



The following is a transcript of the popular episode Travel to [Amsterdam in the Netherlands – Episode 375](#)

Chris: Amateur Traveler episode 375. Today the Amateur Traveler talks about bikes and canals and Van Gogh as we go to Amsterdam. Welcome to the Amateur Traveler.

I'd like to welcome back to the show, Erik Smith, who's coming to us from [Onmyfeetorinmymind.com](#). Welcome back to the show, Erik.

Erik: Thank for having me back, Chris.

Chris: I say welcome back to those of you who have been here for a while, certainly recognized Erik's voice. This is your sixth time on the show. We have come up with five shows that you've been on before at the National Parks Yellowstone and The Grand Teton, The Four Corners Area, Michigan and the South Island of New Zealand. Welcome back. What are we talking about this time?

Erik: We're talking about Amsterdam.

Chris: Amsterdam? Excellent. You were just in Amsterdam within the last

couple of weeks.

Erik: I just got back from a 24-daytrip where I trained all around Europe. My first stop on the continent was in Amsterdam. It was my first time there in a few years. It was good to see that Amsterdam is just this fun and vibrant as I remember.

Chris: You say your first time there in a few years but not your first trip to Amsterdam.

Erik: No, no, no. I have visited Amsterdam. I was trying to figure out exactly how many times, a couple aerial trips, I went in and out of there a few different times. In total probably about 50 or 60 days and seven or eight different visits in the last 15 years.

Chris: Amsterdam was actually my first place that I went overseas. I didn't tell you that. I'd say the place I went and yet we actually because it was our first place, we were intimidated by Amsterdam and some of its reputation. We really didn't see Amsterdam at times. I have been back since but why should people come to see Amsterdam?

Erik: I wouldn't feel bad about being intimidated by Amsterdam. Some of these trips in I took I went with different people. The classic Amsterdam story is one of the first few times I was in is my third time. I brought a friend from Chicago as living at the time. He had never traveled overseas anywhere before. We happen to arrive and this 1998 during the World Cup that was taking at France. We happen to arrive during the Dutch National Soccer game.

We went to our hotel. The lady at the hotel was thoroughly annoyed with us for trying to check in during the World Cup game. She let us put our bags in the room. We went out, walked a little bit to the city. The Dutch managed to win the game late in the game in the 91st minute on a late goal. The people just steamed into the streets wearing their orange which is their color.

I remember it was fine when we were just walking around the two of us for the 15, 20 minutes while that was going on. Once the people got into the streets and

started celebrating, I remember him and I getting ready to go through and just walk through the Red-Light District to look at it and him turning to me and saying, “You know what, let’s wait until tomorrow when it’s light out.” He just was very shell shock by Amsterdam. I wouldn’t feel bad about being intimidated by it.

You also mentioned reputation. It does have a reputation. I always tell people everything you’ve heard about Amsterdam is true and it isn’t true. It’s got this reputation. Some of it is justified and some of it not.

Chris: You should mention what the reputation is.

Erik: The Dutch are known for their policy of tolerance towards what they consider victimless crimes which are in the case of Amsterdam which most often mentioned are the legalization of prostitution and the tolerant attitude towards the use of what they refer to as soft drugs which mostly in most cases means on marijuana and hash. This is one of the things they are most known for.

You asked me about why should you visit Amsterdam. There are a lot of people who visit for those reasons and to reach their own I guess I’m going to try to adapt the Dutch policy of tolerance in this case. Most people who should visit there have to recognize and will recognize what’s in a day that they’re visiting a city that is essentially in of itself a museum.

It’s got hundreds of great museums in it. The city itself is a remarkable city. It has canals that run all the way through it. It’s not like Venice where it’s completely patronized. There are canals that run all the way through it. The city itself is actually below sea level. There are reminders everywhere in the city of the fact of the importance of this city and the sea that is just 30 or 40 miles away.

It’s vibrant. It’s got a great art scene and so much culture. It’s just one of those places when you mention the great cities of Europe, London, Paris, Rome; Amsterdam deserves to be mentioned right up there with the rest of those.

Chris: I should say it doesn't intimidate me anymore. Just for the record, having flown into Cairo at night or other places like that, it seems funny to me that it did but it did. Just being the first place on the continent.

Erik: It's your first place overseas. I could very easily see that. I see that a lot from people there. You see a lot of people who come in. My first experience in Amsterdam was a part of a bus tour. I know that a number of the people on the bus tour that I was with that year that was their first overseas experience. It's a lot to process.

There's a lot going on around you. There's a lot that certain conservative culture is probably harder on them than I would say on other people.

Chris: Now of course, most of that is only true if we go to the Red-Light District which is a relatively small portion of the city. How would you recommend we tackle the city? Where should we start?

Erik: The biggest thing about Amsterdam is you have to decide what your priorities are. If you have a full week in Amsterdam, there are so many museums that you could take two full weeks and visit nothing but museums from open to close, every night over the two weeks and still not cover all. There are just so many museums.

