

Giving back

On a rainy autumn day, we gather under the Rijnhaven metro station. The sky turns darker shades of grey as the sun slowly sets. The chilly temperature contrasts vividly with the cosy programme that De Rotterdam Tours has in store for us.

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Today, we will enjoy a Tuk Tuk tour and visit some unique companies in Rotterdam, each with their own social story. Fortunately, we are comfortable and dry inside the Tuk Tuk, so the drizzle does not bother us. The electric Tuk Tuk goes faster than expected, and behind the wheel, driver Luc maneuvers effortlessly through the busy traffic of the evening rush hour. The Tuk Tuk is decorated with small festive lights, and there are fluffy blankets inside to keep us warm.

Our first stop is Rotterdamsche Confituur. Unlike jam, whole pieces of fruit are used in confituur (confiture). Rotterdamsche Confituur makes their products extra special by adding ingredients such as pine nuts, green tea, cardamom and other spices. Also noteworthy is that their confiture is made by young people with a disability or a distance to the labour market. While learning to make traditional products, they also acquire useful skills for their future. After a delicious tasting provided by the proud employees, we choose a jar of our favourite flavour and continue to our next destination.

Heading from Afrikaanderwijk to Katendrecht, we stop at the Rijnhaven Bridge where we are surprised with delicious hot chocolate from the Doorstroom-Tuk. 'Doorstromen' means to flow through. The project offers a stopover for young

people attending special education, before they move on to a permanent job. Because coffee connects, coffee machines have been specially made for the Tuk Tuks, and a professional barista training course has been developed in collaboration with DAM Netherlands. The students are trained to become a barista in two years – an initiative that increases their chances in the labour market, and more importantly, boosts their self-esteem and helps them reintegrate into society. The Tuk Tuks are available for companies, events and conferences.

At the 'De Kaap' (former sailor neighbourhood), we visit Bakkerswerkplaats, a social project focussing on labour participation. Everyone who wants to work with his or her hands is welcome to join. Their philosophy is simple but brilliant: if you work with your hands and see the result, you will be happy, especially when you meet the people who buy your products. All employees receive hands-on training at Bakkerswerkplaats and can begin immediately, which can be a little tricky as the recipes require attention to detail. This special project has secured employment for 25 people in the last five years – an admirable achievement. Bakkerswerkplaats offers freshly baked cookies and a variety of traditionally baked breads. They even bake bread for a Michelin-starred restaurant!

Along the way we pass the handsome new liquor store Propola, where we enjoy tasting a variety of special drinks. The attractive display

boasts countless drinks that are distilled in Rotterdam. Propola's enthusiastic owners know the story behind each bottle and are happy to share it. It's definitely a great place to score a special gift!

We cross the Erasmus Bridge with our Tuk Tuk and admire Rotterdam's beautifully illuminated skyline. Our tour culminates with a strong espresso at Heilige Boontjes. 'Heilig Boontje' means 'holy bean' and is a nickname for someone who seems holy, but is definitely not. The project trains former criminal youths as baristas at an old police station, thus preparing them to return to society. The project gives them a second chance, as Rodney, co-founder of Heilige Boontjes, explains: "People sometimes make mistakes, but there is often a story behind their actions." He knows the boys and girls from the street and the challenges they have faced in their lives. Heilige Boontjes offers them a safe environment where they are made to feel important and can work towards change. They are given the opportunity to learn a trade and legally earn enough money to survive.

After this special tour we return home with a full stomach and a full heart, happy to see there are so many special projects in Rotterdam where people get the (second) chance they so much deserve.

De Rotterdam Tuk Tuk Tours
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