

Manhattan on the Maas

One of the world's most sustainable cities, Rotterdam blends modern design with progressive thinking – mirrored in a bold, boundary-pushing dining scene

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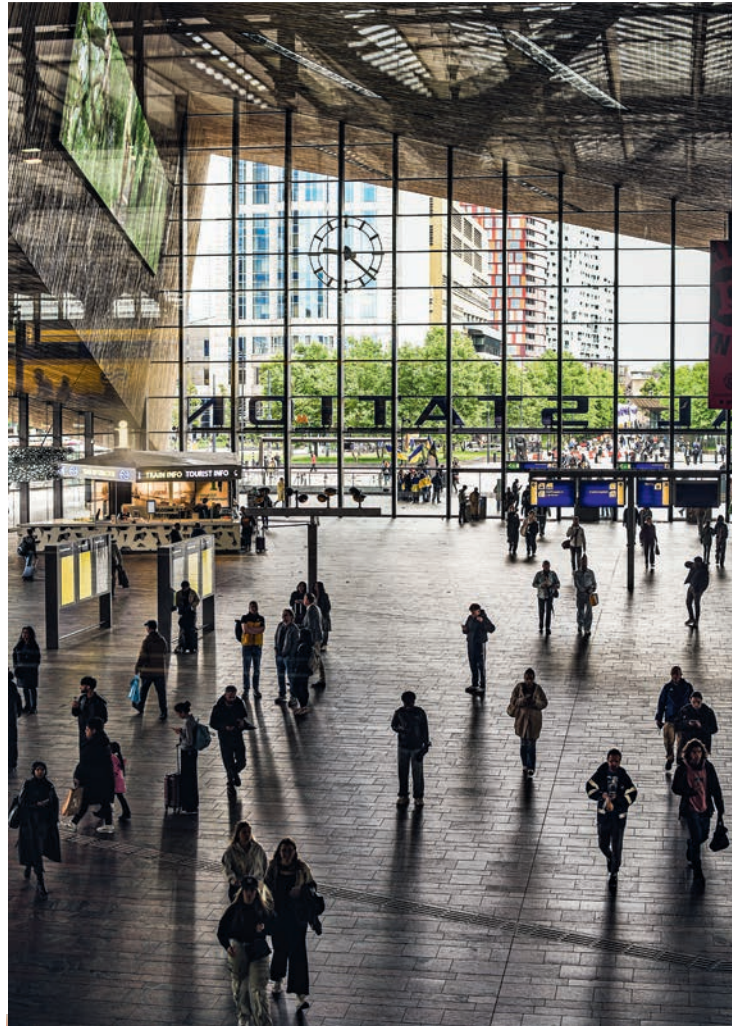
This page, from left: Oude Haven (Old Harbour); three-poached chicken, asparagus, lotus root at Xin. Opposite page: A tempting bakery window in Deliplein plaza



GOURMET TRAVELLER



This page, clockwise from far left: Oscietra caviar, FG Restaurant; a lobster course; Centraal station; FG's red beet with yuzu; pigeon with carrots and shiitake. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: FG's dessert trolley; the dining room; handmade chocolates; white asparagus with seaweed and truffles; Pauluskerk church and shelter; tuna ceviche with pineapple; FG sister restaurant Franky's Grill; François Geurds; a champagne apéritif; lobster with verjus and meringue



Netherlands' second-biggest city has come a long way. Rotterdam emerged from the ashes after being almost burnt to the ground during the heavy aerial bombing of 1940 known as the Rotterdam Blitz. Since, it has embraced the cutting-edge architecture it is now most famous for, and has been dubbed 'the Manhattan on the Maas' due to an impressive skyline. Iconic structures include the forest of tilted yellow cube houses, *kubuswoningen*, and the cable-stayed, asymmetric Erasmus Bridge, crafted in sky-toned steel. This connected Rotterdam's north and south in 1996, announcing the transformation of the Kop van Zuid district, and the abandoned harbour has been turned into a revamped urban centre, dotted with buildings designed by the world's most famous architects. Rotterdam is clearly not content to stay in the shadow of its celebrated party sister, Amsterdam.

