

Grand Café Het Paleis, a Dutch café at Schiphol airport



Netherlands

Schiphol Airport has everything but a brothel

By Joanna Roberts

Once the most you could expect from an airport was a depressing bar and a shop selling neck cushions that deflate when you lean on them. Now you can have a Vegas style airport wedding before you hop on the plane.

The 'Say Yes and Go' marriage package is the latest facility for killing time at Schiphol 'Airport City', designed to have every facility a discerning passenger could possibly want all under one roof. It also nicely demonstrates the Dutch penchant for efficiency that helped Amsterdam Airport Schiphol win over 130 awards, including 'Best European Airport' 15 years in a row.

Once upon a time when airports were a necessary evil in the process of travel, Schiphol was renowned for its shops. It was one of the first to recognise that an airport full of people with time on their hands and literally no-

where else to go is a marketer's dream. 30,000 square metres filled with 150 retailers later and the focus has broadened to not only include passengers but the local community who are lured by the longest opening hours in the region.

The airport is now one of the major drivers of the regional economy, employing over 61,000 people to serve 47 million air passengers each year. If you're one of the lucky 40% of people just passing through Schiphol on a connecting flight, other 'while you wait' activities include visiting the spa (which offers two treatments at once to save time), chancing your luck at the casino or taking in a couple of Dutch masters at the Rijksmuseum. Whether the seedier side of city life—such as the infamous red light district—will also be integrated remains to be seen.

With global aeronautical revenues dropping, the idea of airports as more than just airports is really taking off. Hong Kong International—the best in the world according to the Skytrax rating system—is also based on the concept of an Airport City, or 'Acrotropolis'. In addition to the requisite shopping areas, it features Airport Ambassadors: youths, students and

senior citizens who "wearing a welcoming smile and in easily recognizable uniform, are readily at your service". Also don't panic if you forgot to get an x-ray before you left home—it's on offer at the medical centre in Terminal 1.

Schiphol still has a little way to catch up to receive a five star rating from Skytrax (it currently has four). However one area in which it is flying high is signage. Getting from A to B in Schiphol should be a painless experience due to its highly feted black on yellow signage system in utilitarian font (the colours have spread to the UK but not the font—as Alain de Botton notes in 'The Art of Travel', the distinctive font is one of the things that highlights the foreignness of Holland).

If the idea of airports as cities sounds just too exhausting then don't worry—you will soon be able to rest your weary head at the Yotel, an in-airport hotel brought to you (naturally) by the founder of Yo Sushi. Quite honestly, with hotels, museums, casinos, restaurants and shops, who needs a real city? Very soon Schiphol will be offering the option of Say Yes and Stay. ©

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