What you'd want to do is you'd want to read about it and pick out the ones that are most interesting to you. There are of course the ones that are most famous and the big ones. What I tell people is if you're spending a week in Amsterdam, you could set aside. I would always set aside two days with the idea that you're going to visit museums mostly because you're almost guaranteed to have two days in that week where it's going to rain most of the day. It's north of Europe. The weather is notoriously temperamental.

It's funny every podcast place we talk about South Island New Zealand, Michigan, Amsterdam. It's all temperamental weather. I get stuck in those places.

Amsterdam is no exception. It does rain quite a bit. Of the days I've been there, it's raining down at least half of them. It's good to set aside those museums.

The big three museums are just outside the Main Canal Belt. The three museums are the Rijksmuseum, which is the main national museum which the building in

itself is a work of art. It looks similar to the Central Station where most people come in. Most people find their entrance to Amsterdam in Central Station. That's a very similar looking building but very ornate with a lot of artwork on the outside.

The second museum is the Van Gogh Museum which is dedicated mostly to his works. The third one is the Stedelijk Museum which I know I'm going to massacre Dutch with how many times I've been there. I should be better pronouncing this place.

Chris: I thought you already massacred Van Gogh.

Erik: Of the three, I've been to all three multiple times. I like all three a lot. If you visited all three in a day, it would probably occupy your whole day. The Rijksmuseum is massive and holds an amazing collection of mostly Dutch work but other work from Northern Europe and other parts of the world.

Chris: In mostly classic Dutch Masters' works and best-known for the Night Watch.

Erik: Night Watch, yes. You'll find a lot of Rembrandt and a lot of the famous Dutch Masters are in the Rijksmuseum.

Chris: They were doing a renovation. You didn't get to that this trip.

Erik: I did not, just reopened them.

Chris: Just reopened now, right?

Erik: Just reopened, same with the Van Gogh Museum. Van Gogh Museum was also under renovation when we were there. The Rijksmuseum may just be opening soon.

Chris: That one is opening this week.

Erik: The Van Gogh Museum then opened a couple of weeks ago because while we were there, it was just getting ready to do its reopening as well. I have not seen

either since they've been redone. The Van Gogh Museum, I really liked a lot because and I don't know if the new format is going to keep this. I would imagine it wouldn't. I hope it would because it was amazing.

It was one of the few art museums dedicated to an artist where his works were displayed chronologically. That was very interesting with a guy like him because you watch his descent into madness a little bit.

Chris: You had the similar experience at the Picasso Museum in Spain. When you talk about somebody having a blue period for instance, it's much more obvious when you walk into a room and all the paintings were the same color. Arranging things chronologically made a significant difference in that particular place.

Erik: I wish more of the museums that focus on artists do that. It lends a lot of insight to their lives other than being brilliant artist that you probably you wouldn't get on a daily ... I know both the Matisse Museum and the Chagall Museum in Nice when I visited there, they didn't follow that format. They're great museums of their own but it would be nice.

The third one is the Stedelijk Museum which is the modern-art museum. It's certainly the way it's visited a bunch. I really do think that people do miss it. Obviously, if I'm recommending, I'd recommend the other two first. It's certainly a museum that is worth the time that you can dedicate to it. It is mostly the modern-art. It's mostly Dutch. It does have a lot of pretty diverse collection to it as well.

Chris: We've got museums set aside for rainy day. It sounds like it's the plan here.

Erik: The museums go on and on. Any Amsterdam guide book, any Amsterdam site is going to list them. I'm not going to go into a huge amount of depth on them but there is a museum dedicated to a house Rembrandt lived in and worked in which is fascinating. The Amsterdam historical museum is a really brilliant collection and details. The history of the country in a way where the wealth of the Dutch East India Company is lost on some people history-wise. It certainly comes alive in the historical museum.

There's an archeological museum that's wonderful. There are some unique museums. I call them the Only-in-Amsterdam museum collection. They are smaller and the collection is what you think it would be but it's typically Amsterdam. There is a sex museum, an erotic museum and a hash and marijuana museum.

Again, all are smaller collections but they're one of those places where you can go, "Yeah, that's an Only-in-Amsterdam thing." There are probably a hundred museums I didn't list here. There's something that appeal to everybody. The best thing to do is to check it out.

With the I Amsterdam Card, admission to many of these museums is free or included in it. In some cases it provides big discounts. Get the I Amsterdam Card and then look through the information packet that comes with that and try to decide what appeals to you personally.

Chris: You can get that from the tourist office?

Erik: Yeah, they call it the "fey fey fey" which it's just VVV. It's right in front of Central Station. There's one in the airport as well. There are certain branches all over the city as well. That also includes a transit pass for the GVV Company which is in all the buses but it is a bus and some of the trams and everything. It is a really good value. If you have for a certain number of days, it allows you to use it when maybe the weather turns south.

