

Who we are and why we do it

I sit here writing this from Amsterdam, all the way from the Netherlands. While friends and colleagues swelter in February heat, I'm rugged up against the elements of sleet, snow, rain and temperatures that freeze canals. Putting the finishing touches to a magazine over 16 thousand kilometers away is not hard with high speed Internet and a laptop, but the time difference can be a bit tricky for instant communication.

Walking around this compact and picturesque city is delightful even in face numbing temperatures. I can't recall from previous visits there being so many dogs in the city centre but there are plenty. From little Westies, Cavies, Beagles, happy Labs and lots of mutts. They're a happy and well-socialized lot, trotting alongside their owners, riding on trams and trains or sitting politely under tables in cafes and bars. They're also a hardy lot too, with most not even wearing a raincoat or jacket to ward off the cold and chill. That's surprising, since back home, it only needs to drop below 15 degrees or have light rain for some Sydney-siders to slap a coat on their dog.

But it's the cats that seem to have the upper paw in Amsterdam. Most bars, restaurants and cafes have a resident cat lounging on the furniture or sitting by a window watching the world go by. Many cats I've seen are well fed, which is a nice way of saying that most are too big—or perhaps you could argue they're wearing an 'extra coat'. They're generous enough to climb onto your lap, without invitation, to help warm you up as you drink coffee or a stronger libation.

The Kattenkabinet or Cat Cabinet is a 17th Century 'Golden Bend' house that is a museum devoted to the feline presence in art. It's dedicated to the memory of a frisky tomcat called John Pierpont (J.P.) Morgan (1966-1983), the companion and buddy of the museum's founder, Bob Meijer. The collection includes Dutch and French artworks including Rembrandt, Toulouse-Lautrec and features Picasso's Le Chat. J.P. Morgan lived a privileged lifestyle amongst fine art and the opulent interior of this beautiful house on a stunning canal.

Amsterdam is full of museums and wherever you look, art seems to permeate Dutch culture. A trip to the Rijksmuseum is as cultural and it is enlightening to the role dogs and cats have held as companions, defenders and mousers through history. Many fine paintings from the 16th and 17th centuries feature cats and dogs in the foreground or background in depictions of everyday life.

And as satisfying as it is to know that a magazine can be completed from the other side of the globe with my portable technology, there seems to be something missing—my own Anipals close by. When working on deadlines or pulling long hours pouring through layouts, they're the ones that remind me that taking a break to play, eat or nap is essential to a happy mind, body and spirit.

As much as I love traveling and experiencing the sights, sounds and culture of new or exotic destinations and favourite cities, I always enjoy coming back home. Home is where my heart is because it has the things that make my heart sing—my friends, my family and my pets.

Lisa Treen – Urban Animal Editor



Scooter. (Photo by Animax)

So you want to be the Master of Ceremonies, Scooter?

Scooter's demanding a raise. We think he's barking mad. If we don't oblige, he's threatening to run off and join the circus!

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