

# RED LIGHT DISTRICT WALK

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**Length of This Walk:** Allow two hours.

**Photography:** Consider leaving your phone or camera in your bag.

Don't take photos of women in windows—even with an inconspicuous phone camera—or a snarly bouncer may appear from out of nowhere to forcibly rip it from your hands. In this district, taking even seemingly harmless photos of ordinary people is frowned upon by privacy-loving locals. On the other hand, taking photos of landmarks like the Old Church and wide shots of distant red lights from the bridges is certainly OK. Remember that a camera is a prime target in this high-theft area.

**When to Go:** The best times to visit are afternoons and early evenings. Mornings are dead, but are also when you see more passed-out-drunk-in-a-doorway scenes. Avoid late nights (after about 22:30), when the tourists disappear and the area gets creepy. Earlier in the evening, the streets start filling with tourists, and the atmosphere feels safe, even festive.

**Safety:** Coming here is asking for trouble, but if you're on the ball and smart, you'll find that it's quite safe. The neighborhood is slowly gentrifying, with trendy restaurants and boutiques. There are plenty of police on horseback keeping things orderly, and plenty of other out-of-town tourists. But there are also plenty of rowdy drunks, drug-pushing lowlifes, con artists, and pickpockets. Assume any fight or commotion is a ploy to distract innocent victims who are about to lose their wallets. As always, wear your money belt, zip up your valuables, and keep a low profile.



## The Walk Begins

• Start on Dam Square. Face the big, fancy Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky. To the left of the hotel stretches the long street called...

### ① Warmoesstraat

You're walking along one of the city's oldest streets. It's the traditional border of the neighborhood tourists call the Red Light District.

• Our first stop is the small shop with the large, yellow triangle sign, about 100 yards down on the right at #141.

### ② Condomerie

Located at the entrance to the Red Light District, this is the perfect place to get prepared. Besides selling an amazing variety of condoms, this shop has a knack for entertainment, working to make their front window display appropriate to the season. A three-ring notebook on the counter shows off all the inventory.

• From here, pass the two little street barricades with cute red lights around them and enter the traffic-free world of...



### ③ De Wallen

Amsterdammers call this area De Wallen ("The Walls"), after the old retaining walls that once stood here. It's the oldest part of town, with the oldest church. It grew up between the harbor and Dam Square, where the city was born. Amsterdam was a port town, located where the river met the sea. The city traded in all kinds of

goods, including things popular with sailors and businessmen away from home—like sex and drugs.

According to legend, Quentin Tarantino holed up at the Winston Hotel for three months in 1993 to write *Pulp Fiction* (you'll pass the hotel on your right, at #129). As you get deeper into the neighborhood, you'll see that the area attracts many out-of-towners, especially Brits. They catch cheap flights here for "stag" (bachelor) parties or just a wild weekend—and the money-savvy Dutch accommodate them with Irish pubs and football matches on TVs in the bars.

Pause at the intersection with a small street called Wijde Kerksteeg, which leads to the Old Church. Standing here, you may see gay-pride flags (rainbow colors) or S&M flags (black and blue with a heart). Also notice the security cameras and modern lighting. Freedom reigns in this quarter—under the watchful eye of the two neighborhood police departments.

• Continue down Warmoesstraat a few more steps. At #97 is the...

### 🕒 Elements of Nature Smartshop

This "smartshop" is a little grocery store of mind-bending natural ingredients. Like the city's other smartshops, it's a clean, well-lit, fully professional retail outlet that sells powerful drugs, many of which are illegal in America. Products are clearly marked with prices, brief descriptions, ingredients, and effects. The knowledgeable salespeople can give you more information on their "100 percent natural products that play with the human senses."

Their "natural" drugs include harmless nutrition boosters (such as royal jelly), harmful but familiar tobacco, and herbal versions of popular dance-club drugs (such as herbal Ecstasy). Marijuana seeds, however, are the big sellers. You'll also see mind-bending truffles, a recent trend that caught on after the EU forbade the retailing of hallucinogenic mushrooms. (Truffles grow underground—so they're technically not mushrooms.)

