

It slows your pace, makes you laid back and relaxed, and tries its best to instil the understanding that not all hope is perhaps lost in this world.

Here is a perfect scenario of a city where party-goers from all over the world gather and yet manage to find their ways home more safely than half of the world's securely guarded fortresses. It secretly implies that perhaps allowed the freedom of choice with a dash of sensibility and responsibility, there is hope for a safe world, where children could run about free in the streets, simply because adults know how to act like one.

As with most of my other travel pieces, I like to put in a lot of emphasis on things that cost you nothing! And that is because it was possible for me to do so much that cost either nothing or very little, not because of my overly cautious nature (because I lack that quality completely) or good fortune, but because it is rather possible in most European cities. Yes, there are Van Gogh and Annie Frank's that perhaps make up the list of unmissable stops to make in Amsterdam, however, let me indulge in the free air first.

If you spend an afternoon cycling around the city, and yes it is a highly rated mode of transportation in the city and by far the best option, you can manage to squeeze in the contemporary art scene in small independent galleries. Radar, Galerie Font Welters and Kochsbos, are all full of colourful and surreal artwork.

The EYE film museum is another, where although you would need to purchase a ticket for entry inside, in the basement, visitors can immerse themselves in cinema at a free permanent exhibition. The Panorama room surrounds its visitors with around 100 movie clips and scenes which are projected on the wall.

The viewing pods, specially designed futuristic cabins, have a small sofa inside for visitors to watch films in. It is also worth taking a look at the EYE building itself which sports a dramatic new look with jagged angles and shimmering white exteriors.

Like most European cities, Amsterdam has its fair share of day markets too, each with its own unique characteristics. The Albert Cuyo market in De Pijp and Noordermarkt farmer's market in the Jordaan are exemplary for cheap grocery and organic samplings respectively.

No visitor should miss out on the splendours of a water-borne tour of the canals in this river city. The canals were declared a UNESCO monument and are not only a picturesque attraction but used to be essential to defence and transport back in 17th century Amsterdam.

The canal boat tours take in a lot of the monumental architecture that lines the belt. Any of these tours is an experience to remember and options are plentiful. For a gratis boat trip though, hop on one of the free ferries across the IJ, Amsterdam's waterfront, and explore Amsterdam-Noord.

My Amsterdam travel diary begins and ends with two toppers and I have saved them for the end. The Van Gogh museum. I do not believe anybody walks into Amsterdam with all of its clichés and expects at some point to be touched and mesmerised by art. So much so, that I teeter referring to this astounding art house as anything other than a museum because it stores much more than just history.

With every flight of stairs up the museum, you are in full frontal confrontation with the life of this maestro. You feel his mood sway from one piece to another, feel the depth of his emotions as they are exposed to harsh realities as much as whims, depression and angst. I would like to dedicate another full length piece on this museum alone, but alas, I am almost at the pit of my word count.

Speaking of full frontal surreal experiences that stay with you for a lifetime, my final and undoubtedly, my hero recommendation for this city is the Anne Frank huis. This is the location of the Jewish Frank family hiding place from Nazi occupation during World War II. Anne Frank's diary that later goes on to become one of the most widely read books in the world had been documented from the precipice of this establishment. This is more of a pilgrimage than a museum.

I feel compelled to end this account on a sunnier note, with the suggestion of riding a bicycle to the wonderful Vondel Park for a quintessential day out to catch a sunny Amsterdam. No better way to soak up the mysticism that surrounds this multi-dimensional city with some natural light and oh, some raw herrings from the stands nearby perhaps!

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Photo: Collected

