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GAY & LESBIAN AMSTERDAM

top picks

- **Arc** (p206)
Designer meet-market for being seen, air-kissed and ignored.
- **Black Tulip Hotel** (p207)
Get tied up for a weekend in this spanking fine hotel.
- **De Engel van Amsterdam** (p205)
Cruisey terrace bar for chin-chin wagging.
- **Getto** (p205)
Island of taste in the Zeedijk's sea of testosterone.
- **Mr B** (p204)
For all your jaw-dropping leather, fetish and dungeonwear.
- **Montmartre** (p206)
Campy Bohemian bar where the '80s never die.
- **Queen's Head** (p205)
Queer contrasts of frocks, jocks and Ken dolls.
- **Saarein** (p206)
The original sisters' café, democratised for one and all.

GAY & LESBIAN AMSTERDAM

The Netherlands was the first country to legalise same-sex marriage (in 2001), and homosexuality was decriminalised here as early as 1811. So it should come as no surprise that Amsterdam's gay scene is among the world's largest. Locals are always fretting about whether they've lost their cherry as 'European gay capital', but as debate takes place in the many gay and lesbian establishments (about 300 in total if you count the cool 'friendly' places) you may wonder what they're on about. The lesbian scene is much less active, but that's about par for the course.

For orientation, know that there are four hubs that party hardest. In the Red Light District, Warmoesstraat is home to the infamous leather and fetish bars, dungeonlike darkrooms, porn vendors and coffeeshops; Rembrandtplein (p104) is for traditional pubs, brown cafés and nightclubs, some with a sing-songy, campy bent; and the venerable scene around Leidseplein (p99) has a smattering of venues and hotels. The classiest act is located one street down from the flower market, in Reguliersdwarsstraat, and draws the beautiful twinkies who schmooze and cruise their way along the street. In summer it might seem like a giant block party.

Wherever you are, crowds tend to vary with the time of happy hour – it shifts from bar to bar, and so will you in all likelihood. Note that there have been a number of gay-bashing incidents in recent years, so use your street smarts outside of the pleasure zones. The vast majority of Amsterdam's eateries are gay-friendly, so see the Eating chapter (p156) when the munchies hit.

SHOPPING

Amsterdam is many things to many people, but one thing it's not lacking in inhibition. This means that any shopping needs related to sexuality are catered to with gusto, and that you always leave a shop with more ideas, if less cash, than you entered with.

INTERMALE Map pp62-5 Books

☎ 625 00 09; www.intermale.nl; Spuistraat 251
One of Amsterdam's leading gay bookstores, Intermale has 1½ floors of photo books, sexy mags, videos and pornographic cards.

VROLIJK Map pp62-5 Books

☎ 623 51 42; www.vrolijk.nu; Paleisstraat 135;
☎ 11am-6pm Mon, 10am-6pm Tue, Wed & Fri, 10am-7pm Thu, 10am-5pm Sat, 1-5pm Sun, closed Sun Oct-Dec

The Netherlands' largest G&L bookstore carries the major mags as well as novels, guidebooks and postcards. Upstairs you'll find art, poetry and DVDs.

SHIRT SHOP Map pp100-1 Clothing

☎ 423 20 88; www.shirtshopamsterdam.nl; Reguliersdwarsstraat 64

On gay Amsterdam's main street, this funky, two-storey shop sells tight-fitting

men's shirts to make you look fabulous. Look for sale items around €25.

MR B Map pp62-5 Erotica/Gay

☎ 422 00 03; www.misterb.com; Warmoesstraat 89; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 10am-9pm Thu, 11am-6pm Sat, 1-6pm Sun

Kinkee. The tamer wares at this renowned Red Light District shop include leather and rubber suits, hoods and bondage equipment, all made to measure if you want.

ROB Map pp62-5 Erotica/Gay

☎ 625 46 86; www.rob.nl; Warmoesstraat 71
RoB sells anything and everything for one's bondage and rough-sex fantasy: army gear, leather and rubber are just the start. Oh my!

DRINKING & NIGHTLIFE

More glasses are emptied and partners swung in the old City Centre and the Southern Canal Belt than anywhere else, although Jordaan's low-key scene has a few lesbian cafés. Warmoesstraat in the Red Light District is definitely for those who love it hard – leather and rubber, piercings and slings, darkrooms and acres of porn. A brighter crowd frequents the upper end of the Zeedijk, which has seen a revival of sorts.

