



Eating Europe: Amsterdam's Jordaan

While Eating Europe tours have proliferated through Europe since its inception in 2011, thanks to the Jordaan's central location, humble roots, trend-setting retail renaissance, and history as an international crossroads, this tour remains a cornerstone for the company.

by **ELYSE GLICKMAN**

JORDAAN (pronounced “yoor-daan”), translates to “garden” in English, and no matter when one visits, there’s always a bounty of new discoveries cropping up.

I took the same tour in 2016. The epic journey through Amsterdam’s garden district concluded at **Cafe Papeneiland**, the legendary 450-year-old “brown cafe” whose Dutch apple pie became a sensation beyond Europe thanks to former US President Bill Clinton’s seal of approval. The feast leading up to it was a treasure hunt of sorts, up and down narrow streets lined with specialty food shops, centuries-old neighbourhood pubs, and trendy eateries. Undeniably Dutch stops included a generations-old cheese shop, a pub serving piping hot deep-fried bitterballen (little beef meatballs rolled in breadcrumbs, served with mustard) and a herring stand. These were offset with a recently opened gourmet chocolate shop, a small bowl of Indonesian curry from an established neighbourhood takeaway, perfectly executed fish and chips from another, and an eclectic mix of pub grub.

My March 2024 journey through Jordaan was steered by Katya, whom I was told was one of the company’s most requested guides because of her spin on the enduringly popular tour. Upon her arrival, it was easy to see why many past guests sang her praises. I arrived in Amsterdam in pouring rain, and a weather forecast that promised it

would continue throughout the day. Just after 12:30, she arrived at the tour’s first stop, the venerable **Cafe Papeneiland**, with a sunny disposition as her charges were seated in an upstairs annex. Once we consumed our slices of Dutch apple pie, served by the establishment’s current owner, our group emerged from the dimly-lit room into bright sunshine and spring flowers lining the canals in full bloom.

A few blocks down Prinsengracht, Katya pointed out our next stop, **Vishandel**, a closet-sized family-owned fish deli packing a wide variety of local and European seafood delicacies. There was a line out the door, which meant that our group of ten would have to eat the shop’s biggest draws — herring and fried fish with a house-made “secret” tartar sauce — outdoors. The batter on the fried fish was memorable thanks to a crunchy texture that faded into a lighter-than-air mouthfeel.

En route to cheese shop **Driehoekbuurt**, Katya pointed out that the neighbourhood had been big for breweries over the generations and encouraged the beer drinkers in the group to not miss out on any locally crafted beer offered to them. She also explained that the buildings had tiles so people who could not read in the 17th century could still find the butcher, dairy, produce shop or popular watering holes like the **De Kat in de Wijngaert**. This led to her recommending cat lovers visit **KattenKabinet**, which occupies a houseboat. Once we arrived at **Driehoekbuurt**, we were presented with a flight of regional cheeses, including different expressions of Edam and Gouda going from mild to sharp served with wine, quince, and brown nut bread.

The two children in the group opted for a stop at **Het Oud-Hollandsch Snoepwinkeltje**, one of the oldest surviving candy stores in the neighbourhood. It looks

almost exactly like a scene from "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory" — a compact fantasy land of every kind of sweet imaginable. The owners are so protective of the store's legacy and appearance that only three people are allowed into the shop at a time, and sales are cash-only.

After pointing out a classic Amsterdam "coffee shop" (specializing in things other than lattes), we turned down a street that appeared to be in the midst of gentrification with a couple of fledgling art galleries. Katya mentioned that toward the end of the tour, we'd pass **The Milkmaid Project**, where its proprietor/photographer/artist transports clients back to the 17th century through his artistic and technical skills. We then arrived at **Cafe Boca**, previously the site of a notorious kidnapping of a member of the Heineken family. The brightly lit cafe offers a la carte and multi-course menus for both omnivores and vegans, mixing Latin American, Italian and Japanese influences. We tried a delicious take on Indonesian beef *rendang* (spicy curry) as a sandwich on baguette-style bread. While Katya noted this was an off-the-menu offering, the funky surroundings and menu made it worth a return visit at another time.

Sausage rolls were next up, and while they are widely associated with British commonwealth countries, **Tom's Bread and More** added more comfort food oomph to the stalwart hand-held snack with its buttery exterior and slightly spicy interior. It was here Katya offered her public service announcement on stroopwaffles (the ubiquitous paper-thin waffle cookies held together by syrup filling): Avoid kitschy establishments in malls and well-trodden thoroughfares selling the treats with added toppings and get them at small bakeries instead to enjoy them as intended. En route to our final pub, Katya pointed out standing stones to commemorate Jewish members of the community who were taken away by the Nazis in World War II. This pocket-sized family-owned pub featured a sip of genever spirit hand selected by the owners and the best bitterballen I have tried amongst all the expressions of the snack sampled on previous trips. While the meaty interior was beautifully seasoned and a perfect density, the exterior was bright and crispy thanks to panko crumb-like breading.

Once we passed The Milkmaid Project, the tour was officially over. However, a small handful of spirits connoisseurs stayed behind to check out **Quinta Wine & Liqueurs** whose owner, Ulrich van Stipriaan, is as enthusiastic about his selection of small production genevers as were the owners of the pub rounding out the tour. While it is now easy to learn about what genever is and how and why it is not gin (especially at the always enjoyable Bols Cocktail Museum), listening to the owner's repartee about what makes artisanal genever worth the investment is pure joy... much like a fine gouda or Dutch fish and chips. 



MAKES ABOUT 30 Bitterballen

THESE TASTY Dutch morsels are the perfect nibble to serve with drinks.

Ground Beef

1lb

Vegetable Oil

1Tbs

Butter

2 Tbs

Onion

finely chopped,
1/4 cup

All-Purpose Flour

3 Tbs

Beef Stock

1 cup, warmed

Fresh Parsley

chopped, 1 Tbs

Salt

1 tsp

Worcestershire Sauce

1 tsp

Curry Powder

1/8 tsp

Gouda Cheese

grated, 1 cup

Fine Dry Breadcrumbs

1 cup

Eggs

2

Water

2 Tbs

Vegetable Oil

for deep frying

1 HEAT the vegetable oil in a skillet and brown the ground beef. Remove from the pan and reserve.

2 ADD the butter to the skillet and sauté the onion until translucent. Add the garlic and sauté for a few seconds more until fragrant.

3 STIR in the flour then add the beef stock in 1/4 cup increments, whisking after each addition to avoid lumps.

4 ADD the parsley, salt, Worcestershire, curry powder, ground beef and cheese. Cook, stirring until the cheese has melted and the mixture is thickened.

5 COOL the mixture for several hours (or overnight) in the fridge then shape into small balls, about 1 inch in diameter.

6 WHISK the eggs with the water. Place the breadcrumbs in a separate bowl.

7 DIP each meatball into the egg and then coat with breadcrumbs. This is quicker and less messy if you use a toothpick to pick up and dip the balls.

8 PLACE the crumbed meatballs on a baking tray and chill in the fridge for an hour.

9 DEEP fry the balls until golden, about two minutes. Drain on paper towel.

10 SERVE with mustard for dipping.

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