

# OPINION & COMMENTARY

## Where in the world is Kristi Kelly...?

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Contributor

**DISCLAIMER:** Hey folks. Just a heads up, anyone who has heard anything about Amsterdam knows that it can be a tad “untraditional” in every sense of the word. Though I am going to attempt to tastefully present this information, I am by no means trying to offend anyone nor am I showing support or criticism of how segments of this culture functions. As a traveler, respect is the first and foremost rule, and who are we to judge? I am expressing the honest opinion of my experience in such a city and please read out of enjoyment rather than criticism. Thank you.

Wooden shoes, tulips, windmills and frites (french fries loaded in mayo) all are signature icons of this great country, as well as the Dutch themselves. However, Amsterdam, its major city, proves to be just a little bit different. I knew what to expect, but let’s just say, it blew any expectation I had out of the water.

Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Amsterdam, no one can truly prepare you for this wildly amazing city. You hear the stories, the adventures and the tales, but only until you actually step foot into this surreal world of sights and sounds (and smells) does it all actually come together. There is truly no other city in this world quite like Amsterdam.

After stepping out of the train station, flocks of other curious tourists in tow, we slowly made our way to the bustling main street of Amsterdam central. Eyes wide and searching for any sign of abnormality, I hold tight to my backpack, and for the fifth time, I check my directions on how to get to the “Flying Pig”, one of the famous backpacker hostels in the city. Other than just passing the largest sex museum in the world, things were looking fairly typical. There was McDonald’s, typical infrastructure, gift shops, tour buses, and other than the millions of bicycles whizzing around and the beautiful waterway channels running through the city, there was really nothing that I hadn’t seen before, right? Ummm, yeah, then I turned off main street.

After stumbling into the mass of intertwining narrow alleyways in the

city, I suddenly felt my perspective slowly change. Photos and shop windows have changed from the innocent “we sell stamps” to something a tad more wildly provocative and entertaining. Vivid displays and promises are widely advertised, while the people and settings seemed to get more and more astonishing. It was at this moment, while standing giggling in disbelief in front of this very store window that I realize “holy f\*ck”, I am SO not in PEI right now.”

Blunt, straightforward and unashamed, Amsterdam is an experience I will never ever forget. What a way to start my European adventure. Marijuana, hash and prostitution are all legal here. Students and adults alike flock here from all over the world to experience what this wild city has to show off. Now that is not all there is to offer. As ironic as this sounds, Amsterdam is also home to some of the most renowned museums in the world such as Anne Frank’s house, Rembrandt House Museum, Van Gogh Museum, the Rijksmuseum, and of course, the Heineken Experience Museum, which yes, the museums were exactly why I came to Amsterdam. (cough)

What happens in Amsterdam, stays in Amsterdam but I will fill you in a few points of notice

used that word).

### COFFEE SHOPS:

No, they don’t sell coffee unless it is a very “special kind” and the atmosphere is like nothing you have ever seen. Inside is dimly lit, filled with purple billowing clouds of smoke that just seem to tumble along. The strong smell of marijuana is unmistakable,



Photo: Kristi Kelly

Kristi Kelly measures up to a stack of cheese wheels in Amsterdam.

and upon entrance you are presented with the menu - would you have a taste for anything? The crowd is calm, laid back and overall, the place is pretty quiet (*sauf* the occasional giggling you may encounter). Bulldog Coffee Shops are everywhere - and baby, all I have to say is that they must make a fortune.

### REDLIGHT DISTRICT:

Yes, yes, yes... I went, I went. I was curious! In the daytime it was kind of eerie, but in the nighttime, it was shocking - no, lemmie rephrase that... it was jaw-dropping. Imagine this... it’s midnight, you are walking down a bustling avenue, lit to a red glow from the hundreds of red lights within. To both your left and your right all you are confronted with is pumping music, neon colored sex shops, heavily advertised sex shows, flamboyantly skilled strip shows - and the most mind-boggling of all - women, in lifesize windows (dressed in their sexiest, if dressed at all), trying to sell themselves to the on-lookers. If it wasn’t for the thousands of tourist around, I would have run for dear life. On an interesting note... apparently something like 40% of these women are actually men.... hmmm.? Anyways, you have to see it to believe it, and though I wouldn’t go back (it’s more of a once in a life time thing) - I was flabbergasted (and yes, I actually used that word).

### MUSEUMS and the CITY:

The city itself is lined with tons

of canals and waterways and was relatively pretty. As far as accommodation goes, we lucked out. Both our hostels, the “Flying Pig” and the “Passenger Boat Maria Alberta” (yes, a boat house), were great places to stay - for cheap! As for the nightlife? Amazing! “Escape” was the place to go - and after paying the 17 euros to get in, I wanted a damn good return on my money. Multiple floors, an outstanding live DJ and energetic crowd, you couldn’t ask for better. The coolest thing? You felt like you were partying with people all over the world (which, I guess, with all the tourist there... you kinda were).

Amsterdam baby, it was fun - and though you may be just a \*little\* too wild for me, I appreciate you none the less.

**Random travel tip?** I cannot stress this enough, check online ratings of the hostels you choose to stay at. Things such as walking distance to major sites, lockers, and hot water can make or break a possibly amazing adventure.

Great sites?  
www.hostelworld.com  
www.hostels.com

Travel questions or suggestions?  
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