

amsterdam marketing

PRESS FEATURE

Water in Amsterdam

Amsterdam and water are inextricably linked. By the Middle Ages, Amsterdam was already a city of canals, with the Oudezijds and Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal and the Achterburgwal as its most important waterways. Mediaeval Amsterdam was enclosed and defended by the Singel, Kloveniersburgwal and Geldersekaade canals, which still exist today. A number of defensive towers and city gates can also still be seen, such as the Schreierstoren, Montelbaanstoren, Waag and Munttoren.

Amsterdam's Canal Ring

During the Golden Age (1600-1700), Amsterdam's Canal Ring was extended around the existing mediaeval city, and over the centuries it has grown to become a unique site in the world. The network of waterways was originally created for drainage and to reclaim land to enlarge the city. If the Canal Ring was originally built for practical reasons, however, it was later to become a distinguished district, where wealthy financiers from the world of trade invested in the construction of canalside houses. This was the advent of the Singel, Herengracht, Keizersgracht and Prinsengracht canals.

In 2010 the Canal Ring gained a spot on UNESCO's World Heritage List. The site is unique for its architecture and as a physical manifestation of the immense economic, political and cultural development that Amsterdam underwent during the Golden Age. The recognition of the canals and canal houses as a UNESCO-protected site has increased the city's international renown. It also acts as a stimulus for conservation, so that present and future generations can continue to enjoy the unique way of life around the city's canals. UNESCO divides the ring of canals into two zones: a core area and an adjacent buffer zone. The core area contains the actual World Heritage, with its 17th and 18th century buildings.

Cultural heritage

Amsterdam's maritime success in the Golden Age not only led to an enlargement of the city, but also to growth in trade and architecture. This was marked by the construction of canal houses in the 17th and 18th centuries. The facades of the most notable houses reflected the fashions of the time: first classicism, later also baroque. For the less distinguished immigrants, new areas of housing were built in the northwest (the

Jordaan neighbourhood) and in the east (around the Nieuwmarkt). Both these neighbourhoods were home to many artists, including Rembrandt.

Clean water

In the Middle Ages, the water in Amsterdam was far from hygienic. The canals were used as sewers and people saw them as the obvious place to dump their waste.

By the end of the Middle Ages, the local population was drinking almost a litre of beer a day. However, this was because beer was healthier to drink than water because it didn't contain dangerous bacteria. It should also be added that this was very weak beer, made from what was left over after luxury beer had been brewed.

The water in the canals of Amsterdam is now cleaner than ever. The vast improvement in the water quality is largely due to the connection of the canal houses and houseboats to the sewers, and also because a smaller volume of (relatively cleaner) wastewater makes its way into the waterways. In addition, the sewage treatment plant has been moved to the west of the city, so the treated water is no longer discharged into the canals. The varieties of plant life and fish species you can find in the city show just how much the water quality has benefited.

Living on the water

There are around 2,500 houseboats on the waterways of Amsterdam. Of course, life on the water has its charm and gives a feeling of freedom, but that is not the main reason the houseboat phenomenon came about. From 1950 onwards, houseboats became popular in Amsterdam due to a shortage of conventional housing. During this period, many captains sold their barges because they were switching to larger types of vessels. Amsterdammers were able to buy these 'hand-me-downs' cheaply to acquire an affordable home. The variety of houseboats is huge and they are also very popular among expats and international visitors.

Transport on the water

IJ ferry

The district of Amsterdam Noord (on the northern side of the River IJ) and the city centre are separated by the River IJ. A number of free ferry services, operated by public transport operator GVB, cross the river, connecting the north with the city centre. These ferries transport pedestrians, bikes, scooters and mobility vehicles. Although there are tunnels going under the river, the idea of a central bridge over the River IJ has been under discussion for many decades.

DHL boat

The mail company DHL collects and delivers packages via the Amsterdam canals with its *DHL Express* boat. This form of transport allows mail to be transported quickly through the busy city centre.

