



3 Symbols of the canal city – Amsterdam's bridges

Map: ► 2, A–C 2–5, Orientation map: page 37

Transport: Tram: 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 13, 14, 16, 17, 24, 25: Dam, Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal

In the 17th century, the canals spread like a spider web of commerce over the city, creating over 90 islands and crossed by hundreds of bridges. Amsterdam still has more than 1700 bridges, about four times as many as Venice. The city also has eight historic drawbridges. Our walking route will lead you over seven of them: from Dam Square, which was once Amsterdam's oldest bridge, over smaller arched bridges, to the 'Parisian' elegance of the Blauwbrug.

Amsterdam is a city of bridges. The original settlement extended along both banks of the Amstel, so water played a major role in the history of the city from the beginning. The Amstel was the main shipping thoroughfare; the river was also a key part of the city's defenses. Amsterdam lives on, by and

almost under water: only careful drainage stops it from turning back into a swampland.


The art of building small bridges

Amsterdam's first bridges were made of wood beams. Few of those early wooden bridges have survived, but their design persisted well into the 20th century in constructions of iron and later concrete. There are also many arched stone bridges: one or more arches of vaulted masonry carrying the weight of the roadway and allowing room for ships to sail under the road, often faced with quarried stone. After the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, designs and materials changed drastically. New techniques and the use of iron and steel allowed for lower, flatter bridges. Later in the 19th century, more and more arched bridges were replaced by flat equivalents. The architects of the Amsterdam School (1915-

Vondelstraat curves like an oval around the church. At No. 140, is one of Amsterdam's best-kept secrets: the **Hollandsche Manege** ⁵, the oldest riding school in the city, dating back to the 18th century – the building is from 1882. The riding school is modelled after the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. A sprawling staircase leads to the former orchestra balcony where a café is now located. From here, there is a good view of the animals and the beautiful iron and wood roof.

Summer spectacle

You don't have to go any further than opposite Vondelstraat 164 to find the next park entrance. Walk right to the iron bridge with wrought-iron railings. After the bridge, turn right and you will find yourself on the **Music**

Pavilion ⁶ and 't **Blauwe Theehuis** ². The teahouse – a 1937 design in the style of the Nieuwe Bouwen – now houses a popular self-service restaurant with a large outdoor seating area. Right behind the Music Pavilion, the soaring structure of the **Open-Air Theatre** ⁷  stage rises high in the air. Summer is the busiest season for this park. There are daily performances: concerts, theatre, dance, and entertainment for children.

Exclusive shopping in the P.C.

The southeast park entrance leads directly to the **P. C. Hooftstraat** ¹, now known in the Netherlands as the upscale shopping district for the *nouveaux riches*. There are many fashion shops here as well as the *flagship stores* of several popular brands.

Vondelpark is the park of choice for Amsterdam locals





World-class waterfront location: Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ. The black box is the Bimhuis

mas, the building is briefly transformed back to its original purpose: the circus comes back to town with world-class stars from international productions from Russia, France, China and more. 'Klein Carré' (entrance around the back) is for talented international performers who are just getting started (cabaret, musical theatre, dance).

Excellent waterfront location – Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ: ■ map 2, F1, Piet Heinkade 1, www.muziekgebouw.nl, tram 25, 26. A huge wall of reflective glass framed in an architecturally pretentious structure is the exterior of the modern Amsterdam centre for new music and jazz. The Muziekgebouw has

Tickets for nearly all cultural events are available in the **AUB ticket shop** (see page 23) on Leidseplein (also online). Last-minute sales €! take place on the day of the event, starting at 12:00; from that point on, you can get a 50% discount (www.lastminuteticketshop.nl). Many tickets are also available at the VVV tourist information offices (see page 19).

put itself on the map in no time, thanks in part to its ambitious line-up of non-European and experimental music, not to mention rare and ancient music that is seldom performed elsewhere.

Opera and ballet – Muziektheater: ■ map 2, C 4, Amstel 3, www.hetmuziektheater.nl, tram 9, 14, metro 51, 53, 54. Two world-famous ensembles perform regularly in the modern Stopera building: the National Ballet and the Netherlands Opera. World-class performances of opera, dance, musical theatre and ballet are staged here, encompassing a wide range of styles and genres.

Classic – Stadsschouwburg: ■ D 6, Leidseplein 26, www.ssba.nl, tram 1, 2, 5, 7, 10. The neo-Renaissance municipal theatre (1894) plays a major role in the fabric of the city's cultural life. It hosts a cross-section of the performing arts, from theatre, modern dance and ballet to musical theatre, musicals and cabaret. For instance, when the famous Nederlands Dans Theater ensemble comes from The Hague to perform in the capital city, they perform at the Stadsschouwburg.

Museumkwartier and Spiegelkwartier

► D/E 6/7

The Spiegelkwartier area between Herengracht and the Rijksmuseum is dominated by galleries and art and antique dealers. The Rijksmuseum, the Van Gogh Museum and the Stedelijk Museum are surrounded by spacious streets that open onto Museumplein, the biggest square in Amsterdam. Just a few streets away, P.C. Hooftstraat is one of the most elegant shopping areas in town.

De Pijp ► E-G 7/8

De Pijp is definitely the most colourful part of Amsterdam – and not just because of the many nationalities living here. The many exotic shops, fast food joints, restaurants and of course the international Albert Cuyp Market, the most famous street market in the country, define the street scene here.

Plantagebuurt ► H/J 5/6

The Plantage area in the east of the city includes the Hortus Botanicus gardens and Artis Zoo. The affluent neighbourhood has retained much of its charm.

New Eastern Islands

► Map 3

The construction of this new residential area has attracted extensive international attention. It became the most densely populated urban area in the Netherlands. This eastern port area, with the artificial islands of KNSM, Java, Borneo and Sporenburg, fell into decline in the late 1970s. Large-scale urban renewal was not launched until the early 1990s. Daring architecture is intermingled with low-rise flats containing affordable single-family dwellings, which are in short supply in Amsterdam.

The fringes of the city

Initial explorations of Amsterdam generally starts with the neighbourhoods described above, in and around the city centre. Once you've seen that, take a look on the fringes of the city, where Amsterdam will surprise you with modern architecture, spacious green areas, multicultural flair, colourful markets and less spectacular sights that are still well worth seeing.

A daring urban renewal plan was carried out in the mid-1990s on the former port islands in Amsterdam East, including post-modern residential buildings.