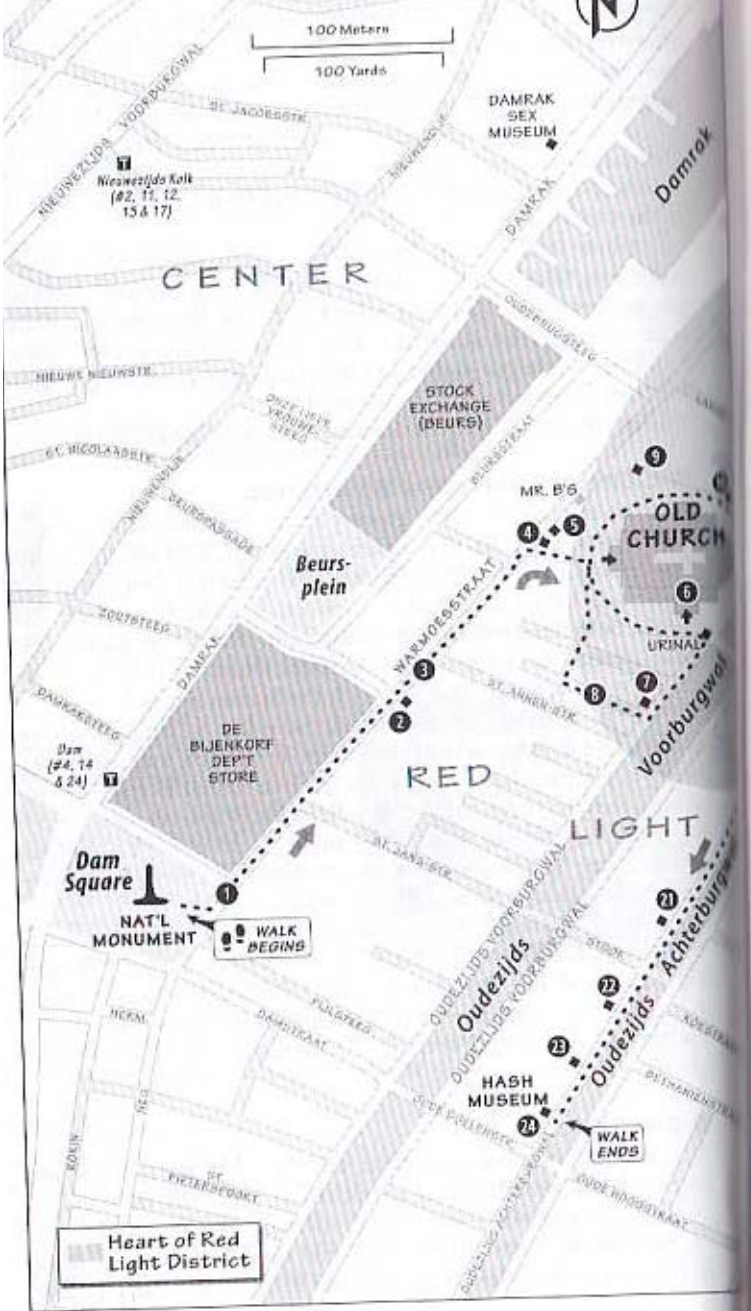
Still, my fellow travelers, *caveat emptor!* We've grown used to thinking, "If it's legal, it must be safe. If it's not, I'll sue." Though perfectly legal and aboveboard in the Netherlands, some of these substances can cause powerful, often unpleasant reactions.

• Continue a bit farther down Warmoesstraat, to an area filled with so-called...

