



# DUTCH COURAGE

Amsterdam still loves Gay Pride, says Roger Wheeler

It's **Amsterdam Gay Pride** on August 1 and they do it better there than anywhere else. Those Dutch folk know how to put on a great show and they still call it Gay Pride. There are literally hundreds of parties that cater, as ever, for all possible tastes. The parade takes place on the canals and the floats – which really do float – are amazing. The whole city joins in the party; we could learn something. The excitement and plain, simple fun are palpable.

Brighton Pride has changed over the years into what is now a giant party in the park for everyone. It's a good thing in many ways that it has become so inclusive that literally everyone and anyone can join in and feel part of the event, but maybe we have lost something in the process. I wonder, what are we actually proud of?



Many of us may have been to Amsterdam and we know it's a lovely and very gay city. The city council is concerned about the increase of organised crime in the centre of the city. It has announced a clean-up of the famous red-light district and is closing down some of the cafés that specialise in the more relaxing types of smoking. The plans seem to have got the balance about right; the red-light district and the cannabis cafés are really only a small part of the many charms of Amsterdam.

So we went back to take a fresh look. Some of the windows in the red-light district have closed. The cannabis cafés are still there – not quite so many it's true but they're still easy to find. So how about the gay scene? The bars

and clubs are all still there and doing good business. Some have fallen by the wayside but all the famous bars are as they were. The two **Thermos Saunas** have been combined into a day and night venue on **Raamstraat**. If you're planning on visiting, take a look at *Gscene's* Dutch opposite number **Gay & Night** magazine for as much information as you will ever need.

We discovered a whole new area of the city that's just been developed – the **Eastern Harbour**. This was a zone of old run-down warehouses and hippie squats, but the whole area has been completely modernised and restored. Now it's very hip with bars, cafés, galleries and cutting-edge architecture.

We spent a night at the **Lloyd Hotel**. It's a hotel, but not as we know it. It's very unusual, housed in a grand listed building dating from 1921. It was once a prison and in many ways it still feels like one. Designed by a team of artists and philosophers, it has 117 rooms with varying levels of comfort. There are exhibitions, lectures and all types of cultural events that are not quite to everyone's taste. I would recommend taking a look at the Lloyd, wander in and have a coffee or a drink. It's different and unusual and there is certainly nothing else remotely like it in Amsterdam. It's a hotel as an art installation.

Enough culture – one night in a former prison, no matter how comfortable the beds were, was quite enough. We moved on to one of Amsterdam's best-kept secrets, the **Bridge**



**Hotel.** This is a hotel in the true tradition of Dutch hospitality. Situated on the Amstel River right in the heart of the city, it's warm, comfortable, very welcoming and run by Andre and Monique Brugman. Their slogan is 'feel at home at The Bridge', and you do.

It is just a B&B with 46 very comfortable rooms, some of which have a view over the river. Of course all rooms have flatscreen TVs, good bathrooms and easy chairs. They are very proud of the fact that a businessman spent 1,000 nights there, over quite a few years it's true, but obviously he thought there was nowhere better to stay. It doesn't take groups or, heaven forbid, stag/hen parties. The self-service breakfast is excellent, with all the eggs, ham, cheese and fruit you can eat.

The Bridge is a great location to see the boat parade and get the real Gay Pride vibe; it is also almost next door to the newly opened **Hermitage Museum**. It's the latest branch of the famous Hermitage in St Petersburg.



So think again about Amsterdam – it's still very much what it always was with a few improvements and remains a great place to spend a long weekend.

### useful websites

- [www.thebridgehotel.nl](http://www.thebridgehotel.nl)
- [www.lloydhotel.com](http://www.lloydhotel.com)
- [www.amsterdampride.nl](http://www.amsterdampride.nl)
- [www.thermos.nl](http://www.thermos.nl)
- [www.weareproud.nl](http://www.weareproud.nl)
- [www.gay-night.nl](http://www.gay-night.nl)
- [www.hermitage.nl/](http://www.hermitage.nl/)