One of the biggest sites that almost everybody who goes to Amsterdam signs up to see is the Anne Frank House. I'm not going to assume everybody knows who Anne Frank is but I would imagine most do. She was a young Jewish girl who lived in Amsterdam during the time of the Nazi Occupation. Her and her family lived in one of these hidden dwellings being taken care of by local "do gooders". She wrote a very famous diary.

Her house is I would say probably the most popular tourist attraction in

Amsterdam. The lines for the Anne Frank House are enormous. Now you can buy your tickets in advance which I cannot encourage strongly. If you do not want to just show up there especially during any time of the year and try to just get in line and wait. You'll wait hours in line and waste the rest of your time in the city.

If you know when you're going, buy your tickets in advance. It's gripping. It's a very sad part of history. It's uplifting to see. It doesn't have a happy ending, spoiler alert. It is one of those things that it's humanity and it's a story that needs to be told. It's told very well through the house itself. It's one of the things definitely worth checking out.

Chris: I have not been there because of the lines. I definitely would underline that is we did not plan ahead and therefore did not see the house.

Erik: I did not go in this trip. I've been two or three other times. The line was just amazing. There's a beautiful church next to it called the Westerkerk. It's not even the thing where you can go on buy your tickets and explore the Westerkerk and the nearby homo monument which on Amsterdam also has a very tolerant policy towards gays. They have a monument near this church that is dedicated to the persecution of homosexuals around the world.

It's not like you can even get your tickets for the Anne Frank House and explore some of the nearby things. You have to stand in this enormous line. It's one of those things everybody wants to see and for a good reason. Do get your tickets in advance. Try to get them far in advance. I looked while it was there, I'm thinking maybe I'd like to check this out and they were sold out for weeks. I would definitely get your tickets in advance.

Chris: You mentioned biking. You're talking about ways to get around in the city. Obviously, biking was one method that you used.

Erik: You talk about being intimidated by Amsterdam. That first experience of biking in the city is one I'll never forget. There are trams running down on a lot of the main road. It's a very bike-friendly city. You can see it because there are bike

lanes along all the roads. That's the one thing I should say very, very important is when you go to cross a street, you got to check your bike lanes then your road and then bike lanes on the other side.

I don't know how many times and my times are obscene. Tourists just wander out in front of biking people because you're not used to looking for traffic in the bike lanes. It's the trams and the cars you're worried about but people stepping out in front. The Dutch people use their bikes for everything; people stepping out.

A lot of that I'm sure is people walking out of these marijuana coffee shops not thinking correctly and stumbling into the bike lanes which I've seen how many times. Dutch people yelling at them for that. It's just a normal tourist, watch out for it.

Biking in the city is great fun. Everybody should try it. There are a number of bike companies. There are ones where you can rent them and take a tour where they lead you around the city to see the sites or either are a number of places where you can rent it and just take it out on your own. I've done it both ways. It's a very Dutch way of seeing the city.

This time we rented them and went out on our own. We just followed bike pass from one side of the city to the other. We went straight through the central part of the city which is known as the Dam which has the Royal Palace and the National Monument and the New Church which is chaotic and full of tourists. Then we found some really beautiful old canals out in both the eastern and western sides of the city where we were the only ones out there biking.

It's a great experience. I'd encourage everybody to try it. If you're too intimidated to do it, in the downtown area of Amsterdam, there's a lot of ways where these bike shops can show you ways to get out of the congested areas where you might

feel more comfortable.

Chris: One thing I remember, you talk about the Dutch and the bikes is the biking garage outside the main train station which is you mentioned as very, very centrally located. Multilevel garage just stuffed with bikes. There are a lot of bikes in the city.

Erik: There are bikes chained to just about every canal bridge. Just about everything that's fixed in the city has a bike locked to it in some way. You hear a lot in every place you ran a bike from, it's going to tell you the same thing. They're going to say you must absolutely must lock your bike every time you leave it alone which bike dock is a big problem in Amsterdam.

That's so hard to believe with the excess amount of bikes. I'm sure it's true but with the excess amount of bikes that there are everywhere. They are just absolutely everywhere. You got to wonder how many of these. It's been years since they've been using. You can see them too. They're just riding away, attached to a bridge or something.

They use it as practical transportation. You'll see people with their dogs in the little bike basket. You'll see people carrying groceries or something that you would never expect to see on a bike. You'll see people biking around Amsterdam. It's not just a catchy little thing. It's a real mode of transport for them.

Chris: I'm going to interrupt. You were talking about sites when I got us off on the bikes.

Erik: Bike, that's one of those experiences that I had that written down as one of those experiences that you absolutely have to do. It's a good thing we mentioned that upfront. As far as other sites go, there's a couple of places that I like a lot that are not always the first place that people go.

One of them is called the Begijnhof, which is a old Beguinage where Catholic women, nuns who did not obviously take monastic vows but they were devoted.

They use these small intercity courtyards places of solitudes to take your women and the elderly.

There is one of these that is still in ... Amsterdam is so much chaos and to go to the Begijnhof and see the calm surrounded by this chaos, it gives you a real powerful image of what this place is. Inside this small middle-ages era courtyard is two small churches and the oldest wooden house in Amsterdam.

