

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

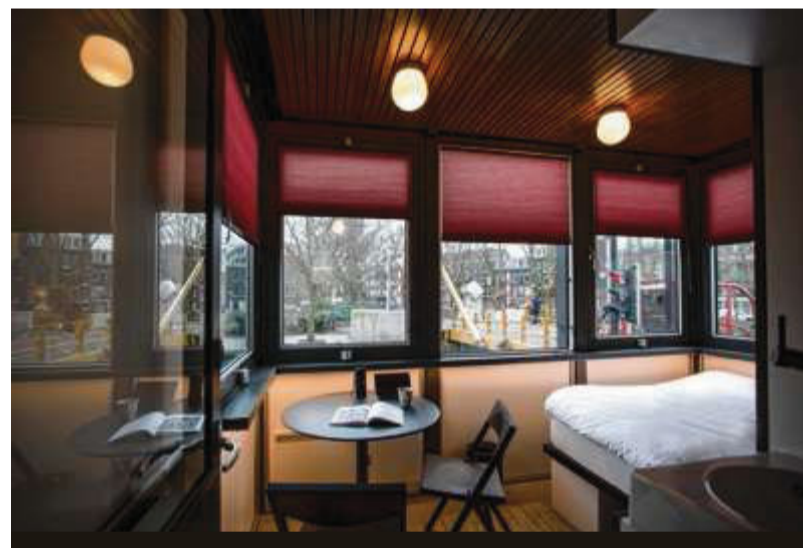
AMSTERDAM'S BRIDGE HOUSES

PHOTOS BY MIRJAM BLEEKER

Above Sweets Hotel Meeuwenplein brug

BY DIANE DANIEL | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Below Sweets Hotel Theopile de Bockbrug



You've heard of staying on houseboats and in canal houses in Amsterdam, but now there's a new and even more unusual type of waterfront lodging — a "bridge house."

Under the name Sweets Hotel, a group of designers and architects is transforming the city's 28 bridge houses into unique "hotel" rooms across the city. The mostly historic structures once served as the work space for bridge operators, but the eventual change to automated technology has been rendering the buildings useless. The oldest house dates

from 1673 and is located on a lock in the middle of the Amstel River, while the most recent is from just 2009 and is on IJburg, a contemporary residential neighborhood built on artificial islands east of the city.

So far 11 of the 28 are ready, with most of the rest of the properties coming on board throughout the year. Because they're so small (one of the most diminutive is 130 square feet) only two people can stay there, and must be age 21 or older.

"We had the idea that we'd be designing 28 rooms, but it's really more like 28 tiny houses," said Suzanne Oxenaar, a cofounder and the artistic director, who also helped launch the design-driven Lloyd Hotel. "We had to deal with electricity, water, and the whole thing."

Before transforming the structures, which the partners are leasing from the city, they gather for what they call a "design picnic." "We all go to the small house and stand inside and think, what is the power of this particular house? Which period is it from? What is still there? All the interior design is contemporary, but we try to translate the image of the house and of its period," Oxenaar said.

One of the next available is the oldest, the adorable Amstelschutsluis, which sits on a concrete lock. Because it's in the middle of the Amstel River, it must be reached by boat — hotel staff will transport



guests by electric boat.

"I think that will be one of the favorites," Oxenaar said. "It's like an island. That's one of the only ones that has a real kitchen, even a professional kitchen."

When asked if it might be a hassle to stay there, in that you have to call for transportation, Oxenaar quickly replied, "When you're there, you don't want to leave."

Prices start at \$187 a night. Stays can be booked online at sweetshotel.amsterdam.

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Sweets Hotel Kattenslootbrug

HERE

WINE FESTIVAL DEBUTS IN MAINE

It makes perfect sense that foodie-friendly Portland, Maine, is launching a weeklong festival devoted to the appreciation of wine. Presented by Wine Wise, a wine education events company, Portland Wine Week (June 18-24) debuts with something for everyone, from casual wine drinkers to serious oenophiles. More than 40 events are taking place throughout town, including six wine dinners, pairing and performance events, tastings, wine education classes and seminars, and more. The week's busy schedule features a Champagne brunch at Lolita; rosé night at Sur Lie; new releases and library wines of Channing Daughters winery at Hugo's; southern Italian white wine and seafood pairing at Scales; an evening of natural wines at Piccolo; meet and greet with an Austrian wine expert at Central Provisions; and much more. Tickets for some events are limited (www.portlandwineweek.me).



