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Romance on the Canals

Opulent, sumptuous and decadent, the Toren is a glorious hideaway on the Amsterdam canals, says *Helen Dalley*

Situated in two 17th century Dutch canal houses in the heart of Amsterdam's canal land on Keizersgracht in Westermarcht, the Toren is certainly no shrinking violet with its textured snakeskin print wallpaper, opulent chandeliers and elaborate ceiling frescos. With just 40 rooms in this luxury boutique hotel, you're assured of personalised service – staff take pride in making tailored sightseeing recommendations – it's also an utterly romantic destination, which is further evidenced by the general manager Ellen van Wittmarschen's insistence on fresh flowers in the public areas, and a cosy fireplace to snuggle up to in the lounge.

Bedrooms have the feel of a chic, upscale boudoir, with large, ornate mirrors, lamps sourced from upscale antique shops and plenty of pillows to lean back into. The chiming of bells from adjacent church, Westermarcht, reminds you that you're in one of the city's most historic districts, with the Anne Frank museum just around the corner. Having recently been renovated last November – an audio tour is now offered – this poignant place reveals how the teenager's family escaped from the Nazis through photos, quotes and video testimony of survivors.

Situated on the top floor of the main house, the junior suite offers sweeping views over the canal while there's an option to transform two executive suites into one extra-large suite. I'm in a garden cottage, where lush fabrics in purple, red, black

and gold enliven the room, and there's a separate living area complete with chaise longue. Loved-up couples will appreciate there's space for two in the shower/aromatherapy steam cabin and an in-room double whirlpool spa. There's a sofa and a table outside my door, where I can kick back and gaze up at the city's rooftops and listen to the church's pleasant chimes. To encourage inter-guest mingling, there's a communal space in the middle of the garden identified by its umbrella.

With its plush leather sofas, romantic lighting and a ceiling fresco painted by students from the Leiden university (Rembrandt was once a student there) the lounge is an inviting haven with sumptuous drapes hanging at the hotel's large bay windows. Pull up a stool at the bar and order up a gin & tonic with some Bobby's gin from Amsterdam, which combines juniper and rosehips with cloves, lemongrass and cubeb pepper for a spirit described as, "Dutch courage mixed with Indonesian spice" and is garnished with raspberries, blueberries and mint leaves. The lounge also doubles as a breakfast room, and is the perfect place to indulge in a spot of people watching, with hordes of locals cycling determinedly past as you nibble a miniature pain au chocolat and sip a tea or coffee, both of which are presented in a silver pot so guests can linger over top-ups.

As with any boutique hotel, you may have to venture out for dining options, with the lounge's menu limited to small dishes, platters and canapes. If you're looking for the same heritage chic as the hotel, try De Silverin Speigel for dishes like oxtail with onion marmalade, potato froth, crispy potato crackling and stewed pear with chocolate mousse, curd and stroopwafel ice cream, or Senses restaurant, where



chef Lars Bartelsen's pioneering menu incorporates his own ketchup, liqueur and G&T caviar. Those looking to indulge in spot of retail therapy are also well-placed to do so at the Toren, with a host of delicious designer boutiques on the doorstep such as We Are Labels for shoes and jewellery from brands including Club Manhattan, and The Otherist for upscale prints, jewellery and homeware.

Once you're settled in for the night, light some candles and sink into the Jacuzzi... or head to the bar lounge once more for a nightcap (it's open until 1am) and engage in some chit-chat with the friendly bartenders, or other lone guests propping up the bar. While romance is at the heart of this hotel, the convivial staff ensure singletons feel equally welcome in this blissful bolthole in the heart of Amsterdam's canal district. thetoren.nl

