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LUXURY TRAVEL

A master's guide to the charms of Amsterdam

Follow in the footsteps of Rembrandt and take a VIP canal cruise on board a sleek
1950s wooden motorboat during a sumptuous stay in the Dutch capital

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Herengracht, one of the city's arterial waterways

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These tours are one of a kind, as is the new five-star hotel on Dam Square that supplies many of her clients. A labour of love for the Dutch hotel guru Eric Toren, Hotel TwentySeven sits on top of the Royal Industrial Club

Toren originally planned a 40-room boutique boltin a beautiful 1916 building with stained glass and fabulous ceramic tiling. hole, but realised that there weren't enough large windows to give guests a decent view. He settled on 16 suites, the decor of which is best described as Dutch maximalist: everything here is dialled up to exquisite. Every inch of every suite is lavishly decorated, with silk wallpaper overlaid with copper filigree. Floors are oak and covered with silk rugs from Nepal, while huge velvet sofas vie for attention with idiosyncratic modern art (curated by one of the city's galleries) and extraordinary light fittings.



Hotel TwentySeven is in a beautiful building with stained glass and ceramic tiling

The largest suite has a heated roof terrace overlooking the shops on Rokin that's perfect for a sundowner. For a romantic getaway, however, nothing can beat the tower suite, which is like something out of Rapunzel, with an octagonal master bedroom, tall narrow windows and a magical floating-candle installation in the domed ceiling.

The opulence extends to butler service for all. Mine gives me a quick but essential tutorial on how to work the ambient lighting and climate-control systems (mercifully there are some proper light switches too), and takes me on a tour of the marble bathroom, with its steam shower big enough for two, customisable multicoloured mood lighting and enormous whirlpool bath.

To top it off, all suites have quadruple soundproofing, so you can't hear a peep of the madness going on in Dam Square below. It's like being in a plush, supremely comfortable cocoon. Although, thanks to the jolly, relaxed and super-helpful mainly local staff, it's not remotely stuffy.

This is no whispery mausoleum either. On both nights of my stay Bougainville, the restaurant, and the stylish, dramatically lit bar, filled with damask chaises longues and satin pouffes, are packed. But this is hardly a surprise: Toren's crack team includes the head barman Erik van Beek, who has just beaten bartenders from 34 countries to win Bacardi's award for the best new cocktail — Cariño, an unlikely but successful combination of rum, yellow chartreuse, Greek yoghurt, vanilla syrup and lemon juice that I'd be nervous about trying

to recreate at home.

The words “fine dining” tend to make the heart sink, but Bougainville gets away with it, mainly because of the staff, who are genuinely warm, welcoming and excited about what they do. Lendl Mijnhijmer, recently voted the best sommelier in the Netherlands by Gault & Millau, is a star; I’d give him an award too for the unusual wines that he pairs with the top-notch (and at €75 not insanely expensive) five-course tasting menu, especially a herbal palomino fino from Cadiz and a spicy Sicilian spaccaforno.

Fabulous and spoiling though it is, you can eat only one meal like this in a weekend: the next night I’m happy to join the throng in the House Kitchen of the new Amsterdam outpost of Soho House and tuck into well-executed, locally inspired comfort food: herring and salmon with dill and pea shoots, followed by roast pineapple with salted caramel.

The private members’ club opened on the Spuistraat this summer and has been packed from the first day. Carved out of an imposing granite and limestone-covered 1930s Bungehuis building that oozes art deco had plenty of its original features for its designers to work with. Amsterdam University, the previous occupant, had covered up everything with plasterboard and false ceilings, and its stained-glass windows, endless swathes of glazed ceramic tiles, rich wood and marble panelling have all been restored.

The look is laid-back mid-century modern, and like the group's other branches, it has a buzzy Cecconi's restaurant and airy Cowshed spa on the ground floor, both of which are open to the public. There are 79 guest rooms (members get priority) spread across three floors, graded from tiny to "monumental", with huge beds and fabrics and inspired by the original windows in the grand Bungehuis staircase.



The bar at TwentySeven

Farther up there's an enormous gym, a screening room with gorgeous velvet armchairs, plus the club and House Kitchen. The crowning glory is the signature rooftop pool and bar, with spectacular views of the city. More prosaically, if you fancy a bike ride there are 75 parking spaces, and a workshop should you come a cropper (it's painfully easy to get wheels trapped in the tram lines).