

# A GREAT DAY TO BE A QUEEN

**CHRIS GEARY reports from Amsterdam's Queens Day celebrations...**

FROM the moment you step off the train station into Central Square, the colour of Orange and smell of Cannabis is evident; yes, it's Amsterdam. There are two great times to visit this amazing city: **Gay Pride** takes place the first weekend of August (where it clashes with Brighton Pride), and **Queensday** on the 30th April (unless it's a Sunday, when it's moved to the 29th). Queensday is officially the national celebration of the birthday of the Queen Mother, but in reality it's really just an excuse to party hard. The celebrations take place all over the Netherlands, but have a special atmosphere in the big cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam or The Hague where nearly everyone dresses in orange, the colour of the Dutch royal family. In Amsterdam, Queensday is by far the cities largest open-air festival, with an estimated 750,000 people coming into the city from all over Europe. The day is declared a "free market" day, which means all street trade can be

done without paying taxes (no VAT) and you can buy just about any old crap imaginable from the masses of street traders that set up stalls, from single shoes to broken irons. Yet it's fun to have a browse - we found some fab drag outfits! Festivities began the night before, and while street parties are no longer allowed that night, the bars were packed. Friday night was until now known for its big **Salvation** ([www.salvation-london.com](http://www.salvation-london.com)) party at Escape nightclub, however, the club has stopped its monthly parties in Amsterdam and now holds special one-off events (the next one is its 5th birthday on Friday 5th June). The biggest party on the Friday night was the opening night of **Fresh**, a new bi-monthly party from the producers of occasional club event Rapido. It was held at the Sugar Factory nightclub, a fantastic little venue, only holding around 400 people but was sold out well in advance and heaving with Amsterdam's finest shirt lifters.

Saturday was the official Queens Day and partying began as soon as you got up and ventured outside. Cars and trams are banned within the entire canal belt of the city and locals begin spreading their goods on the sidewalks, bridges and curbs, and the streets begin filling with people. Between 10am and 8pm, most of the city is a sea of people shopping, drinking, dancing, and just wandering around to gawk at the spectacle. Every street, canal and square in the city can surprise, amuse, delight, and occasionally shock you with its activities!

The **Homomonument** resembled a gay pride festival with community-orientated performers interspersed with top dance sets set in the surroundings of the **Westerkerk** and the gay monument. The **Amstel** area was the place to experience some traditional Dutch schmaltz with drag numbers mixed in with a few good dance tunes as well - a must for anyone wishing to get a taste of high Dutch camp.

The **Reguliersdwaerstraat**, normally a two minute walk from the Amstel, was so congested that it took us almost 40 minutes to reach the stage area. The best dance music in town echoed between the buildings of this narrow street and while the high energy attracted a good many straight people who were passing through, the trendy go-go boys and very affectionate same-sex couples maintained a definite gay tone.

After dancing in the sunshine and drinking far too much it was time to freshen up and get ready for the big evening party: the **Orange Ball** ([www.RiedijkProductions.com](http://www.RiedijkProductions.com)). It was a fantastic set-up run by promoter Robert Riedijk, the man behind White Party Amsterdam (on Gay Pride Day, August) and White Party London (May 27th).

Sunday featured the biggest and most spectacular party of the weekend, the **Rapido** ([www.ClubRapido.com](http://www.ClubRapido.com)) t-dance with local and international DJ talent such as Davis Knapp, Giangi Cappai, Fabio White and Doug Gray. It's a fairly new event at the multi levelled Paradiso nightclub, holding well over 1,600 sweaty, beautiful muscle boys (think Salvation in London on a bigger, grander scale). People have started calling it "the best gay party in Europe" and in my opinion, it really was with stunning production, music and a crowd to rival most major international events. The next date for Rapido is Sunday August 6th (Amsterdam Pride Weekend).





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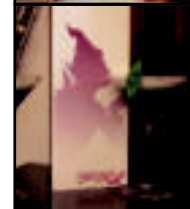


AWARD WINNING CLASSIC THAI CUISINE



LIFE can be full of surprises and this was most certainly the case when my dining companion and I arrived outside Yum Yum (translates as Spice Spice). Behind the frontage of a magnificent Georgian facade is a Thai restaurant that offers something a little bit special. Sleek design obviously influenced by a Feng Shui exponent, the use of natural woods, country of origin props (the upturned hand of friendship and masks) and indigenous plants set the scene for a remarkable eating experience. Starters of Soft Shell Crab and Fresh Spring Roll (exquisite minted vegetables wrapped in fine rice paper) prepared our taste buds for main courses of Lamb Mossiman Curry and Sea Bass with lime, garlic and chillies. I was very keen to try Yum Yum's version of a very traditional fish dish - some Thai restaurants I have eaten in get it so wrong, but Yum Yum got it very right with the fish presented on the plate with such care and artistry that it could have still been swimming in the sea. Accompanied by Khao Soy noodles and rice the balance between the fish and meat tipped the scale perfectly. Our wine of choice was the Gewurz Traminer, a hock from Alzace (£22 a bottle) which prepared our palates for the puddings: Chocolate Fondant and Lemon Grass Creme Brulee completed a well crafted meal. Refraining from coffee, I wanted to cherish all the fantastic flavours in my mouth as long as possible.

> Yum Yum is at 183 - 187 Stoke Newington High Street, N16. Opening times: 12 noon-3pm, then 6-11pm weekdays. Saturday and Sunday from 12 noon-11.30pm. Lunch specials and home delivery are available. Reservations 020 7254 6751. Home delivery 020 7241 5678. [www.yumyum.co.uk](http://www.yumyum.co.uk)



Pics by M Martinais