CITY CENTRE

CAFÉ BARDEWIJN Map pp62-5 Gay Bar

☎ 420 51 32; Zeedijk 14

This very friendly beer bar draws a mixture of local gay regulars and tourists, and has killer views of the canal out back and Zeedijk in front, making it a must on Queen's Day.

CUCKOO'S NEST Map pp62-5 Gay Bar

☎ 627 17 52; Nieuwezijds Kolk 6

A small, busy bar said to have the largest 'playroom' in Europe. You could spend a whole night exploring the labyrinth of cubicles and glory holes.

DE ENGEL VAN AMSTERDAM

Map pp62-5 Gay Bar

☎ 427 63 81; www.engelamsterdam.nl; Zeedijk 21; ☎ from 3pm Tue-Sun

The new 'Angel' draws a cruisey terrace crowd who toast the evening's promise with a flute of blended juice or champagne. DJ Mayday spins her favourites on Wednesday, and the TGIF drink night is starting to gel.

GETTO Map pp62-5 Gay Bar

☎ 421 51 51; www.getto.nl; Warmoesstraat 51; ☎ Tue-Sun

This groovy, very long restaurant-bar is loved for its entertainment (tarot readers, DJs, bingo competitions). Great people-watching from the front, and a rear lounge where you can chill. Draws a cross-section of the gay community.

PRIK Map pp62-5 Gay Bar

☎ 320 00 02; www.prikamsterdam.nl; Spuistraat 109; ☎ 4pm-1am Sun & Tue-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat
'Sexy snacks and liquids' is the motto of this peppy new retro bar with an 'I've just redone my loft' clientele of 20- to 30-somethings. Live DJs spin pop, house and dance discs.

QUEEN'S HEAD Map pp62-5 Gay Bar

☎ 420 24 75; www.queenshead.nl; Zeedijk 20; ☎ 4pm-1am Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat

A beautifully decorated, canal-view, old-world-style café once run by legendary drag queen Dusty. The place has toned down a bit – there are still drag shows on Tuesday, but the crowd is more mixed, and even straights are welcome.

COCKRING Map pp62-5 Gay Club

☎ 623 96 04; www.clubcockring.com; Warmoesstraat 96; ☎ 11pm-4am Sun-Thu, to 5am Fri & Sat

This popular club has a disco downstairs playing techno and trance, while upstairs is a hot cruising area; leather boys are particularly welcome. Look for live strip shows and 'shoes only' parties.

ARGOS Map pp62-5 Leather Bar

☎ 622 65 95; www.argosbar.com; Warmoesstraat 95; ☎ 10pm-3am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat
Amsterdam's oldest leather bar hosts leather boys of all ages in its famous darkrooms. The regular 'Sex on Sunday' party is always wild (though safe). Dress code: nude or seminude.

WEB Map pp62-5 Leather Bar

☎ 623 67 58; St Jacobsstraat 6; ☎ 2pm-1am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat
Cruisey, well-established leather and clone bar with darkrooms and 'bear nights'. No, the pit below the grate in the floor is not a real loo.

JORDAAN

THERMOS DAY SAUNA Map p86 Gay Sauna

☎ 623 91 58; www.thermos.nl; Raamstraat 33; admission €18; ☎ noon-11pm Mon-Fri, noon-10pm Sat, 11am-10pm Sun

Thermos is a sprawling, popular place for sexual contacts, with porn movies, private (or not so private) darkrooms, roof deck, hair salon and restaurant.

CAFÉ SUGAR Map p86 Lesbian Café

☎ 623 12 34; Hazenstraat 19; ☎ 6pm-1am Thu-Mon

Not just for lesbians, the Sugar throws great parties and has a conscience for the goings-on of the *buurt* (neighbourhood). Come on in, blow up a balloon and hit the dance floor.

DE TRUT Map pp58-9 Lesbian Club

☎ 612 35 24; Bilderdijkstraat 165e; ☎ 11pm-4am Sun

Just west of the Jordaan, this Sunday-night club is a lesbian institution held in the basement of a former squat. Its name means 'the tart' and it comes with an attitude; arrive well before 11pm, and know that heteros are definitely not welcome.

SAAREIN Map p86

Lesbian Café

☎ 623 49 01; Elandsstraat 119

This one-time feminist stronghold is still a meeting place for lesbians, although gay men are welcome too. The café dates from the 1600s, and vestiges remain. There's a small menu with tapas, soups and specials.

