
The Red Light District

The tourists' point of view

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Index

Introduction p. 3

My experience in the Red Light District p. 4

Amsterdam's Red Light District tour p. 5

Surveys p. 11

Introduction

“Some tourists think Amsterdam is a city of sin, but in truth is a city of freedom. And in freedom, most people find sin”. - John Green

Amsterdam’s Red Light District attracts tourists from all over the world. According to a survey presented in the website iamexpat.nl **66,1%** of those interviewed declared that the main reason for visiting Amsterdam is its cultural history, while **16,5%** choose to visit Amsterdam because of Coffeeshops and soft drugs. Furthermore, also according to the survey, almost half of those interviewed (**46%**) position “exploring the Red Light District” among the most popular activities. It is not new that the Red Light District and its surroundings represent something unique in the entire world, and because of that people are so willing to visit it at least once in life.

I also did not know anything about the Red Light District before coming to Amsterdam as an Erasmus student in August 2016 other than stories. I have always been very curious of this reality so far from that in my country (Italy), so I always asked many questions to people I knew had been there, in order to understand better how such a thing could become an integral part of the city and how it could actually work. My questions concerned mostly the women in the windows. In Italy, we are used to thinking about prostitution in rather negative terms. In my country, as in many other countries, prostitution exists in a legal grey area. Whilst it is strictly speaking legal for individuals to engage in sex for money in private, public solicitation remains illegal¹.

Of course, as one might guess, there are still prostitutes on the streets trying to sell their bodies. One can find them usually late at night on the streets in specific areas. However, all of them are working illegally, maybe under the control of a pimp. According to many surveys that can be found through google, many prostitutes apparently suffer from venereal illnesses, and eventually people know it. However, even with its illegality and perceived health risks, prostitution still continues in Italy and elsewhere. Apparently, it looks like something people cannot do without, just like alcohol, cigarettes, drugs and so on. However, prostitution (if kept under control) is not a danger for people’s health such as alcohol, tobacco and drugs in general.

I always wondered: then, why is it illegal? Even without having the knowledge of what was going on in Amsterdam, I always admired the way this city was able to ‘satisfy’ their citizens’ needs, even profiting from it! I still did not find an answer to my questions concerning why governments could not understand the utility of rendering this kind of market legal and, above all under control.

However, I decided to myself document the impact of this market on Amsterdam’s citizens and on tourists in order to figure out if the way this city deals with prostitution was to be considered as good as it was painted from the outside or if it was just a honey trap, hiding problems and unsolved matters under the surface.

In the following paragraphs, I will present briefly my own experience as a 1-year exchange student in the beautiful city of Amsterdam where I had the possibility to enter this ‘candy land’ and to research its history and collect people’s opinion about it. However, in this essay I will focus on the impact the area had on tourists, focusing on what they expected and what they actually experienced once they arrived here.

¹ "Legge 75/58 20 February 1958 "Abolizione della regolamentazione della prostituzione e lotta contro lo sfruttamento della prostituzione altrui" (detta "Legge Merlin")" (PDF). www.pariopportunita.gov.it/images/stories/documenti_vari/UserFiles/L_20-2-1958_n75.pdf

My experience in the Red Light District

I would like to start with my story. Before coming to the Netherlands, in my mind I painted Amsterdam's Red Light District as an area of total perdition, where one would find many drunk guys staring at the prostitutes the whole time. For sure I expected way more people to be around than just the ones I saw closing deals with the prostitutes and eventually entering their spaces to have sex. I am not saying that I expected the Red Light District to be unsafe, as I have known for a long time that Amsterdam is one of the safest cities in Europe, at least according to statistics found on the internet and according to many people's opinions. But still, I expected it to be vibrant, and it well and truly lived up to this expectation. I certainly did not expect there to be more than one red light district in the city.



Once I arrived there I was kind of shocked. I remember the day I visited the Red Light District for the first time as if it was yesterday. Me and my flatmates had just arrived in town and a few days later we decided to go visit the city center. We ended up in Dam Square with the tram and at some point we started walking towards one of the streets nearby. I was just following the guys, since I felt quite disoriented at the time.

