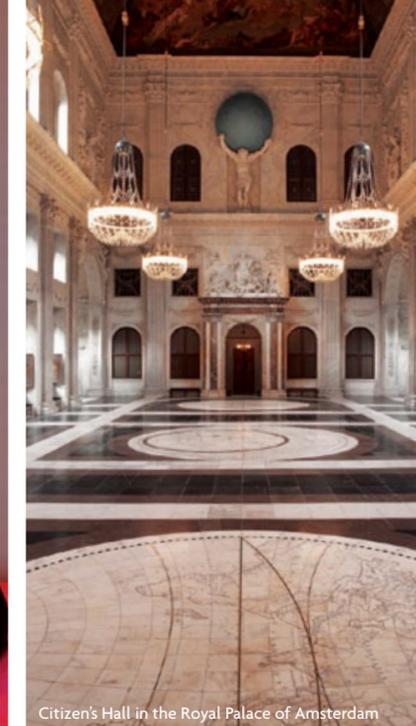




Royal Palace of Amsterdam



The Dylan Thomas Suite



Citizen's Hall in the Royal Palace of Amsterdam

24 HOURS IN... Amsterdam

Eclectic, fashionable and hipster-cool Amsterdam is home to masterpiece-filled museums, cutting-edge Dutch designs and Michelin-starred dining

Words: Rebecca Haddad

09.00 After touching down at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol (www.schiphol.nl), your chauffeured chariot will be waiting to take you to Sofitel Legend The Grand Amsterdam. This storied hotel is steeped in history – it was formerly a 15th-century convent, then the headquarters of the Dutch Admiralty and then Amsterdam's city hall (you can learn about it all on one of the daily tours that reveal the most notable points of the property). There's surely no finer place for a good night's sleep than in the hotel's Imperial Suite, which has charming views across the neighbouring canal and design elements in regal purple. Of course, Amsterdam's eclectic, trend-setting appeal also extends to its boutique offerings: The Dylan is a 44-key establishment perched along the Keizersgracht (Emperor's Canal) and oozes modern, chic interiors that contrast pleasantly with the hotel's historic façade. This stay is also well located if you're seeking a slice of Amsterdam's hip nightlife.

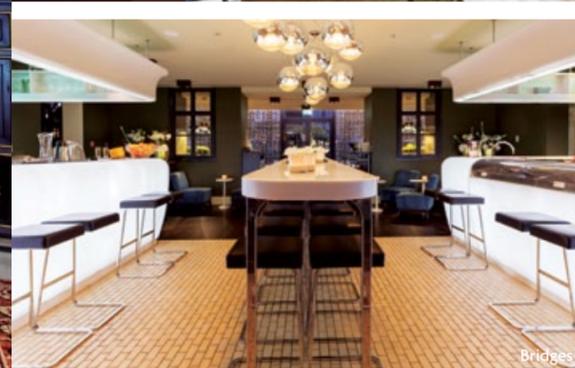
11.00 Yes, Amsterdam is the city of cycling, but if you're staying at the Sofitel, it's just a short walk over the adjacent canal and across to the Royal Palace of Amsterdam (closed Mondays, Fridays, Saturdays; +31 20 620 4060; www.paleisamsterdam.nl), which commands its own square. This old, elegant building is used to this day by the House of Orange for royal engagements, but when the king and his subjects aren't in residence you can take a one-hour tour of the property, marvelling at the lavish marble interiors seemingly covered in paintings and sculptures.

