

amsterdam marketing

PRESS FEATURE: USA IN AMSTERDAM

The United States in Amsterdam

Amsterdam has very old links with the United States of America. In 1780, John Adams opened the first American embassy in the world in Amsterdam. However, the first contacts with Amsterdam were actually much older. In 1609, Henry Hudson left Amsterdam's Schreierstoren in his ship *De Halve Maen*. After a long journey, he reached the island of Manhattan where he founded Nieuw Amsterdam, which later became New York City. It is, therefore, not surprising that some New Yorkers have a feeling of *déjà vu* when they visit Amsterdam.

Many street names and neighbourhoods in New York – such as Broadway (Bredestraat), Brooklyn (Breukelen), Harlem (Haarlem), Coney Island (Konijneneiland), the Bowery (Boerderij), Wall Street (Walstraat) and Canal Street (Kanaalstraat) – recall the old Dutch names of Nieuw Amsterdam. This is also true for words such as dollar (*daalder*), waffle (*wafel*), candy (*kandij*), cookie, (*koekje*), boss (*baas*) and coleslaw (*koolsla*). The best example is of course the word “Yankee”, which is a corruption of the traditional Dutch first name Jan-Kees.

Pilgrim Fathers

There are still many traces in Amsterdam of the people who founded New York and many other “colonies” in America. One example is the West India House, where the West India Company gave the order to found Nieuw Amsterdam and where Peter Stuyvesant was appointed governor of Nieuw Amsterdam. The oldest portrayal of what is now New York is on display in Amsterdam's Scheepvaartmuseum (National Maritime Museum), and the church of the Pilgrim Fathers can be found in the Begijnhof.

With a large loan from bankers in Amsterdam, John Adams returned to the United States in 1780 to rebuild the nation after the revolution. American influences can also be found in Amsterdam – such as buildings inspired by American architecture and works by many 20th-century American artists in the Stedelijk Museum. Americans certainly should not, therefore, feel like strangers in Amsterdam. On the contrary, a visit to Amsterdam is almost like going home – which is perhaps why Amsterdam is so popular with American tourists.

Schreierstoren

English seafarer Henry Hudson received the commission from the Dutch East India Company to find the northeastern navigation route to the Dutch East Indies. In 1609, he departed Amsterdam on the ship *De Halve Maen*. The advancing pack ice forced Hudson to change course and he eventually reached Lange Eylant (Long Island). The Hudson River was named after him. *De Halve Maen* departed from the Schreierstoren, which is situated on the corner of the Prins Hendrikkade and Geldersekade. A memorial plaque was affixed to the tower in 1927 by the Greenwich Village Historical Society of New York City.

West India House

Haarlemmerstraat 15 is the cradle of the city of New York. This is where, in 1625, the Heren XIX (19 Gentlemen), the board of the West India Company, decided to found Nieuw Amsterdam, later to become New York. Crijn Frederikxz was commissioned to build Fort Amsterdam as a defensive bastion of the settlement Nieuw Amsterdam, which consisted of 30 wooden houses and a mill. In 1626, the island of Manhattan was bought from the Native Americans for 60 guilders, ten shirts, 80 pairs of silk stockings, ten rifles, 30 bullets, 30 pounds of gunpowder, 30 axes, 30 kettles and a copper cooking pot. The most famous governor of the new colony was Peter Stuyvesant. After completing his term of office, he stayed in the new land on his farm: the Bowery. St Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, where Stuyvesant is buried, still stands. A bust of Stuyvesant can be found in the courtyard of the West India House in Amsterdam. The secretariat of the [John Adams Institute](#), the United States' cultural institute in the Netherlands, is also located in this building.

Warehouses of the West India Company

Several of the warehouses of the West India Company (WIC) have been preserved, including the impressive WIC complex on Prins Hendrikkade at the corner of 's Gravenhekje. These warehouses were built in 1642 and were once used to store beaver skins from the island of Manhattan. The emblem of the WIC still graces the façade.

Oude Kerk (Old Church)

With the first stone laid around 1300, the [Oude Kerk](#) is the oldest building in Amsterdam. This is where the grave of Kiliaen van Rensselaer (1588-1643), founder of the American colony Nieuw Nederland, can be found. Van Rensselaer became director of the West India Company in 1628. In 1629, he founded a settlement for Dutch emigrants east of the Hudson River. He managed this colony – which was later to become Nieuw Amsterdam, the present-day New York – from his canal-side home in

Amsterdam. Van Rensselaer's descendants had a bronze plaque with his portrait affixed to one of the pillars in the nave of the Oude Kerk in 1949. He is buried in grave 52.

Scheepvaartmuseum (National Maritime Museum) Amsterdam

The [National Maritime Museum](#) in Amsterdam houses the oldest picture of New York: a view of the Nieuw Amsterdam settlement, which is included in a 17th-century map of Nieuw Nederland.

The English Reformed Church and the Pilgrim Fathers

The English Reformed Church, a medieval church that has been made available to the English-speaking community in Amsterdam since 1607, can be found in the Begijnhof. It served as a refuge for the Pilgrim Fathers in Amsterdam. There are still services in English every Sunday.

John Adams: first American embassy in the world

After the American Revolution in 1780, John Adams (1735-1826) came to the Netherlands to borrow money to enable the new nation to develop further. He succeeded in obtaining a loan of 5 million guilders – an unprecedented sum in those days – from an Amsterdam banker.

