

Amazing Cheeses

The Reypenaer Cheese Tasting Class

By Jan Ross

Reypenaer has a
wide variety of
cheese selections



We stepped out of one of the ubiquitous Amsterdam canal boats onto the cobblestone path which ran beside one of the many scenic canals in the city, which is sometimes referred to as “the Venice of the North”. Canals run everywhere throughout this beautiful European city and are one of the main modes of transportation, as well as the home of many charming houseboats. There are several different canal boat routes you can take, each of which goes to a different part of the city and to different tourist destinations within the city. You can easily hop off at, say, Anne Frank’s home, and later hop back on to see another location.

Many-leveled warehouses with big windows which had been converted to homes and apartments overlooked the canal; hundreds of bikes – the transportation of choice in Amsterdam – lined the streets. Everyone in Amsterdam seems to ride a bike and you even see very young children cycling around. Mothers place their babies in especially designed carts to pull behind their bikes and fit their groceries into large baskets.

But we didn’t pay much attention to these uniquely Amsterdam sights because we were on a mission. A cheese-tasting mission. Dutch cheese can be found everywhere in Amsterdam in many different forms and you can pretty much have cheese for every meal of the day if you choose – and it will all be delicious! Cheese is available in all the restaurants in many delectable forms and you can purchase it in any of the large or small markets or even at the open air markets.

Braving the icy November rain and with written directions that included confusing words like Dam/Raadhuisstraat, we headed to the



Cheese can be found everywhere!

Reypenaer Cheese Tasting Rooms. Reypenaer makes some of the most delicious Dutch cheese. They have a 100-year-old warehouse on the Oude Rijn in Woerden, where the cheese matures naturally as it has done for three generations of the family, resulting in a distinctive and complex flavor and aroma. The historic ripening process of the Reypenaer cheeses is unique in the Netherlands and these artisan cheeses are also quite unique. Some of the older cheeses have a strong, salty flavor, while newer cheeses are much milder.

But they also have a lovely little store, tucked away on a side street in the middle of Amsterdam where they sell a variety of cheeses. In a quiet little basement furnished with wooden tables and chairs like a schoolroom, they have cheese tastings with the guidance of an expert cheese taster. Each cheese tasting session lasts approximately one hour and is designed for a maximum of 20 people per tasting. Tasting workshops take place every Wednesday to Sunday throughout the day and the basic introductory workshop costs 7.50 euros per person. There is also an advanced tasting with wine and a connoisseur tasting with wine and port. In addition, they will cater to private groups and parties as well as corporate events.

We shook the rain out of our coats



Bikes are literally everywhere in Amsterdam



Cutting some cheese samples

LEFT Wine with your cheese?

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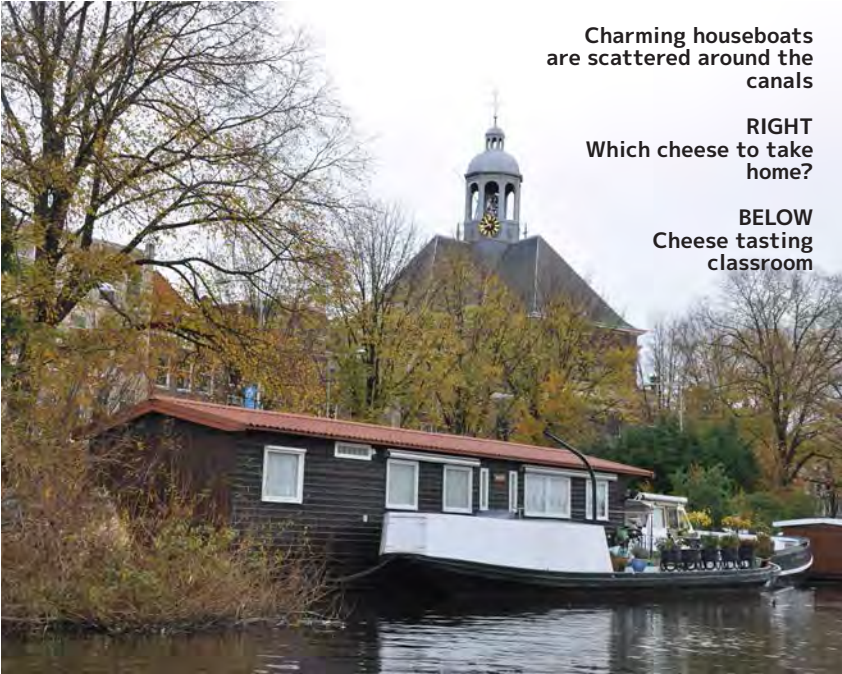
"Tools never go out of fashion."

and settled down at our little table for two with several others who had braved the rain, all for the love of cheese. We watched a video clip about cheese and then we began the sampling. On our small wooden table we had a cutting board with several large chunks of cheese, all with different colors and consistencies. As the cheese taster explained about how the cheese was aged and what we should expect to taste, we cut slices, sampled them and made notes to compare the different experiences, so we could decide which cheeses we preferred. The longer the cheeses had been aged, the more crystals formed, which is why the the older cheeses were more salty and strong-tasting. Some in the class much preferred this stronger flavor but we liked the mild cheese best.

and cheese and a good time was had by the entire group as we devoured all the different types of cheese trying to decide which was our favorite. The expert cheese taster answered questions about the different cheeses and walked around, talking to us about our choices. The intimate tasting experience was a perfect introduction to Dutch cheeses.

Once we had sampled our fill, we all went upstairs to the little shop and chose the cheeses we wanted to purchase and take home. If you are in Amsterdam and you like cheese (and who doesn't, really?) you should do this cheese tasting. It was fun and delicious and we felt like expert cheese gourmards while we were participating. The shop is located a short walk from the Grand Dam, where there are lots of little shops and restaurants where you can grab a bite – in case you didn't have quite enough cheese!

Small glasses of wine were available for those who wanted to pair wine



Charming houseboats are scattered around the canals

RIGHT Which cheese to take home?

BELOW Cheese tasting classroom

