



The Bloemenmarkt is a riot of colour



Try the conservatory at the Krasnapolsky



The Wiechotel offers wonderful views

30 BEGIJNHOF RETREAT

You may not want to begin with the Begijns (a religious order), but sooner or later you'll probably crave a little peace and release from the Amsterdam crowds. The Begijnhof is the Begijns' retreat, an enchanting courtyard of almshouses built in the 15th century. Rather like London's Inns of Court, this is a time-warped oasis few visitors are aware of. Unfortunately, the houses are private, but there are two small churches which permit visitors.

Where: Entrances at Spui 14 and Kalverstraat (Amsterdam Historisch Museum).

When: Open daily dawn to dusk.

How much: Free.

31 PIER 10 RESTAURANT

When in Amsterdam, eat on the water. An old shipping office at the back of the main railway station may not seem the best address in town, nor the place for a celebrity chef to cook his stuff – but then, Amsterdam is full of surprises. The atmosphere is trendy-casual and the food (fish, of course) very highly rated by locals and visitors. Reserve a place in the Glass Room.

Where: De Ruijterkade (020 624 8276).

When: Dinner only from 6.30pm.

How much: Average main course 140.

32 PUCCINI BOMBONI

At first glance, this minimalist designer boutique looks more like a Bond Street shoe

shop than a canalside chocolate-maker, though if you still need convincing you can gaze in at the confectioner's process, which is entirely homemade and without any of those nasty artificial ingredients. For chocoholics, Puccini is music to the tastebuds, though try not to break down when they tell you the price.

Where: Staalstraat 17

33 PAPENEILAND BAR

Situated on a picture-postcard humpback bridge on Prinsengracht, the Papeneiland (it means Pope's Island) is the sort of Dutch idyll that theme-park designers bend over backwards to replicate. With its bulbous, black cast-iron stove and blue delft tiles, it's rather like walking into one of Jan Steen's boozey paintings. Very gezellig.

Where: Prinsengracht 2.

34 THE CANAL HOUSE HOTEL

"Sleep in the 17th century" runs the advertising blurb for the Canal House. And indeed, it does look remarkably like a setting for a BBC costume drama. Fortunately, the friendly owners lighten up what might otherwise be a rather "preserved-in-aspic" atmosphere, and there's a bar and a garden where you can go to chill out after a busy day's sightseeing. Ideally situated on a quiet part of the Keizersgracht, five minutes stroll from Dam Square.

Where: Keizersgracht 148 (020 622 5182).

www.canalhouse.nl

How much: Double rooms from £235.



The Canal House Hotel: a grand setting



Buy yourself a cigar at PGC Hajenius