You're able to see where these women would have taking care of the destitute and the elderly and the ill. You're also able to see these two beautiful churches that are in there. It's also a court called Spui. I've been told that the ui in Dutch is pronounced like the ow in cow so Spui is the name of the court.

It's not far from the main Dam area which is a short walk up from there. Finding your way into it, it's a little confusing. There's a big wooden door and it has on the front of the name of the courtyard. You could probably ask just about anybody. It's one of the places I send people first.

Most people get off in Central Station and walk down one of the two main streets away from the train station which is a frenetic activity. It has all these tourist stuff and hotels and street peddlers and all these activities. You walk a little bit further out. I tell people to go there because they've had a chance to see the cast of Amsterdam. Then they wander into this really spiritual place that has a lot of solitude.

It's certainly unique from the rest of Amsterdam. These small courtyards were all over the low countries. Belgium has a number of these in place. I knew Bruges is well-known for its courtyard as well which is a short walk from the train station there in Bruges.

Another place that I don't think it's recommended a lot is the Albert Cuypmarkt which is out beyond the Main Canal Ring. It's a short walk from the museums area. It is a local market. I spent a lot of time up there because I love the vast array of things you can get there. You can find Dutch cheeses and meats. The few times I've been to Amsterdam, the three or four weeks where I've actually rented either an apartment or a houseboat and catered for myself. I would always go out there and buy our groceries.

One these local markets, it's frequented by people out there to get their everyday items and their groceries and stuff. It's a wonderful look into Dutch life which sometimes it's hard to see in certain parts of Amsterdam. This market is wonderful. My last trip out there, my friend and I were out there just one of the city sites a little bit and take some pictures of the market. We ended up finding some great things to eat. She was able to find a really good waffle, the Belgian-style waffles with chocolate and just bought anything you could want. I was able to have churros.

There's a lot of food options. It's one of the cheapest places that you'll find souvenirs as well. Besides being a local market, they have a number of very large souvenir shops. Amsterdam with its reputation has some of the funniest and it's one of those places you can buy souvenirs and just delight the people that you give the key chains and the magnets and stuff like that. There's just so many funny little souvenirs that come from Amsterdam. The Albert Cuypmarkt is a great place to find it.

The other place I recommend that people at least look at and this one I don't think I need to recommend and I think everybody goes is the Red-Light District itself. I don't think you need to spend a lot of time there. Usually I tell people for me, if you're not somebody who's looking to really feel the party, scene, the massive crowds that tend to go there later in the evening, say 9:00 or 10:00 or after. I'd say 7:00 to 8:00 is a good time to walk around the Red-Light District.

It's something you need to see this idea of legalized prostitution in this one small

area. Again, we mentioned how intimidating it can be. It's mind-boggling for most people. I've heard people refer to it. I can't think of a description I haven't heard of the Red-Light District. Some people say it's sad. Some people say it's unique. Some people say it's a good way of looking at things. Everybody has got their own opinion on it. It's something you want to see.

The most shocking thing and I want to prepare people in advance is the prostitutes have these windows that they stand behind. People just come up and talk to them. That's probably the thing that is hardest for people who haven't seen it or been prepared for it to accept and understand.

The rest of Red-Light District things to see there, there's everything you can imagine. There are sex shops selling pornography and every other kind of thing you can imagine in sex shops. Then also there are these sex shows clubs that have big gaudy advertisements out front. Those are unavoidable.

The thing about the Red-Light District that is most dumbfounding to people is it has some of the most gorgeous architecture in the entire city. Of all the other things I just described, who's noticing it? There is a fantastic, huge, absolutely massive church on there called the Oude Kerk which is the old church.

There is also in a small canal house on the northern end of the Red-Light District heading towards Central Station. There is one of these hidden churches from when the Protestants took over, they obviously banned all the religions. There was a need for some of these churches to go underground. There's this fantastically ornate church in a canal house. They are called Our Lord in the Attic.

It's interesting in such a tolerant open city to see something that had to be hidden at one point in time. It's a museum now and a very interesting place in of itself. A lot of the row houses, everywhere in Amsterdam there is these long row houses. They all have these gables on tops. The most famous one is the stepped gable which just looks like steps up the top of the building.

There are also rounded gables and many different kinds. Most of the beautiful gables and some of the most beautiful sculpture on house is right down there in the Red-Light District. If you're interested on architecture but you're intimidated by the Red-Light District, go down there at 10 in the morning. The scene is not crazy at 10 or 11 in the morning.

You can see this old church. You can see the Our Lord in the Attic. You can see a lot of the gorgeous and in the Canal Stone they are also very pretty; a little bit dirtier than other parts of the city but gorgeous. It's a place that shouldn't just be skipped because, "I don't approve of any of that. I'm not in tinny of that." It's something that if you don't at least see it, you're probably not getting the full picture of Amsterdam. I'm not saying you have to get involved in any of it but you should probably see it.

Chris: Excellent. What should we see next?

