



## Press release

Date: 20 March 2019

### **The City of Amsterdam bans guided tours along sex workers' windows in the Red Light District**

The city board has taken the decision to ban guided tours along sex workers' windows in the Red Light District. Guided tours in the rest of the city centre – beyond the Red Light District – will still be permitted, but only if tour guides have a special permit and follow all relevant rules. The City will also ban free tours and soliciting visitors to take part in tours. In addition, in the future participants of guided tours will need to pay an additional fee/tourist-tax, the so-called VMR fee.

Deputy mayor Udo Kock (Economic Affairs): "We are banning tours that take visitors along sex workers' windows, not only because we want to prevent overcrowding in the Red Light District, but also because it is not respectful to sex workers. It is outdated to treat sex workers as a tourist attraction."

The ban is currently being formalised, as are the bans on free tours and soliciting participants. The free tours are attracting more visitors, increasing the overall number of tours in the area; actively encouraging people to take part in tours, after which they are asked to pay a contribution retroactively, is often felt to be disruptive.

The maximum number of participants on guided tours will be decreased from 20 to 15. In addition, the City will, in consultation with the industry, introduce an official accreditation for tour guides that can only be gained if the guides fulfil certain requirements. Guides that offer tours in the centre, but beyond the Red Light District, will also need a special permit; this is currently not the case.

All these new measures will come into effect on 1 January 2020, which is when the current permits expire. The details regarding the introduction of the VMR fee for tour-participants, which is currently set at 66 eurocent, and which is already charged to passengers of canal cruises and sightseeing bus tours, will be further defined this spring.

Since the introduction of the current licensing system on 1 April 2018, 1,600 licenses have been granted to tour guides in the Red Light District. Guides need the license to be allowed to give tours in the Red Light District. There are fines for disregarding certain rules, which include not exceeding a maximum number of participants, not stopping at inconvenient points (such as narrow bridges and in front of shops) and not showing disrespect towards sex workers, for example by taking pictures of them.

Evaluation of the current license system showed that while it has reduced the level of disruption caused by groups, it has not eradicated it; residents and local businesses in the Red Light District still experience

disturbances caused by groups of tourists. More than 80 per cent of people working in the sex industry that were interviewed in the course of the evaluation said the tours had a negative effect on their business. In addition, sex workers still experience severe problems with participants of guided tours, such as rude behaviour and unwanted photographs.

Each week, more than 1,000 guided tour groups pass through Oudekerksplein in the Red Light District. At peak times – between 11:00 and 12:00 and between 19:00 and 20:00 – there are 28 groups per hour on average on the square. Lately businesses and residents that live nearby the Red Light District have also experienced disturbances caused by guided tours in their neighbourhoods.

Since the introduction of the current permit system on 1 April 2018, numerous tour guides have been approached and reminded of the rules and 12 guides have been fined, including six guides working for a company offering pub crawls. Fines for guides illegally offering tours or breaking the rules after already having received a warning are 190 Euro. In addition, guides that break the rules three times have their license temporarily revoked. If the guide ignores the rules again after the return of their licence, the licence is permanently revoked. If two guides working for the same company are fined, the company is liable to pay a penalty of 2,500 Euro.

From 1 April 2019 tours in the Red Light District may already not take place after 19:00. They are currently permitted until 23:00.

**Note to editors/not for publication**

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