Innovation seems to be the mantra of this ambitious city, where change-makers, artists and entrepreneurs enjoy the freedom to experiment. Unsurprisingly, this includes food. Rotterdam's creative population has given the city a unique culinary identity →

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel New York Former headquarters of the Holland America Line, which offered transatlantic crossings until 1971, this is one of the most iconic buildings in Rotterdam. Built in 1901, it oozes old charm, with terrazzo floors, stained glass windows and high ceilings. There are 72 stylish rooms, some boasting wonderful harbourside views of the Kop van Zuid neighbourhood. Doubles from £151. *Koninginnenhoofd 1, +31 10 439 0500, hotelnewyork.com*

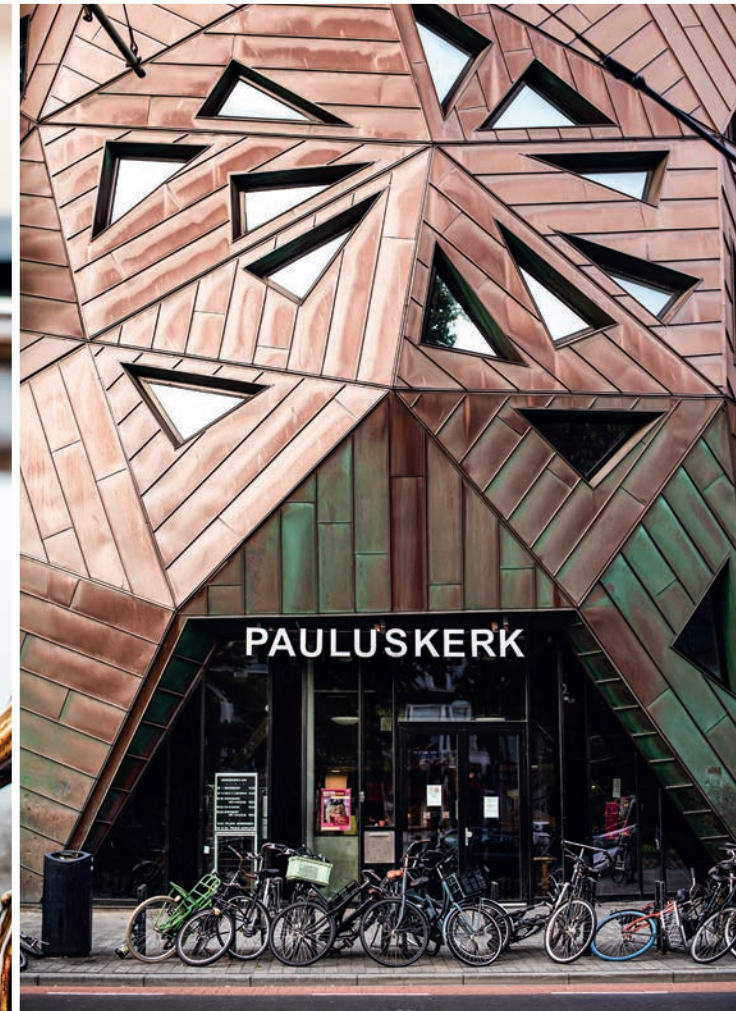
Man Met Bril Koffie Hotel The world's first 'coffee hotel' situated in a quiet residential neighbourhood along the Rotte River, with its own on-site roastery, a brew bar and 20 simple, modern rooms. Guests can order barista-made drinks straight to the bed. Doubles from £120. *Linker Rottekade 12, +31 10 307 2855, manmetbrilkoffie.com*

Nhow Located on the Wilhelmina Pier in the De Rotterdam skyscraper, design-conscious Nhow offers stunning views of the River Maas and the famous Erasmus Bridge. With 287 modern, minimalistic rooms spread across 10 floors, it has a fun, industrial feel, with polished concrete, floor-to-ceiling windows and stripped wood. A vast seventh-floor bar and terrace makes the most of the river vista. Doubles from £105. *Wilhelminakade 137, +31 10 206 7600, nhow-hotels.com*

Wikkelboat Moored in Rijnhaven and Wijnhaven harbours – both vibrant and historic areas – these floating boutique houseboats are solar-powered and sustainably made. Different-sized huts can sleep up to nine, offering well-stocked kitchenettes and private sundecks. Doubles from £330. *Wijnhaven 2, +31 88 888 7000, wikkelboat.nl*



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The city is tackling the challenges of rising seas with innovative architecture that includes temporary reservoirs and floating structures. One of the hottest restaurants, Putaine, is housed in a modular timber building that sits on a platform adaptable to changes in water levels

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Turkish breakfast at O; Rotonde chef Jord Coree; the distinctive cube houses; Markthal; Station Bergweg food hall; bread with miso butter, Putaine; tables in the restaurant; baklava with pistachio ice cream at O; inside Fenix; its futuristic staircase. This page, from left: A glass of bubbly is poured at De Matroos en Het Meisje; pani puri with white asparagus tartare; the restaurant's arched windows overlook a leafy plaza



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that combines the best of Dutch produce with ground-breaking techniques, making Rotterdam's food scene as eclectic as its skyline.

