

Tourists in Amsterdam: 'It's worse when they throw up in a plant pot'

Crowds of drunken visitors and gondolas in the canals test residents' patience

Renate van der Zee Amsterdam

Els Iping caught a group of male tourists ripping out the shrub in front of her house in the centre of Amsterdam last weekend. They were wearing pink dresses and were very drunk. "These kind of things happen all the time," she says, matter of factly. "It's worse when they throw up in your plant boxes, because you can't rinse it away - you have to scoop it out."

Over the past 10 years, Iping, 64, has witnessed her neighbourhood change as the result of an unparalleled growth in the number of visitors. "Every day throngs of tourists pass by my window. The weekend now starts on Thursday afternoon; the screaming and shouting of tourists boozing it up is deafening. And the rubbish they leave behind!"

As she speaks, as though on cue, a group of 30 tourists gathers in front of her window to listen to the lengthy spiel of their tour guide. "The atmosphere in the neighbourhood is very different now," Iping continues. "Shops for local people have been replaced by shops that



A fridge magnet from an Amsterdam tourist shop. Local people complain that other shops have been driven out of business

needs to be done but to be quite honest they are a little late. I miss a sound vision for the city's future. The measures they are taking now are mainly in reaction to residents' complaints."

Walking through the crowded streets of her neighbourhood, she points out all the tourist shops that had once catered to locals. "The chemist, the fishmonger, the hairdresser and the shoe shop have all disappeared, replaced by shops that sell ice cream, souvenirs and cannabis seeds," she says.

"What used to be our local cheese shop is now called the Cheese Experience. The shop assistants speak English and they only sell one type of prepackaged cheese. No sane Amsterdammer would ever buy a piece of cheese there."

Growing tourism has effectively changed neighbourhoods, says Iping, with most landlords opting to rent out their properties to tourism service providers.

"It's become difficult for GPs and physiotherapists to find practice space around here; as a result, facilities for local people are disappearing," she explains. "But compared with other people I still call myself lucky. At least I know my neighbours." One of her friends lives on a street where virtually all the apartments are rented out to tourists.