Suddenly, I started to notice the first windows: we had just entered the Red Light District! It is quite funny because apart from the windows with the girls inside it did not feel like a different area of the city (especially 'that' area as I expected it to be) at all. It was almost night, and I did not feel unsafe and nobody ever bothered me, not even for a single moment. Honestly, after all the time spent in this city, I might argue that I felt more safe in Amsterdam's Red Light District than in the city center of my birthtown, Thiene (way smaller compared to Amsterdam). I spent a lot of time looking at how the girls were dressed and I was really intrigued by the way they expressed themselves through the clothing. In my mind, I was wondering: "Oh, this girl looks so punk dressed up like this" or "Oh, this girl looks like one of those bimbos walking on the streets with a dog in their purse". But then I started to wonder: "How far is the person they try to 'project' while working from the person they actually are?"

Some of my friends (who had previously visited the Red Light District) told me that they were surprised that many of the girls were ugly, especially during the day. They warned me not to take any photos or I might get into trouble. Some of my girl friends also noticed that when they were staring at the prostitutes too much, they felt bothered and they could probably pull the curtain closed in order not to be seen anymore by them.

I might agree with the first two points, but not with the last one. Every time I was walking through the RLD girls never seemed bothered by my presence at all. But maybe it is because I have always

tried to behave as polite as possible towards them, because somehow I felt kind of sorry for them. I believed that the vast majority of the prostitutes working behind the windows in the Red Light district are not forced to sell their bodies and actually choose prostitution as a job. However, I still do not think it is an easy decision and nor an easy job. During my time in Amsterdam I have seen many people not just staring at the prostitutes, but also pointing at them, eventually mocking them and often many guys behaving slimyly towards them. I consider prostitution work like many others, worthy of respect as any other job.

I might argue then, that it is rude to make fun of prostitutes just as it is rude to go to watch a movie and start being loud with friends and throwing pop-corn all around. Both are considered rude behavior, but reactions to this behavior are different. If we see somebody being loud at the cinema, we start to think things like: “Oh, that’s so immature!” Or “Oh, did his/her mum not teach him/her how to behave?”. However, when I saw people mocking prostitutes I have never noticed such signs of disapproval by the bystanders.

This was nothing more than my first impressions of the Red Light District.

According to the [Iamsterdam magazine](#), the average stay of tourists in Amsterdam is around 3 to 4 nights for the international tourists. As the RLD represents one of the main attractions I wanted to understand what kind of knowledge about it tourists could actually ‘bring home’ after what is likely to be only a terse visit. **Tours** are an easy and fast way to have an informed glimpse of this area of the city and its history, so I decided to analyze this kind of infotainment for tourists in the next section.

Amsterdam’s Red Light District tour

First of all, I would like to give my personal opinion about the tours of the RLD the city of Amsterdam offers and the quality of the information that is provided. I knew almost nothing about Amsterdam’s RLD before I actually informed myself through historical readings and discussions with people that have some knowledge of the topic.

The city of Amsterdam offers many free tours, presenting the city in general and outlining some facts about the RLD itself as well. However, no free of charge tours of the Red Light District are offered. Most of them cost around 10 euros, but also more expensive ones can be found such as the ones offered from the Prostitution Information Center. These are certainly more expensive (17,5 euros) but presumably more complete.

I first took part in one of the free generic city tours with minimal information about the Red-Light District. Afterwards, I took part in two other tours focused on the Red Light District. The first time I took paid tour in the it was with **Amsterdam Underground**. This company is really peculiar, because it is the only non-profit organization that organizes tours offered by homeless people in Amsterdam, some of whom were involved in illegal activities back in time in the same area. The price is 12,5 euro. The tour was really interesting, since our guide presented his own experience as a drug dealer in the area, that was still quite dangerous in the recent past. The tour focused on this particular aspect of the area as a place of danger, sleaze and sin. The guide himself admitted to having often visited the prostitutes when he worked there as a drug dealer. Besides he offered us a

wide explanation concerning other aspects, not necessarily linked to danger. This was the tour which I found the most interesting and the most worth taking part in.

