

Rotterdam Festivals

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stad leven!

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Annual Report Rotterdam Festivals

Reflecting on 2025, Rotterdam Festivals is very pleased with what has been achieved. We brought the city to life with festival moments that will be remembered. Meanwhile we took important steps for the entire sector thanks to our role as knowledge experts in the field. We made a clear statement aimed at local politics in Rotterdam. Winning the award ‘2025 IFEA World Festival & Event City’ means that Rotterdam is now officially recognised as the best festival city in the world.

Festivals

More than ever before, Rotterdam showed what it stands for as festival city in 2025. The events calendar was brimming with creativity, authenticity, courage and content. Both with rough edges and with intimate, touching moments. Take the *Bombing of Poems*, for example, bringing an impressive message of beauty and connectedness on 14 May 2025. A helicopter dropped thousands of poems over the Binnenrotte in the city centre of Rotterdam. To commemorate the bombing of Rotterdam in 1940, now 85 years ago.

The edition of the Rotterdam Rooftop Days was one to be remembered. Visitors could enjoy the giant slide from the roof of the Maritime Museum down to Leuvehaven. What's more, existing festivals offered new elements such as unexpected locations or by adding fascinating collaborations. Unfortunately, festivals organisers faced increasing costs and increasing regulatory pressure again in 2025. Rotterdam Festivals supported them with advice and practical assistance during these uncertain times.

More free events on the south bank

In the spring of 2025 Rotterdam Festivals invited festival organisations to submit proposals for free festivals on the south bank. Thanks to the success of *Zomer op Zuid* (summer on the south bank) and the end of Metropolis there was room for new initiatives. We are proud that we were able to organise more free festivals in 2025. The anniversary edition of North Sea Round Town, the Harvest Party *Oogstfeest* including the parade, ALL CAPS Super Sunday and the Urban Gospel Festival all took place on the south bank of Rotterdam and largely had free admission.

International network

Many organisations and cities abroad are interested in how we organise festivals and events in Rotterdam. And vice versa, we are often inspired by other cities around the world. We are proactive in finding each other, creating a network, exchanging knowledge and we join forces when dealing with complex issues.

What we focus on

Throughout 2025, Rotterdam Festivals focused on three main points that we find important for the festival sector: sustainability, accessibility and new creators.

Sustainability

The project Sustainable Deal (*Duurzame Deal*) was completed in 2025. Over the last four years, excellent milestones and valuable results were achieved. All the knowledge we acquired has been collected and made available for the entire sector on a website. Now that Sustainable Deal has come to an end, Rotterdam Festivals will continue to encourage the sector to innovate and invest in sustainability. For example, by inviting them to work with the reusable cup (*Uitagenda beker*) that was developed with Cup Exchange in 2025. This cup can be used at festivals and events to replace single use plastic cups. This sustainable cup was launched during Keti Koti and was used at 10 festivals in 2025.

Accessibility

In November 2025 Rotterdam Festivals launched the annual programme Accessibility (*Jaarprogramma Toegankelijkheid*) which was developed in close collaboration with Buro Nuvo. This programme is about accessibility to all visitors, to be inclusive

for everyone with disabilities. The launch was attended by 25 ambitious festival organisers. Thirteen of them decided to create a frontrunners group who will proactively work towards improving the accessibility of festivals in Rotterdam. We will support them in this process with Buro Nuvo on our side.

New creators

The third focus in 2025 was to meet new creators who come up with exciting and innovative ideas for the city of Rotterdam. We have actively looked for and reached out to them. We are now in touch with 45 new creators, and we are working on an annual programme for new makers which will be implemented in 2026.

Culture participation, research & expertise

For many years now, Rotterdam Festivals has studied the needs and wishes of various culture target audiences in the city. Because we are continuously conducting research, we are right at the heart of the cultural landscape allowing us to spot trends. We shared our Cultural Segmentation Model with the rest of the Netherlands, and we made a flying start with the Audience & Impact Dashboard.

Audience surveys

Rotterdam Festivals encourages the cultural sector to work with a data-informed approach. For many years we have been helping cultural organisations to collect this data. Every cultural organisation in Rotterdam receives an annual report from us with data about the audience they reached that year. This was also the case in 2025. We offered a clearer understanding of the audience reached to more than 100 cultural organisations because we carry out this audience analysis every year. In addition, we conduct research once every two years into the audience reached by all cultural organisations in Rotterdam collectively. On 9 December we presented the key findings of the most recent study to the sector.

Managing for impact

We encourage cultural organisations to work with an impact-driven approach. This requires a different way of thinking and acting. We support organisations in this process, by having meetings with them and offering practical tools and resources.

