

# tourist,

your experience, but they don't want to connect with you as human beings. God no. Here's another Dutch saying: "Both visitors and fish stay fresh for three days". Mind you, that's our hospitality guide for those who are *close to us*: nice that you're here, my sister with whom I shared my childhood, but please don't stay at my house for more than a weekend. Imagine how they think of *you*.

I know what you're thinking: but everybody's so nice here! Indeed, visitors are always raving about our English language skills. And yes, I'm proud of the fact that Dutch cinemas don't dub their movies, as they do in more chauvinistic countries like Italy or Turkey, enabling us to learn the English language faster. But I don't think shop keepers, waitresses or hosts immediately start speaking in English to you because they want to welcome you. I think it's the opposite: it's because they want to keep you at bay, like the water that surrounds us. They don't even want to give you a chance to try and speak our language, because they don't want you to stay. They don't encourage you to say simple things like 'Dank je wel' or 'Dag!', while even the Americans shout 'Merci' and 'Bonjour' at their Parisian hosts. They suck up to you, make you feel at home, but only within your designated tourist bubble where you have to spend your money, like a hostage of consumerism.

And that's such a waste. In this tourist bubble of yours, you're raised like an only child who gets all the attention from his parents. It may feel nice, but actually you're not fully appreciated for who you are. You become arrogant, limited and lazy. You start thinking that you own Amsterdam and its people, and the inhabitants hate you for it. When one of the great lessons that travelling can teach is actually: humility. When you try to utter a few words in a strange language or get lost in a new environment, you realize how insignificant you and your whole identity really are. When you talk to a local, you understand that your personal set values is only relative. And that vulnerability makes you a better person.

Take your cycling skills, for example. I know Americans compare something that's easy to 'riding a bicycle', but even things that are easy to learn come with different levels of skill. Like swimming. Or hotdog eating. Anyone can eat a hotdog, but only Joey Chestnut can eat 69 hotdogs in ten minutes. Dutch people basically come cycling out of the uterus at birth, on a tiny baby bike, so we're really good at it. Way better than you, especially in our city.

This would be alright, only if you realized how bad you are and adopted a more humble cycling style. Instead you are in our way, swaying like maniacs. Last summer, a Portugese tourist got so lost on his bike that she ended up on the freeway and had to be contained by the police. Imagine an amateur guitarist, obviously trying to jam along with Prince; that's you when you're cycling in Amsterdam. You'd better watch and learn.

The same goes for walking. Amsterdam may seem like an open-air museum, but there are actual-

ly a lot of subtle rules for where you should walk. In fact, with *every* time from *any* curb, you could be entering an entire new sphere. So be careful. In 2016, the Amsterdam ambulance service warned about a sharp increase in accidents involving tourists, who either stepped in front of speeding local bicycles, or who fell face-down from their own.

And there's *so many* of you. A city with about 800.000 inhabitants, hosts about 15 million visitors each year. Now consider the fact that you're all confined within the city center, and it's no wonder you get hit by our bikes. You're like a zombie wall that we have to get through when we want to reach our destination. The city has recently started to listen to its citizens, and now tries to limit the amount of visitors. But it's too late.

This massive influx of tourists is also pretty ironic. As you may know, our immigration policy has hardened severely over the years, maybe finally showing Holland's true intolerant face. Many asylum seekers got so frustrated with the bureaucratic hurdles they kept having to face that they committed suicide. An Iranian set himself on fire in Dam Square in 2011 – but you won't get to see monument dedicated to him. The public opinion is now harsher than ever when it comes to foreigners, or even fellow citizens with different skin color. But when that xenophobe-voting cheese salesman sees a group of tourists, he smiles broadly and welcomes them: "Hello peoples! Where you from?"

That's the worse part: your superficial presence is preventing those who actually want to build a life here from doing so. There's a hotel or Airbnb apartment on every block, but students are unable to find a place, or they pay ridiculous prices for rooms the size of toilets. Immigrants, who put their life on the line to reach our country, have to stay in out-of-use prisons. Artists and young people who invested in the city, who partly made it the attractive travel destination it is today, are driven to the outskirts.

So there you are, in a consumerist bubble where you can only talk to other tourists or people who work in the industry that serves (or uses) you, in a city so crowded that you can hardly walk on its beautiful curbs without getting pushed off and hit by an angry Amsterdam cyclist. No adventures, no lessons, no authentic experiences, no new friends. You go home unchanged, with some IAmsterdam selfies and a lot less money, like you never even left, and I hate you. Why? Why would you do that?

There are those, including the director of the Rijksmuseum, who think we should attract more sophisticated-

tourists. I don't believe that. All foreigners, when visiting another country, are inherently stupid. You can't help it: you just don't understand anything. I'm that way when I'm abroad: I stare endlessly at subway maps, my mouth open like a complete idiot. So you're easy to nudge, or even to fool: if someone tells you to go somewhere, then that's where you go. Every city gets the tourists it deserves.

I think there's another way. First of all, don't come to Amsterdam. As I said: it's crowded and boring. I wouldn't go here. Go to Lisbon. Go to Brussels. Much more exciting and interesting.

Then, when you do come, you should accept your touristic stupidity. And, now that you're aware of it, don't let anyone take advantage of it. Don't take the easy route because the touristic industry makes you feel at home. You wanted to get away from home, right? So show some humility, and be brave. Turn off Google Maps and just wander around. Learn some basic Dutch and refuse to speak English for the first two minutes of a conversation.

Talk to us. We may be shy at first, but secretly we love to talk and our national history has actually made us a very curious and openminded people. As soon as we're sure you're not a German who wants to kill us, or a flood in human disguise, we'll probably have a nice conversation with you. Maybe we'll even teach you some Dutch swear words. Or some handy bike tricks. And you could teach us some things about *your* strange culture, too. And maybe, just maybe, this will make us all less scared of foreigners.

That's the unfulfilled potential: real interaction, instead of checking off tourist boxes. Because you're a curious person, not just a consumer. Just like me.

Your potential friend,

Rutger  
Lemm