I decided to take also part in another tour, offered by the company **Sandeman**, which turned out to be one of the most popular among tourists according to a survey I made and that I will present later. Since this company represents the most popular among the majority of those interviewed, I would like to describe accurately this last tour, in order to give an idea to people of what to expect when taking part in such tours. It lasts around 2 hours and the price I paid was 12 euros (14 euros for not-students).

The group was quite omogeneous and there were people from all over the world. I remember there were people from China, USA, France, Italy, India, Taiwan and also one of them was Dutch.

The guide was a canadian guy who I think he was in his 30s. He seemed a nice guy, very outgoing and friendly. Sometimes maybe a little bit inappropriate. For instance, when he explained us the reason why there are no male sex workers, he said “Male sex workers did not and would not have any success since women don’t need to pay for sex, they just need to go to a bar!”.

I had the impression that this tour had more an entertaining aim rather than a informative one.

The guy spoke very fast in order not to waste time but he was always understandable. Also he was encouraging the group to ask him questions if they had any doubts.

1 - The Condomerie



The first stop of our tour was the Condomerie, the famous condom-shop in Amsterdam. The guide explained that the shop was first opened in 1987 and that it was the first condom shop to be opened, which is however just partly true. Indeed, the Condomerie was the first shop dedicated entirely to condoms, but condoms could of course be purchased elsewhere previously. After that, he explained what kind of contraceptive methods were popular back in time, especially referring to condoms. Most of this information, however, I found to be not really relevant to the tour itself. Then he explained that Warmoesstraat (where the Condomerie is) was the financial center of the city in the 16th and 17th centuries.

2 - The Oude Kerk

The guide presented The Old Church as the oldest building still surviving in Amsterdam. At that point he outlined a few aspects of the history of the city. Amsterdam became, indeed, famous worldwide because of fishing and trade. During the so called Golden Age the city of Amsterdam became one of the most important economic and trading centers of Europe and the world.

At this point, he kind of made up a story in which he argued that the reason why this church emerges right in the center of the RLD is closely linked to the selling of indulgences. Indeed, he pointed out that the church was little frequented (only 5% of the inhabitants attended church) but men used to go there just to visit the priest and confess that they had sin or that they were going to sin in the next future (intended as whoring). At this point, the priest would have forgiven the guys’

sins in change of a certain amount of money.

Actually, however, the Oude Kerk had been made way before the Red Light District emerged. Of course eventually men used to buy indulgences, but that was surely not the reason why the old church was built in that specific spot.

Furthermore, he described the church as the best church in Amsterdam for the acoustic, also thanks to its wooden roof.

3 - Belle's statue

Belle is a modern representation of sexworkers as well as the first and only statue celebrating sexworkers all over the world. According to the guide, this feeling of awareness was expressed by the Prostitution Information Center (in the same square as the Old Church). The Prostitution Information Center founded in August 1994 by Mariska Majoor argues that prostitution is no reason for shame in any sense and this organization aims to take care of the prostitution environment by helping the girls, providing information and fighting the stigma of prostitution. Mariska commissioned Els Reijerse in 2007 to make the statue.



The guide then told us that in the Oude Kerk area of the Red Light District there are mostly eastern european girls and that the windows are all relatively new. According to him, the sex trade in the area is of a medium/low level compared to the one in other red light districts in the city such as the one in the area of De Pijp, meaning it is mainly for tourists or those who are less selective in their preferences. He stated that prostitutes 'of a certain level' do not work in the windows, but in clubs or as escorts. Most of my fellow tour goers appeared to accept the guide's explanations just a couple of

them asked him a few question, but not challenging him in any way.

He explained the trade in financial terms: pointing out the advantages of legalized prostitution for the government as well as a description of costs and shifts: the windows are rented by the prostitutes for an 8 hour shift and the price is on average 150 euros per shift. The prices for the sexual performance depend on the 'package' you choose. The cheapest one is the standard one, called 'suck and fuck' (50 euros), and it lasts 15 minutes. Customers who want more and are prepared to pay for it have the option of the 'girlfriend package' for 30 mins (price 150 euros) or the 'porn package' (250 euros).



