

# FRIENDLY AMSTERDAM WILL BE GREAT 2005 CONVENTION SITE

by Mike Collins (TX)

Like Cole Porter's song, *I Love Paris*...Rome, too. The French Riviera has its splendor, and I'm impressed with the Costa del Sol. But my favorite European destination is Amsterdam, the site for the 2005 FFS Convention/Reunion. And here's why:

While I can speak some French, Italian and Spanish, I don't need to learn Flemish to enjoy Holland. Not only is English spoken by more than 90% of the Dutch, but it is spoken very well. Truth be told, the Dutch prefer that Americans speak English because the difficult pronunciation of Flemish makes attempts to communicate slow and unintelligible.

At a restaurant last November, my date ordered in Flemish and the waitress apologized that she did not understand Flemish. So we ordered in English! Many shows are in English. Movies are in English with Flemish subtitles. So communication is no problem.

Amsterdam also is a compact city of approximately 700,000. The downtown area with its main tourist areas of the Dam, Rembrandt Plein and Leidse Plein is less than a square mile. It's a fantastic walking community, with interesting bookstores and record shops that contain some jazz recordings which would be difficult to find in the U.S.

One strong suggestion: don't rent a car. In planning an itinerary, you'll be going two blocks here, then three blocks there, etc. You'll need to walk further to overpriced, very limited parking areas. And illegal parking is dealt with harshly, such as metal boots on tires. An auto is much more trouble than it's worth...worse than Times Square, San Francisco or Miami's South Beach.

Hotel and restaurant prices in Amsterdam are the highest in the nation, but substantially less than in London, Paris or Rome...or New York or San Francisco, for that matter. A decent dinner in a moderate restaurant for two by the Leidse Plein can be enjoyed for about 25 euros, tax and tip included. Read a guide book for tipping practices, since many items include most of the top and usually all taxes.

Then there are the sights to see. You've got to take a boat trip through the canals. While the Rijksmuseum and Van Gogh Museum are most famous, I enjoyed the Amsterdam history museum even more. There are more than three dozen museums in the Dutch capital, including the Anne Frank Huis (which isn't as cramped as I had imagined).

Amsterdam's famous nightlife includes its Red Light district, with young ladies motioning from the windows. Go ahead and see it...more than 80% of the traffic are tourist gawkers, not customers. But don't take pictures. A coffee house with green foliage on the sign indicates a spot for imbibing of legalized drugs...I skip visits inside these, also.

Public transportation is numerous and frequent...another reason for avoiding automobile rentals. August weather is at its best, with a normal high temperature of about 75 degrees, with an overnight low of about 60.

Clubs stay open late. My favorite jazz hangout is Alto Jazz Cafe, one block east of the Leidse Plein. Entertainment changes nightly, and there is no cover charge. Dress everywhere is casual, but you might need jacket and tie to enter the Casino, also near the Leidse Plein. The Vondel Park is the major park, just south of the central area.

What I treasure the most is the friendliness of the populace. Dutch are very curious about the United States, its views and its customs. At times they will disagree, but the discussions do not turn abusive by any means.

FFS conventions involve fixed costs. Our European members are going out on a limb to create a unique experience for our organization.

In past conventions our European and Asian members have supported our host conventions. Don't you think that some turnabout is fair play and we need to aid their endeavor? But the primary reason I urge attendance is that you'll really have a splendid time in this city of 1,000 bridges.



The central station.



Did I say the people are friendly?  
(Her name is Samantha.)