

In the footsteps of

The Great Explorers



“In the footsteps of the great explorers”

I’m cycling through Amsterdam’s historic centre, a UNESCO world heritage site and an enduring testimony to the city’s rich history.

During the Golden Age in the 17th century, Amsterdam’s port was at the centre of a global trade network, with ships sailing to Asia, Africa, Brazil and the Americas, and merchants trading goods across Europe.

I pass in front of Paradiso, the iconic rock music venue where bands like The Rolling Stones, The Sex Pistols, The Cure, Nirvana performed, but also more recently Lenny Kravitz and Amy Winehouse.

Along with the nearby Milky Way, it became synonymous with the hippie counterculture and the rock music of the seventies.

I turn right and then left and I cycle on the Prinsengracht, one of main canals, where warehouses built in the 17th century are still in good shape. Much has changed since then: in those days merchants travelling to Brazil were away for months, maybe even years. Today, businessmen fly to São Paulo and are back in the polder within days.

I pass in front of the house where Anne Frank lived, talking about an authentic story, and enter the Jordaan neighbourhood where strolling through the small streets and drinking caffè latte has become the favourite pastime of the locals.

My quest to travel around the world to write stories about cool destinations, visionary people and brands with a purpose starts here in Amsterdam.

I turn right at the end of the canal, zigzag through some smaller streets and end up in front of Central Station. I now enter the oldest part of town where the sailors and merchants took off on their wooden ships, ‘the port of Amsterdam’.

Now, 670 years after Amsterdam received city rights, my trip around the world in 80 stories starts at the same point from where explorers left for their overseas journeys. And to where they returned with experiences, knowledge and... stories.

Maarten Schäfer

- Inspirational speaker

- Author ‘Around the World in 80 Brands’