This banker, Van Staphorst, lived at Singel 460. Adams settled in Amsterdam, first on the Oudezijds Achterburgwal, at the corner of the Oude Hoogstraat, and from 1781 to 1782 at the Keizersgracht 529. This building is considered the first American embassy in the world. Adams later worked as American ambassador in France and England. In 1797, he succeeded George Washington as the second president of the United States. A memorial plaque on the façade of Keizersgracht 529 was unveiled in 2004 by the Mayor of Amsterdam and the American ambassador.

The Royal Palace Amsterdam: California as island

The Royal Palace on Dam square was built between 1648 and 1655 as Amsterdam's Town Hall. The beautiful Burgerzaal, the heart of the palace, reveals traces of America. The marble floor shows the Eastern and Western Hemispheres as they were known at the time. What is striking is that California is still depicted as an island. Until the 18th century, cartographers assumed that this peninsula was completely surrounded by water.

The pediment of the rear exterior wall of the palace is decorated with a picture of the four continents, as they were known then. The peoples of these continents pay homage to the City Virgin of Amsterdam by offering

fruit and other produce. America, which in the mid-17th century was not yet the superpower that it is today, is shown in the lower right. This continent was – not surprisingly for that time – represented by three Native Americans, recognisable by their feathered headdresses.

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American Hotel

Around 1900, various Amsterdam architects drew inspiration from American architecture. The American Hotel on the Leidseplein was opened in 1881 by the Dutch-American C Steinigeweg. In 1902, the hotel acquired its present façade and famous café with art deco interior. This “Café Americain” is popular with both Amsterdam residents and tourists. The art deco interior is still virtually intact today.

When the hotel was extended in 1928, the year of the Amsterdam Olympics, the façade overlooking the Leidsekade was adorned with sculptures, symbolising different cultures. The second sculpture from the left is a Native American with a tomahawk.

Abercrombie & Fitch in Gebouw New York

At the end of 2012, American fashion chain Abercrombie & Fitch opened its doors in a prestigious Amsterdam building on the corner of the Leidsestraat and Keizersgracht. This New York Building was constructed in 1891 to house the New York Life Insurance company. The letters “N” and “Y” can be found above the entrance. On the top floor, there is an eagle holding the American flag in its talons. The building was designed by architect J van Looy, and used to be home to the Metz & Co department store.

Europe’s biggest Starbucks in a vault below ground

The Bank at the Rembrandtplein has been home to a very special [Starbucks](#) since 2012. The American coffee house chain café is located in a former vault of the Amsterdamsche Bank, which means most of the store is below ground level. With a surface area of 430m², this Starbucks is the largest in Europe. The facility boasts a 17-metre long coffee bar for customers who want coffee in a hurry, as well as a slow coffee theatre. Antique Delft blue tiles have been used as décor around the concrete pillars for a typically Dutch character.

Biggest Apple Store at the Leidseplein

In 2012, Apple opened the doors to a new flagship retail location in the Hirsch building at the Leidseplein. It has the longest service counter of all Apple Stores across the globe. What’s more, no other Apple Store has as

many demonstration models for customers to try before they buy as here. But perhaps the most eye-catching feature is the completely transparent staircase leading to the first floor. The impressive Hirsch building was opened as a high-class fashion house in 1912. The [Apple Store](#) is open every day into the evening.

Boom Chicago: witty improv theatre

In 1993, a group of creative Americans from Chicago relocated to Amsterdam. Thus began [Boom Chicago](#), a comedy theatre where actors gently mock contemporary characters and events through improvised skits every evening. They began in a small theatre on the Leidseplein, but Boom Chicago is now located in the beautiful Rozen theater on the Rozengracht at the heart of the popular Amsterdam district the Jordaan. The performances are, of course, in English – or rather, American. They attract an international audience, including many Dutch people and expats.

American delicacies and other products

Amsterdam offers enough places where you can enjoy American delicacies such as bagels, muffins and chocolate-chip cookies. One well-known example is Gary's Muffins on the Kinkerstraat 140; all their delicious products are prepared and cooked on location. The American Book Center on the Spui offers one of the widest selections of American and British books in Europe. America Today, with branches in places like the beautiful Magna Plaza shopping centre (Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal), shows that American fashion has international appeal.

Modern art and artists

American art and artists are well represented in Amsterdam. The Stedelijk Museum has Europe's most important collection of post-war American art. It includes a large selection of major works by artists such as Bruce Nauman, Andy Warhol, Barnett Newman, Roy Lichtenstein, Willem de Kooning, Jeff Koons and Donald Judd. The Stedelijk Museum reopened its doors in September 2012 after an extensive renovation and expansion. The United States is also well represented among the dancers and musicians of the Dutch National Ballet and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra respectively.

John Adams Institute

The [John Adams Institute](#), named after the first American ambassador in Amsterdam, is an independent institute dedicated to furthering the cultural exchange between the United States and the Netherlands. Since 1987, the institute has grown into a leading cultural centre in Europe,

hosting frequent lectures and bringing well-known American writers and thinkers to Dutch audiences. The secretariat of the John Adams Institute is located in the West India House.

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Public information:

www.iamsterdam.com

Amsterdam Marketing Press Office

Email: pressoffice@iamsterdam.com
Images: <http://mediabank.iamsterdam.com/>
Telephone: +31 (0)20 702 6265

About Amsterdam Marketing

Amsterdam Marketing is the city marketing organisation of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area, active in the fields of promotion, information, research and services. Our ambition is to put this region on the map as one of the five most attractive metropolitan areas in Europe for residents, visitors, businesses and influential groups. Under the motto 'I amsterdam', we present the region as a dynamic place to live and work, an attractive travel destination and a test market for innovation.