Erik: There are a couple of things I recommend about the Amsterdam that the other ones are known for flowers. There are three things in particular; one in Amsterdam, one just outside, one that's a little further of feel. I recommend that have to do with flowers. The Keukenhof Gardens is the far one. That is the National Gardens of the Netherlands. It's about a 15-minute train ride to skip all the airport and then another 30-minute bus ride. It is only in season from mid-March to mid-May.

Now we were there near the end of April this year. Usually that would be prime tulip season. The fields would be full of color and tulips. They had the longest, coldest winter if anybody can remember in Northern Europe. We got to the Keukenhof. The only tulips we saw were actually inside the exposition halls where usually it's seeing fields worth.

I just saw a bunch of bloggers who were there this past week. They were lucky enough to see the tulips in full bloom except that the gardens are getting ready to

close. It was a very odd season issue. Again, if you're there from mid-March to mid-May, that's definitely something you'd want to check out. Then the tourist information office in Amsterdam has sells, passes and transportation combo tickets that you can use to get out to the gardens there.

The one that's in Amsterdam, there's a touristy-type flower market about halfway between Central Station and Leidseplein which is one of the main squares. It's another place where you can get a little bit of a glimpse. It's a very touristy place. If that's all you're going to be able to do is get to see something about the flowers in Haarlem and that's a good place to go because they sell the bulbs there. You're not going to make it out to the market I described. It's another good place to possibly find your souvenirs.

There are as well as flower shops. There's a really good cheese shop down there where you can sample some of the Dutch cheeses. It's a very touristy place again. It's not too authentic but if that's the best you're going to do, then that's something you should check out.

The one place I recommend that is a hard-sell for people. I've recommended this probably a hundred times. I only know of a couple other people who've done it. It's called the Aalsmeer Flower Auction. The reason people don't get to this quite honestly is because the bulk of the action at this flower auction takes place between 7:00 and 11:00 AM.

Chris: That's not too bad. I thought you were going to say 5:00.

Erik: It's about an hour bus ride out. It does require getting up and getting ready at your hotel at 5:30 getting the bus from Central Station at 6:00 and being out there at 7:00. It is so worth it. What it is it's this enormous facility, probably the size of three or four dome stadiums in the US. A massive facility with just these moving carts where the flowers from all over Haarlem, from greenhouses from the fields, whatever.

Then there are these two auction halls where they have these gigantic clacks on the wall. The clacks display all kinds of information about the flowers, where they were grown, the grower, the type of soil used. They're very distinct. The auction halls have these long ... it's like an auditorium. The bidders from all over Europe sit with their laptops or with a specially designed system that they have there and bid on these large batches of flowers.

The auction halls themselves are fascinating, watching the little carts move around. My friend who was with me described it as almost like a Disney movie, watching these little tiny carts. They're bigger than a moped like a standup moped. They're towing around these flowers everywhere. It's frenetic activity. She said it almost look like a scene out of the movie Cars.

It's very unique. It's something that it's early in the morning I understand but there's this large catwalk above the facility. They have information boards and all kinds of different languages. We're able to walk around above the action and see these people at work towing the flowers around once they're bid on. They're put on a truck. It's an amazing place.

It is pretty easy to get there. You have to take a bus, connection bus 172. Again, the tourist information office which is open at 6:00 AM. Get your tickets the day before. They can sell you the bus pass to get out there and everything and the bus driver. Just let the bus driver know where you're going. It's a real simple thing to do.

Chris: Excellent. You were there for the eighth time, ninth time?

Erik: Somewhere.

Chris: The city is much the same as it's been the other seven times. Did anything surprised you in this time?

Erik: No. I guess the biggest surprise is how little it changed. Again, I anticipated

that. From what I understand, they have gone through efforts to make the Red-Light District feel safer. I will say that they did succeed on that. When I was there in the late '90s and early in the 2000s, there were a lot more guys selling hard drugs who we call them the coke speed ecstasy guys.

They would walk right up to you and say that in about 30 different languages. They give it even a senior feel. I didn't get that sense from it this time. I do think that they've gone out of their way to sure that up a little bit. I know that they've closed a bunch of coffee shops. They're trying to encourage less drug tourism.

Chris: At one point they were even flirting with. They did ban drug tourism for a while. That didn't stick as my recollection of that.

Erik: It was never going to fly in Amsterdam.

Chris: It wasn't that they were closing down the drug trade of soft drugs. It's just that they were going to require you to show that you are a citizen.

Erik: The last read and other people I talked to over there, I believe that's still the case outside of Amsterdam. That they still need some membership card or something like that outside of Amsterdam; not Amsterdam, it just wouldn't fly. That's all there is. There's a huge market for that. That's part of Amsterdam which is why one thing I wanted to mention very quickly. This is probably the oddest advice for a city that you do a podcast on. One my best advices on Amsterdam is get out of Amsterdam.

Chris: That advice have taken.

Erik: The reason say this is because it's not meant to say anything bad about Amsterdam. I would hate for people to have their whole impression ...

