

The City of Waters

Rotterdam takes pride in being wet and wonderful.

by Olly Beckett



Erasmus Bridge

Left: Andrea Arnelin / Sine / eStock Photo Right clockwise: Karol Kostowski / AWL Images Ltd, dbrn/hj - stock.adobe.com, FENIX museum, Olly Beckett, dogannasut - stock.adobe.com



Cube-shaped houses that look as though dozens of dice are about to settle on a decision....



IN ROTTERDAM, WATER IS EVERYWHERE. With the Maas River draining to the sea and the Rhine running from inland Europe, 23 percent of this Dutch city is water. For centuries, inhabitants have learned to tame it and turn it to their advantage. Here, you'll find Europe's largest seaport, although it's slowly moving further toward the sea, leaving behind opportunities in the form of abandoned warehouses and empty shorelines. And, oh boy, is the city doing something interesting with those shorelines.

ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Rotterdam is one of those rare ports where you can arrive via either ocean or river, with riverboat and cruise ship berths in the city center. Just behind where the likes of Royal Caribbean and MSC Cruises dock is the Rijnhaven, once one of the city's oldest dockyards, now transformed by waterside wonders including *wikkelboat* on-water accommodation, craft breweries, and floating offices. There's more yet to come:

In the next few years there'll also be an urban park and a beach. (As part of Rotterdam's transformation, the water itself has, over the years, been cleaned.) Also beside the ocean cruise terminal, but recalling the past rather than looking to the future, is the old Holland America Line headquarters. Built in 1901 in an Art Nouveau style known as *Jugendstil*, this grand building has, since 1993, housed Hotel New York, the opulent restaurants and bars of which offer a tempting

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menu. Quite the contrast to the experiences of emigrants who passed through here on their way to the Americas! In total, around 2 million people departed from Rotterdam between 1880 and 1920, seeking escape from Europe's troubles and a better life across the Atlantic. Cruisers arriving in the city next year will get to visit the new FENIX museum which is dedicated to migration and offers: "Stories about love and goodbyes. About searching for identity or finding happiness," according to

its promotional material. In person, the museum creates personal connections with stories of immigration. "One of the objects on display is a bald-eagle money jar from the USA that once belonged to an Irish emigrant," says head of exhibitions Hanneke Mantel. She's part of a team who found 2,000 suitcases from around the world that had been used by emigrants passing through or to Rotterdam. "With the suitcases, we are building a huge maze in the museum," Hanneke adds.

ART AND ADVENTURE

Across the water, located next to elegant Museum Park, is a recent opening: Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen ("the Depot"). It's an eye-catching, bowl-shaped building entirely covered in mirrored glass. Inside is a hollow space criss-crossed by glass walkways, escalators, and elevator shafts. The Depot is so named thanks to its primary function as a storage facility for 154,000 works of art. However, what makes this building so wonderful is that, unlike galleries where most art is often stored away and very rarely seen, the Depot is designed to display its entire collection. The lofty view from

the roof terrace is included in the €20 (\$21.75) entry fee.

Back to the water and time for something more active. Frustrated at having to travel great distances to catch a decent wave, surfer Edwin van Viegen decided to do something radical. Many years later his vision is almost complete: This spring, the RiFo10

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surfvenue opens in the Steigersgracht Canal. Water will be filtered and pumped into the canal (which has already had centuries of grime cleaned out of it), and pneumatically generated waves, powered by wind and solar power, will rise to 1.5 meters (5 feet) and carry surfers for 8 to 9 seconds through the middle of the city and past a surf shack. It'll cost between €25 and €55 (\$27.20 and \$59.87) for 55 minutes in the water, depending on which waves you want to ride. Wetsuits and boards are available to rent.

Minutes from RiFo10 is the architecturally spectacular Markthal. Beneath its curved roof is

a feast of colorful food stalls. Another architectural wonder can be found on the other side of Binnenrotte Square: cube-shaped houses that look as though dozens of dice are about to settle on a decision. The cube houses back onto Oudehaven, or Old Harbor, where several terraces offer a serene spot for enjoying a drink while watching small boats sail to and fro. Not far from here is the spot where the river cruises dock.

A PAST AND FUTURE RIVER

Dating to the 1300s, Delfshaven is Rotterdam's true historic heart. Picturesque buildings are reflected in still waters and

there's an old windmill to satisfy shutterbugs. People have worshiped at Delfshaven's Pelgrimsvaderkerk since 1416, including the Pilgrim Fathers (after whom the church is named) who fled to America in 1620.

End your day by looking forward in Keilehaven, just a 6-minute taxi ride from Delfshaven. Aiming to reconnect people with the water, and embracing the rising waterlines that come with climate change, the innovative Keilehaven Tidal Park turns an old industrial area into an ecological wonderland, where people and other animals can enjoy the water ... no matter how high it gets. ●

The Depot

Oly Beckett