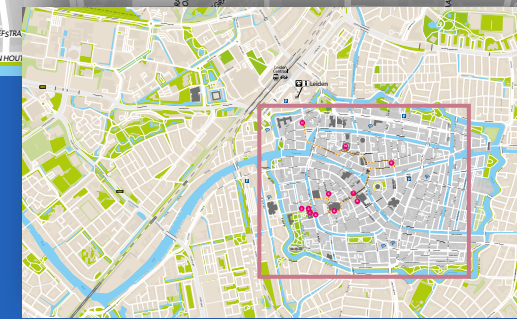


Leiden City World Walk: Traces of Italy in Leiden

From Dante to Galileo, from gelato to the Giro d'Italia: how many things can a city in South-Holland and Italy have in common? Discover the Italian influences that enrich this city, with this Leiden City World Walk. Let yourself be taken along the most remarkable spots that reveal a unique connection to the *Bel Paese*.



1. The University - Academy Building
2. The 'Sweat Room'
3. The botanical garden
4. Elsevier printing house
5. The Latin School
6. St Peter's Church
7. Giro d'Italia in Leiden through Breestraat
8. Giuseppe Giusto Scaligero
9. Lombardsteeg
10. The Boerhaave Museum
11. La Venezia, Italian ice cream

Research & Text: *Carmen Van den Bergh, Raffaele Di Filippo and Martina De Poli / Leiden University*

Translation: *Chiara Mazzei, Elettra Danese and Isabella Fiedor*

Photography: *Pim Rusch and Marit Brun*

This Leiden City World Walk is brought to you by



1 The University - Academy Building

Leiden University, founded in 1575, is the oldest in the Netherlands. William I of Orange established it after the European model - pioneered by the University of Bologna. Today, the university counts around 34,000 students and has hosted many renowned scholars and research projects, including Italian scientists such as the Nobel Prize winner Enrico Fermi. The vibrant academic environment of Leiden and the guidance of physicist Paul Ehrenfest were fundamental for Fermi: here he found the necessary support to develop his research. One of the faculties of the university is that of the Humanities, in which 'Italian language and culture' is also taught. Here, students can specialise and become an Italy expert through courses in language, linguistics, history, literature, culture, and art.



2 The 'Sweat Room'

Within the university we find the so-called 'Sweat Room' (Zweetkamertje). The 'Sweat Room' was the place where traditionally the PhD candidates, after defending their dissertation, waited for the final decision of the Doctoral Committee. It is precisely due to the nervousness of the moment - hence the nickname of the room - that the students started doodling on its walls. Today, these walls display thousands of signatures, including those of the current monarchs of the Netherlands and other notable figures such as Sir Winston Churchill and Nelson Mandela. The room is adorned with charcoal drawings made in 1865 by Victor de Stuers. The artist decided to inscribe over the entrance door the famous quote by Dante Alighieri "LASCIASTE ogni SPERANZA voi che entrate" (Abandon all hope, ye who enter here) as a way to wish - with a touch of irony - good luck to the soon-to-be Doctors.

3 The botanical garden

The city's botanical garden (Hortus botanicus) was established by the end of the 16th century, following the model of the botanical gardens in Salerno and Padua. Its purpose was to provide a place for medical students of the university to study medicinal herbs. The garden is renowned for hosting the first tulip bulb of the Netherlands, which was planted by its first director: Carolus Clusius. Clusius corresponded extensively with the Florentine botanist Matteo Caccini, who served as an agent of the Medici court in the Netherlands at that time. This connection between Leiden and the Florentine court persisted. The botanical garden therefore was one of the sites visited by Cosimo III, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, during his trip to Leiden in the 17th century.



4 Elsevier printing house

Once located at the Rapenburg canal, the historic Elsevier printing house in Leiden used to print books that were prohibited in other parts of Europe. Among these books stands out Galileo Galilei's famous treatise "Discourses and Mathematical Demonstrations Relating to Two New Science", first published in 1638. At a time when the Church rejected Galileo's geocentric theory, the city of Leiden supported him by distributing his work. Interestingly, in Italian journalistic lingo, the term "elzeviro" ('literary article') stems from this Belgian/Dutch family name. (It refers to a third-page article that used to be printed in the distinctive Dutch typeface used by the Elsevier printing house.)