He also explained the prerequisites a girl must have in order to become a prostitute: being a European citizen, and older than 21 years old (recently augmented from 18 years).

Then they have to apply to the chamber of commerce and wait for their eventual approval.

The end of the explanations in this area regarded a couple of curiosities: the guy stated that the girls always keep close to themselves a cup of pee, in case they are bothered by potential clients. He also pointed out how weird it is that right in the middle of the Red Light District one can find

activities such as Christian Hostels and kindergartens.

Last but not least, he stressed that once we would be in the heart of the Red Light District we were not allowed to take pictures, because the majority of them choose prostitution to achieve a goal in their life that requires a certain amount of money, but still they want their privacy to be protected because it might be that the goal they are trying to achieve, such as education, is not compatible with their job. Could you imagine if people knew that the teacher of their children in the elementary school is an ex-prostitute?

3 - The sex shops

After entering the sex shop², the guide gave us a brief history of the vibrator. Apparently it was invented in the 19th century to ‘cure’ women from hysteria. He said that that women’s supposed ‘madness’ was caused by a lack of regular ‘good sex’. It was actually a medical issue and the church was also involved, as they couldn’t promote more promiscuous behaviour, and thus needed to find an alternative for satisfying a woman’s needs. He continued his vibrator talk by saying that since masturbation and sex between not-married people was a sin, at some point the vibrator was invented and doctors used it to cure their patients.



3 – Café In ‘t Aepjen



I found this building really peculiar. This pub³ is located in one of the last two of Amsterdam’s wooden houses. This was the usual building style before stone houses became a requirement after a big fire in the city. Above the entrance of some houses in the area there is a gablestone. Back in time they had no street addresses and the picture in the gablestone symbolized the activity that was going on in the building. In this specific case, the building was a sugar refinery. It later became a shop and finally a pub. Here Dutch gin was served (*Jenever*).

There are two styles of dutch gin: the young and the old. The guy explained that the old one is a bit more like scotch so he suggested us to go for the young one in case we want to try it. The drink must be sipped and there is a specific way to drink it. Indeed Jenever is usually poured to the rim of the ‘tulip glass’, so you are expected not to pick up the glass but rather bend over and try to get the first sip without touching it.

Some dutch people I met during my stay in Amsterdam also suggested me to drink it accompanied by a glass of beer (that would be called *kopstoot*).

² The Most Vibrating Shop - De Wallen - Warmoestraat 62

³ Address: Zeedijk 1, 1012 AN Amsterdam, NL

The name of the pub in dutch means ‘in the monkey’ and there is a reason for this peculiar name. This pub had always been popular among sailors of the East India Company and apparently they used to take the monkeys they brought from Asia as a payment. It is said that even today it would be accepted to pay with a monkey, although there are no examples of someone who actually tried to do so. According to the guide, this was one of the worst spots in town back in time, you should have been in great troubles to go there and rent a room. Those same rooms are nowadays, according to what the guide said, part of a 5 star hotel. Since the only hotel closeby is the [Hotel NH Collection Amsterdam Barbizon Palace](#), so I guess he was referring to this one.



4 - The heart of the Red Light District



At this point of the tour, we had a walk through the main street of the Red Light District. A bit before that, the guy told us a couple of interesting anecdotes.

Bet Van Beeren, opened in 1927, and is apparently regarded as the first gay bar ever. However, according to him, this is still not 100% sure, but it certainly is among the first ones. He also said that, the interior remained unchanged since then.

This is, however, not completely true. Indeed it looks the same but was thoroughly renovated and for instance separate toilets for men and women were installed. The guy argued also that in some streets, one suddenly sees blue lights in stead of red ones. The guide explained that the blue lights mean that the sexworker is transgendered. However, there is no such a thing which might be called ‘the blue light district’. [For further informations about this topic, I would like to suggest the readers to follow this [link](#). The link will bring you to a blog which I also used to gain some informations for my thesis and it’s written by a prostitute who I also met in person.]

