

Left: **Natalie Portman, Will Smith and Brad Pitt** are all fans of this eclectic city. **Main:** The canals in Amsterdam make for a picturesque European getaway



Destination:

AMSTERDAM

The famous and fabulous are making this trippy city one of the hottest destinations on the planet...

Amsterdam isn't dubbed sin city for nothing – the famous red-light district and cannabis-selling coffee haunts have been drawing bright young things for decades. The liberal lifestyle isn't the only reason to visit, however. Celebrities are flocking to the cosmopolitan capital to hang out in the cafes lining the canals, the intimate clubs and buzzing bars.

Why it's hot right now
Amsterdam is many things at once – both sexy and seedy, groovy and grimy – but either way, its eclectic atmosphere is infectious. 'My favourite city is Amsterdam, because it's so open,' says Natalie Portman. 'I like how everything is allowed there.' Well, not quite everything, but this is one of the few places you can order a joint with your latte and where prostitutes are on display in glass-fronted 'shops'. But even hard-partiers such as Amy Winehouse – who stayed sober for her Netherlands concerts – can find things other than smoking to explore.

Where to head first
Dubbed 'the Venice of the north', Amsterdam is built around a cobweb of canals and a central square, called the Dam. Stroll or rent a bike and cycle along the picturesque canals

– Herengracht, Prinsengracht and Keizersgracht are the prettiest. You may recognise the stately mansions, alfresco cafes and luxury hotels from the film *Ocean's Twelve*, which was shot on location here. Make time to take a tour of Anne Frank House in Prinsengracht – where Natalie Portman popped in for a history lesson. To mingle with the locals, head to the Jordaan district – you might bump into Brad Pitt, who's rumoured to own an apartment there.

'My favourite city is Amsterdam, because it's so open'

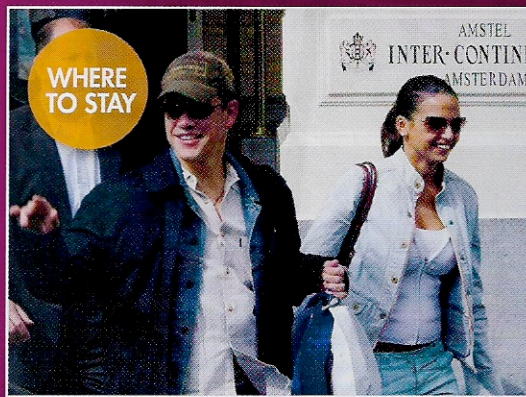
Where to shop
Amsterdam is a hunter-gatherer's heaven – especially if you're after second-hand styles. Nicole Kidman snaffled a 1920s bridal gown at a flea market and wore it when she said 'I do' to Tom Cruise. 'Not such a good omen!' she admits now. As well as vintage finds, there are plenty of other great buys at Amsterdam's largest open-air market, Albert Cuypmarkt. Magna Plaza and the busy Kalverstraat are home to must-stop shops such as Zara, H&M and MNG. For some serious

credit-card debt, head to the PC Hoofstraat shopping strip for luxe labels such as Gucci and Cartier. For a more permanent reminder of your visit, scope out the many tattoo parlours – just like Angelina Jolie, who had a dragon drawn on her hip when she was there...

Where to indulge
Make like a celeb and drop into De Dampkring for a caffeine fix. 'We have Brad Pitt in our store a few times a year,' says owner Paul Wilhelm. 'All incognito with a beanie and glasses. Just sitting there, smoking some.' If you prefer a natural high, coffee lovers go celebrity spotting at the swanky Café Americain near Leidseplein. As the sun sets, follow the well-heeled to the dark Jimmy Woo club for live house and hip hop, and to spot celebs such as Robbie Williams and Justin Timberlake, who recently vetoed the Cristal Champagne for lots of water. When hunger strikes, head to Ristorante d'Antica where George Clooney wines and dines when he's in town.

STAR HOTSPOTS

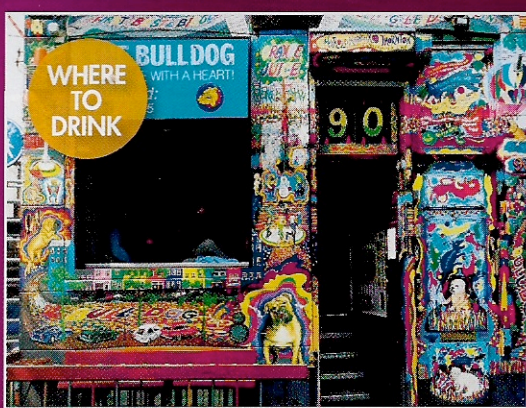
Find out where the celebs go when they're in Amsterdam...



AMSTEL INTERCONTINENTAL, PROFESSOR TULPPLEIN 1
 This luxe lodging is home away from home for Madonna and Matt Damon. Celebs indulge in unrivalled room service – Kate Moss ran up a reported \$9500 bill!



Right: The Prinsengracht (Prince's Canal) leads up to the Westerkerk church.
 Below: Soak up the sun and the culture in an outdoor cafe



THE BULLDOG COFFEESHOP, LEIDESPLEIN 17
 Head to this hot spot if you want to live the high life with the likes of Britney Spears, or head upstairs where DJs mix it up for stars such as Mariah Carey.



✈️ Ready for take-off?

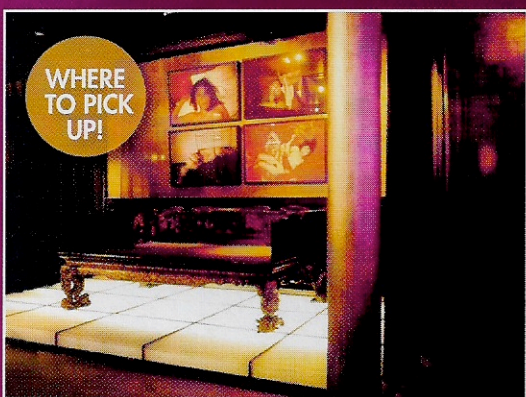
Getting there: Japan Airlines flies from Sydney to Amsterdam via Tokyo from \$2187, including taxes. Phone Escape Travel on 1300 799 783.

Stay like a star: Madonna and Mick Jagger stay at the stately Amstel Intercontinental with stunning views over the Amstel river and cascading 'waterfall' showers. Doubles start at \$690. Log onto www.amsterdam.intercontinental.com for more details.

And if you want a true hippie celeb stay, check into Room 702 of the Amsterdam Hilton – where John Lennon and Yoko Ono held their famous 'love-in'.

Stay for a steal: You might spot Jamie Oliver at the artsy Lloyd Hotel (www.lloydhotel.com) – it's just down the road from his restaurant, Fifteen, in the trendy East Docklands district. Doubles range from one to five stars and start at \$150.

More info: www.lamsterdam.com.



JIMMY WOO, KORTE LEIDSEWARSTRAAT 18
 Unless you're on the guest list like A-listers Matt Damon and Missy Elliott, dress up and join the queue to get into this oriental-inspired club.