



Amsterdam.



When asking about the espresso coffee scene in Amsterdam, authorities in Australia and the UK led me to believe that there is no good **espresso** in Amsterdam. Well, I am here to say, this is simply not so.

My local research with a hotel receptionist and hairdresser was more positive. (You can always count on hairdressers to know what's happening!) Both happily wrote a list of their favourite haunts.

It's convenient that all are in easy walking distance and fit on the map you get from the hotel. With lists and map in hand, Paul and I took off to discover what Amsterdam has to offer a couple of Australian espresso enthusiasts – and to find the famous Dutch apple cake.

In and around the area known as Centrum, you will find ...

Melly's Cookie Bar (Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal 137) behind the Royal Palace on Dam Platz, in one of the shops attached to the back of the church. Guillermo will proudly tell you that he and his beans are from Livorno in Italy; he will offer a Portuguese pastry or some Dutch cookies with

your coffee – and a South American wine tasting to follow. Next door is Koffie Culture Centrum (Damrak 133), a supplier of machines and locally roasted beans. The former owner, Henk van der Roest, happened to be there and claims he is the grandfather of Dutch coffee, proudly showing us a copy of the book he wrote about it. Just off Dam Platz is Bar Italia (Rokin 81-83) – not the famous Bar Italia in London with an Amsterdam outlet – but a place modelled on the Italian grand cafe/espresso bar concept, complete with panninis, tiramisu and good Lavazza coffee.

At The Coffee Connection (Nieuwezijds Kolk 33), Dave the barista was competently churning out whatever his international customers ordered. He presented us with perfect 'piccolos' and the Americans next to us gave the nod of approval for their 'grandes'. Dave obviously understands that customer service is the key to his success and has the personality to make it happen. (Dave

has to move soon, so might now be in a new location.)

Close to the Nieuwmarkt, there is Hofie van Wijs (Zeedijk 43), a delightful establishment that has stood the test of time since 1792 and still roasts their beans in-house. There is an amazing mini museum – full of all kinds of coffee and tea memorabilia. I recommend you take their Tour of Old Amsterdam, that starts with selected single-origin coffees from Indonesia and, of course, a slice of apple cake.

Between Rembrandtplein and Frederiksplein, a quieter and less touristy precinct where I will choose a hotel next time, there is ...

Brug 34 (Utrechtstraat 19) scored the highest on our AAA criteria of Ambience, Attitude and Action. It is a chic little place, with vases of fresh tulips on every table. Sjors, the barista, was keen to please and produced two perfectly balanced espressos. Il Tramezzino (Utrechtstraat 24) is



perhaps most impressive for its colourful display of the special type of Italian sandwich known as tramezzini. But the coffee, an Italian blend proudly prepared by Vlad from his tall Electra (the one with the eagle on top), was impressive as well. De Koffie Salon (Utrechtstraat 130) offers choices – sit at the bar, linger at the communal table to chat or work at your computer – or wander around the walls enjoying the exquisite photo display, featuring film celebrities from past decades. This is a well-established place that also does classes.

At Two for Joy (Frederiksplein 29), I never got an explanation of the quirky name, as Mahir was way too busy pushing out great espressos and foaming his milk to perfection. There were lots of comfy little spaces inside – and a sunny spot to sit out the front. This is obviously where locals drop in to enjoy a superb coffee or pick up a bag of freshly roasted beans – and dogs are obviously welcome.

Everyone will tell you to head in the direction of the Jordaan and De Negen Straatjes, (the old Jewish area) to find good gourmet experiences, including coffee at ...

Screaming Beans (Hartenstraat 12), where it is obvious they have the espresso formula nailed, with luscious looking beverages darting in every direction and all the recent trends happening. They advertise that most products are organic, and the place was packed with happy customers. There is also a small training centre out the back.

Although it was not on our list, just by chance we stumbled upon SOK (Hartenstraat 34). Named after Sander, Onno and Kees, the three

baristas running it, it's a 'pop-up' designed as a space where experts come to share and learn. Kirby Berlin, our Australian latte art champion, was there practising for the upcoming world championship event in Maastricht. Her triple tulips looked perfect – and tasted terrific too!

Kaldi Koffie and Thee (Herengracht 300) is a chain of machine and bean suppliers with coffees and teas from all over the world and every type of machine and accessory imaginable. They serve a good espresso and recommend you finish it off with one of their fine chocolates.

You can see there is great espresso to be enjoyed in Amsterdam – so long as you know where to go. Some places have only been open for less than a year, so it's a new and rapidly growing scene. Next time you visit Amsterdam, put on your walking shoes, get the hotel concierge to help you find the streets on your map – and enjoy another Perfect Espresso guide to exceptional coffee experiences – along with some fine Dutch apple cake.

But be **warned**... In Amsterdam, if a place is called a coffee shop, as opposed to a café or bar, you need to know that you won't get coffee of any kind there.

Instead, it sells soft drugs such as cannabis (marijuana, weed, by its other names) and, although not exactly legal, is tolerated by the Dutch government.

Curious, Paul and I took the tourist tour. It was blatant pro-cannabis propaganda, but extremely interesting, taking us to places in the famous red light area we might not venture to otherwise – such as the so-called Cannabis Museum and College. With names like Funny People Coffee Shop and Funky Weed Coffee Shop, you are in no doubt that these are not the kinds of places you go to for coffee and cake.



Our reason for being in The Netherlands was to exhibit at the SCAE World of Coffee in Maastricht – a most elegant Dutch town that boasts five restaurants with Michelin Stars. All the cafés and bars turned out treats too for the visiting coffee folk from around the world, and the Mayor put on a great welcome party at the Town Hall.

The SCAE World of Coffee hosted five World Championship events: the Latte Art, Coffee in Good Spirits, Cezve/Ibrik, Cup Tasters and Brewers Cup. We were proud to be there waving the flag for the Australian competitors, including Luca Costanza, who came in 3rd in the World Brewers Cup and Andy Freeman, who came 5th in the World Cezve/Ibrik.

There were some surprise firsts this year, with South Korea winning the Cezve/Ibrik Championship and Russia, the Coffee in Good Spirits. The winner of the new event, the Brewers Cup, went to Ireland. With Greece winning both the Latte Art and the World Cup Tasting Championships, it was no surprise that Greece took out the overall title of Best Coffee Nation.

And finally, a big thank you to Mark Hanna from Natvia Australia for hosting the amazing Sweet Fantasy barista party afterwards. It was a truly magical experience!