



Amsterdam on two wheels

The best way to explore the Dutch capital is on a bicycle, says **Joanne Poh**

WITH an extensive network of bicycle paths running adjacent to public roads and a remarkably flat landscape, Amsterdam boasts an environment so suited to cycling that the locals often joke that Dutch children learn to cycle before they can walk.

Cyclists coasting breezily down bike paths with mobile phones plastered to their ears are a common sight, and it is not unusual for commuters to perform the gravity-defying stunt of eating breakfast and pedalling to work at the same time.

The bicycle offers travellers a most convenient and authentic way to see the city. Cheaper than taxis and faster than trams, a good city bike is not only immune to the caprices of traffic but also provides the rider with an unparalleled view of the city's lovely canals and architecture. Why choose to be ensconced in a steel cage when the air is fresh and the streets are pretty?

Numerous bicycle rental agencies abound, and travellers should have no trouble obtaining a good city bike. Damstraat Rent a Bike, located just a five-minute walk from Amsterdam Centraal Station, provides bicycles at reasonable rates.

All the attractions listed below are easily accessible from the city centre by bicycle.

The grass is greener here
Now that you have gotten your bicycle and are mobile, pedal on down to the Vondelpark, which is immensely



Top: Strawberries and cherries at the market. Above: Traditional Dutch architecture.

popular in spring and summer. A sprawling public garden, Vondelpark is home to a rose garden and a film museum. Its popularity among the locals can be attributed to the Dutch love for being outdoors, as seen by the many couples stretched out languidly

on the grass in the summer. Who needs to impress a date with expensive restaurants and fast cars when you can take her to the park on your bicycle?

A museum for everyone

While Amsterdam's most famous museums such as the Rijksmuseum and the Van Gogh Museum are concentrated in the area around the aptly named Museumplein and are accessible by a quick ride around the area, commuting by bicycle allows you entry to many lesser-known, but by no means less fascinating, museums — no matter how small and inaccessible the side streets leading to them are.

Take a peek into a residential boat on a canal at the Houseboat Museum at Prinsengracht. The pianola museum in the Jordaan is a musty, delightful hole-in-the-wall dedicated to antique self-playing pianos.

Kattenkabinet at Herengracht, open only on weekends, displays art dedicated entirely to cats. And if you're a big fan of furry felines, check out Poezenboot — a boat full of cats that will keep you company when it opens to the public for two hours each day.

Better than malls

With bicycle racks on every street

corner, parking will be the least of your concerns, leaving you free to shop at the far more interesting street markets.

The Albert Cuypmarkt, Amsterdam's most popular market, presents a lively, bustling scene with stalls displaying a multicultural mix of produce. The market provides travellers with countless opportunities to savour some of the most beloved Dutch snacks such as the legendary stroopwafel, a syrup-filled waffle sandwich. Also try herring, a Dutch snack of raw fish topped with onions.

At Waterlooplein flea market, vintage lovers will have a field day weaving through rows of stalls selling everything from leather boots to antique watches.

Longer-term visitors may be able to pick up a good second hand bicycle at a stall on the southern end of the market.

Bicycles can be hired in any of the many rental agencies.

PHOTOS: JOANNE POH

GETTING THERE

Singapore Airlines flies daily to Amsterdam Airport Schiphol in about 13 hours 45 minutes. KLM also operates direct flights to Amsterdam.

INSIDER'S TIPS

Forget about getting a high-tech mountain bike with a million gears. The classic Dutch street bike is simple to use, possesses a quaint old-fashioned appearance and is optimally built for cruising on flat land.







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