Amsterdam Walking Tour Number Two -- by Jay Brentjes, October 2010

This walking tour covers another part of Amsterdam that may be of interest to those of you who liked the first tour No. 1. To save space, I have deleted several pictures for this pdf file. At the end of this page, you will again find a map with numbers that refer to a few of our stops. I have also repeated the detailed map of the earlier tour. It is the start of both, but I added a blue line for this segment. So, let's start walking and enjoy.

1. If you are starting from the cruise terminal walk along the waterfront to the Centraal Station. From there go to the St. Nicolaas Church. You will see it in the distance. But let me explain.

This is the largest Catholic church in Amsterdam. Obviously it is not as grand nor as old as so many others in Europe. The reason is that, for a couple centuries after the religious upheaval known as the Protestant Reformation, Catholics were barely tolerated and their churches were converted by the Protestants. Later we will see one (the Zuider Kerk, the South Church) that is no longer used as a church and is now an exhibit building.

At the church turn right and go further to the Zeedijk (Sea Dike). Notice that the Dutch language uses a combination of words and also that the 'ij' in 'dijk' sounds just like the English 'dike'.



De Waag



2. You are now in the same neighborhood that was part of the first Amsterdam Walk. So you can elect to just stay on the Zeedijk or take the little detour as shown on the smaller map in blue. Continue until you reach the Nieuwmarkt, a large square with the castle like building known as the Waag.

The Waag (meaning 'weigh') is a medieval looking building which originally was constructed in 1488 as the St. Anthony's Port.

It was one of three original city gates. During the expansion of Amsterdam in the 16th century, the surrounding walls were taken down to help with the construction of better wharfs This impressive building remained standing and was converted to a weigh house in 1614. Later, the surgeon's guild would perform public dissections! It is here that Rembrandt painted The Anatomical Lesson of Professor Tulp in 1632 (presently in Museum the Mauritshuis, Den Haag). For a while it also housed the Jewish museum. The building has been completely renovated and is a cafe-bar/restaurant.

3. At the south end of the Nieuwmarkt you will come to the Kloveniersburgwal (another one of those impossibly long words). You might note that, in order to make it a bit easier to recognize, I have broken up the names of streets, churches and canals. In Dutch they are one word. Now look for the canal and follow that until you come to the first bridge. Make a left turn onto the Nieuwe Hoogstraat (New High street). When you come to a narrow alley, make a right and you will see the Zuiderkerk.

This church was designed by the master builder Hendrick de Keyser and was erected between 1603 and 1611. This was the same architect who later designed the Noorder Kerk and the Wester Kerk. After his death in 1621, de Keyser was buried in the South Church. During the last four centuries the Zuider Kerk has been modified several times. At the end of the seventeenth century the original stained-glass windows were replaced by plain glass to improve the lighting. The last church service in this church was held in 1929. Since then, the building has had many different functions. It was used to store Bibles and during the winter of 1944-45 it served as a morgue. In 1968 it became the property of the city of Amsterdam and then it lay dormant until a major restoration took place between 1976 and 1979. Now it used as a municipal information center for urban development and housing.

Continue south and weave your way along the Pentagon alley until you come to the water way called the Oude Schans. Turn left and follow the canal to the large bridge. Cross this and you are near the corner of the Rembrandt House, our next stop.

Rembrandt House

4. Rembrandt lived in this house between 1639 and 1658, but it is now a museum worth a visit. The building (with the green shutters) was constructed in 1606 and 1607 in what was then known as the Sint Anthonisbree Straat. Much later, the street was called the Jodenbree Straat. At the beginning of the 17th century this was a new district where many rich merchants and artists settled. The original house was built on two lots, then around 1627-28 the house was drastically remodeled. It was given a new facade, a triangular corniced pediment—the height of modernity at the time—and another story was added.



The reconstruction was probably overseen by Jacob van Campen, who was later to make his name as the architect of Amsterdam Town Hall (now the Palace in Dam Square). The modern building you see to the left of the house is now the entrance. It has a gift shop, elevator, stairs and additional exhibit rooms. I also want to stress that there are a number of museums along this walking tour and to spend lots of time at each will not be possible in one day. So, select the ones you like and skip others. Buy a 'Museumkaart' here. It gives you entry to all the museums in the Netherlands.