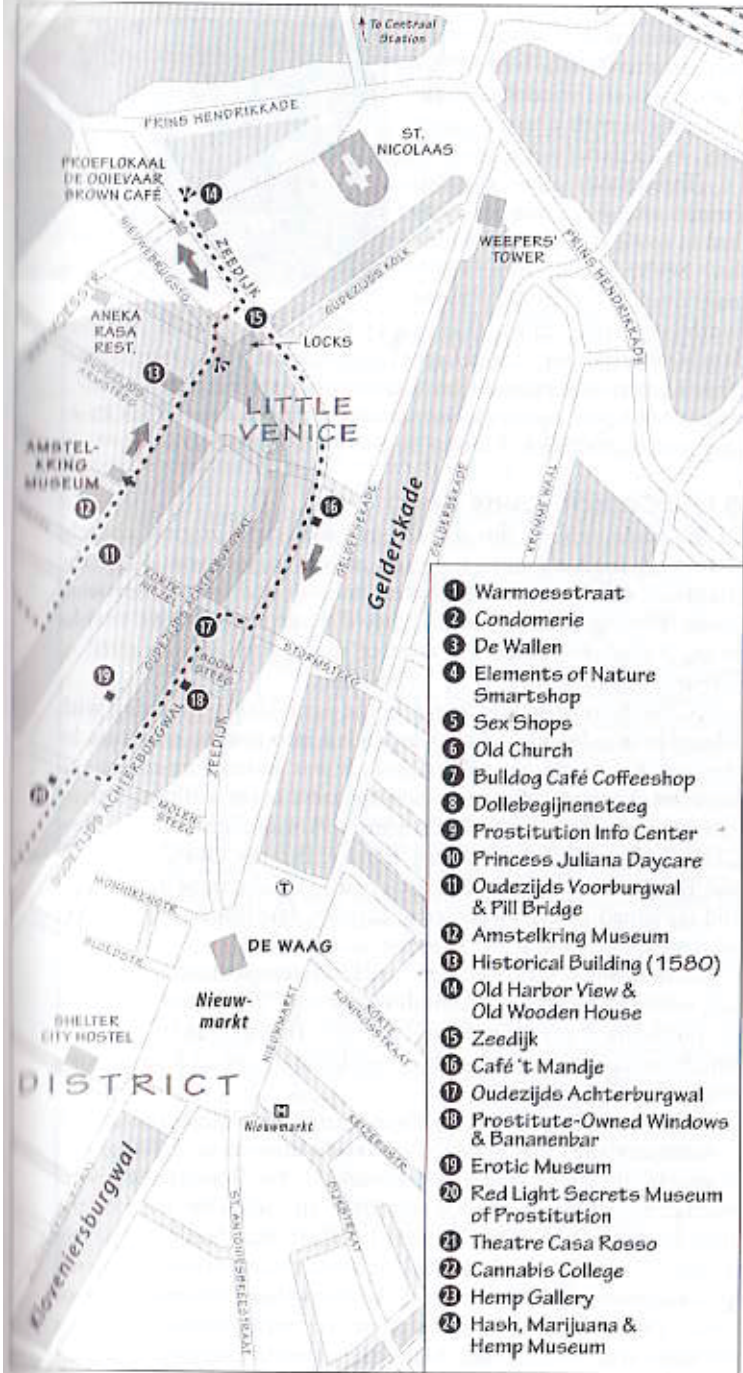
### 🕒 Sex Shops

A few steps down Warmoesstraat, at #89, is **Mr. B's Leather and Rubber Land**, proudly flying an S&M flag. This place takes macho to painful—and what seems like anatomically impossible—extremes. (Ouch.) Downstairs, you'll find some irresistible deals on whips and masks. Nearby (at #93 and #96), notice the very low-

# Red Light District Walk







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profile entrances to several men-only leather bars, with their black doors and windows. These places come with a bar, a dance floor, and a dark back room.

Throughout the district, various sex-shop retail outlets deal in erotic paraphernalia (dildos, S&M starter kits, kinky magazines) and offer video booths with porn films, charging by the minute. While Amsterdam is notorious for its Red Light District, even small Dutch towns often have a sex shop and a brothel to satisfy their citizens' needs.

• *Backtrack a few steps to the intersection, and head down Wijde Kerksteeg to the Old Church. Pause at the base of the impressive tower.*



## 6 Old Church (Oude Kerk)

As the name implies, this was the medieval city's original church. Returning from a long sea voyage, sailors of yore would spy the steeple of the Old Church on the horizon and know they were home. Having returned safely, they'd come here to give thanks to St. Nicholas—the patron saint of this church, of seafarers, of Christmas, and of the city of Amsterdam.

Church construction began in the early 1200s—starting with a humble wooden chapel that expanded into a stone structure by the time it was consecrated in 1306. It was added onto in fits and starts for the next 200 years—as is apparent in the building's many gangly parts. Then, in the 15th century, Amsterdam built the New Church (Nieuwe Kerk) on Dam Square. But the Old Church still had the tallest spire, the biggest organ, and the most side-altars, and remained the city's center of activity, bustling inside and out with merchants and street markets.