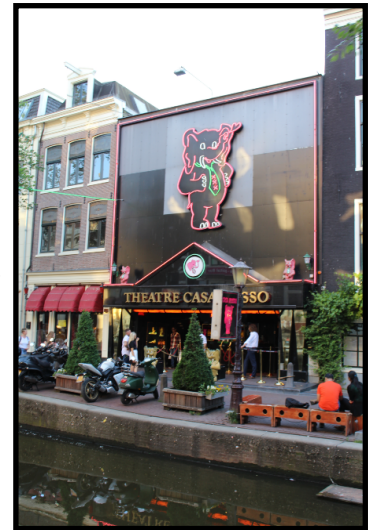
However, as he noted, actually all windows have also blue lights inside at the back of the girls, to balance the contrast with the red light. A couple of theories about why red lights are used to highlight the presence of a sexworkers followed.

The first theory referred to the Bible where the story of Rahab is narrated. She was apparently a prostitute who identified her house with a red rope. The second theory, dates back to the golden days when red lights were left outside the brothels to indicate that they were open.

He then answered one of the most frequently asked questions: are there any guys that work as sexworkers in the Red Light District? It seems like they tried to introduce male sex workers in 2007. In a specific area of the RLD they put some announcement on the walls with the purpose of

recruiting male sexworkers but things did not work very well, especially because the only customers that came were gay guys and there was a small army of photographers in front of the windows. The Sex Palace is one of the few peep shows still running. The guide explained that with the advent of the internet and online porn, many of these places had to shut down. Inside, one can find people having sex or masturbating. He related that this is not these people's full time jobs, they just get paid to do it.

Teatro Casa rosso is instead more of a venue. For 45 euros one gets a couple of drinks and can watch sex shows. Apparently solo acts often involve a banana and the guy explained that the idea was taken from the Bananenbar close by and was then brought into the Casa Rosso.



5 – Amsterdam and the Coffeshops



In the same area, there is also The Bulldog, the first and most Famous coffee shop in Amsterdam. We had a brief discussion about how the light drugs market works. He mentioned of course cannabis and hash, but also truffles. Before coming to Amsterdam I had no idea that also hallucinogenic substances can still be purchased.

6 – Back to the Old Church Square



We were then brought back to the square in front of the Old Church where this art piece lays. In 1993 this piece was found one morning out of the blue and the artist remained unknown.

A discussion about the future Red Light District followed. I found this part very interesting. He explained that the government wants to restrict the Red Light District and tries to turn the windows into bars and restaurants. Less prostitution and more tourism is the motto.

Since he knew I lived close to Venice, he took the city of Venice as an example of how they want to transform Amsterdam. Indeed, Venice is merely a city for tourists. There are almost no locals living there and the city is just full of shops, restaurants and bars for foreigners. I wonder if it could be a good idea in terms of tourism, since one of the main attractions of Amsterdam is, indeed the Red Light District!

At the end of the tour people seemed to have enjoyed the guide's explanation and were happy to give tips to him. Also they stopped by to ask him advices for restaurants and other attractions. Indeed, as he stated at the beginning, he declared himself available to be asked for advices. One of the restaurants he strongly suggested was 'The Bird', a Thai restaurant in Amsterdam's 'Chinatown'. From my point of view, I can say that that was a really good advice, the food there is very good and also the spot is regarded as one of the best Thai restaurant in Amsterdam.

Surveys

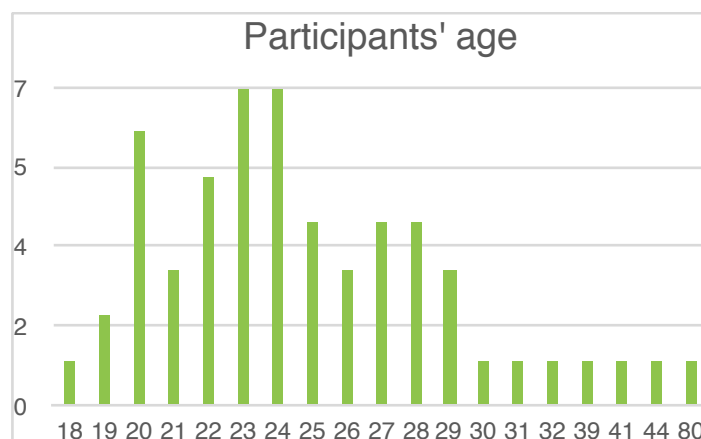
When performing research in the social sciences, often surveys are used to gather data on people's perceptions of a given topic. Thus, in my work, I started with collecting a few opinions.