5 The Latin School

In the surroundings of the university, a true “Latin Quarter” was formed. The scholars of that time used Latin as their common language. The young artist Rembrandt van Rijn received his formal education at the Latin School (Latijnse School), in which he learned grammar, logic and painting fundamentals. Rembrandt’s distinctive technique, chiaroscuro, appears to be an echo from Italy. In fact, experts strongly believe that he may have been influenced either by his teacher Jacob van Swanenburg, who had spent a considerable amount of time in Italy, or by the works of Dutch artists known as the “Utrecht Caravaggism” group, who took inspiration from the style of Michelangelo Merisi, known as Caravaggio. The architecture of the entrance gate to the Latin school is in Tuscan style. Nearby, you can even have your face scanned to obtain a personal portrait in Rembrandt’s style.



6 St Peter’s Church

The Pieterskerk (St. Peter’s Church) (1121) has been one of the central landmarks of city life in Leiden for over 900 years. The city of Leiden, known as ‘Sleutelstad’ (Key City), owes its symbol to the patron saint of this church, Saint Peter: just like on the flag of Vatican City, it features the two crossed keys of Saint Peter. Inside the church are the tombs of notable figures in Leiden. In addition to the tombs of the family of Rembrandt van Rijn, there are other notable individuals buried here.

The Van Mieris family of painters was active in Florence and Rome. Composer Cornelius Schuyt, whose works were influenced by the Italian Renaissance, is also laid to rest here. Finally, the Italian architect Giovanni Giudici played a significant role in the church’s restoration in the early 19th century.



7 Giro d’Italia in Leiden through Breestraat

On Breestraat, one of the main streets in the city center, hundreds of bicycles pass by daily. On May 10, 2010, professional cyclists rode through the street during the third stage of the 93rd edition of the Giro d’Italia, which ran from Amsterdam to Middelburg via Leiden. Traditionally the Giro starts and finishes in Milan, with few exceptions. One notable exception is that the race has started in the Netherlands three times, highlighting the Italian-Dutch connection.



8 Giuseppe Giusto Scaligero

Giuseppe Giusto Scaligero, in whose honor this commemorative plaque is placed on the house he once lived in, was a French humanist of Italian descent. In 1593, he moved to Leiden after receiving an invitation to work at Leiden University. As an exceptional scholar and polyglot, Scaligero became a prominent figure within the academic community, and his books and manuscripts still form the core of the university library’s collection. The library also houses a dedicated institute named in his honor, which has been promoting research in select collections since 2000. Scaligero owes his surname to his father, the Italian humanist and scientist Giulio Bordon, who falsely claimed to be descended from the noble Veronese family Della Scala. Among his achievements, Bordon discovered the chemical element platinum.



9 Lombardsteeg

The 'Lombardi Alley' (Lombardsteeg) is named after the numerous merchants and especially the rich Italian bankers who, from the 13th century onwards, settled permanently in the Netherlands. Specifically, this small street in the city centre was the place where the very first 'Lombardi' of the city carried out their profession. In any case, these clever businessmen, despite the name they were known by, derived from the Lombards, they did not originate from the modern-day region of Lombardia, but mainly from Piemonte, Liguria, and Toscana. If today we use words such as bank, conto, giro, ... in Dutch, we owe this to the Lombardi.



10 The Boerhaave Museum

The Boerhaave Museum (Rijksmuseum Boerhaave), located near the ruins of the Gothic church dedicated to Madonna (Vrouwekerk), provides a family-friendly journey into the world of sciences. It features a reconstructed anatomical theatre inspired by the one in Padova. The museum is dedicated to Herman Boerhaave, a scientist and researcher who also served as a professor of medicine at Leiden University. Boerhaave is regarded as the founder of clinical teaching and modern hospital practices. Throughout his career, Boerhaave successfully demonstrated the relationship between symptoms and 'lesions' (damage to human tissue) and worked to correct misconceptions about human body functions. His intellectual honesty inspired the character of Dr. Bainer, one of the main characters in the comedy "Il medico olandese" by Venetian playwright Carlo Goldoni, which takes place in Leiden.



11 La Venezia, italian ice cream

At number 11 on Steenstraat the Olivo family's ice cream shop 'La Venezia' is located. Giovanni Olivo, originally from Belluno, arrived in the Netherlands in 1933 and started working as an ice-cream maker in Oegstgeest and Leiden. Over the years, he established 'La Venezia'. In the 1950s and 1960s, many Italian ice cream maker families moved to the Netherlands to work during the summer and returned to Italy in the winter. Another notable ice cream family in Leiden was the Belfi family, also from Belluno. In 2003 Luigi Belfi's ice cream cart, used in the early 20th century, was donated to the Museum De Lakenhal in Leiden.

*Leiden City World Walk by LeidenGlobal and
Leiden University – Faculty of Humanities.*