The **tower** is 290 feet high, with an octagonal steeple atop a bell tower (you can pay to climb to the top). This tower served as the model for many other Dutch steeples. The carillon has 47 bells, which can chime mechanically or be played by one of Amsterdam's three official carillonneurs.

Circle to the right to the church entrance. While the church is historic, there's not much to see inside other than 2,500 gravestones in the floor (the most famous is for Rembrandt's wife, Saskia). Its stark plainness stems from the religious wars of the 16th century: Protestants gutted this Catholic church, smashing windows and removing politically incorrect statues they considered "graven images." One renowned girl threw her shoe at the Virgin statue. (Strict Calvinists at one point even removed the organ as a senseless luxury, until they found they couldn't stay on key sing-

ing hymns without it.) Atop the brass choir screen, an inscription (*'t misbruyk in Godes...*) commemorates the iconoclasm: "The false practices introduced into God's church were undone here in 1578."

The church, permanently stripped of "pope-ish" decoration, was transformed from Catholic to Dutch Reformed, "St. Nicholas" was dropped from the name, and it became known by the nickname everyone called it anyway—the Old Church.

Nowadays, the church is the holy needle around which the unholy Red Light District spins. This marks the neighborhood's most dense concentration of prostitution.

Back outside, explore around the right side of the church. You'll see a **statue**, dedicated to the Unknown Prostitute. She's



nicknamed Belle, and the statue honors "sex workers around the world." Also nearby, you might trip over a bronze breast sculpted into the pavement, being groped by bronze hands.

Attached to the church like barnacles are **small buildings**. These were originally used as homes for priests, church offices, or rental units. The house to the right of the entrance (at #25) is very tiny—32 feet by 8 feet. (An elderly lady lives in the house at #19 and doesn't like tourists, so be discreet.)

The green metal structure over by the canal is a public **urinal**. It offers just enough privacy. This one gets a lot of use. City trucks circulate around town on a regular basis, suds-ing them down.

Consider that, on average, about 12 people drown in Amsterdam every year. When found, most of them turn out to be men with their zippers down. It's not hard to imagine the scene: Some guy is drunk as a skunk at 3 a.m., goes to the edge of the canal to take a pee...and falls in.

• *From the urinal, go a half-block south along the canal toward the...*

### 🐕 Bulldog Café Coffeeshop

The Bulldog claims to be Amsterdam's very first marijuana coffeeshop, established here in 1975. Now there's a chain of Bulldogs around the city. At "coffeeshops" like this one, customers start the transaction by asking the bartender, "Can I see the cannabis







menu?” (As it’s illegal to advertise marijuana, buyers must ask to see a list of what’s for sale.) Then the bartender pulls out a display case with different varieties of weed, sold in baggies or prerolled joints. It’s all clearly priced, and available either to-go or to smoke on the premises. You’ll see people at the Bulldog enjoying a joint while they sip a beer or a Coke.

As coffeeshops go, the Bulldog is considered pretty touristy. The staff is unimpeccable, though, and timid first-timers are guided through the process. Connoisseurs, however, seek out smaller places with better-

quality pot. While the Bulldog caters to a young crowd, other coffeeshops play Donovan and target an older, mellower clientele.

The political winds regarding cannabis are always shifting. Some Dutch leaders propose forbidding sales to nonresidents, hoping to discourage European drug dealers from driving over the Dutch border to buy large quantities of pot to sell illegally in their home countries. However, such a law would be devastating for Dutch businesses, which depend on out-of-towners. Many Amsterdam politicians favor keeping pot legal—for the sake of business and to prevent legal cannabis sales from moving to the black market (with its attendant street crime).

For more on the Dutch approach to pot and how coffeeshops work, see the Smoking chapter.

*• Time to dive into the heart of the Red Light District—we’re right around the corner from one of the neighborhood’s main streets for legal prostitution. On the other side of the Bulldog, to the left, start with the narrow alleyway called...*

### ● Dollebegijnensteeg

You’re right in the thick of high-density prostitution. Remember: Don’t take any pictures, and watch for pickpockets if crowds jostle together. If you do both these things, you’ll be fine.

As you pass window after window of women in panties and bras, notice how they wink at the horny men, rap on the window to attract attention, text their friends, or look disdainfully at sightseers. You can take your time here and then explore deeper (or you





can hurry to the end of the block and turn right to return to the Old Church).