Much of the creative effort is focused around sustainable water management. With over 80 per cent of its urban area below sea level, the delta city – long vulnerable to flooding – could face a dangerously wet future. The city is tackling the challenges of rising seas with innovative architecture that includes temporary reservoirs and floating structures. One of Rotterdam's hottest restaurants, Putaine, is housed in the Floating Office Rotterdam, a modular timber building that sits on a platform adaptable to changes in water levels. Completed in 2021, the building set the tone for the transformation of the Rijnhaven port, a former industrial harbour, which is now becoming a lively residential quarter.

The story of repurposing abandoned port areas is a recurring theme in Rotterdam, once the world's busiest cargo port and to

this day the largest one in Europe, and over the years areas away from the city centre have become attractive hubs. A quick water taxi ride from Putaine takes you further away from the centre, to Merwe-Vierhavens, an old port site on the north bank of the Nieuwe Maas. Once among the largest fruit ports in the world, it eventually became too small for container ships and is undergoing a transformation. A 100-year-old former citrus warehouse, for instance, has been turned into a microbrewery.

'This site used to be a ghost town; we were one of the first ones here,' Denis Van Der Heijden explains over a Limoncello NEIPA, a refreshing pale ale made with leftover lemon peel supplied by craft limoncello makers from The Hague. Stadshaven Brouwerij minimise their own waste by sharing spent grain – the main byproduct of the brewing industry – with their neighbours, a floating microdairy, who repurpose it as a nutritious cattle feed. Any

WHERE TO EAT

De Matroos en Het Meisje With checked tablecloths, deep blue walls and large arched windows overlooking the leafy Deliplein plaza, this relaxed dining room is a perfect spot for a leisurely candlelit dinner. Creative dishes like morel mushrooms stuffed with Dutch prawns are complemented by an excellent wine selection focused on lesser-known French, German and Italian vineyards. Five-course menu €60.

Delistraat 52, +31 6 4238 6976, dematroosenhetsmeisje.nl

FG Restaurant A brainchild of Rotterdam's most celebrated chef, François Geurds, FG has held two Michelin stars since 2013. This trendy urban spot under old railway arches offers a mesmerising experience, from ceramics that have been custom-made to match specific dishes to indulgent oscietra caviar and a dessert trolley filled with inventive pâtisserie and signature bonbons. Five-course tasting menu €170.

Katshoek 37b, +31 10 425 0520, fgrestaurant.nl

O Chef Maksut Aşkar of Istanbul's Michelin-starred Neolokal brings the flavours of Anatolia to the ground floor of the new Fenix art museum. Perfect for a slow Turkish breakfast or a meze lunch, a feast of Turkish cheeses, marinated olives and zesty dips is rounded off with fluffy, sesame-studded *simit* bread from the bakery next door. Meze platter €22.

Paul Nijghkade 5, o-anatoliancafebakery.nl

Putaine Situated inside the world's largest floating sustainable office building, Putaine boasts a sunny terrace and a summer swimming pool. Chef Michael Schook is at the helm, serving seasonal and multi-layered dishes, like kohlrabi dumplings with smoked celeriac and

verveine on both tasting and à la carte menus. Five-course tasting menu €67.

Antoine Platekade 996, +31 6 2851 0545, restaurantputaine.nl

Rotonde Local vegetables, grains, legumes, fruits and mushrooms are prepared over a wood fire in this stylish, green-Michelin-starred restaurant. Chef Jord Coree creates plant-focused delicacies with sorghum, salsify, XO sauce and fermented wild garlic. Four small plates, including dessert, €44.

