill has been one of the main landmarks of Haarlem for centuries. The mill is open to the public.

Frans Hals, Teylers Museum and the Dolhuys

Haarlem boasts a number of unique museums that attract visitors from around the world. The most famous is the Frans Hals Museum, which is housed in the 17th-century Oudemannenhuis (Old Men's Almshouse). Of all the Haarlem-based painters of the Dutch Golden Age, Frans Hals is by far the most famous, and this eponymous museum owns the world's largest collection of his paintings, including his renowned regent portraits and group portraits of celebrating riflemen. The collection provides an excellent impression of the important position that Haarlem held as a painters' city in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The Teylers Museum, which is the oldest museum in the Netherlands, is also well worth a detour. Visitors have been welcome here since 1784 to marvel at the collection of art and scientific objects. The collection includes fossils dating from millions of years ago, scientific instruments, coins, paintings, prints and drawings by artists including Rembrandt and Michelangelo. The interior of the museum alone, with its monumental Oval Room as the jewel in its crown, is a must-see. This is the only place

where you can still see and experience an authentic museum interior from the 18th century.

Another of Haarlem's top cultural and historical attractions is the Dolhuys, the former leper, plague and insane asylum that was founded in 1320. Now a psychiatry museum, visitors see how the "insane" were treated in the past, raising the interesting question: what is "normal"? The recently restored 18th-century Regent's Room is also worth seeing.

Music and theatre

Haarlem has a multifaceted cultural life. Classical music can be heard at the Philharmonie, while theatre and cabaret performances take place in the Stadsschouwburg, an impressive theatre built in 1918. Contemporary theatre and dance performances are staged at the Toneelschuur, a spectacular building that was designed by Haarlem artist Joost Swarte and architects Mecanoo. Contemporary bands from the Netherlands and abroad can be seen in pop temple Het Patronaat.

Shops and sidewalk cafés

Seen enough culture? Dive into the cosy shopping streets in and around the Grote Markt and relax in one of the cafés and restaurants after you've finished shopping. There are sidewalk cafés throughout the city.

Tourism

Tourism is becoming increasingly important to Haarlem, which only falls behind the four large cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht in terms of visitor numbers. Reasons for visiting include the broad range of cultural-historical attractions, shopping and dining establishments, its convenient location near Amsterdam Airport Schiphol and the capital itself, and its proximity to the Dutch coast with its wide beaches and unique dunes.

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About Amsterdam Marketing

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