• *Return to the Old Church and start to circle the church clockwise. Around the back, you'll see older, plumper (and cheaper) prostitutes. In the same area, at Enge Kerksteeg 3, is the...*

### ⑨ Prostitution Information Center (PIC)

This information center exists solely to demystify prostitution, giving visitors matter-of-fact information on how the trade works and what it's like to be a sex worker. It doles out pamphlets, books, condoms, T-shirts, and other offbeat souvenirs, and offers walking tours (see "Orientation," earlier, for details). They have a map showing exactly where prostitution is legal, and sell a small, frank booklet answering the most common questions tourists have about Amsterdam's Red Light District. The center also offers a one-to-one workshop, for women only, on what it's like to be a sex worker in Amsterdam (must be booked in advance).

Nearby is a room-rental office (labeled *Kamerverhuurbedrijf*). Prostitutes come here to rent window space and bedrooms to use for their work. The office also sells work supplies—condoms by the case, toilet tissue, and lubricants. This office does not arrange sex. The women who rent space from this business are self-employed and negotiate directly with their customers.

In return for their rental fees, prostitutes get security. The rental office provides constant video surveillance. (You may see small cameras and orange alarm lights above many windows.) If prostitutes have any trouble, they press a buzzer that swiftly calls a burly bouncer or the police. The area sure looks rough, but aside from tricky pickpockets these streets are actually pretty safe.

• *Continue circling clockwise around the church. Amid prostitutes in windows, find the white brick building on the left at Oudekerksplein 8. This is the...*

### ⑩ Princess Juliana Daycare

De Wallen is also a residential neighborhood, where ordinary citizens go about their daily lives. Of course, locals need someplace to send their kids. The Princess Juliana Daycare is for newborns to four-year-olds. It was built in the 1970s, when the idea was to mix all dimensions of society together, absorbing the seedy into the decent. I don't know about you, but this location would be a tough sell where I come from.



• Turn left at the canal and continue north along...

### ⑩ Oudezijds Voorburgwal and Pill Bridge

Pause at Pill Bridge and enjoy the canal and all the old buildings with their charming gables. Back in the 1970s, this bridge was nicknamed for the retail items sold by the seedy guys who used to hang out here. Now it's a pleasant place for a photo op.

• Just past the bridge, at Oudezijds Voorburgwal 38, is one of the city's most worthwhile museums.

### ⑪ Amstelkring Museum (Our Lord in the Attic Church)

With its triangular gable, this building looks like just another townhouse. But inside, it holds a secret—a small, lavishly decorated place of worship hidden in the attic. Although Amsterdam has long been known for its tolerance, back in the 16th and 17th centuries there was one group they kept in the closet—Catholics. (For more, see the Amstelkring Museum Tour chapter.)

As we stroll up the canal, remember that this neighborhood is Amsterdam's oldest. It sits on formerly marshy land that was reclaimed by diking off the sea's tidal surge. That location gave Amsterdam's merchants easy access to both river trade and the North Sea. By the 1500s, Amsterdam was booming.

• Near the next bridge, on your left at #14, is an old brick building with red shutters.

### ⑫ Historical Building

This building dates from that very era—around 1580. At the time of its construction, Amsterdam's citizens were rising up in revolt to throw out their Spanish rulers. Now free to govern themselves, a group of energetic businessmen turned the city into a sea-trading hub. By 1600, brave Dutch sailors were traveling as far as Africa, America, and Asia. They returned with shiploads of exotic goods to sell to the rest of Europe.

Next to the red door, notice the label: "Leger des Heils"—that's "Salvation Army." There was a time when this was a bastion of compassion and hope for the desperate people who littered these streets. By the canal is a statue of Major Alida Bosshardt—a Salvation Army officer who worked tirelessly in the Red Light District in the mid-20th century.

The part of the canal we're walking along now is known as "Little Venice" (a



term used Europe-wide for any charming neighborhood with canal-side houses). Houses rise directly from the water here, with no quays or streets. Like Venice, the city was built in a marshy delta area, on millions of pilings. And, like Venice, it grew rich on sea trade.