Goudsesingel 230, +31 6 4939 7269, restaurantrotonde.nl

Tres An intimate, 16-seat culinary journey in Emy Koster and Michael van der Kroft's intriguing basement in Rotterdam's city marina, where a playful tasting menu of 18 'servings' of fermented, aged and concentrated produce is prepared before your eyes in a spectacle of state-of-the-art culinary techniques. Tasting menu €160.

Vijf Werelddelen 75, +31 6 1802 7316, tresrotterdam.com

Xin Raised in Rotterdam by immigrant parents who ran a Chinese restaurant, chef Alexander Wong blends traditional recipes with his own food memories and fine-dining techniques, resulting in a mesmerising fusion of flavours in dishes like *bitterballen* croquettes with beef and fermented black beans, or North Sea crab with rice wine and caviar. From €130.

's-Gravendijkwal 68, xinrotterdam.com

Zeezout Since 1998, this restaurant – now Michelin-starred – in the upmarket Scheepvaartkwartier neighbourhood has been known for using the best the sea has to offer. Chef-owner Patrick 't Hart serves hand-dived scallops, Zealand oysters and salt-crusted sea bream, prepared with subtle finesse. Three courses from €76.

Westerkade 11, +31 10 436 5049, restaurantzeezout.nl



This page, clockwise from top: In the kitchen at Tres; Jord Coree at Rotonde; Floating Farm's Minke van Wingerden; sliced yellowtail with fresh wasabi.

cracked cans from the brewery are used to wash the wheels of Gouda-style cheese that mature on the lowest level of the three-tiered Floating Farm, positioned beneath the water's surface to create a cool space for storage. This self-sufficient powerhouse supplies Rotterdammers with low-food-miles milk, cheese, buttermilk, yoghurt and butter.

The culinary journey continues under the arches of an iconic railway viaduct, Hofbogen, built of reinforced concrete in the early 20th-century. Part of the city's first electric train line that once connected Rotterdam and The Hague, Hofbogen was taken out of service in 2010 and became the longest monument in the Netherlands, winding through the northern part of the city for almost 2km. An easy walk from the futuristic Centraal station, the multicultural district of Rotterdam Noord is slowly filling up with upscale restaurants, microbreweries and trendy boutiques. One of the railway line's old stations, the turn-of-the-century Station Bergweg, now houses a vibrant food hall, where retro clocks and train timetables hang above bottles of natural wines and locally brewed beer, with hip vendors offering everything from Zeeland oysters to creamy Basque cheesecakes.

The top of the viaduct will soon be turned into a climate-adaptive park with a circular water system, while underneath, the old railway arches house boutiques, ateliers and restaurants, including FG by Rotterdam's superstar chef, —————>

DON'T MISS

Fenix This new art museum about migration was opened in May 2025 in a historic harbour warehouse on Rotterdam's quays of departure and arrivals. Visitors are invited to explore stories about love, home, identity and the human desire to seek happiness, through the eyes of international artists from Steve McQueen to Shilpa Gupta. Tickets include access to The Tornado, the futuristic staircase that opens out to a platform that offers panoramic views of Rotterdam's skyline. Entry £13. *Paul Nijghkade 5, +31 10 313 4760, fenix.nl*

Floating Farm The first floating farm in the world is not only an impressive structure moored in the Merwe-Vierhavens old harbour pool, but it is intent on tackling challenges of self-sufficiency, circularity and sustainability. Farm tours and cheese tastings available; book a visit via the website. *Gustoweg 10, floating.farm*

Markthal One of Rotterdam's most emblematic structures, the inverted-U-shaped Markthal comprises coveted glass-walled apartments arcing over a 40m-tall market hall, filled with everything from pintoxos and kebabs through Gouda and *stroomwafels* to Indonesian satays and Japanese curries. Drop by on a Tuesday or Saturday to pair your visit with the lively outdoor market on the Binnenrotte. *DS Jan Scharpstraat 298, markthal.nl*

Stadshaven Brouwerij Take a look behind the scenes and see how Rotterdam's most sustainable beer is brewed, as well as learning about the redevelopment of the Merwe-Vierhavens area, from an abandoned fruit port to an emerging new neighbourhood. Tour and tasting from £10. *Galilleistraat 24, +31 10 307 6838, stadshavenbrouwerij.nl*



