Winter in Amsterdam

CANALS, MUSEUMS AND A FESTIVAL OF LIGHT IN THE QUIET SEASON

By Mohammed Reza Amirinia

CATEGORY: TRAVEL DESTINATIONS



AMSTERDAM NEVER SLEEPS
an all year round experience

THE UNASSUMING ANN FRANK HOUSE
over one million visitors every year

MUSEUMPLEIN MASTERPIECES
Rembrandt, Vermeer, Van Gogh

THE AMSTERDAM LIGHT FESTIVAL
a fairytale display of colour

A CITY OF WATER AND LIGHT

Winter in Amsterdam

canals, culture and the glow of the light festival in the quiet of winter

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One of the best views of Amsterdam is by a canal tour at night

Amsterdam never sleeps. It becomes an all year round experience to visit Amsterdam even in the cold of winter. There is everything for everyone to explore and enjoy a pleasurable break.

The city is famous for its red light district and tolerance in the use of drugs. This district, which has been subject of social and political debates in Dutch media, is very busy day and night. It is very close to a 13th century Old Church (Oude Kerk), the oldest building and the oldest parish in Amsterdam but this area around the Oudezijds Voorburgwal canal is kept fairly safe and fully controlled by the authorities. Most tourists will inevitably find themselves in the narrow streets of this neighbourhood out of curiosity. It is also normal to see families, around this district. Most guided tours take visitors to this area of the town to amuse them with unexpected scenes, not seen in other conservative cities of Europe. However, this is not the real Amsterdam and what Dutch people are proud of.

I

THE REAL LIFE OF A UNIQUE CITY

The real life of this unique city lies where artists, painters, poets, writers and dreamers lived. Many galleries, museums and antique houses along the canals, bridges and narrow streets reflect the depth of a rich culture which inspired many well-known and famous authors, novelist and art creators and encouraged art collectors and curators to build art houses.

Anne Frank House is one of the most visited places in Amsterdam. A 16-year-old Jewish girl who became the victim of Nazis crimes during the World War II, the young Anne, who lived secretly for two years in the hidden annex of a house located along Prinsengracht canal, wrote her diary in hiding. She desired to become a famous writer, but did not live long enough to see her dreams come true. Her short life and remarkable experience brought her fame all over the world. Over one million visitors every year visit the house and the exhibition to pay tribute in her memory. Young and old people step into her secret annex to get inspiration from her big soul.



the unassuming Ann Frank House

II

THE RIJKSMUSEUM



the famous 19th century Rijksmuseum

One can see the richness of a city in its museums. Amsterdam has been pioneering in assembling and shaping world heritage not only in Europe but also in the world. The Museum Square or Museumplein is the center of excellence to gather knowledge and history in a celebrated area of the city with its chic brand-name shops, stylish cafes and restaurants. The famous 19th century Rijksmuseum with its grand architectural monument stands at the heart of the museum square along with Stedelijk Museum of Modern Art and Van Gogh Museum. This prominent and sophisticated district is an art lovers paradise.

The Rijksmuseum was reopened in glory on April 2013 after 10 years of extensive restoration and renovation. Originally built in 1885 as the largest museum in Netherlands, it is one of the most known museums in Europe. The museum is dedicated to arts, crafts and history in Amsterdam with masterpieces from Rembrandt, Frans Hals, Johannes Vermeer and Jacob Isaakszoon van Ruisdael. In contrast to historical Rijksmuseum, the Van Gogh museum is in a modern building opened to public in 1973 and is mainly dedicated to the paintings and drawings of Vincent Van Gogh and his contemporaries. In contrast to the Van Gogh and the Rijksmuseum, the Stedelijk Museum is designed for modern and contemporary art.

III

THE CONCERTGEBOUW

Just opposite the Mecum Square in Van Baarlestraat street, Amsterdam's great concert hall is housed in the majestic Concertgebouw, which was opened in 1888. The building is spectacular as a revival of classical art forms, complemented by its breathtaking acoustics and sound system. This concert hall is renowned worldwide with over 600 concerts performed every year.

– But you cannot leave Amsterdam without visiting another museum; -the Hermitage Amsterdam, a branch of the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Located on the banks of Amstel River in a classical 17th century building, the collections are often transferred from Saint Petersburg to Amsterdam to be exhibited for a period of 6 months.