• *At the end of the canal (where some nice gable stones are embedded in a wall), continue straight up a small inclined lane called Sint Olofssteeg. You're ascending the protective sea dike (Zeedijk) that prevents this neighborhood from being inundated by North Sea tidal surges. At the top, turn left and walk along the street called Zeedijk. Go about 100 yards to the end of the block, where it opens up to an...*

### ⑩ Old Harbor View and Old Wooden House

As you survey the urban scene of today's Damrak and Centraal Station, imagine the scene as it looked in the 1600s. What today is mostly concrete was once the city's harbor. Boats sailed in and out of the harbor through an opening located where the train station sits now (on reclaimed land). From there, ships could sail along the IJ River out to the North Sea.

The **old wooden house** near here (at Zeedijk 1, now a café) was once a tavern, sitting right at what was then the water's edge.

It was a bustling port. Amsterdam became home to the Dutch East India Company, the world's first multinational corporation. Goods from all over the world flowed into this harbor, where cargo was then transferred to smaller river-trade boats that sailed up the Amstel to Europe's interior. The city grew wealthier and larger, expanding beyond De Wallen to new neighborhoods to the west and south. In its Golden Age, Amsterdam was perhaps the wealthiest city on earth, known as the "warehouse of the world."

Picture a ship tying up in the harbor. The crew has just returned home from a two-year voyage to Bali. They're bringing home fabulous wealth—crates and crates of spices, coffee, and silk. Sailors are celebrating their homecoming, spilling onto Zeedijk. Here they'll be greeted by swinging ladies swinging red lanterns. Their first stop might be nearby St. Olaf's chapel to say a prayer of thanks—or perhaps they'll head straight to this tavern at Zeedijk 1 and drop anchor for a good Dutch beer. Ahh-hh!

• *But our journey continues on. Backtrack along the same street, to the crest of a bridge, on...*

### ⑪ Zeedijk

You're standing at about sea level. If you look down at the canal-side lanes, you'll see how much below sea level Amsterdam generally is. The waterway below you is part of the city's system of **locks**: Once a day a worker opens up the box at the far end of the bridge, on the right, and presses a button. The locks open, and the tides



flush out the city's canals. Look down—if the gate is open, you might see water flowing in or out.

Zeedijk street runs along the top of the sea dike. It also connected the harbor, bustling with ocean-going ships, with De Wallen.

In the early 1600s, Zeedijk was thriving with overseas trade. But Amsterdam would soon lose its maritime supremacy to England and France, and by mid-century, its trading ships and economy had been destroyed by wars with these rivals. The city remained culturally vibrant, and banking flourished—but without all the ships, De Wallen never really recovered. For centuries, the area languished as Amsterdam's grimy old sailors' quarter.



But as you continue down Zeedijk and around the bend, you can see that the area has become fairly gentrified. Residents enjoy a mix of ethnic restaurants—Thai and Portuguese, for example—and bars like the Queen's Head (at #20, on the right) that draw a gay clientele. The apartment building at #30 (on the right) is new, built in "MIIM" (1998).

Back in the 1960s, it was a whole different story. Amsterdam was the world capital of experimental lifestyles, a wide-open city of sex and drugs. By the 1970s, Zeedijk had become unbelievably sleazy. When I made my first trip here, this street was nicknamed "Heroin Alley." Thousands of hard-drug addicts wandered the neighborhood and squatted in old buildings. "Pill Bridge" (which we passed earlier) became "Needle Bridge." It was a scene with little else besides sex, hard drugs, and wandering lonely souls. The area was a no-man's-land of junkies fighting among themselves, and the police just kept their distance.

But locals longed to take back this historic corner of their city and got to work. First, they legalized marijuana and allowed "coffeeshops" to sell small quantities. Then they cracked down on hard drugs—heroin, cocaine, and pills. Almost overnight, the illicit drug trade dropped dramatically. Dealers got stiff sentences. Addicts got treatment. Four decades later, the policy seems to have worked. Pot smoking has not gone up, hard drug use is down, and Zeedijk belongs to the people of Amsterdam once again.

• Pause at #63, on the left.

