

# travel



Major airlines have agreed on a standard that will allow travellers to check in using a bar code sent to their cellphones, thus doing away with the need for a boarding pass.

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# Amsterdam's idyllic lifestyle

Canals, cyclists characterize downtown vibe

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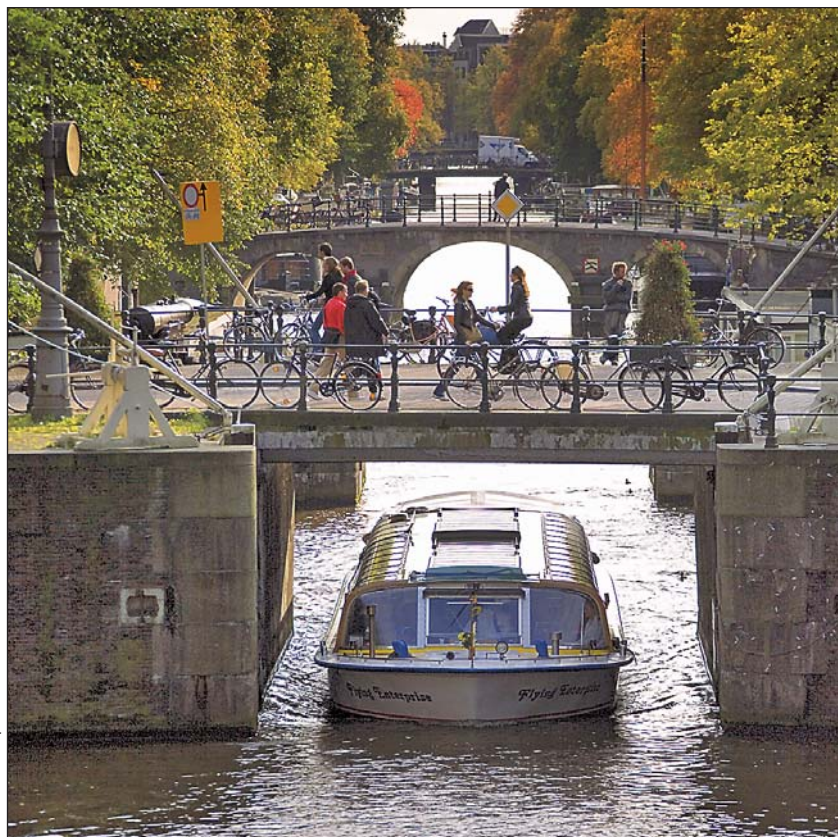
Living by a river canal, waking up to a glorious view. Being able to bicycle to work because, well, the office isn't that far away. And if you happen to own a boat, navigating the waterways on a sunny day is like living a picture-perfect postcard image.

Such is the life for many Amsterdam residents — such is the dream for many travellers to have these kind of options!

Amsterdam's layout revolves around its approximately 90 islands connected by hundreds of bridges, creating a ring of canals that outnumber those seen in Venice or Paris. There's more than 1,600 bridges, including eight drawbridges in this city of 743,000.

So you can patrol along the water or get around on bike. There are still many vehicles, but getting around narrow neighbourhood streets is simply not as easy. Drivers are often waiting for cyclists to get out of the way before they can rev up and pass.

Renowned as the City of Bikes, using pedal power is a great way to view the city's



JURIEN DRENTH/VISIT HOLLAND



VISIT HOLLAND

Above and right, canals and bicycles are hallmarks of Amsterdam's relaxed daily way of life.

architecture. New data says the Dutch are travelling longer distances on bikes every day, according to the country's Central Bureau for Statistics. Netherlands cyclists biked an average of 2.4 kilometres per person per day in 2006.

While cycling is also an obvious benefit for personal fitness, biking with far more people in the streets than you normally see calls for extra sensory perception, especially during the biking rush hours. Giving the right of

way is the only way to ensure a safe ride, or you'll be running into heavy metal (cars and trams). Once you get the hang of what to look for, it all becomes second nature.

A major tourist attraction remains the Anne Frank House as the long lineups prove. For more than two years Anne Frank and her family hid in the annex of a building during the Second World War to hide from the Nazis. It's estimated the Diary of Anne Frank, a staple of study in many history

classes, has sold more than 31 million copies worldwide.

Seeing other parts of The Netherlands is a breeze with a Eurail pass. A day trip to The Hague is worthwhile to see all the foreign embassies and government ministry buildings, as well as the world famous Supreme Court called the Hoge Raad der Nederlanden. Oddly enough, even though the government operations are in The Hague, the city of around 475,000 is not the capital.

Moving around country will be even quicker once the new high-speed rail line is ready to roll this December. The line will also connect to Belgium. For example, an Amsterdam-Antwerp journey that currently clocks in at just over two hours will be reduced by about an hour.

For many reasons, from an outside perspective, Amsterdam is known as a liberal oasis on the social front in two main areas: The place where marijuana is smoked openly and bought legally, and the famous Red Light District area reserved for sex trade workers to openly engage clients. Since 2000, prostitutes, behind windows, have been allowed to legally conduct their business. But, of course, Amsterdam is so much more.

The city is also home to a fast-growing tourism business started by three Dutch women. Imagine being in a city and going into someone's house and having a home-cooked meal, talking about everything under the stars. Or getting a personal tour directly to the best places to shop or to see live entertainment.

That's the mandate of Like A Local (*Like-a-local.com*), an especially useful service for those who can't be bothered to navigate through tourist guides or have time to do a lot of research before travelling.

The payoff is getting the real goods instead of being exposed to just general mainstream to-do lists.

And having fun while you're doing it all.

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