

AMSTERDAM

One Day, One City

By Genevieve Northup

No matter how long you're stationed in Europe, there is not enough time or money to see it all. If you have just one day for Amsterdam, begin with the one-hour 100 Highlights canal cruise to create your game plan.

See

Museums: The Rijksmuseum houses valuable antiquities, photographs, sculptures and paintings. Vermeer, van Dyck and Rembrandt are among the artists represented.

Gaze at the astounding masterpieces "The Bedroom," "Sunflowers," "Irises" and more than 700 other works at the Van Gogh Museum. Special exhibits are also rotated throughout the year.

The Anne Frank House brings the words of the girl's famous diary to life and offers a personal account of the Holocaust. Enter the secret annex where two families hid before their arrest and transfer to concentration camps.

Gardens, Parks & Pleins (Squares): After touring the galleries of the Museumplein, head to the bustling Damplein to see the former royal palace and stop for an al-fresco lunch at a sidewalk café or a quick bite at a food truck. Finish a busy afternoon with a cocktail at one of the bars along Leidseplein, and scope out Rembrandtplein's diverse bars, clubs and pubs.

The Hortus Botanicus was established as a medicinal garden in the early 17th century. Today,

explore an indoor rain forest, green houses and gardens with more than 6,000 plant types.

Escape the urban chaos to stroll through the Begijnhof, a peaceful green space tucked among medieval houses. Listen to summertime open-air concerts at Vondelpark, the city's largest park. From March to May, see millions of flowers at Keukenhof, 45 minutes away.

The Red Light District: Women bear all in this area of brothels and adult stores. Wander through after dark before heading to neighboring "Chinatown" for dinner.

Chinatown: Dozens of restaurants serve delicious, traditional Chinese, Thai,

Indonesian, Malaysian, Japanese, Korean and fusion cuisine, so prepare for a feast. Recreate these Asian specialties at a Dun Yong cooking class, hosted in the city's most prominent Asian store.

One bit of advice: Steer clear of "coffee shops" in Amsterdam. Customers at these establishments are looking for something stronger than caffeine.

Do

Spend: Red lights aren't the only thing shining in Amsterdam – buy diamond

bling from Coster or Gassan. Peruse the daily market at Albert Cuypmarkt and



Nieuwmarkt's antique fair held on Sundays from May to October. Browse the vibrant floating flower market or eclectic Dappermarkt. Find fashion by exclusive labels on sale at Bijenkorf during the "crazy days" (*dwaze dagen*) in autumn.

Celebrate: Amsterdam has several annual festivals worthy of repeat visits. To commemorate the ruling Orange-Nassau family, the citizens of Amsterdam gather in the streets for concerts, parades and flea markets on King's Day or Koningsdag, formerly Queen's Day. The city is bathed in orange, so pack your funkier carrot-colored attire to blend in.

From late November to mid-January, the Amsterdam Light Festival brings cheer to a drab, dreary winter. The themed installations are best witnessed by boat.

In August, you can hear classical music performances at every square and canal. The Grachtenfestival encourages musicians of all ages and levels to share their passion.

Lace up your comfy shoes, pack survival snacks, charge your camera and download an offline city map to your smartphone to help you hit the ground running in Europe's exciting cities. Amsterdam is only a warm up for your travel adventures! ■



© ELISSA1000.123RF.COM