

SUNSHINE GUIDE TO AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

SEASONS: Amsterdam has the standard northern European four-season year, delayed slightly and made more moderate by its proximity to the North Sea. Spring (April and May) sees the leaves bud out, green things sprout, and the days get increasingly longer. Summer (June through September) days are long and mild, and the vegetation is in full foliage. Autumn (October and November) brings shorter days and the first frosts. Winter (December through March) landscapes are grey and cold, the branches are bare, and patches of ice and snow can be seen in the streets. The onset and length of these seasons varies considerably from one year to another.

SUNNIEST MONTHS: April through early September. This is when you can expect to get the sunniest weather of the year. Northwest Europe is not one of the world's sunny places; and, in general, only some 37% of the year's daylight hours will be sunny. This ranges from a high of 47% in pleasant June, to a low of 17% in gloomy December.

Spring gets the most clear days, about one day in five. The sun won't be seen at all on three days a week during the late autumn and early winter.

WARMEST MONTHS: July and August, but they are better described as having mild days and cool nights. The prevailing winds are off the North Sea, and keep summer temperatures from getting very hot. The hottest temperature of the year will probably be around 86°, and will most like occur sometime in August.

For a few nights during July and August, the average visitor might sleep better with some sort of room-cooling. Such nights are rare, however.

COOLEST MONTHS: January and February. Amsterdam winters are dark, windy, wet, and chilly; but they are not really very cold. Below-zero temperatures can be expected any time from November through April, but they are never the rule. Most afternoons will rise above freezing, even when the mornings are frosty. From late December through the end of February, about one day a week will fail to make it above freezing during the afternoons--usually during an outbreak of polar air. The coldest temperature of the year will be around 16°, and will probably occur in January.

Even during the coldest months, most of the precipitation falls as rain (sometimes freezing rain) rather than snow. Snow is common enough, but rarely stays on the ground for long.

DRIEST MONTHS: March through August. Some 51% of the year's days will get no measurable precipitation; that is, they will get less than a hundredth of an inch. May will have 61% such days, whereas November will get only 39%. A "reasonably dry day" in the table, however, is one with less than a tenth of an inch--a more useful measure. It takes at least that much to wet the ground under the trees.

THINGS TO KNOW: Sea temperatures are for the North Sea coast and beaches. Although quite chilly by American standards, the hardy Dutch seem to take them in stride.

Amsterdam will often have a distinct "urban heat island" effect. Under windless and rainless conditions (or near), the city center will be many degrees warmer than the outlying suburbs (such as the airport). This is especially noticeable at night and in the winter. Precipitation of any kind diminishes this effect, and a strong wind will eliminate it completely. Table temperatures are for the city center.

Copyright 1995 by Patrick J. Tyson, Box 492787, Redding CA 96049. All rights reserved.