We made a flying start with the Audience & Impact Dashboard. Cultural organisations who use this tool can measure the impact of their work themselves. A pilot study was conducted

in 2024, and we received additional financial support from the city council of Rotterdam in 2025 to really make a start. The sector turned out to be very interested in this tool. Throughout the year we guided cultural institutions on using an impact-driven approach. At the end of 2025 as many as 133 cultural organisations in Rotterdam had created an account on the dashboard and 43 studies had been conducted.

Rotterdam Festivals also conducted research itself – about how the festivals in Rotterdam are rated by visitors. The respondents gave an average score of 8.2 out of 10 when asked about their level of appreciation. This provided a very useful insight into how highly visitors rate festivals and events. As many as 68% of the respondents stated that they felt more connected to Rotterdam by visiting a festival.

Sharing knowledge

We share the data that we collect with our surveys so the entire cultural sector in Rotterdam can use this information. Our reports and presentations (online and in person) are open to everyone. We also travel throughout the Netherlands to give workshops about the Cultural Segmentation Model to all kinds of organisations who want to learn how to work with it or who want to know more about the Audience & Impact Dashboard.

Marketing & Communication

The Marketing & Communication department of Rotterdam Festivals focuses on various target audiences. We aim to inform and inspire the festival organisers and cultural institutions in the city. We provide advice to the municipality of Rotterdam. And we promote the wide range of cultural events and festivals to all residents and visitors (by using *Uitagenda*).

Informing and inspiring the sector

In 2025 we have further improved our role as knowledge expert. Numerous cultural organisations joined our online or live meetings, workshops and networking events. We also shared knowledge by making videos, animations, blogs and articles (both online and in print).

IFEA Award

In September we received great news: Rotterdam had been selected by IFEA (the International Festivals and Events Association) as the winner of the 2025 IFEA World Festival & Event City! We shared this recognition for our work with many. Both in the city of

Rotterdam by presenting the award to the mayor of Rotterdam in the presence of many festival organisers and the press. And beyond Rotterdam by proactively approaching the national and international press. This resulted in excellent free publicity, so Rotterdam is now even more widely known as the best festival city in the world.

A manifesto for the local elections

In the run up to the local elections in Rotterdam in March 2026, Rotterdam Festivals has drawn up a manifesto as a starting point for election debates and coalition negotiations. This document is clearly asking local politics to recognise the value of festivals for the city and to be in favour of a lively city.

Uitagenda

In 2025 we studied the user experience of uitagendarotterdam.nl on mobile phones. Some points for improvement were found and addressed immediately. We also conducted a survey among readers of the *Uitagenda Rotterdam* magazine. The launch of the newly restyled magazine took place at the beginning of the year, when the design and the sections were adjusted slightly. Our followers and impact on social media grew in 2025. Particularly on TikTok, going from 7,000 to 12,000 followers, and on Instagram, reaching 40,000 followers. We generated more visitors to *Uitagenda* by organising strategic promotional campaigns. This allowed us to tell an even larger audience about the range of culture on offer. We managed to structurally improve the online search behaviour with the children's campaign 'Vlieg eropuit!'. We aimed at 75,000 clicks to the online children's calendar (*Kidsagenda*), but we achieved more than 152,500 in the end.

The *Uitagenda Rotterdam Podium* (Stage) at Rotterdam Central railway station also contributed to our visibility and brand name recognition. Travellers were treated to a taster of cultural events in the large hall of the central railway station. One of the highlights was a pop-up performance by Armin van Buuren to promote A State of Trance.

About the organisation

Employees

Director of Rotterdam Festivals, Renske Satijn, was on sick leave at the beginning of 2025. She returned to work in September. Until that time, she was replaced by Frans Vreeke, who was appointed as interim director in June 2024. Two new employees were added

to the team for Culture Participation, Research & Expertise in 2025 to meet the increasing demand due to our collaboration with Digital Heritage Netherlands (*Digitaal Erfgoed Nederland DEN*).

Finance

The year 2025 was the first year of the new Cultural Plan Period 2025-2028. From this year onwards, Rotterdam Festivals is the account holder of more festivals compared to previous years. This means that our turnover has increased significantly. The additional, one-off subsidies for the National Firework Show and the *Nationale Taptoe* made the turnover even higher. The fact that the city council decided to release the budget that had been reserved to save Metropolis and to use it for festivals with free admission in the south of Rotterdam meant another increase of our budget of € 86,000 in 2025.

Overall, the financial results show a small loss (of about € 8,000). This was partly due to the sick leave of Renske Satijn when she was replaced by an interim director.



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