

Amsterdam's cosiest cafes

Wander into one of [Amsterdam's](#) legendary brown cafes and you'll discover that these atmospheric spots, which strike a curiously enchanting balance between buzzing bar and laid-back cafe, are somehow more than the sum of their parts.

Picture candles dripping wax, a crackling fireplace, dark wood, beer flowing freely and walls stained by years of smoking (hence the term *bruin cafe*). Add plenty of conversation – from European football to Dutch politics to local gossip – and throw in some only-in-Holland *hapjes* (snacks).

These cafes exude a warm, friendly coziness that is so quintessentially Dutch, a specific word exists to describe the feeling: *gezellig*. While it's nearly impossible to literally translate the term into English, no matter: *gezellig* must be physically experienced. The following cafes – some of the most enchanting in Amsterdam – are perfect places to begin your romantic education in all things *gezellig*.

Cafe de Wetering

Bursting with locals of all ages, local secret Cafe de Wetering (Weteringstraat 37) is easy to miss. Tucked into one of central Amsterdam's hidden streets, it is not far from the famed antiques corridor of Nieuwe Spiegelstraat. Perch on the upper level by the fireplace, or sit at the bar to chat with the wisecracking bartenders. On chilly days, it's an ideal refuge.

Cafe 't Smalle

The historically working class Jordaan neighbourhood is rife with inviting brown cafes that ooze neighbourhood character, and [Cafe 't Smalle](#) is the crown jewel. Sit inside and admire how candlelight flickers over the impressive Art Nouveau glasswork, or head out to the stone terrace. Raise a *jenever* (local Dutch spirit) to the boats gliding by, and relish your good luck: you have just snagged one of the best canal-side seats in town. Egelantiersgracht 12. Sun-Thur 10-1, Fri-Sat 10-2

Cafe Berkhout

Once a derelict bar, this beautifully refurbished brown cafe in De Pijp – oft called the Latin Quarter of Amsterdam – sports a chandeliered, shabby elegance worthy of the neighbourhood's bohemian reputation. Located across the street from the Heineken Brewery, [Cafe Berkhout](#) is a natural post-brewery chill out spot. Come for a convivial football-watching crowd, or just curl up on the battered leather couches and take in some serious De Pijp people watching.

Cafe Pels

Smack in the middle of the *Negen Straatjes* (Nine Streets), arguably Amsterdam's most fetching shopping district, [Cafe de Pels](#) is a lovable local spot to wind down with a beer after splurging on four-year-old Gouda and Dutch-made boots. This place isn't fashionable, and that is exactly why it remains effortlessly cool. Come for breakfast, when regulars unfurl their newspapers over the worn wood tables and chat about the news of the day.

De Twee Zwaantjes

For an unforgettable, typically Dutch experience, duck into [De Twee Zwaantjes](#) (The Two Swans) to witness a rollicking cabaret-meets-karaoke evening, featuring a mix of well-known classics and traditional Dutch tunes that everyone from the piano player to the patrons sing with ebullient relish. The fact that singers are often fuelled by liquid courage only adds to the spirited fun. Feeling bold? Ask for the microphone. Prinsengracht 114. Sun-Thur 3-1, Sat-Sun 3-3

De Pieper

An easy walk from Leidseplein, De Pieper (Prinsengracht 424) is one of the oldest brown cafes in town, dating from 1665. Cosy up near the stained glass windows with a beer pulled straight from the circa-1885 Belgian beer pump, and marvel at the curiously appealing claustrophobia of this low-ceilinged bar (after all, people were shorter back in the 17th century – even the famously tall Dutch.) Sun-Thur 11-1, Fri-Sat 11-3

Cafe Langereis

A lovely brown cafe along the Amstel River near Rembrandtplein, [Cafe Langereis](#) only *feels* like it has been around forever. That's because the friendly young owner scoured the city for antique fixtures and furniture to recreate the lived-in feel of the vintage brown cafes she had long admired. Freshly ground coffee, fresh flowers on the tables, an upright piano, and a classic rock soundtrack keep things fresh.

Cafe Brecht

Named after the renowned German dramatist and poet, Bertolt Brecht, the woman-owned [Cafe Brecht](#) may be the only establishment in Amsterdam with German poetry inscribed on the walls. The young and gorgeously rumpled dig the funky, elegant vibe – think mismatched velvet chairs, vintage lamps, and plenty of books and games – along with the chance to feel like an intellectual for the price of a beer.

Café In 't Aepjen

This Brown Café is housed in a 15th century wooden building, one out of two remained wooden buildings in the city. It has always been a bar; sailors used to gamble their last few guilders here. They sometimes had to pay with something else than money like exotic animals brought back from their overseas trips ('Aepjen' is an old Dutch word for little monkey). Zeedijk 1 | Sun – Thu 3pm-1am, Fri & Sat 3pm-3am

Café Hoppe

Café Hoppe is one of the most famous brown cafés in Amsterdam. The right side of this Brown café has been a bar since 1670. The bar has beautiful ancient wood paneling, sand on the floor, no music and is a standing room only. The left side offers seating. Hoppe's customers are from every class of the society and come from any neighborhood of Amsterdam. Around five the café is usually crowded with office suits on their way home. Spui 18-20 | Sun – Thu 8am-1am, Fri & Sat 8am-2am

Café 't Loosje

This popular Brown Café is housed in a former tram waiting room, located on the Nieuwmarkt (new Market). They offer a great beer selection on draft. Café't Loosje attracts a lively mix of students, locals and tourists. Enjoy yourself on a sunny day at the outdoor terrace, overlooking the busy Nieuwmarkt. Nieuwmarkt 32-34 | Sun-Thu 9.30am-1am, Fri & Sat 9.30am-2am

Café Reynders

Café Reynders was founded in 1880 and is a traditional Brown Café situated on the popular and touristic Leidseplein. The interior hasn't changed much from what it was back then. Inside you will find ancient pictures of the Leidseplein. Leidseplein 6 | Sun-Thu 9am-1am, Fri & Sat 9am-3am

Top tips:

Boldly go Dutch by sampling the notoriously bracing *jenever*, Holland's trademark spirit. (Don't be timid—if you can stomach gin, you'll be fine.) Usually imbibed straight up, it can also be mixed with juice or soda. To wash down the hard stuff, order up a plate of the quintessential Dutch bar food, *bitterballen*. Don't be put off by their unassuming appearance: these little golden fried meat and potato balls are much tastier than they look.