Chris: Of the Netherlands be it Amsterdam.

Erik: Of the Netherlands based on what you see in Amsterdam. There's a bigger country out there. It's certainly a lot more tame in a lot of ways and certainly a lot more down to earth. The Dutch are just wonderful people and so remarkably

intelligent. If you meet a Dutch person who doesn't speak not only English and two other languages, that's a bit of a surprise. They're more of a linguist.

Chris: There's a new ad campaign from the tourism board in Holland that basically, it's the original cool is the ad campaign. I've linked to the video and the show notes for it. It's funny. They did a good job with it. They say everybody speaks English and then they have one guy who is speaking Dutch and they basically labeled him as the one guy who doesn't speak English.

Erik: That's so powerful. It's amazing.

Chris: It's funny because it's so true.

Erik: It is and it's not just that you can always find somebody to help you find a bathroom. If you can have a conversation with almost anybody, it's remarkable.

Chris: What we noticed is when you rent a car and turn on the radio, almost all of the music was in English. There aren't as many people writing songs in Dutch. People are being exposed just very constantly to English, very proficient in the language from that point of view.

Erik: Very much so. That holds even outside of Amsterdam as well. I mentioned get out of Amsterdam. The Netherlands itself is wonderful. There are so many great destinations that could be a home of their podcast. Obviously, I'm not going to get into that. I wrote down four places that are within an hour via bus or train from Amsterdam that I think people would enjoy as a nice day trip. They are Haarlem, Utrecht, Alkmaar and Volendam.

Haarlem is probably the closest and easiest accessible. It's a 15-minute train ride from Central Station. The book, *The Hiding Place* took place there. The Corrie Ten Boom house is one of the ... it's a similar story the Anne Frank, another hidden place. The Corrie Ten Boom House is a museum there.

Chris: The difference is that Anne Frank's family was being hidden and Corrie Ten Boom's family was doing the hiding.

Erik: Exactly.

Chris: Both went to concentration camps and Frank obviously died in the concentration camp. Corrie Ten Boom's family died but she survived and then wrote a book about their experiences hiding their Jewish neighbors because they thought it was wrong obviously.

Erik: It also is wonderful moved on. I like most about Haarlem is Amsterdam is like most big cities and a lot of European big cities tend to be a little dirty in places. They're old cities. I'm not criticizing. That's what happens when you get to be an older city. There are little unpolished on the edges in some places will run down. Haarlem is typical little Dutch town. It doesn't have the drug tourism. It's just a quiet little town. It's got a nice cathedral in the middle. That certainly a big part of it.

The second small town is Utrecht which is a university town which is about 30 minutes by train south of Amsterdam.

Chris: You say small towns, these are really small cities both of the two given names so far.

Erik: Exactly. None of these are little country towns. It's a country with a very high population. They are small cities. Utrecht is a college city. It's got a vibrant feel good pubs, good cafes. Another place it's got a great church that you can climb to the top of it and look out over the city and the canals and everything.

The third one I mentioned is Alkmaar. That's about an hour, a little over an hour north which has a cheese market once a week where they carry the cheese around on the traditional Dutch way which is this long poles and these swinging apparatuses that go between them with the perfectly round wheels of cheese, tucks, got samples all over the place. I believe it's on Fridays but I didn't get a chance to check in to that. That's one thing. That's all be very touristy and very crowded.

The fourth place I mentioned is Volendam which is a traditional Dutch fishing village. Volendam, you actually the other three are ticket train to Volendam. One you take a bus to. The thing I remember about Volendam is there's a lot of little

seafood stands all over the place. You walk along the main drag. You just order seafood from these little seafood stands. They put it in large paper cup and use just a toothpick to eat it right there. The seafood is certainly excellent.

That's my advice to give yourself a better picture of the Netherlands by getting out to one of these small little daytrip towns.

Chris: I'm going to throw in one there and that is the town of Edam which is also fairly close to Amsterdam, just north of Amsterdam.

Erik: You can do Amsterdam and Edam on the same trip.

Chris: Exactly. It's just a picturesque beautiful little town, couple of windmills, couple of canals, a very pretty town. It wouldn't take about an hour to walk the whole town but just picture perfect. As you say, once you get away from the greediness of Amsterdam, you get Dutch clean for me which is not dirty but I've never seen so many people washing windows.

Erik: Exactly. Edam is great because you can go there and you can rent a bike in Edam and bike to Markem or to Volendam. These are two small fishing villages. You could spend your day. That's a great place to bike especially if you're too intimidated to try in Amsterdam. It's a little flat country for biking. You're not worried about going up and down hills or anything. You're just biking from place to place. I know a lot of people who bike from Amsterdam to Haarlem, 15-minute train ride, an hour and a half bike. It's certainly very easy to do that. Do you want to talk about food?

Chris: Yeah, let's talk about food. I was just looking at my question.

Erik: You can get anything you want in Amsterdam, pretty much.

Chris: In so many ways.

