



Pawn has tried three different short-term rentals for this summer visit to Europe. In London it was Hoxton Street, a bustling center of the mod arts community in the vibrant East End. Amsterdam brought me to a wee little rear studio, behind a canal house, across the canal from le Hermitage. In Brussels it is an 18th floor perch in Brx Nord. Hoxton was a keeper of a place; I'd come back there in a heartbeat. Friends live close by, and favourite galleries are just a short stroll along the Regent's canal, itself a beckoning attraction. The flat itself was a treat, spacious and well appointed, with so many accoutrement just downstairs: grocers, ATMs, chicken shack, kabobs, pizza (traditional or cheap), shops and galleries, etc.

The only shortcoming of this location is the relative distance from the tube. While **Pawn** prefers buses — they allow one to see the city — they often cannot compare to the speed of the underground. The nearest tube stop, Old Street, is a 12 minute walk, and is poorly connected (Northern Line, City branch), so transfers are often mandatory. The nearest buses are a 3 minute walk to Kingsland Road, and between the several lines serving the two stops, will get you most anywhere.

The "Bungalow Studio" in Amsterdam is another matter. First off, it is very very small, about 3m x 7m L shape, with the long part of the L about 1.5m wide. A single bed filled most of that space. A quite nice bathroom is tacked onto the end, itself about 1.5m x 3m. This used to be part of a carriage works, or garage, which one supposes occupied the courtyard of the century-old building above.

The entire *raison d'Être* for this little room is **location**. Le Hermitage, which **Pawn** so enjoyed last year is literally across the canal from the front door. Around the corner in one direction is the National Opera House, home of the National Opera & Ballet companies. Around the other corner is the Jewish Museum. A short walk takes one to the bustling Dam Square and the streets of posh shops and tourist gawking. Multiple tram and bus lines compliment the Metro station a block away.

But the dwelling itself was not just small, but cramped. There is a total of about 2 square

metres of floor space in the whole place, with a small couch, table & chair, two smallish stools and a telly table joining the bed & kitchenette cabinet. Just about enough space to put down one's suitcase and still be able to walk around it all. There was no power near the table, which necessitated precarious draping of cords to enable the writing of blogs, and don't even get me started on the damn toilet seat!

Not going back there, no matter how good the **location** is.

Now to Brussels. The trip here was easy and direct — a quick two-stop, 3 minute, ride on the Amsterdam Metro (53) to Centraal Station, and then an NS Intercity direct to Bruxelles Nord. The walk from the station to the apartment tower was a brisk 10 minutes, but not bad, even with luggage.

This studio is lovely in comparison to the cramped hovel of Amsterdam. Roughly 6m x 8m, the space is easily divided into an airy salon, small kitchenette, and sleeping alcove, with sheer drapery available to separate these. The entire south wall is dominated by windows, and a door to the balcony beyond. "Windows on Brussels" is how the owner promotes it, and that couldn't be more accurate. Situated in the northern quarter of the city, with southern exposure, the entire city is there before you!

This is a place to which I would gladly return.

Then there's the crowing of the roosters and the braying of the goats. Yes, 18 storeys below is a nice city park, complete with petting zoo. Dawn to dusk the roosters announce themselves to the world, competing with the band shell in the civic square a few blocks away. A succession of rock and roll bands occupy the latter, urging one to press closed the door and windows, which do quite effectively block out the noise. Whatever is happening in that civic square, it was capped last night with a midnight fireworks display, a treat from the 18th floor. Oh, and this account wouldn't be complete without mentioning the length of the days. This trip started on the Solstice, and even now, nearly two weeks later, sunrise is 5:30 and sunset is 22:00. That's a 16:30 hour day, versus 14:20 back home. It's a little unnerving to have sunlight streaming into the flat at 10:00 at night! But the night is dark, quite dark. The evenings can be blinding.