



Amsterdam basics

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Caroline Sieg

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Bucolic canals, charming bridges and laid-back atmosphere: there's so many reasons to love the ['Dam](#). So how to get the most out of your visit?

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Pack an umbrella

Amsterdam's weather is notoriously fickle. Luckily, the showers usually pass quickly.

Bring cash

Many shops, restaurants and bars generally only accept cash or Dutch debit cards.

Eat some herring

Hollandse Nieuwe (fresh herring) is a Dutch favourite. May to July is prime herring-eating season. Definitely try it, but don't dangle it above your mouth like they do in the tourist brochures. Amsterdammers eat it in a far more civilised fashion – chopped and served on a paper plate with onions and sweet pickles, using a tiny toothpick as a utensil, or wrapped up in a soft white roll (*broodje herring*).

To market, to market

Eat your way through the multicultural [Albert Cuypmarkt](#). Munch on cheese, olives, *frites*, caramel-filled *stroopwafels* and more while watching the world go by.

Hire a bike

Hire a bike for your stay. Most people hire a bike for a day and wish they'd had one from start to finish. It's cheap, it's green and it's how the locals get around – why not join them? Be even more eco-conscious and hire one at [Recycled Bicycles](#).

Watch where you walk

Don't walk in the bike lane, unless you want to get hurt, cursed at, or both. Bikes lanes are clearly marked red. Just treat it like a busy street – look both ways and cross quickly. And if there's a light, wait for the green walk signal.

Follow coffeeshop etiquette

Amsterdam's coffeeshops are legendary. If you visit one, remember three key facts: 1) Cannabis is not actually legal (but selling and carrying small amounts is tolerated). 2) Since the tobacco-smoking ban took effect, you can't smoke a cigarette or a joint containing tobacco inside a coffeeshop. In short: marijuana joints are OK, tobacco cigarettes are not. 3) You can't buy or drink alcohol in a coffeeshop.

Try the pie

Holland's most famous sweet treat is apple pie – served with an obscene dollop of whipped cream. [Winkel](#) in the Jordaan has the best one in town.

Shop on

The Negen Straatjes (Nine Streets) is the place to go boutique shopping – but many of the shops close on Sundays and/or Mondays. For the best experience, hit the area on a bustling Saturday and grab a coffee in the nearby cafés.

Don't panic

Accept that you'll get lost. Every visitor does – Amsterdam is a spider web of canals and bridges. Don't fret – it's all part of the fun. When finally you pull out your map to find your way, don't be surprised if someone offers to help you get your bearings – the locals are happy to help.

Red faces

Don't take photos of the prostitutes in the windows in *De Wallen* (the Red Light District) – it's disrespectful, and also might get your camera flung into a canal. For more information about this neighbourhood, check out the Red Light District Tour offered by the [Prostitution Information Centre](#).

Further information

Jump on the [Netherlands](#) branch of the Thorn tree forum for answers to all your Amsterdam questions. [New coffee shop laws?](#) Dining out [at a reasonable price?](#) It's all there.

A former commissioning editor in Lonely Planet's London office, [Caroline Sieg](#) (www.siegcaroline.com) is a half-Swiss, half-American writer and editor specialising in Europe and the US. Follow her on Twitter [@carolinesieg](#).

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Want more detail? Get Lonely Planet's [Amsterdam city guide](#).

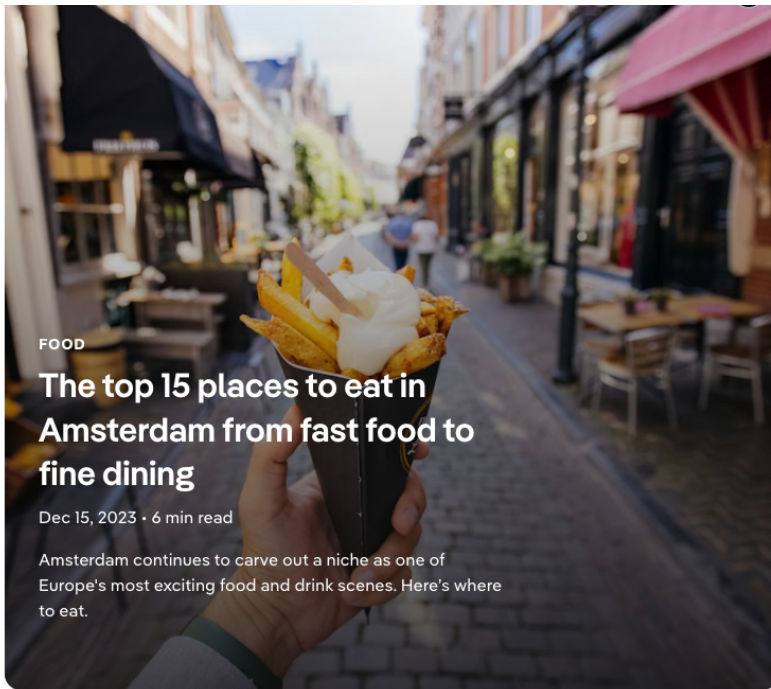
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