Erik: In so many ways. The food is just one of those ... a blogger I like a lot who I'll keep a name list because he confesses to date that his first experience with fries and mayo was he'd had a little too much to drink which is the only way he was able to get himself to try the French fries and mayo for the first time. He said it

was actually better than he thought.

When you think of fries and mayo and you're like, "This doesn't sound appealing at all." The first two or three times I was in Amsterdam, there is no ... I don't eat mayo on much stuff here in the US. There's no way I'm eating that on fries. It took me a while but boy, every time I'm there now, the fries and the mayo. There's a great stand up by Spui, the court I talked about with that has the base top right off of it.

It's a place that does the fries and not only do they have the mayo. They have 25 other sauces. This is a very typically Dutch thing to do is have your fries and mayo. Obviously, that doesn't close down our food section because if that's all they're known for cuisine-wise, we're in trouble. That's one of the big snacks. You'll see everybody eating it.

As far as Dutch food, you'll have to search out traditional Dutch food. There are some restaurants that do it there. Dutch food is more veggie and less meat. As much as I hate recommending it, there's a wonderful page on Wikipedia of all places, it does a great job of explaining what a traditional Dutch cuisines are. I'm not going to try to do that.

If you want to eat traditional Dutch cuisine in Amsterdam, there are four or five restaurants that have a good reputation for it. Honestly, that's really it. You're really going to search it out if you want traditional Dutch cuisine.

What Amsterdam food-wise is known for now is the absolutely dumbfounding array of ethnic foods that are available. Obviously, with the Dutch East India Company being so influential in the history of the country, there are a number of Asian restaurants, cuisines that are available from those areas. Most notably the Indonesian rice table, the Indonesian restaurants which the rice table is a circular table that you turn. It has different dishes on it. It's meant to be shared amongst a

group of people.

It is a real experience. Be careful of the curry sauce. It's will scald your mouth. I found that out the hard way. The meal itself is wonderful. On the more expensive side but again one of these experiences I can't recommend enough. In of itself it's just an experience.

Chris: I want to calibrate that being hot because you're from the Midwest. Do you generally eat spicy?

Erik: Not incredibly spicy. I know what incredibly spicy is. This is as hot as anything I've ever had. It's as hot as Indian food easily. This is one particular sauce that I ... it look like the liquid red of a candy cane I guess I would say. That's how just describe it is. It's just hot. For days, I felt like I had scalded my palette. You can ask them for different level. They obviously see tourists all the time. You can ask them for different levels of hot and what not. No point out what's hot and spicy.

The second time I went and had the Indonesian rice table. I made sure I asked what was hot and what wasn't. I was a little better prepared the second time through.

The second cuisine that you see a lot is Brazilian Steakhouses and those do fantastic job of steaks and similarly meat-based meals. On top of that, seafood obviously a country where the sea is as vital to the country as it is in Amsterdam and the Netherlands in general is going to be good with Seafood. Seafood is expensive as well as it is in most places. Even if it's a national cuisine form. The seafood dishes are phenomenal and well worth checking out.

Those are the three biggest. I've seen Cambodian restaurants, Nepalese restaurants, Mexican, anything you're looking for, you're going to find there. You just have to find out. We ate at a Greek restaurant this time. It's pretty much anything you could want, you're going to find.

A lot of the biggest variety of them probably around the corner I called Leidseplein which is one of the main areas that has cafes and restaurants around. It's the center for night life as well.

Chris: Excellent. Most memorable local you met.

Erik: I'll just stick to this trip because we're calling the hundreds of people I met there. I had a very eccentric owner of the house boat I rented once. He wanted to know what we were into specifically and wanted to give us a breakdown. He initially since we were younger we were there for the activities of the Red-Light District. He started going into great detail about all the things we could find there which we weren't really there for that but did find the whole explanation very amusing.

He spoke 10 different languages as he was renting out his house boat to so many different people. He'd become so good at being able to explain the city for people. He had been on the Dutch Military for a while. He traveled all over the world. He was just fascinating. That was the previous guy.

This last trip, I met a bartender who is also fascinating. He spoke seven languages. In the time I set talking to him, it was at a great beer bar there called Gollem which is right by Spui as well. They have a lot of great Belgian beers and a good Dutch selection and everything.

He knew his beer well. In the time I was there I saw him conversed to people in at least four different languages. Not just giving them an idea of beer in four languages but able to have conversations.

Him and I talked politics a little which as I mentioned the New Zealand podcast, a lot of times travelers don't unless there's something going on politically that dominates the headlines. You do not often aware of how the locals deal and he gave me a lot of insight on local Dutch politics which I found just interesting.

Chris: Excellent. You're standing in the prettiest spot in all of Amsterdam. Where are you standing? What are you looking at?

Erik: The canal scenes at night. The bridges are all lit up. The canals at night are just gorgeous. I always tell people, "No matter what you're doing, make sure you get out to more of the Western Canal Belt. There's an area out there called the Jordaan which is like the word Jordan but spelled with an extra A. It's a very residential area and there are a lot of just gorgeous canals that are lit up at night.