I visited two exhibitions of Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age and Dining with the Tsars. Eight magnificent ceramic and creamware services from the collection of the Hermitage in St Petersburg were exhibited in a setting that conveys what the balls and banquets of the Tsar's court were like.



the majestic Concertgebouw, which was opened in 1888



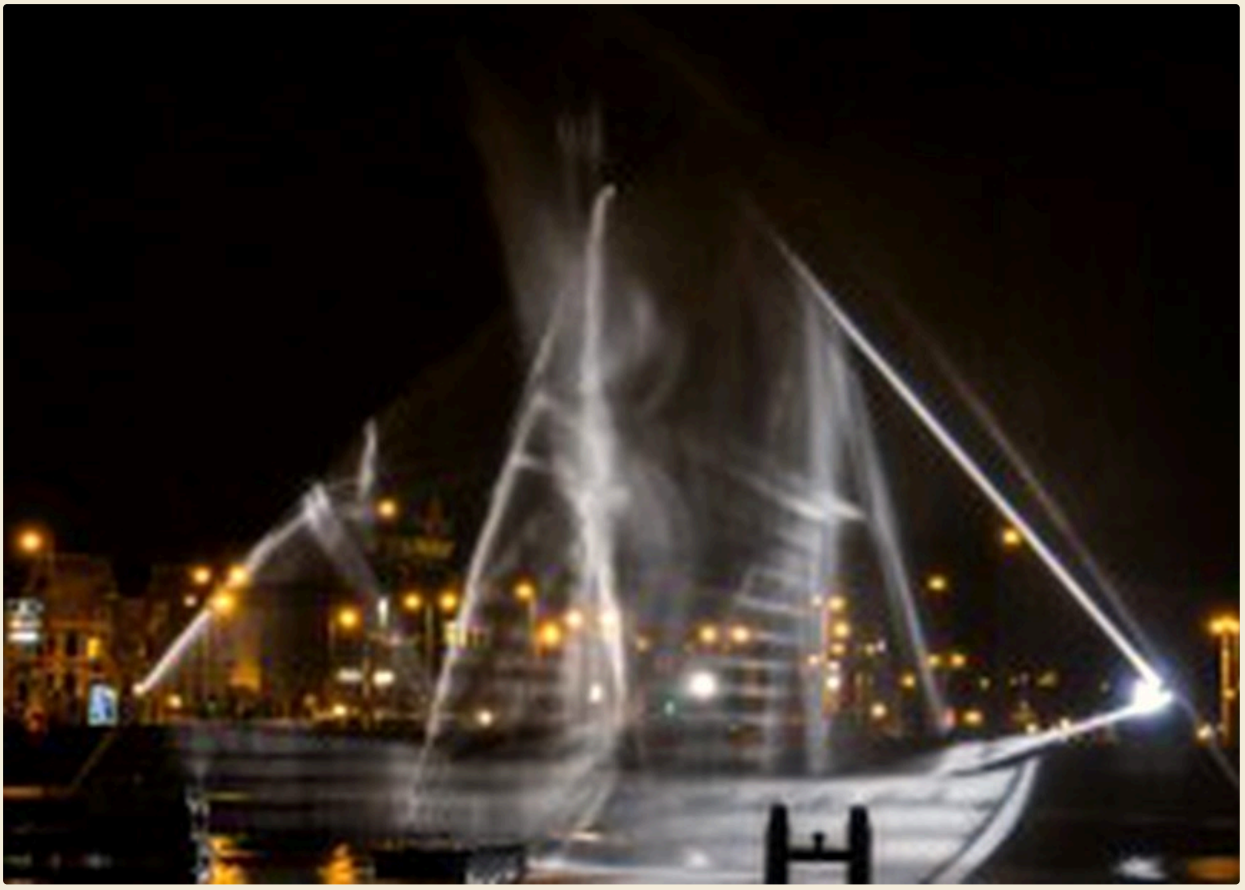
a dinner setting at the Hermitage - Amsterdam

IV

THE AMSTERDAM LIGHT FESTIVAL

Winter in Amsterdam is as warm as summer. During winter, a Light Festival illuminates the city with sculptures, installations, and light projections on trees and historical buildings. The young and well-known artists display their creations in the public places and parks along the historical canals of this joyous city. Light is the central theme in the city from the end of November until mid January. All cultural institutions and government organizations in Amsterdam engage in this unique experience to illuminate the city, bringing the light of joy and happiness to residents and visitors.

The walking tour encircles the city center, with its various squares and parks, passing the waterways. One can start the walking tour from the historical Plantage neighborhood to observe the illuminated and lighted artworks. It was an unforgettable experience to follow the walking route, despite the cold and stormy weather, to see the artworks of CampFire, The Millers Tale, Alley of Light, Bicycle Dome and Tulip Mania, when I had a guided tour of the light festival.



