



ESCAPE

EDITED BY

■ [jp.thompson@sundayworld.com](mailto:jp.thompson@sundayworld.com)  
■ [brian.farrell@sundayworld.com](mailto:brian.farrell@sundayworld.com)

# Dam busters

**EUGENE COSTELLO** checks out what the Dutch capital has to offer outside of canals, coffee shops and river cruises



**W** E ALL know the Amsterdam of canal and coffee shops, of tulips and river cruises. But there is a

far more diverse Amsterdam away from these chocolate-box images. Amsterdam, away from its alluring centre, is in fact a necklace of diverse and vibrant neighbourhoods, a mix of hipster and homely with excellent restaurants and burgeoning cultural attractions. For scale, Amsterdam's population is about a third bigger than that of Dublin but it's around twice the size.

I took my daughter, Evie, for a spring break to one such neighbourhood in the regenerated former industrial North Amsterdam called Buiksloterham —

reminiscent of the docklands of Dublin and London. The good news is that once we caught the train

*Our visit to Anne Frank's House was emotional. The story still stirs and shocks*

to Central Station from Schipol Airport (€22 return), and had picked up our rental bikes from the MacBike store on the station concourse (€9.75 for one day, extra days are €6 per day, a bargain and a must-have in this supremely bike-friendly city), it was a one-minute crossing over the Amstel river on the free ferry.

Embark behind Central Station and from the terminal on the north side, it was less than a 10-minute ride to our Airbnb apartment on Ridderspoorweg, a super-cool split-level warehouse type affair with everything provided by our super-host, the genial and affable Thijs. (It's listed on Airbnb as "Luxury Amsterdam loft apartment with cheap parking", and cost us around €70 per night.)

The first night, we cycled up to NDSM Wharf, an eccentric regenerated shipyard that is now an avant-garde artistic



**COBBLED TOGETHER:** Stunning side streets

centre with a famous flea market and lots of reclaimed sea containers, street art and graffiti.

We chose to dine at Pilek, a kind of *Mad Max* post-apocalyptic restaurant housed in old sea containers. Inside, it feels as though you are in a trendy barn, with glorious views through floor-to-ceiling windows and a wood-burner surrounded by sofas. I opted for a venison stew with parsnip chips, mash and greens (€21.50, with a very quaffable red Grenache at €4 per glass).

The next day, we set off on our bikes



**DAM FINE:** There is something for everyone

to make full use of our Amsterdam City Card, which cost €95 and were valid for 72 hours from first use, giving us access to most of the city's museums, galleries and attractions.

We loved the Rembrandt exhibition at the Rijksmuseum, a huge Gothic fantasy in the style of London's Natural History Museum. We spent two hours here, and marvelled at sketches shown alongside the completed works. Particularly captivating was *De Aardappeleters* (The Potato Eaters), a group of peasants eating by the light of an oil lamp, their appearance more like

caricature and reminiscent of the style of the great 20th-century figurative painter Peter Howson.

Next up, we headed to the Van Gogh Museum, a stunning legacy to the great man's work. The section devoted to his 'madness', together with letters sent to his brother, was especially moving.

But far more emotional was our visit to Anne Frank's House (not included in the City Card, €10 for adults, €5 for children 10–17, free under 10). The story still stirs and shocks, echoing down the 65 years since her betrayal and death.

We loved MOCO, the Museum of

Contemporary Art. It has an enormous collection of Banksy pieces and the exhibition has been extended to the end of September. Go while you can! And look out for pop-art icon Roy Lichtenstein's pastiche of Van Gogh's bedroom.

Cycling between museums around the canal district, Jordaan, is a wonderfully liberating sensation, and simply the best way to see Amsterdam.

Brunch at Café P96 on Prinsengracht was a real find, with a near-perfect 9/10 rating on TripAdvisor. It's a brown bar, very authentic, that serves hot chocolate with cream or coffee with cheese toasties by day and is a bar by night.

That evening, we dined at our favourite find, Café George on Leidsegracht. A simply enormous portion of boeuf bourguignon with creamy mash for me, and a tower of scrambled eggs with baked

tomato on toast for vegetarian Evie.

Outside in the dusk, a wild bird skeeted and splashed into the canal, causing ripples. Such peace and tranquility in the heart of the city.

We devoted the next day to our adopted neighbourhood of North Amsterdam.

First up was The Lookout. This is the A'DAM Tower, a 22-floor super-cool office tower that houses a boutique hotel and a revolving restaurant. On the roof is an observation deck with bar serving drinks and snacks, and the best view of the city skyline across the river. Adrenaline junkies will love the swing — Over The Edge — that, at 100 metres up, is Europe's highest. It's included in your Amsterdam City Card (find out more at [adamlookout.com](http://adamlookout.com)).

And after The Lookout, we headed next door to This Is Holland, a

fantastic audio-visual experience promoting the country. The undoubted pinnacle of the visit — and, according to Evie, of the whole trip — was a simulated 4D aeroplane ride that took us through clouds, with sea spray on our faces as we skimmed the waves, taking us across this small but perfectly formed country, gliding over great forests, regal palaces and, finally, back to Amsterdam where we landed and disembarked. Utterly enchanting.

This flight of fancy was, like Amsterdam itself, a visual and visceral triumph, tinged with sadness that we would, that evening, have to make our way back to Schipol to head home.

But with flights from Dublin only an hour and 40 minutes, it was, I suspect, only the start of a lifetime love affair for Evie, and a renewal of vows for me.



LATE DEALS

## Sun rises on Japan

Cassidy Travel has just launched its first Japan brochure and among the many attractive packages to this fascinating land is an all-inclusive



'Week in Japan', which explores Tokyo, the regal grandeur of Kyoto, the perfect symmetry of Mount Fuji, Nara's Todaiji Temple with its resident deer, Osaka and the naturally scenic area of Hakone. From €4,790pps, which includes flights and meals. Call Cassidy Travel on (01) 8786888 or book in one of their nine stores across Dublin.

## Crystal clear ski slopes

Guaranteed snow, perfect pistes, local festivities and delicious food — what else could you wish for this Christmas?



Take a look at Crystal Ski's latest winter offers. If Andorra is your thing you can fly out December 22 from Dublin to Toulouse, stay in the 3\* Sant Roma Apartments (pictured), Arinsal, on a self-catering basis for 7 nights from €609 per person (4 Share). If you prefer Italy, you can leave on the same day and fly into Turin, stay in the 3\* Campo Smith Apartments, Bardonecchia, on a self-catering basis for 7 nights from €645 per person. To book your ski trip, call (01) 653 3504.

## Aer Lingus adds seats

Now in full flight, Aer Lingus' summer schedule welcomes back many seasonal routes flying to popular European



city break and 'sunscape' destinations such as Perpignan (pictured), Pula, Pisa, Palma Majorca and Sicily, plus many more. The airline added close to 300,000 extra summer seats to Europe, increasing capacity on routes such as Nantes, Milan, Bilbao and Alicante.

The airline introduced two new routes from Cork this summer — Nice in France, a twice weekly service from Cork which started on April 17 as well Dubrovnik, Croatia which commenced on May 4. And not forgetting their new destination of Minneapolis in the US, which launches from July 1.