MARINA CELEBRATES 50 YEARS IN NANTUCKET

Ahoy mateys! The 240-slip Nantucket Boat Basin celebrates its 50th anniversary with new events and offers. Most notably, the marina is hosting its inaugural Father's Day Fishing Tournament (June 15-16) that kicks off Friday evening with a Captain's welcome reception on Old South Wharf. The next morning, teams compete for the top title in categories such as heaviest fish and most fish caught. On June 9, the annual "Touch-a-Boat Day" invites families to tour the marina and enjoy complimentary snacks. Located two blocks from town, the docks offer a variety of amenities, including complimentary Wi-Fi, kid's fishing equipment, and pre-arrival concierge service (www.nantucketboatbasin.com). You can sleep on the waterfront at The Cottages at Nantucket Boat Basin, 12 pet-friendly waterfront cottages with full kitchens located on three wharves jutting out into Nantucket Harbor. For the 50th anniversary, a \$50 Nantucket Island Resort credit applies to stay, or use at sister restaurants, TOPPER'S at The Wauwinet and Brant Point Grill at the White Elephant, or the White Elephant Spa. Promo code: NBB50. (www.thecottagesnantucket.com)

THERE

HISTORIC HAUTE COUTURE IN MONTREAL

Fashionistas won't want to miss the major exhibition debuting at the McCord Museum in Montreal. Organized by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, "Balenciaga, Master of Couture" celebrates Cristóbal Balenciaga, a fashion designer who represents the pinnacle of haute couture in the 1950s and 1960s. More than 100 garments and hats will be displayed, drawn mainly from the Victoria and Albert Museum's extensive fashion holdings, the largest collection of Balenciaga in the United Kingdom. Sketches, photographs and fabric samples contextualize the garments and patterns, and x-rays, toiles and film are used to reveal details in their construction and making. Balenciaga's legacy will be shown through the display of creations by protégés like Courrèges and Ungaro, who trained and worked at his Paris salon. June 15-Oct. 14 (www.museumccord.qc.ca/en).

GO CARD SAVES CASH ON POPULAR TEXAS ATTRACTIONS

Families heading to Texas for summer vacations may want to take advantage of the flexible San Antonio Explorer Pass. As San Antonio marks its 300th birthday, visitors can enjoy savings of more than 15 percent on sightseeing to more than 15 popular attractions, museums, and tours. Determine your price by choosing three, four, or five-attraction passes; pick one out of four premium venues, and remaining choices from list of 15 further experi-



ences. Includes Go Rio San Antonio River Cruise, Hop-On Hop-Off San Antonio Bus Tour, Buckhorn Saloon & Museum and Texas Ranger Museum, San Antonio Zoo and more. A new premium attraction is iFly Indoor Skydiving, a skydiving simulation that offers the thrill of flying without needing a plane or parachute. Rates from \$92 per adult; \$87 per child, ages 3 to 11. www.smartdestinations.com

EVERYWHERE

GEL REVITALIZES TIRED EYES

Puffy, tired-looking eyes are par for the course on long-haul flights. With that in mind, Malin+Goetz has introduced Revitalizing Eye Gel, its newest and most targeted treatment for the delicate under-eye area. Fast-absorbing and lightweight, the invisible gel brightens with rice and soy peptides while cooling cucumber soothes and helps alleviate puffiness. Diamond powder light reflectors work to im-

prove the look of dark circles (the bane of every traveler), and hydrating marine extracts hold moisture for instant results. The small dispenser easily meets TSA requirements, so you can toss it into a carry-on bag without worry. \$42. (www.malinandgoetz.com)

SNAZZY HI-TECH BEACH TOWELS

Bulky beach towels can take up valuable space when packing for a trip. When traveling to your favorite beach location this summer, lighten your load with BeachTech Towels. Made of super absorbent and lightweight high-tech fabrics, these anti-bacterial, stain-resistant, and fast-drying towels fold into an easy-to-carry packet the size of a small clutch purse. Zippered corner pocket is ideal for storing keys or other personal items. Available in six colorful and stylish designs. \$29.95; Summer Fun 3-pack \$65; towel without zipper pocket \$19.95. (minny.com/collections/beachtech-towel)

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