the Ghost Ship

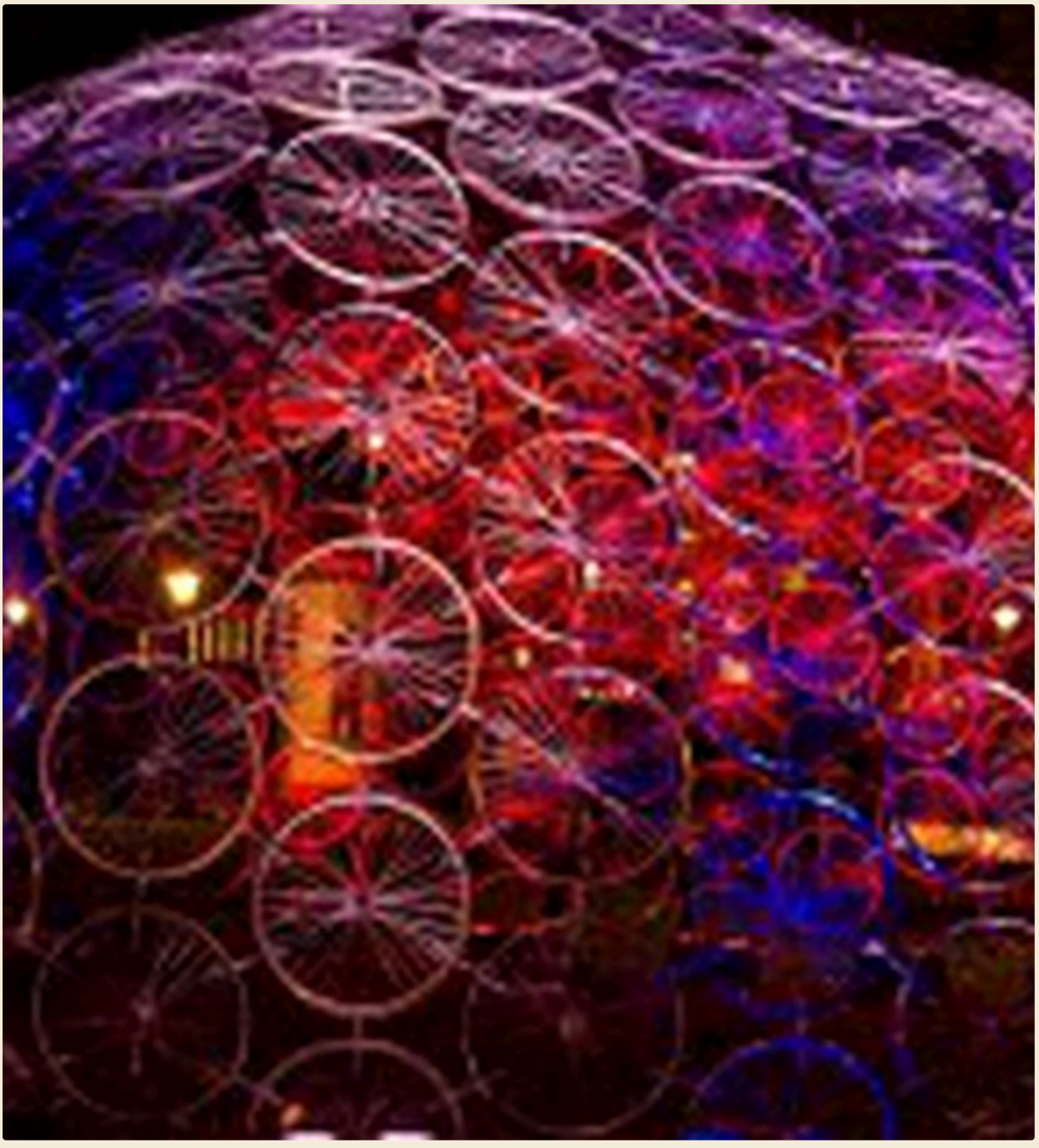
Another great way to experience the light festival from the water is by a guided boat trip when it is dark. The light art and projections throughout the canals and in the Amstel river is a fairytale display of colour. The highlights of this showcase by international artists over the water are the replica of a Ghost Ship, Floating Bridge, Light House and Light Bridge. The Ghost Ship is magicly created by the water fountains and light works in the corner of canal.

V

TOLD AND UNTOLD STORIES

Amsterdam is a city full of many told and untold stories. Every canal, street and house has its own tale. Even the hotel where I was staying has its own interesting story to tell. The Manor Hotel near the Oosterpark, only ten minutes from the city centre is a converted historic building dating from 1891, which used to be a public hospital. Van Gendt, who was also the architect of the Central Station and Concertgebouw, designed it. Many famous people including Prince Bernard, the husband of Queen Juliana stayed in the hospital. The well-known footballer Johan Cruyff was also born there.

Amsterdam is a mysterious city with many features, which cannot be explored in a short visit. I managed to glimpse only a small grasp of the city of water and light. It is certainly my mission to come back again to research this cosmopolitan city.



part of the light show from this winters' festival

Amsterdam is a mysterious city with many features, which cannot be explored in a short visit.

PLAN YOUR JOURNEY

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