The first survey is about the experience of taking part in a tour of the Red Light District and since not many people I know actually took part in a tour I decided to post the link to the survey on several facebook groups (such as Expat Republic Amsterdam, Free Stuff Amsterdam etc.). In the second I asked a few people to tell me about their first experience in the Red Light District, in order to understand how such an environment could impact a foreign tourist.

Red Light District Tours – Survey No.1

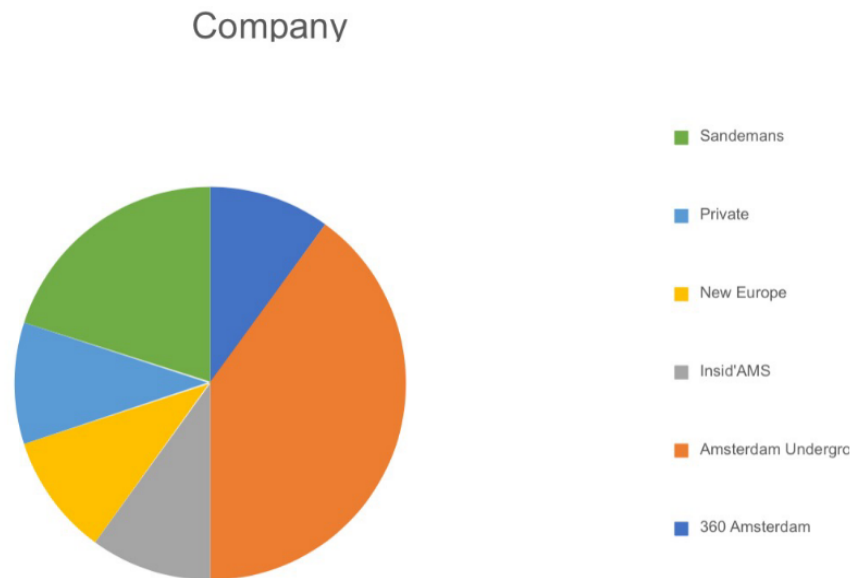
As already stated, I reached these people from facebook groups of people presumably all living in Amsterdam at the moment of the survey (or that, at least, lived in Amsterdam for a certain time). Also I submitted it to some fellow students of mine through the Campus Facebook group. I obtained in total 56 answers.

I first asked the participants their **age** and their **nationality**. The majority of the participants were in their 20s and they were mostly from Europe, most of them from Italy (about 42,89%). Ca. 10% came from Germany and form Spain c.a. 6%. A few of the participants came also from out of Europe like Canada, Bosnia and Liberia. 80,4% were females, while 19,6% were males.



55,80% of those interviewed never participated in any tour and had no desire to, whilst 23,10% never participated but would like to. 21,20% did take part in a tour.

Most of those interviewed took part in **Amsterdam Underground**'s tours (40%) while 20% took part in **Sandeman**'s tours. Other companies were chosen by approximately 10% of people each.



The majority of the participants (54,50%) regarded their **overall experience** as 'excellent'. C.a. 18% of the participants regarded it as 'very good' and the remaining 18% as 'good'. Nobody had a negative opinion about it.

The majority of the participants (64%) thought that the guide had an 'excellent' **knowledge** on the topic and 27% of the interviewed judged it as 'very good'.

18% of the interviewed regarded their knowledge about the topic **before** the tour as poor, while 82% regarded it as average.

According to those interviewed, **after** the tour, 36,4% perceived their knowledge as good, 47,5% thought they had very good knowledge and 18,2% said they had excellent knowledge.