SOUTHERN CANAL BELT**ARC** Map pp100-1

Bar/Restaurant

☎ 689 70 70; www.bararc.com; Reguliersdwarstraat 44; ☎ 4pm-1am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat

The cool minimalist interior is sooo right for beautiful media types (mostly gay, but also lesbian and straight). Fancy martinis are the drink *du jour*, and the kitchen serves up zesty fusion cuisine.

OTHER SIDE Map pp100-1

Coffeeshop

☎ 421 10 14; www.theotherside.nl; Reguliersdwarstraat 6

This coffeeshop has grass from Jamaica, very strong Dutch super-skunk, hash from central Asia and more. Many tokers here are on a time-out from clubs like Arc.

LELLEBEL Map pp100-1

Drag Bar

☎ 427 51 39; www.lellebel.nl; Utrechtsestraat 4; ☎ 9pm-3am Mon-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat

This hole-in-the wall just off Rembrandtplein has karaoke, singing and comedy shows that bring out the best in any girl's wardrobe. It can get bitchy, but always in the funniest possible way.

AMSTEL TAVERNE

Map pp100-1

Gay Bar

☎ 623 42 54; Amstel 54

This historic brown café with Delft-blue tiles draws a 40s-and-up crowd that, in the right temperatures, spills onto the street to mix with passers-by. Definitely has that trademark 'only in Amsterdam' vibe.

YIPPEE AYE 0-73!

The hottest game in town is *Gay Super Bingo* (☎ 776 46 00; ☎ 8pm 1st Wed of month) at Strand West Beach (Map pp58-9). Theme: all-American rodeo. No guns allowed.

MONTMARTRE Map pp100-1

Gay Bar

☎ 620 76 22; Halvemaansteeeg 17; 5pm-1am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat

Regarded by many as the Benelux's best gay bar, and a busy weekend will show why. Patrons sing along, or more like scream along, to recordings of Dutch ballads and old top-40 hits. It's like a campy Eurovision song contest.

SOHO Map pp100-1

Gay Bar

☎ 616 13 12; www.pubsoho.eu; Reguliersdwarstraat 36; ☎ 6pm-2am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat

Pure kitsch – imagine an old-world English library on the *Titanic* – this huge, two-storey bar pumps with a young and ridiculously pretty clientele, drinking and flirting around the bar or on the upstairs Chesterfield sofas.

APRIL Map pp100-1

Gay Club

☎ 625 95 72; Reguliersdwarstraat 37

April is equally famous for its happy hour, a relaxed atmosphere (even when it's packed) and beautiful guys who cram into the space to flirt and drink. The revolving bar can make you giddy after too many cocktails.

THERMOS NIGHT SAUNA

Map pp100-1

Gay Sauna

☎ 623 49 36; www.thermos.nl; Kerkstraat 58-60; admission €18; ☎ 11pm-8am Sun-Fri, to 10am Sat

After the clubs close, Thermos Day's night-owl brother lets it all hang out. It's similar to the day sauna, except there's no restaurant, roof deck or hair salon.

VIVELAVIE Map pp100-1

Lesbian Café

☎ 624 01 14; www.vivelavie.net; Amstelstraat 7; ☎ 3pm-1am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat

Just off Rembrandtplein, this lively place is probably Amsterdam's most popular lesbian café for its flirty girls, good-natured staff, loud music and large windows. In summer the outdoor terrace buzzes.

Also recommended:

De Spijker (Map pp100-1; ☎ 620 59 19; Kerkstraat 4a) Friendly leather bar with pool tables and busy darkroom.

Entre Nous (Map pp100-1; ☎ 623 17 00; Halvemaansteeeg 14) Club recovery zone; cosy despite the blood-red wallpaper.

DAILY MARRIED IN AMSTERDAM

Richard Keldoulis is co-founder of Pink Point, the gay and lesbian information kiosk (see p208). We asked the native Australian, married to his Dutch partner since 2004, about the paper chase of tying the knot.

How much bureaucracy was involved?

It was actually quite easy, because I got Dutch citizenship after living with my Dutch partner for five years. But now, to bring a partner in, gay or straight, it's a nightmare. You have to go back to your country of origin to apply, and your partner has to earn 120% of the minimum income. And it's virtually impossible now to bring in a partner from, say, Morocco or Turkey.

What are the pros and cons of registration on one hand, and marriage on the other?