### ☉ Café 't Mandje

This is one of Europe's first gay bars. It opened in 1927, closed in 1985, and is now a working bar once again. It stands as a memorial

## Social Control

De Wallen has pioneered the Dutch concept of "social control." In Holland, neighborhood security doesn't come from just the police, but from neighbors looking out for each another. If Geert doesn't buy bread for two days, the baker asks around if anyone's seen him. An elderly man feels safe in his home, knowing he's being watched over by the prostitutes next door. Unlike many big cities, there's no chance that anyone here could die or be in trouble and go unnoticed. Video-surveillance cameras keep an eye on the streets. So do prostitutes, who buzz for help if they spot trouble. As you stroll, watch the men who watch the women who watch out for their neighbors—"social control."

to the woman who ran it during its heyday in the 1950s and '60s: Bet van Beeren, "Queen of Zeedijk." Bet was a lesbian, and her bar became a hangout for gay people. It still is, though all are welcome. If you go inside for a drink, you'll enjoy a tiny interior crammed with photos and memorabilia. Bet was the original Zee-dyke—you might see a picture of her decked out in leather, cruising the streets on her motorcycle. Neckties hang from the ceiling, a reminder of Bet's tradition of scissoring off customers' ties.

• *This tour veers right at the next intersection (near #80), back into the heart of the Red Light District. For a quick detour, however, you could continue straight ahead for a peek into the local Chinatown. Otherwise, make the next right and head a few steps down narrow Korte Stormsteeg street, back to the canalside red lights. Then go left, walking along the left side of the canal.*



## ⑩ Oudezijds Achterburgwal



We're back in the glitzy Red Light District. This beautiful, tree-lined canal is the heart of this neighborhood's nightlife, playing host to most of the main nightclubs. Stand here for a second and take it all in. The street is lined with ladies in windows, sex shops, sex museums, strip

clubs, and theaters where sex acts are performed before live audiences.

• *Start making your way down the street's left-hand side. After about 30 yards, pause at the small alleyway called Boomsteeg.*

### ⑩ Prostitute-Owned Windows and Bananenbar

Many of the prostitution windows near here (such as at Oudezijds #17, #19, and #27, and along Boomsteeg) are run by a cooperative of entrepreneurial prostitutes called My Red Light. You may see their for-rent signs, seeking prostitutes who want to rent a window space. These women have banded together to create nice rooms for their clients and good working conditions for themselves, such as a lounge for sex workers between shifts.

Continue a few yards ahead, to #37. This popular nightclub ("Banana Bar") has an erotic Art Nouveau facade that's far classier than what's offered inside. Basically, this place is a strip club with a-peel: For €60 you get admission for an hour, drinks included. Undressed ladies serve the drinks, perched on the bar. Touching is not allowed, but you can order a banana, and the lady will serve it to you, any way you like. For a full description, step into the lobby.

• *A few yards farther along, at Molensteeg, cross the bridge to head to the other side of Oudezijds Achterburgwal. Once across the bridge, we'll turn left. But first, pause and look to the right. At #54 is the...*

### ⑪ Erotic Museum

"Wot a rip-off!" said a drunk British lout to his mates as he emerged from the Erotic Museum. If it's graphic sex you seek, this is not the place. To put it bluntly, this museum is not very good (the Damrak Sex Museum on page 78 is better).

This museum, however, does offer a peek at some of the sex services found in the Red Light District. Besides the self-pleasuring bicycle girl in the lobby, displays include reconstructions of a prostitute's chambers, sex-shop windows, and videos of nightclub sex shows (on the third floor). There's also the S&M room, where S-mannequins torment M-mannequins for their mutual pleasure.

• *From the bridge, turn left and walk south along Oudezijds Achterburgwal. At #60H is the...*

### ⑫ Red Light Secrets Museum of Prostitution

Though overpriced, this museum is an earnest and mildly educational behind-the-scenes look at those women in the window. You'll walk through a typical (tiny) room where prostitutes stand at the window, and a typical (tiny) back room with a bed and sink where the dirty deed takes place. There's a cheesy hot-tub room for the high rollers, a display of S&M paraphernalia, and several videos about daily life for prostitutes. Perhaps most thought provok-



ing: a video giving you the point of view of a sex worker as browsers check you out. The place is small, and a visit takes about as long as a typical session with a prostitute.

Farther down Oudezijds Achterburgwal (at #78) is **The Love Boutique**. Part lingerie store, part soft-core sex shop, this place caters to all of your sensual needs.