Activities on the water

Amsterdam City Swim

The construction of sewers (the last area of Amsterdam to be connected was the Canal Ring, and that was only in December 1987!) and the relocation of the sewage treatment plant to the outskirts of the city has greatly improved the water quality. As a result, the canals had become clean enough for the city to hold the first Amsterdam City Swim in September 2012. More than 1,100 swimmers took to the water to raise money for motor neurone disease research. One of the more famous among the swimmers that year was Queen Máxima (then still Princess). It's now an annual event, not only attracting thousands of participants, but many more supporters who cheer them on and raise money for a great cause.

Canal cruises

A novelty that arose during the 17th century was pleasure boating. Sailing and rowing became popular. The wealthy bought splendid yachts, while less well-off Amsterdammers would rent rowing boats. Today a vast range of vessels ply the Amsterdam canals, from ramshackle tubs to gondolas, pedal boats and of course canal cruise boats. In turn, canal cruises have become Amsterdam's biggest tourist attraction.

SAIL

Once every five years, the city plays host to SAIL Amsterdam. During this huge event, Amsterdam becomes devoted to all things nautical. The IJ becomes packed with Tall Ships from all over the world, as well as hundreds of other remarkable vessels, reflecting all aspects of the Netherlands' maritime heritage.

Skating on the canals

Amsterdam's canals don't even lose their appeal if it's freezing cold. In winter, as soon as the temperature drops to four degrees below zero, the Keizersgracht is closed off to boats. If the ice gains enough thickness, this elegant canal becomes a stunning natural skating rink for young and old.

Events on the water

Water and Amsterdam: a great combination! Every year, various free events are held on and beside the city's waterways. In August there is the annual Grachtenfestival, a classical music festival that also includes the unmissable Prinsengracht Concert, performed on a floating stage on the canal. The traditional Liberation Day Concert on 5 May takes place each year on the River Amstel by Royal Theatre Carré. On King's Day in April, the canals become one big festival of orange, and during the famous Amsterdam Gay Pride Canal Parade, they turn pink. All in all, it's a party for everyone, whether or not you're in a boat.

Museums about water

National Maritime Museum

The National Maritime Museum (Scheepvaartmuseum) possesses one of the largest maritime collections in the world, with around 400,000 objects providing a virtually comprehensive overview of Dutch maritime history. The museum is housed in the Arsenal ('s Lands Zeemagazijn), a historic building designed in 1656 by Daniël Stalpaert as a storehouse for the Admiralty of Amsterdam. The Arsenal was built in the Golden Age, when Amsterdam was the largest port in the world. Today, over 350 years later, the Arsenal remains an imposing and distinctive building. It makes a perfect location for the National Maritime Museum, where it has been housed since 1973, and which reopened in 2011 after major renovation work.

Houseboat Museum

It can be hard to imagine what it's like to live on a houseboat in the heart of such an iconic city. However, the Houseboat Museum on the Prinsengracht showcases how life actually is on board a houseboat, how wastewater is discharged, and how the residents come by their water and electricity supplies.

Museum of the Canals

Housed in a historic building on the Herengracht, the Museum of the Canals (Het Grachtenhuis) takes its visitors on a journey through 400 years of history, on which they discover how the canals were constructed and how for centuries people have been making money here, creating art, holding celebrations and living their everyday lives. The museum shows what makes the canals so special, right up to the present day.

The Rembrandt Sloten Windmill and Coopery Museum

The Rembrandt Sloten Windmill is a working drainage windpump that is open to the public. The mill keeps the water in the surrounding lower-lying area below a certain level.

The Coopery Museum displays a variety of scale models of sailing ships, built by the Dutch since the 15th century. It provides a picture of how people in days gone by struggled to conquer the water.

Facts and figures (source: Waternet & Amsterdam Marketing)

165	canals, with a total length of 50 kilometres
2,000,000	cubic metres of water
80	bridges in the Canal Ring
2,500	houseboats
7	ferry routes
16	locks
12,000	bikes hauled out of the canals each year
0.4	metres below sea level

Amsterdam, August 2015

Note to the editor: The information may be freely referenced or copied if the source is credited: www.iamsterdam.com. The above information is subject to change and Amsterdam Marketing accepts no responsibility for inaccuracies in published information.

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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 its 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.