Registration is for pets, as one friend put it. Marriage entails the broad spectrum – everything is settled legally, your pensions, benefits and so on. But it also puts your relationship on an equal level. Registration keeps you on a different level, a second-class thing.

Can anyone just come and get married here?

I get a lot of emails from people who want to come to Holland and tie the knot. But it's not that easy. One partner already has to be a resident, or have Dutch citizenship. Gay marriage is so normal here that it seems weird that you don't have it everywhere else.

Exit (Map pp100-1; ☎ 625 87 88; Reguliersdwarstraat 42) Carnivorous nightclub with a busy darkroom and 'Drag Planet' nights.

Sappho (Map pp100-1; ☎ 06 2868 4906; Vijzelstraat 103) Arty mixed-to-lesbian bar; women-only on Friday.

soft furnishings, in addition to TV, phone, safe and fridge. The breakfast room (with ruby-red walls and make-a-friend communal tables) becomes a gay internet café later.

ORFEO HOTEL Map pp100-1

Hostel

☎ 623 13 47; www.hotelorfeo.com; Leidsekkruisstraat 14; dm €35-45, s with bathroom €60, d with/without bathroom €80/125, tr €150; ☎

A cheap option for gay fellas, central Orfeo has simple, small, wood-panelled rooms (with TV, phone and minibar), sexy staff (they told us so themselves) and the flirtiest breakfast room in town.

AERO HOTEL Map pp100-1

Boutique Hotel

☎ 622 77 28; www.aerohotel.nl; Kerkstraat 45-49; d €90-110, without bathroom €75

Just steps away from Leidseplein, the popular Aero Hotel has been in the throes of renovation, but will surely be the cat's pink pyjamas by the time you read this. Rooms facing the back are quieter, and Camp Café's Sunday champagne brunch will remain a fixture.

BLACK TULIP HOTEL

Map pp62-5

Boutique Hotel

☎ 427 09 33; www.blacktulip.nl; Geldersekaade 16; incl buffet breakfast s €115, d €125-195; ☎

This small gay hotel (males only) has more bondage gear than you can shake a whip at. Everything is fashionable and (pardon the expression) spanking clean. Rates include ensuite bathroom, fridge and minibar.

AMISTAD HOTEL Map pp100-1

Boutique Hotel

☎ 624 80 74; www.amistad.nl; Kerkstraat 42; s €100-115, d €130-150, s/d without bathroom €75/94

Rooms at this bijou hotel are dotted with Philippe Starck chairs, CD players and chic,

FURTHER RESOURCES

There are boatloads of G&L resources in this town, so this is more about focussing on what you need.

INFORMATION

Amsterdam Police Gay Network (☎ 559 53 85; homonetwork@amsterdam.politie.nl) The place to report any trouble or harassment.

COC Amsterdam (Map p86; ☎ 626 30 87; www.cocamsterdam.nl; Rozenstraat 14) The national gay and lesbian organisation, the oldest of its kind in the world.

Gay & Lesbian Switchboard (☎ 623 65 65; www.switchboard.nl; 📺 noon-10pm Mon-Fri, 4-10pm Sat & Sun) Great source. Provides advice on an anonymous basis.

Pink Point (Map p92; ☎ 412 44 63; www.pinkpoint.org; Westerkerk Sq; 📺 10am-6pm) Staffed by volunteers, this kiosk next to the Homomonument (p95) is a goldmine for details on Amsterdam's gay and lesbian scene, as well as souvenirs and gifts.

Schorer Foundation (Map pp100-1; ☎ 573 94 44; www.schorer.nl; Sarphatistraat 35; 📺 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) NGO offering healthcare services, HIV prevention and buddy care.

WEBSITES

www.cocamsterdam.nl Organises club nights and other events.

www.gayamsterdam.nl Published by the *Gay News*, and comprehensive.

www.gay.nl Directory to pretty much anything in town, in Dutch only but decipherable.

www.pinkpoint.org Links and information.

GUIDES & MAPS

Bent Guide (Pink Point) Published in English, full of insider info on all facets of gay life.

Gaymap Amsterdam, Gay News Amsterdam, Gay&Night Listings mags available for free around town.

RADIO & TV

The local gay radio station **MVS** (www.mvs.nl) broadcasts 7pm to 8pm nightly on 106.8 FM (cable 103.3 FM), with an English programme on Sunday. TV shows are broadcast 8pm to 9pm on Saturday via local station Salto A1.

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