All of the interviewed would suggest other people to take part in the tour. Some of them specified that they would recommend the tour to friends, people with an age range between 25-65.

Furthermore, some of them would recommend the tour to both locals and tourists in order to have a different perspective about the area.

When asked those interviewed about the favourite aspect of the tour, it turned out that many people were enthusiastic about the opportunity of having an entertaining and deeply knowledgeable guide and the total "immersion" in this specific area that they said 'looked like if it was [from outer space.](#)'

Others were more pleased with the information about the ladies in the windows. Last but not least, some also enjoyed the visit to the current drug center (Amsterdam Underground's tour).

Those interviewed in my survey regarded as the least favourite aspects of the tour the business of the area itself for it was hard sometimes to hear the guide. They also did not like visiting the area with people who were not really open-minded. The majority of the people, however, couldn't find any negative aspects of the tour.

First impressions

Now I would like to analyze other foreigners' first impressions and compare them with mine. I collected these opinions through observations made in the area, by interviews and by submitting a simple question to some of my Italian and non-Italian friends that have been visiting Amsterdam. I think that the way people focus on different things is really peculiar, and should be taken into consideration for the tourist market.

By randomly walking in the Red Light District I noticed that mostly young guys were interested in both sex shops and windows. They kind of tried to show-off with their friends while in all-male groups. I could hear them saying things like "Ohh, if my girlfriend was here, she would be so jealous!" Or "Ooh! Look at that chick she's so hot!" And many other sentences of 'appreciation' for the girls' bodies.

Even though tourists knew they couldn't take pictures of the prostitutes, they still took photos of everything else they could take a photo of. I guess it is because it's kind of a cliché and it is something they could use to show-off with their friends back in their home countries. Most of the people love taking pictures on the bridge close to the Old Church.

The majority of the people in the area belonged to this kind of tourists: curious and exaggeratedly interested in some aspects. The majority of them pretended not to be as interested as others (especially girls) but still they had a look at the prostitutes whenever they could. There were also people that seemed not to be interested at all in the prostitutes, but I guess they are mostly locals. Some group of guys actually have the courage to go and talk to the prostitutes but I had the feeling that such guys would have never really done it, especially really young ones. Indeed I saw many of them having conversation with the girls but actually no one going inside. The only time I saw somebody coming out from a window I was in De Pijp, and the guy seemed to be a businessman in his 50s.

Couples also look with interest at the prostitutes/sex workers in the same way and the women usually did not look jealous. Instead many of the young women I have seen looked even more interested than their male partner. When tourists enter the narrow streets where the prostitutes are, one can see their heads moving left and right very fast, I guess because they want to see them all but without giving the impression of observing too much and spending too much time in front of the windows. Even people passing by with the bike or the moped always gave a look! I have noticed many guys having interactions to negotiate, but not so many actually entering the spaces. I have also met a couple (male and female, friends of mine) asking the prostitutes for a ménage-à-trois but they eventually came out. It was indeed really hard to find a girl available to have a threesome and even when they found it, the price was apparently too high for them (200 euros). Especially considering that this girl accepted just to play toys with this girl friend of mine but not to take part in the whole sexual intercourse with the two of them.

To conclude I will give the word to the interviewed's opinion. They are of different nationality, gender and age and all these factors contribute to their different perspectives on the Red Light District.

For me it was very weird to see these women behind the windows. I thought it must be very boring. But at the same time I was wondering if some of them actually like their jobs. What I seriously recognized was that a few women were actually really hot! But as I am a woman, for me it was really interesting to see prostitutes for the first time in my life (as you're not allowed to enter the Red Light Districts in Germany). The atmosphere was not uncomfortable. – **Woman, 27, Germany**

I didn't expect to see the women so out in the open for everyone to see. It was strange to me for prostitution to be so open and public, coming from Canada. But I felt it empowered the women and they were now in control of the process, as opposed to in Canada where the women are forced into dangerous areas to do their job. The openness of the Red light district made the topic of sex less taboo and more acceptable to discuss. It made it easier to address the topic and I felt people in Amsterdam were more comfortable discussing sexual matters. – **Man, 26, Canada**