In 1639 Rembrandt purchased the house for thirteen thousand guilders, a huge sum in those days. Since Rembrandt had already established himself as a great artist, he was allowed to make installment payments. This was also the time that he was awarded the prestigious commission to paint the Night Watch. Despite the fact that his earnings were substantial, Rembrandt was unable to pay off the mortgage and he was forced into bankruptcy. In 1656 Rembrandt's property was inventoried for the benefit of his creditors, and his household effects and collection of art and curiosities were sold. A couple years later, the house itself was auctioned for a little over eleven thousand guilders. Meanwhile Rembrandt had moved to a small rented house in the poorer neighborhood of the Jordaan where he lived until his death in 1669.

After your visit, go back to the corner and turn left. This takes you to the flea market at Waterloo Plein.

Jewish Community

5. The Jewish community in Amsterdam played a major role in the development of this area as well as the city as a whole. To appreciate this, we need to go back to the Spanish Inquisition of the 16th century. The Catholic rulers of Spain and Portugal expelled thousands of Jews and many came to the Netherlands where the Reformation and the resistance to the Spanish burden was taking shape. Most settled in this district which became known as the 'Jewish Quarter' and the community referred to themselves as 'Portuguese Jews'.



Initially there were three Sephardic groups which later were merged to form the Talmud Torah. It still exists today with several hundred members. Waterloo Plein itself was created in 1880 when two canals, the Prozen Gracht and Hout Gracht were filled. The picture above shows the two canals with the Jewish Synagogue to the left and the big Portuguese' to the right. After these canals were filled in 1893, a Jewish market was started in this spot. It turned into the biggest and one of the most important markets in Amsterdam. Of course, at the end in 1941, with the persecution of Jews by Nazi Germany all this stopped. Now we have the 'flea market'.

In the the 60s and 70s, the flea market was a general bazaar, a trading place associated with the youth culture. It was then that Amsterdam was a magnet for the hippies from all over Europe. Between 1977-1984, the market had to move. A new town hall and opera building were being created and when the construction was completed, the new flea market became the narrow row of tents and stalls we see today.

As you walk along the rows, you will find few Jewish people and more Muslims and others buying and selling things. There are more than 300 stands with new and second hand clothes, old military uniforms, old books, videos and DVD's, electronics and lots of junk. But ask, as I did, and find something that is of special interest. It took many stalls before I found three old mouth 'harmonikaas' to add to my musical instrument collection.



At the east end, cross the busy street towards the large brick building. This is the academy of architecture. Go around the building to its left and at the end of the long brick wall, you will come to the Jewish Museum. Before you go in, look to your left and you will see the Portuguese Synagogue. There is also a large statue between the trees. It is a dockworker, to commemorate the strike called in Amsterdam in February of 1941 to protest the round-up of Jews by the Nazis. Each February 25th a wreath is placed

at the memorial to remember this event. The location is symbolic because this is the Jewish quarter, but also this used to be where boats would tie up, as seen in the picture above.

The synagogue is worth a visit. It is a monumental building with a nice courtyard. It was built during the early 1670s at a phenomenal cost of 186,000 guilders. When it was completed, it was the largest synagogue in the world. Because of the clay soil around Amsterdam, buildings of this size were constructed on wooden pilings that were sunk deep into the ground. If you go inside, ask to see the basement. You might be surprised!

From the Jewish Museum we walk along the narrow street going west. This ends at a broad boulevard still called Waterloo Plein. Across the street you see the civic center and opera house. Go left until you come to the river Amstel. Remember 'dam across the Amstel', hence Amsteldam? Make another left turn and walk across the 'ophaalbrug', a typical Dutch draw bridge.

The Hermitage of Amsterdam and the Willet-Holthuysen Museums

6. The large brick building is the Hermitage of Amsterdam. You will find the entrance a bit further.

In 1680, a wealthy merchant, Barent Helleman, left his entire fortune to the Catholic deanery of Amsterdam. The money was spent to build a home for elderly women on land that was donated by the city. The building was very large with rooms for about 400 women who were over 50 years old, Catholic and in good standing. The facade along the Amstel river is more than one hundred meters and was the longest in Amsterdam for centuries afterwards.