This page, clockwise from top left: Lobster know-how at Tres; Emy Koster and Michael van der Kroft; buckwheat crackers with white beans and nasturtium at Rotonde; the dining room; Floating Farm cheeses; Putaine scallop tartlette; Hotel New York; Rotonde; sorghum bread, beans, mizuna; white asparagus with strawberries, Putaine; Bar Bocht



Clockwise from far left: Prawn-stuffed morel mushrooms, De Matroos en Het Meisje; redeveloped docklands of Kop van Zuid; champagne at Xin; dim sum; Fenix. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Alexander Wong; North Sea crab, rice wine, caviar; steamed scallop; the café-lined Oude Haven

FOOD GLOSSARY

Bitterballen A popular deep-fried bar snack of bite-sized beef and gravy croquettes, served with mustard

Hagelslag Chocolate sprinkles, typically served on buttered bread or a slice of toast for breakfast

Oliebollen Fried yeast dough balls

Poffertjes Traditional small, fluffy pancakes served with a generous dusting of icing sugar and a knob of butter

Stroopwafel A classic Dutch cookie made from two thin waffle layers with a caramel filling

Tompouce A pastry made of two layers of puff pastry filled with crème pâtissière and topped with pink icing

François Geurds. An abandoned railway arch may seem like a modest location for a two-Michelin-starred venue, but it fits François' philosophy perfectly: 'I don't care if you arrive in a three-piece suit or a pair of jeans and sneakers; our door is open.' Having cooked with Heston Blumenthal at The Fat Duck, François, originally from Eindhoven, returned to the Netherlands in 2009 and made Rotterdam his gastronomic headquarters. 'It's a city that embraces innovation, always open to change,' he says, leading the way into a stylish dining room filled with designer lamps and swivel chairs. 'Rotterdamers are hard-working and direct; there's no beating around the bush, which makes them easier to work with.' Adjacent to the restaurant is the FoodLab, a flavour laboratory that serves as a culinary playground for François and his team. This is where they work on chocolate and ice cream, develop new pastries, breads and daring dishes that end up on the tasting menu, such as hummus-filled sweet macaroons, piccalilli ice cream exploding with popping candy, or meringue flavoured with lobster bisque.

'We may not have the most exciting food culture in the Netherlands, but our snack culture is next level,' says chef Michael van der Kroft. Together with Emy Koster, he runs Tres, an uber-local, experimental restaurant. 'We seem to love small things, like bitterballen – deep-fried beef balls served with mustard – or poffertjes, small, fluffy pancakes.' Michael turns these traditional comfort bites into modern delicacies, serving a golden pancake with zesty crayfish salad, or creating a savoury version of a popular Dutch pastry, *tompouce*, swapping crème pâtissière and pink icing for lobster tartare and crispy fish skin. This 16-seat restaurant is tucked away in an old port turned into a city marina, in a former entrepot building once used for storing imported goods. Michael and Emy, on the other hand, hardly import anything. 'We're a small but rich country – you'd be surprised how much you can get here,' Michael explains on the way to the vast, dimly lit basement. A locally sourced cornucopia greets you: fish and seafood from the Dutch north and the island of Zeeland, white asparagus and strawberries, a uniquely shaped citrus called Buddha's hand, twisted roots of ginger, wasabi and galangal, all grown within a 20-minute radius – Emy picks up all supplies by car every Thursday.

Michael likes using unripe fruit for acidity, but these haven't always been easy to source. 'When I first rang farmers to enquire about pale, unripe strawberries, several hung up, thinking it was a prank call,' Emy laughs. When an ingredient is unavailable, Michael experiments, making his own miso with local yellow peas instead of soy beans, substituting barley for rice. A self-taught



At Tres restaurant, traditional comfort bites are turned into modern delicacies: a savoury version of a tompouce pastry swaps crème pâtissière and pink icing for lobster tartare and crispy fish skin





Above from left: Cheese wheels mature at under-water level at Floating Farm; a tasting platter; sustainable brewery Stadshaven

chef, Michael works locally, but thinks globally, implementing cooking techniques inspired by his travels, extracting flavour by ageing and fermentation. It's a rare pleasure to watch the spectacle he puts on with two sous-chefs in the cosy bubble of the basement, an enchanting sequence of grilling, mixing, emulsifying and charring. 'Our diners are curious,' Emy says, as she pours a glass of fermented blueberry and thyme juice. Both she and Michael grew up in Rotterdam and it was an easy decision to open their restaurant here. 'In a way, it's more challenging than Amsterdam, as we have fewer tourists. It's a city that plays hard to get,' she says. 'Rotterdamers don't follow trends like Amsterdammers do, but once they like something, they tend to be very loyal.'