I saw it during the day, so I did not experience it as a dangerous area. Before coming to Amsterdam I had always imagined it as some sort of Bronx. I felt kind of bad for the few women I saw in the windows, I could never be able to imagine how they actually feel. Especially because there were a lot of tourists staring at them with a certain curiosity. As already said, however, I did not feel uncomfortable at all, but again, I guess it was because I visited it during the day. – **Man, 60, Italy**

At first sight it looks like a normal area, not really different from the rest of the city apart from maybe a couple of signs. I did not know at all that in the middle of the Red Light District there is a church and the fact that so many prostitutes are working really close to a church kind of struck me. I thought it was a really interesting element. Furthermore, I thought that the area had only to do with prostitution but it's actually remarkable also for many other things which I did not expect. – **Man, 21, Italy**

I thought the RLD would have been bigger and women there more "loud" when it comes to marketing themselves. It felt bad seeing that those things in that district are real and women really work there to earn their living. It was shocking to see people (men) walk out the doors. – **Woman, 24, Finland**

My first experience was accidental, I remember wanting to go visit the red light district by not specifically at the time I first did. I was looking for a coffee shop entrance and ended up going down the super thin alley way and walking through the red light district. I did not expect it to be so similar to the rest of the city itself (if it wasn't for the women behind the windows) – **Woman, 20, USA**

The first things I wanted to see was how the ladies were dressed. As we also have paid-sex service in Bulgaria, though not legal, I wanted to compare their clothing. I have to say I was positively impressed because they were clean, their make up was done well and they seemed proud. On the other hand, in Bulgaria you can find those women on the highways and on big roads, but they are dressed in cheap shorts and big overcoats because they can only stay there at night. Moreover, they use fire in huge metal containers to keep warm. My friends and I had fun going around the rooms and it all felt very normal and in place. I found most peculiar the lack of vandalism and feeling of a ghetto, which I expected around this kind of job. However, making it legal and making them pay

taxes like any other job in the Netherlands really raises the standards and it does the country and city only good. – **Man, 19, Bulgaria**

The first impression when visiting the red light district for the first time was shocking. I just didn't expected the girls to be that exposed. I was curious in seeing what they actually would be like towards the potential clients as well as the reactions of the people passing by. – **Woman, 22, Spain**

Most of my friends are impressed when they go there, at first they find it kind of funny, but then most of them want to leave because it feels depressing. It seems very odd the way people look at it as a touristic attraction. Even tourist families with young teenagers visit the Red Light district. Is odd that you have prostitutes around a church and next to kindergartens. Is odd the way women are inside windows, waiting to be chosen and that any person can choose to have sexual relationships with them. Is odd that these woman are so young and decide to have this job, while they should have a lot of other opportunities. – **Woman, 22, Portugal**

I did not expect so many people to casually walk around. Also I found peculiar that the red light district was positioned in the middle of the city center because usually people want to go incognito and is difficult when there are so many people around. Another interesting thing that I noticed is that the girls are actively trying to get you attention by hitting their heels in the windows or staring at you. There is a lot of shady people but police too. – **Man, 24, Greece**

We visited during the day so it wasn't as "dramatic" as we had expected. There was a LOT of tourists, and people smoking and drinking in the afternoon. We didn't find that the actual red district area was that clear to us since we went during the day. A lot of the sex workers were not working during the day, which probably was good since we felt a bit uncomfortable walking past their windows. There was one very narrow street filled with windows and we felt super weird walking through there. RLD also felt a bit unkept in our opinion. For example, the café we visited had a really gross bathroom. I've visited other cafés of the same chain and the dirtyness has only been an issue in their RLD location. In general, RLD felt very touristy but it was fun to see and we had an interesting experience. – **Woman, 23, Finland**

Amazing how it is all regulated. I was impressed by the fact that a kinder garden exists right next to the district. Then I realized that in the NL that is seen as completely normal and not rare or crazy. – **Man, 22, Argentina**