It's just beautiful the way that it light up. If the weather is participating nicely, it makes great strolling. Definitely the canal belt at night especially away from the bright lights of the busy or more touristy areas.

Chris: Excellent and you thought that one was easy. One thing that makes you laugh and say, "Only in Amsterdam."

Erik: Let's stop and do part two just on this one. Let me take the easy way out here and say I have not even going to try to come up with one but the people especially the people who you can tell went there for drug tourism. There is a much a mosaic of them. They're so unique. You get your image from this '70s America or from the Caribbean Island. There are so many diverse types of people there. You look at them and say, "Yup, that's a person who is here for this." It's an all sort of only-in-Amsterdam thing. There are so many only-in-Amsterdam scenes.

Chris: You'll say the '60s aren't dead. They just moved to Amsterdam.

Erik: Yeah, they moved to certain areas in Amsterdam and certain brains of Amsterdam. There are so many unique things. Like I mentioned, some of the souvenirs are just so wildly inappropriate but so funny.

Chris: I noticed you weren't getting really specific with that

Erik: I want you to keep your clean rating.

Chris: Thank you.

Erik: I'm not going to go into depth with it. My blog is family-friendly too. The only person who reads my blog is my mom. I'm not going to do a very graphic post there on some of the stuff we took pictures of. Anybody who wants to know what's funny about it, I did bring back some very amusing pictures of ... Let's just put it this way. Things shaped in chocolate you wouldn't really imagine are things you'd see shaped in chocolate except maybe in bachelor and bachelorette parties. There's just so much of that. Whether you're smoking dope or not you're going to laugh a lot. It's a city with a good sense of humor about itself. That's nice to see. It really is. It's refreshing. A lot of cities take themselves very seriously. Amsterdam is not afraid to make fun of itself.

Chris: Before we get to our last two questions, one more thing you think people should know before they go to Amsterdam.

Erik: One more thing I think I didn't mention that I probably should is you should always at some point in time try to see if the city from the water. There are a number of canal cruises. There are canal cruises for any interest. You want to sit on a boat and drink beer with the top-down and slowly cruise through. You want to cruise the Red-Light District. You can get a tour of that, anything you want. There's a way for you to see the city from the water which again is so important to the makeup and the history of the city that I would say make sure you do that. There are really touristy ones right in front of Central Station. You could do them cheap or you could do them expensive. You can have full type course meals on boats, whatever. Make sure you get down on the water and see the city from there. During the summer you can actually rent the kind of boat, the little paddle boats.

Chris: Paddle boats.

Erik: It's sometimes frustrating to maneuver. If it's 80 degrees which is not always, if it's 80 degrees up on the surface on where you're walking around on the street and stuff and it's not a windy day, it will be 90 in the canal. Just be forewarned that it's a little bit warmer and a little bit swampier down there. It's still a fun activity.

You got to get on the water. You got to see the city from there if you want a good idea of what the city is like.

Chris: Excellent. Finish this sentence. You really know you're in Amsterdam when ...

Erik: When you've just walked out of a museum containing some of the greatest art you have ever seen to see a scruffy long-haired guy wearing an American flag shirt running to a Dutch tourist because he's had a little too much to smoke.

Chris: You prepared for that one, didn't you?

Erik: No, I'm trying to recall the most common image I'd seen there and having the bike stupid tours collisions are one of the biggest things. We mentioned biking, just let me say one thing real quick. If you're biking in the city, don't let it intimidate you but do not bike straight up streets that have tram lines. Do not bike in the middle of them because the tires of the bike can get caught there.

Try to keep them in the opposite way of the tram lines. I've seen a bunch of people wiped out that way too. Do the opposite way of the trams.

Chris: I might would have thought that you're standing in front of a great big sign that says Amsterdam. Might also be obvious because they have the great big letters, the six feet tall that I see everyone take a picture in front of.

Erik: I Amsterdam.

Chris: I Amsterdam.

Erik: We got there in the afternoon on first day. There were 200 people. I'll send you two different pictures, one of when we first got there, the 200 people everyone trying to get the perfect picture of the I Amsterdam. It's right by the Rijksmuseum, right by the museum.

Chris: Exactly.

Erik: Then the one that I got that night after I helped the bartender closed that

café GolleM which is another story. I walk back around 2:00 in the morning passed it. It was me and a small handful of a tour. I was able to get a beautiful shot of the whole sign which is hard to do. It is a typically Amsterdam image as well.

Chris: Excellent. If you had to summarize Amsterdam in just three words, what three words would you pick?

Erik: Culture, enigmatic and fun.

Chris: Excellent. Erik, thanks so much for coming back in the show. We're going to have to retire your number at this point. Six is the limit. No, I'm kidding. I'm sure we'll have you back on some time. Thanks so much for giving us your view of the City of Amsterdam.

Erik: I appreciate you having me back. It's fine because I don't know that I'll find any place new anytime soon that you haven't covered already. You're doing a good job of covering the world, Chris.