The building now houses the Hermitage, a museum with various exhibits and art objects. It was inaugurated by Queen Beatrix in June 2009. To watch a video clip of the ceremony, go to the bottom of the Hermitage web site: http://www.hermitage.nl/en/

7. Go back to the bridge and cross the Amstel going west. You could continue on the Amstel Straat, but it is very busy. So, turn left and walk one block along the Amstel. You will have a nice view of the draw bridge and the Hermitage across the water. When you come to the Heren Gracht, (the Gentleman Canal) turn right and continue along the canal going west until you come to number 650. This is the Willet-Holthuysen Museum. With your museum kaart it is worth a quick visit to see how well- to-do folks lived along these canals in the 19th century. Upon their death, the house was donated to the city by Abraham Willet (1825-1888) and his wife Louisa Holthuysen (1824-1895) with the agreement that it was to be a museum. You will find the entrance underneath the steps. This is the start of the self guided tour.

Rembrandt Plein, the Munt and Flower Market

8, 9 and 10. Continue along the Herengracht and when you come to the first bridge, turn right again. You are on the Utrechtse Straat which takes you to the Rembrandt Plein. Notice all the restaurants around this area. Here you can relax, people watch with a glass of beer, or continue on our walk. Cross the park and take the Reguliersbree Straat. Be sure to walk along the left hand side and watch for the trams and bicycles; they are silent weapons. Towards the end of the street you will see De Munt.
At first you might think it is another church, in fact, the top looks a bit like the Zuider Kerk!
No wonder, the architect was Hendrick de Keyser again.



This building has been here since 1620 and it took the place of the oldest gate into Amsterdam. The original Reguliers Gate was built around 1475 and had two towers and a guard house, all made out of wood (prior to the invention of making bricks). Most of that burned down in 1618. Hence, the tower as we see it today.
Keep in mind that this spot is at the major crossing of the Amstel River and the Singel and at the southern tip of the city. It was most prone to land attacks during the middle ages.
In the 17th century this building was used to mint coins. It was a temporary spot because of the invasion of the French (but that is another story). The name Munt remained.
At least until a few years ago, the Munt housed a Delft's Blue ceramic shop 'De Porceleyne Fles'.

The flower market is to your left. If you were to stroll a few yards along the Singel on the north side you could see that it is indeed a 'floating market'. But take the south side and you will find not only flowers, but lots of bulbs of hyacinths, tulips, crocuses and others for sale. Said enough!



Spui

11 and 12. At the end of the Flower Market you come to a bridge and the Konings Plein (Kings Square). This is a popular place to park and lock bicycles. Notice that most are not your typical 'ten speeds'. I should also mention that two of the pictures below were not taken at the Kings Square.

Continue straight until you come to the Kalver Straat, then turn left. This is a shopping haven that was very popular several years ago, but has lost its appeal in favor of the larger malls.



It used to be the main street in Amsterdam and was 'the place to own' when playing Monopoly back in the old days. However, it is still a 'must do'.

After a couple short blocks you come to an open area. This is the Spui, a quaint spot with a history of its own.

The Spui, just like so many other wide streets in the old parts of Amsterdam, used to be part of a canal. It was filled in 1882. Then during the 1960s it was the scene of the youth movements and their protests against large corporations. The statue, called 'Lieverdje' or Sweetie, was actually donated by a large tobacco company. Now you will find book shops and maybe a print or other souvenir to take home.



Begijnhof of Amsterdam

13 and 14. From here you have a choice. It has been a long day and perhaps you want to go back to the train station, your hotel or cruise ship. I suggest taking one of the trams such as number 25 or 26 which go directly to the cruise terminal as well as the train station. Or you could walk there.
But, again, be careful when crossing the streets. Behind one tram could be another coming the other direction. I had an uncle who was killed by one on his bicycle because he was not looking the right direction.

If you have a few more minutes there is one place you have to see. It is the 'Begijnhof' of Amsterdam. To go there continue along the Kalverstraat from the Spui. Only a few short blocks further you come to the Begijnhofsteeg or alley. Go left and follow this until you come to this gate. Enter and you'll be surprised.
As part of the walking tour of Brugge, Belgium, I described who the 'Begijnen' or Beguines were and why and how these women lived. Again they were not really nuns, had not made vows to the church, but were very religious and did a lot of good work for the poor and sick.



One resident, Cornelia Arens, so loved the Begijnhof that she humbly asked to be buried in the gutter in 1654. She lies under the slab of red granite on the walkway along the left side of De Engelse Kerk. The last Beguine here died in the 1970s.



It might also be of interest to some Americans that in 1608 this was the place where the Pilgrims spent time before they settled in Leiden. From there they then moved to their new country on the Mayflower.

This concludes the Walking Tour of Amsterdam Part 2.
Below are the two maps I referred to. They are a bit smaller and you might want to print them to carry.



