

Lloyd Hotel: Utilitarian Chic in Amsterdam

While researching historic accommodation for a stay in Amsterdam, I came across the **Lloyd Hotel** (Lloydhotel.com) awash with cultural, historical and architectural eccentricities. Reached by taxi or by frequent electric train service, this rather forbidding brown brick structure overlooks a major city waterway slightly outside the tourist core. Originally built a century ago as a six-storey emigrant processing center for poor Europeans who hoped there were better lives in the New World, it later served as a refugee centre for Jewish people during WWII, and as a young offenders prison before falling into disuse. By 1996, the Municipality of Amsterdam was looking for a new idea for the building with a less heavy history.



After years of design creation by four visionary initiators, it re-opened in 2004 as a cultural arts hotel with 117 rooms, an authentic restoration proudly reflecting its chequered history with surprisingly attractive, even playful, elegance. It was an instant international success. With no two rooms alike in design, furnishings, colour scheme or size, what really peaked my curiosity was the one-star to five-star room ratings all under one roof. Now that's quirky! I decided to book a couple of nights to stay in each of these extreme stars.

With no doormen and only a modest entrance I felt more like I was entering a hostel than a famous hotel. The friendly staff at the tiny reception cubicle where I checked in directed me to the top floor where my five-star attic room awaited. Exiting the sixth floor elevator, narrow hallways were decorated with strips of stained dark brown linoleum, surely from the hotel's youth prison days. Assured that mine was one of the most popular rooms in the hotel, I entered a dimly-lit industrial space with roughly-bolted wooden beams, silver pipes and battleship-gray concrete floor. Small dormer windows gave harbour glimpses if I stood on tiptoes and leaned out, but luxury became obvious in the queen-size bed and large bathtub, both prominent in the bedroom. By contrast to the bedroom, the ensuite bathroom with shower, toilet and sink shared postage stamp-sized space.

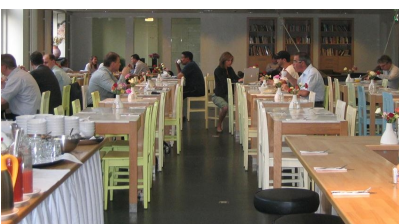
In addition to leisure travellers of all ages, there are many businessmen and women who choose Lloyd Hotel for its comfort, friendliness, health-conscious breakfast buffet and back-to-basics lunch and dinner venue designed with straight back chairs and wooden tables like an institutional canteen. Most repeaters have a favourite room in mind too. Equally significant to the owners is the hotel's reputation as a Cultural Embassy, attracting arts and culture guests who enjoy performances, festivals and exhibits

year round hosted in its dramatic, gallery-like public spaces. Many international artists and musicians stay and perform at the hotel.



When I made my move down several floors to a one-star room, I was startled by the upgrade of the still-narrow hallway to gleaming gray and red pottery tiles covering the floor and half way up the walls. My one-star bedroom was the size of a modest walk-in closet, with a single metal bed and tiny metal table and chair, with just enough floor space for one medium suitcase. However, there was no downgrade of the hotel's amenities, all neatly arranged, including a terry towel bathrobe. A large window gave a panoramic view of Amsterdam's bustling commercial harbour (without having to stand on tiptoe). Though my boot camp-style single bed looked like it could easily be purchased in a garage sale, in fact each bed was custom-made at a cost of thousands of Euros, based on the original design used by the youthful inmates. With a first class mattress, two feather pillows and a duvet topping the bed frame, I have no doubt that I experienced a comfort level none of the bad boys every knew.

A couple of doors down the tiled hallway was my shared bathroom, labelled BADKAMER, for which occupants of three bathroom-less accommodations on my floor each had a key for their exclusive use. With two ceiling-to-knees windows, the immaculately-kept black and white tiled bathroom was four times the size of my one-star room!



So how does this quirky hotel choose a rating for rooms? Entirely by size! No matter how many beds, the view or the floor, it's all about the square footage. Room prices vary from 95 to 450 Euros, including breakfast buffet. Only the one-star rooms have shared bathrooms. Check out different room designs on the Lloyd Hotel website, and book early no matter what time of year you are visiting Amsterdam.

By Alison Gardner

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