

get packing

where? **AMSTERDAM** ✓

how long? **FIVE NIGHTS** ✓

how much? **LESS THAN AU\$3400** ✓



Text by **Mihal Greener**

FOR A CITY OF LESS THAN A MILLION people, Amsterdam punches above its weight when it comes to interest factor. From slender Dutch houses with gabled rooftops leaning precariously over canals to edgy shops and cosy cafes, plus an arts scene that spans the Dutch Masters to Marilyn Manson, Amsterdam is filled with pockets to uncover.

OUR TIPS FOR A FIVE-NIGHT TRIP

Jump on a train at Schiphol airport and 20 minutes later you'll be outside Amsterdam's

central station. Avoid the souvenir shops overflowing with clogs and tulips on the Damrak and stay at the three-star Linden Hotel in the *gezellig* (cosy) Jordaan area, among artists' studios and hidden courtyards – all offering a relaxed, neighbourly vibe. After dropping off your bags, hire some wheels from Bike City. Amsterdam's centre is compact and easy to navigate by foot and tram, but with dedicated bike paths and not an incline in sight, the city is made for cycling – helmet optional. Use the three main canals that horseshoe through the city (Prinsengracht, Keizersgracht and Herengracht) as your points of reference and visit the intersecting Nine Streets neighbourhood. The nine tiny thoroughfares

are packed with quirky boutiques, purveyors of collectables and cafes. Search for vintage treasures at Nic Nic on Gasthuismolensteeg, and enjoy browsing the eclectic vinyl collection – jazz, funk, rap and disco – across the street at Waxwell Records. For a light lunch squeeze into local favourite, the candy-coloured cafe Toos & Roos on Berenstraat. When the small streets become too crowded escape to the tranquillity of Vondelpark, an enclave of green tucked into the city centre. Join the locals and make the most of any sunshine on the balcony at 't Blauwe Theehuis, a 1930s modernist pavilion now home to a cafe. If you're in the mood for high-end window-shopping go around the corner to PC

Hoofstraat, where you'll find Hermès, Jimmy Choo and Gucci. For budget-friendly buys try Albert Cuyp Market, filled with bric-a-brac, souvenirs and street food. After you've worked up an appetite making your way through the market, enjoy Bazar Amsterdam for its Middle Eastern delicacies served on oversized platters brimming with dips and meats. For dessert, head around the corner to De Taart van m'n Tante (The Cake of my Aunt) for decadent baked goods that are as colourful and inviting as the kitsch 1950s decor.

AFTER THE SUN GOES DOWN Dutch colonial history has made Indonesian food a local specialty. Visit Restaurant Blauw, named Amsterdam's best Indonesian restaurant by The New York Times, order a *rijsttafel* (rice table) and feast on a banquet including egg in sambal sauce, turmeric beef and roasted coconut for AU\$45 a head. Be sure to plan ahead and check out what's playing at two of the most memorable music venues in town, Melkweg and Paradiso. These intimate clubs are housed in a converted milking factory and former church, respectively, and you can check out local artists or see an international act at a very reasonable price. If you want to take advantage of the Netherlands' relaxed attitude to soft drugs visit Dampkring on Haarlemmerstraat. Exposed bricks and low lighting create the ambience of an upscale bar, rather than a seedy hangout for just-turned-legal backpackers. Get some advice from behind the counter on what to try and keep your map handy for the short trip back to the Jordaan.

GET SOME CULTURE Art lovers will be spoiled for choice in Amsterdam, with more than 50 museums from which to choose. Make the most of a unique collaboration between three of the city's biggest museums by visiting the Hermitage Amsterdam's new exhibition, *Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age*. The collection brings together 30 giant seventeenth-century group portraits – on display until the end of 2016 – from the Rijksmuseum and Amsterdam Museum.



Because of their size the portraits, nicknamed the 'brothers and sisters' of Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*, have rarely been displayed and never before together.

DAY TRIPPING An hour's train ride away and you will be reaching for your camera to capture the many charms of Delft. The city is home to Delftware, the famed hand-painted blue ceramics, and enthusiasts can visit De Delftse Pauw factory for a free tour. Walk through the main square, dominated by the Nieuwe Kerk (New Church), which is more than 600 years old and home to the Dutch royal family's crypt. On Thursday and Saturday mornings wander through the antique and book markets held along the canals. If you're lucky you might find one of the country's most prized souvenirs, a KLM ceramic house, filled with gin and handed out by the airline in business class on its international flights.

COSTS

ACCOMMODATION
LINDEN HOTEL, JORDAAN
 AU\$180 a night per room
lindenhotel.nl
TOTAL = AU\$900 (or AU\$450 a person, twin-share)

FOOD & DRINK
 A coffee and sandwich for lunch will set you back about AU\$15–AU\$20. Herring or chips will give you change from AU\$5. If you keep breakfast and lunch simple and splurge for a two-course dinner and a couple of drinks, budget on AU\$100 a day.
TOTAL = AU\$500

TRANSPORT
 Return flights from Melbourne to Amsterdam with Qatar Airways cost from about AU\$1738
qatarairways.com
 Return train from Schiphol airport – AU\$12
 Return train to Delft – AU\$35
 Bike hire from Bike City, five days – AU\$66
bikecity.nl
TOTAL = AU\$1851

TOURS AND ACTIVITIES
 Paradiso and Melkweg tickets – about AU\$30
 Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age at the Hermitage – AU\$22
 Dampkring coffee shop – joints AU\$7
TOTAL = AU\$59

TOTAL: AU\$3310

* Prices are approximate and based on the exchange rate at the time of writing.



DESTINATION HIGHLIGHTS

Topping Amsterdam's cultural calendar are the King's Day celebrations on 27 April, when the city becomes a sea of orange and festivities, and Gay Pride, which transforms the canals into a riot of colour at the end of July/early August.

VITAL STATS
 The unit of currency in Amsterdam is the euro.

WHEN TO GO
 It's warmer between April and September, but pack a waterproof jacket any time of year.

TOP TIP
 To stretch your euros further, try Dutch street food. Herring is available from vans dotted across the city. The best chips are at Vlaams Friteshuis Vlemincx. They're typically served with mayonnaise, but it's worth experimenting with curry ketchup, sambal or apple sauce.

FURTHER READING
 Amsterdam city's official website has information on upcoming events and other things to do.
iamsterdam.com