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TRAVEL

Happy Hooker runs The Happy House in Amsterdam

Xaveria Hollander is 'favourite raunchy' B&B host

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"So, did you have sex?" That's the first question out of Xaveria Hollander's experienced mouth after my night of bicycling around Amsterdam with a male companion. I have returned to The Happy House, Hollander's B&B, to find the madame busy in her office, working on last-minute arrangements for her trip to Spain to attend to her most recent theatre production. We end up discussing female ejaculation a.k.a. "squirting."



"So, you are a squirter!," Hollander exclaims. "I have a good friend who is famous for her squirting." Talking with Hollander is refreshingly uninhibited, making one feel at ease to talk about sex or why the hell Amsterdam would be building a subway. It seems as though I can talk with her about anything.

Hollander is not your typical B&B proprietor. The Happy Hooker turned into the happy B&B booker 10 years ago, when she started her B&B business, The Happy House in Amsterdam. Staying with Hollander is like visiting your favourite, raunchy aunt, with whom you can talk dirty about sex or politics, and listen to a variety of music — there is an entire wall full of CDs in the living room — and read dirty magazines.

Anything goes at Hollander's house parties (drag kings and queens, burlesque-types and others), which unfortunately I missed by one day. While visiting, I meet John, the producer of the film, *The Happy Hooker*, who invites me to sit with him in the dining room to have a puff and chill.

Hollander is indeed connected, has many followers, fans and friends, and sometimes can hook you up on a hot evening date. She holds workshops on sex and relationships, and her space is available for dinners, parties and intimate screenings. The house is a grand brick villa surrounded by roadside trees, and in back, a lush garden frames an outdoor dining area. Inside, the rooms are colourful with bright red trim and yellow walls. On the second floor of the main house is a small, unassuming bathroom with a shower (no bathtub), which is shared between three bedrooms. This is Europe, where bathrooms are not spa-size as they are in North America. I am staying in The Goliath room in a comfortable and worn bed.

The Happy House is gay-friendly, pet-friendly and handicapped-friendly with auto-chair access to the second floor. Hollander will even be cordial to the most prudish if they dare to step through the front door.

Those younger than 40 likely don't know Hollander's infamous persona from the 1970s. Read *The Happy Hooker* to be shocked, bemused and entertained by the sexually charged woman who made her living in the sex industry, working her way up the sex-fueled ladder as one of the world's top madams. A decade ago, she changed careers (well, sort of, as Hollander suggests there is no difference — running B&Bs is not unlike running a New York warehouse). Now, at 66, she is an author, entrepreneur, legend and performer. This woman is a powerhouse with much to share.

She claims she has no lingering issues except for her weight. Growing older is tough, even for a diva. When asked about cosmetic surgery, she is succinct and upfront. "Never had my tits or nose done nor put botox anywhere. I once tried liposuction, but I gained that weight back within months." She did, however, correct her "Jewish heavy eyelids" 15 years ago to look better for the camera.

Even though she had sworn against marriage, she took the plunge with her friend and lover, Philip, three years ago. It beats growing older alone, she says, and marrying a man with whom she shares common bonds seemed the thing to do. The couple now has an uber-full schedule, travelling around and running two B&Bs, one in Amsterdam and the other in Marbella, Spain. Hollander produces theatre productions and burlesque shows in both European countries, and they often visit friends in New York.

In Amsterdam, Philip will pick you up from the airport with a hug for \$43, which is far nicer than taking a taxi. For an additional \$94 per person, Philip cooks dinner — one night, he whipped up Indonesian curried chicken, a fresh salad and a fresh fruit bowl. It was tasty and fresh, as was the conversation. Philip generously lent me a bicycle, hooking a red flashing light to my back pocket for my nighttime journey around Amsterdam.

Most things in Amsterdam are easily accessed from Hollander's house by bicycle or tram. The B&B is two blocks from the #5 Tram Line, Beethovenstraat, with upscale boutiques and cafés. From there, I could easily journey to the Rijksmuseum and the Van Gogh Museum. On Beethovenstraat, I pick up a pair of kick-ass grey cowboy boots, taste local cheese in a tiny cheese shop and have an excellent coffee at Cafe Fidelity on the corner.

The Happy House is not a five-star hotel, but for \$145 to \$180, it can be both relaxing and stimulating. This is not the place to stay if you prefer fancy amenities and fluffy down duvets. To me, it's one-star accommodation, with Hollander being the star. It's ultimately a place where you can shed your inhibitions about sex and life in general, really relax and be quite satisfied about being in Amsterdam for either a short or extended time while keeping company with a living legend and her entourage.