• *Continuing south, you'll pass two Casa Rosso franchises a block apart. The larger, lined by pink elephants, is...*

### ④ Theatre Casa Rosso

This is the Red Light District's best-known nightclub for live sex shows. Unlike some strip clubs that draw you in to rip you off with hidden charges, the Casa Rosso is a legitimate operation. Audience members pay a single price that includes drinks and a show. Evening performances feature strippers, but the main event is naked people on stage engaging in sex acts—some simulated, some completely real (€40, €50 includes drinks, tickets cheaper online, nightly until 2:00 in the morning).

As you continue south along the canal, you gotta wonder, Why does Amsterdam embrace prostitution and drugs? It's not that the Dutch are any more liberal in their attitudes—they aren't. They're simply more pragmatic. They've found that when the sex trade goes underground, you get pimps, mobsters, and the spread of STDs. When marijuana is illegal, you get drug dealers, gangs, and violent turf wars. Their solution is to keep these markets legal and minimize problems through strict regulation.

• *But enough about sex. Let's talk about drugs. (Don't worry, our walk is nearly over.) Along the right side of the next block, you'll find four cannabis-related establishments, starting with the Cannabis College, at #124.*

### ④ Cannabis College

This free, nonprofit public study center aims to explain the pros and cons (but mostly pros) of the industrial, medicinal, and recreational uses of the green stuff. You can read about practical hemp products, the medical uses of marijuana, and police prosecution/persecution of cannabis users. The pride and joy of the college is downstairs. For a €3 donation, you can visit the organic flowering cannabis garden. The garden is small—it fits the Dutch legal limit of five plants per household. And if you've brought your own pot,



they'll let you try out their vaporizer, a device that lets you inhale without actually smoking, making it less damaging to your lungs.

• *Continue up the street to #130, the...*

### ⑫ Hemp Gallery

One ticket admits you to both the Hemp Gallery and the Hash, Marijuana, and Hemp Museum (described next). The gallery focuses mainly on extolling the wonders of industrial hemp, and isn't as meaty as the small, earnestly educational museum. If you have the patience to read its thorough displays, you'll learn plenty about how valuable the cannabis plant was to Holland during the Golden Age. The leafy, green cannabis plant was grown on large plantations. The fibrous stalks (hemp) were made into rope and canvas for ships, and even used to make clothing and lace.

• *Next is our last stop at #148, the...*

### ⑬ Hash, Marijuana, and Hemp Museum

This museum treats marijuana like it deserves scholarly study. The exhibits are quite extensive and interesting.

Certain strains of the cannabis plant—particularly mature females of the species *sativa* and *indica*—contain the psychoactive alkaloid tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) that makes you high. The buds, flowers, and leaves (marijuana) can be dried and smoked. The brown sap/resin/pitch that oozes out of the leaves



(hashish, a.k.a. hash) can also be dried and smoked. Both produce effects ranging from euphoria to paranoia to the munchies.

Throughout history, various peoples have used cannabis as a sacred ritual drug—from ancient Scythians and Hindus to modern Nepalis and Afghans. Modern Rastafarians, following a Bible-based religion centered in Jamaica, smoke cannabis. To worship, they get high, bob to reggae music, and praise God. They love the Bible verse (Genesis 1:11-12) that says God created "every herb" and called them all "good." All over Amsterdam, you'll see the Rastafarian colors: green, gold, and red, mon.

The museum's highlight is the grow room, where you look through windows at live cannabis plants in various stages of growth, some as tall as I am. At a certain stage they're "sexed" to weed out the boring males and "selected" to produce the most powerful strains. Your ticket includes a souvenir guidebook about the exhibit and a fun photo op.

At the museum's exit you'll pass through the **Sensi Seed Bank**

**Store**, which sells weed seeds, how-to books, and knickknacks geared to growers.

• *We've reached the end of our tour. Dam Square is just two blocks away. Continue a few steps farther up the canal to the big and busy Oude Doelen street. Look right, and you'll see the Royal Palace on Dam Square.*

### **Congratulations**

We've seen a lot. We've pecked at locals—from prostitutes to drug pushers to the ghosts of pioneer lesbians to politically active heads with green thumbs. We've talked a bit of history, a little politics, and a lot of sleaze. Congratulations. You've survived. Now, go back to your hotel and take a shower.