12.00 It doesn't take a first-time visitor long to work out that Amsterdam is a glorious jumble of contrasts. After a dose of history at the Royal Palace of Amsterdam, walk down to chic De Negen Straatjes, or "The Nine Streets" (www.theninestreets.com), Amsterdam's hub of all things cool and creative. From independent

"A HUB OF ALL THINGS COOL AND CREATIVE. FROM INDEPENDENT GALLERIES, INTIMATE CAFÉS AND BOUTIQUE SHOPS, DE NEGEN STRAATJES, OR "THE NINE STREETS", OFFERS SO MUCH CHARM THAT IT'S EASY TO WHILE AWAY THE HOURS"

galleries, intimate cafés and boutique shops, the district offers so much charm that it's easy to while away the hours – but you're only here for a short time, so stops must be carefully calculated. Make sure to visit Leafde (+31 20 785 3278; www.leafde.nl) and Van Ravenstein (+31 20 639 0067; www.van-ravenstein.nl) for designer wares as you wind your way towards the Jordaan neighbourhood at end of the district. A stop at legendary Pompadour (+31 20 623 9554; www.pompadour-amsterdam.nl) teahouse is mandatory. Place your culinary trust in the hands of the owners, who will put together a small selection of handmade chocolates for you to take on the road. Even if you scoff them down yourself, there's no need to stress as there is still plenty of walking and cycling to be had to help burn off the calories.

13.30 Finally, it's time to do as the locals do and hop on a bike, from



Bridges



Rijksmuseum

"IF JAMES BOND WERE TO PAY AMSTERDAM A VISIT, HE WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY HEAD FOR VESPER BAR "

one of many rental shops scattered around town. From The Nine Streets, follow narrow roads along the canals of Jordaan, heading slightly south-west past the heady smells of the Bloemenmarkt (flower market) to the Museum Quarter. There, a few hours are necessary to absorb art history at the Rijksmuseum (+31 20 674 7000; www.rijksmuseum.nl), before zoning your attention in on one of the Netherlands' most famous creative minds at the Van Gogh Museum (+31 20 570 5200; www.vangoghmuseum.nl). Keen to continue your artistic tour of the city? The Rijksmuseum Canal Cruise will take you on a 75-minute journey past sights such as Rembrandt's house – where he painted "The Night Watch".

15.00 You've earned some time to rest your cycling legs, so leisurely bike (or cruise if you're so inclined) back to The Dylan for the hotel's famed High Wine experience. Sample four of the

finest drops from the hotel's cellar, accompanied by four savoury snacks such as Icelandic halibut with deep-fried olives and capers, and roasted pheasant with sauerkraut. If you would rather stick to the traditional afternoon concept, a wide selection of teas is also available.

17.30 Head back to the Sofitel for pre-dinner prep at the So Spa. Enjoy an invigorating Sublime Scrub with a red clay body mask and pink pulp cream followed by a toning massage with Fabulous Prickly Pear Oil and toning gel created by legendary model and actress Marisa Berenson. The 90-minute treatment is just long enough to lull you into a state of relaxation before you head out for a long night discovering Amsterdam's enticing nocturnal life.

20.00 A meal garnished with Michelin stars is one of life's finest gourmet experiences, and luckily,

you don't have to travel far to enjoy such an experience in Amsterdam. The Sofitel's on-site restaurant, Bridges (+31 20 555 3560; www.bridgesrestaurant.nl), may be the breakfast buffet stop every morning, but it moonlights as a Michelin-starred restaurant. Diners in the know flock here for the seafood; it's hard to go past chef Bobby Rust's pan-fried halibut or the sea bass in salt crust.

22.00 If James Bond were to pay Amsterdam a visit, he would undoubtedly head for Vesper Bar (www.vesperbar.nl) in Jordaan, which takes on another identity during summer nights, buzzing with an influx of young and fashionable holidaymakers. And if you're going to have the full Bond experience, order the signature Vesper Martini with gin, vodka and Lillet – shaken, not stirred.

23.30 The night is always young in this city, so before you call it quits,

take a short ride – or a long stroll – to Vesper's sister venue, Chapter 21 (+31 20 344 6426; www.chapter21.nl). Its muted interior sets a sophisticated mood in the intimate lounge space. And the best part? If you can afford a lie-in the next morning, then the lively and legendary Supperclub (+31 20 344 6400; www.supperclub.com) awaits just upstairs. ☎

Stay

SOFITEL LEGEND THE GRAND AMSTERDAM
+31 20 555 3111
www.sofitel-legend-thegrand.com

THE DYLAN
+31 20 530 2010
www.dylanamsterdam.com