Chef Jord Coree from Rotonde, a green-Michelin-starred restaurant that cooks local plants over wood fire, agrees Rotterdam is full of curious diners. 'The city had to be rebuilt after the World War II bombing, so change is in Rotterdam's bloodstream,' he says, charring fluffy sourdough pittas over smouldering wood. About 80

per cent of his menu is vegan, and all of the vegetables and most of the seeds come from farms around Rotterdam.

'Many chefs start with what they want to cook and then try to source the produce. We do it the other way around – we check what we can get, communicating with farmers every week, and then think about what we can do with it,' he says. Jord and his team minimise waste and build flavours through fermenting, pickling, drying and conserving. Kitchen scraps like citrus peel or herb stems are used in cocktails at Bar Bocht next door, where diners can flow seamlessly before or after dinner. Any leftover bread is pulsed into breadcrumbs, asparagus peels are turned into a fragrant stock, excess tomatoes are dried and ground into an umami-rich powder.

Dinner at Rotonde is a vibrant affair, the simple interior filled with weathered classroom chairs, an open kitchen with an open fire taking centre stage. Wooden tables are decorated with bouquets of umbrella-shaped dill flowers, industrial metal shelves hold cookery books and an array of pickles and ferments: large jars of white elderflowers, syrup-covered spruce needles, pickling wild garlic leaves, blackcurrant branches macerating in vinegar. Stylish Rotterdamers, glass of natural wine in hand, are dipping smoky pittas in homemade pine needle oil, inspired by summer evenings and campfire bread. Food is excellent: crunchy buckwheat crackers spread with spiced bean pâté, small potatoes wrapped in wakame and served with a pungent relish, miso paired with redcurrants and hibiscus powder in a sweet-and-savoury pudding.

One of the newest additions to Rotterdam's sleek skyline is Fenix, an art museum focused on migration, with a striking, futuristic staircase crafted from 297 reflective stainless-steel panels. To get there, you cross the Rijnhavenbrug, a pedestrian bridge that connects the skyscraper-filled Wilhelmina Quay with Katendrecht, Rotterdam's former Chinatown. 'Before the bridge was built, this was no-man's land,' says Eva Eekman, local restaurateur and the owner of Putaine. Some 13 years ago, she opened one of the first restaurants in Katendrecht, a charming, wine-focused De Matroos en Het Meisje, 'the sailor and the girl', which alludes to Katendrecht's past as a red light district that attracted homesick seamen. 'My parents were terrified; they didn't think it was safe,' she recalls.

Since then, the peninsula has become one of the most sought-after neighbourhoods in town, with artisanal bakeries, swish wine bars and the stunning museum. Climbing the soft curves of The Tornado – Fenix's emblematic staircase – you reach a windy viewing platform. From here, you can admire the patchwork of tall, modern buildings and historic quays, which have long been a place of departures and arrivals, shaping the city into what it is today. □
Food and Travel travelled with Rotterdam Partners. rotterdam.info

TRAVEL INFORMATION

Rotterdam is the second-biggest city of the Netherlands, located in the Dutch province of South Holland. Situated on the Nieuwe Maas river, accessing the North Sea via the Nieuwe Waterweg, Rotterdam is Europe's largest seaport. Currency is the Euro and the languages are Dutch and Frisian, but English is widely spoken. Time is Central European Standard Time (GMT+1).

GETTING THERE

Eurostar offer daily direct trains to Rotterdam from London St Pancras International. eurostar.com

British Airways fly to Rotterdam from London City Airport. britishairways.com

GETTING AROUND

Public transport is very reliable, with a good underground, tram and bus network. With the Rotterdam City Card, you can travel unlimited on public transport for one, two or three days. In addition, it gives you a 25 per cent or more discount at attractions, museums, tours and restaurants. ret.nl rotterdam.info/en/visit/city-card-rotterdam

By water Waterbuses and watertaxis provide an interesting way to navigate the city. waterbus.nl watertaxirotterdam.nl

RESOURCES

Visit Rotterdam is the official website of Rotterdam Tourist Information, offering extensive information on the city's sites, architecture, museums and more to help you plan your visit. rotterdam.info