

The Netherlands Bike & Boat: Springtime in Holland

Bike Vacation Only

Nobody does springtime in Holland quite like VBT. We've planned for you an itinerary of cycling past windmills and polder villages followed by relaxing on your group's private Dutch barge. As your cozy ship floats along Holland's network of canals, you'll cycle easy paths past massive fields of blossoms, stopping to learn about the history of tulips, daffodils, and other bulbs at the unique garden museum Hortus Bulborum. Visit the family home of farmers in Gouda—and learn about the famous cheese-making traditions there. During this exceptional springtime bicycling vacation, your experienced VBT trip leaders and dedicated barge crew will open the doors to Holland's most celebrated season.

Cultural Highlights

- Learn how historic windmills work and how they are used to reclaim land called "polders."
- View rare and historic flower bulbs at the flower garden museum, Hortus Bulborum.
- Explore the living catalogue of spring flowers at Keukenhof Gardens.
- Explore Holland's "Green Heart," a rural and peaceful nature zone.

What to Expect

This tour is rated Easy, and both hybrids and E-bikes are offered. Riding is primarily on paved roads and paths with very few hills, although wind may increase the difficulty factor since there is often little or no shelter. Cyclists may stay on the barge on windy days if they wish, but they will miss out on some of the incredible scenery, which is best viewed while pedaling. Support vehicle assistance is not available on the bike path sections of the ride.

Tour Duration: 8 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 15-25 miles

Average Cycling Time: 2-4 hours

Group size: 24 max

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

March 48°/37°, April 53°/40°

Average Rainfall (in.)

March 3.5, April 1.5

DAY 1: Your VBT Vacation Begins / Embark Barge / Cruise to Zaandam / Zaandam Warm-Up Ride

You are responsible for making your way to our barge, arriving between 12:30 and 1:00 p.m. Embarkation is not permitted before this time, as the crew will be preparing for your arrival. If you are delayed, you must contact the barge as soon as possible to arrange an alternative meeting point, as we will set sail promptly at 2:00 p.m.

The barge will be moored at Oosterdok, near the entrance to the NEMO Museum, located behind Amsterdam's Centraal Station. Please refer to the information in your Vacation Preparation Handbook for the barge's contact number.

Upon arrival at the docks, meet the barge crew and your VBT trip leaders, who will welcome you aboard with light refreshments. Shortly after, we'll set sail from Amsterdam, cruising along the Noordhollandsch Kanaal—the waterway connecting Amsterdam to the North Sea—passing the striking EYE Film Museum.

After a short sail, we'll dock in Zaandam, where you'll disembark for a scenic warm-up ride along the River Zaan and through a quiet rural residential area.

This evening, join the group on board for a welcome dinner.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Zaandam Warm-Up Loop — 16 km (10 miles)

What to Expect:

The route offers a glimpse into Zaandam's industrial heritage, taking you along a mix of streets, bike lanes, and bike paths. Continue to a quaint neighborhood of traditional houses, where you'll have a great opportunity to practice navigating using the Dutch Bike Network System signs.

Cumulative Distance Range: 16 km (10 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2: Cruise to Zaanse Schans / Cycle to De Rijp / Visit Schermerhorn Windmill Museum / Alkmaar

This morning, as you enjoy breakfast, your barge sails to Zaanse Schans. Upon arrival, visit a working sawmill powered entirely by wind before cycling along the River Zaan and the Knollendammer Canal toward Alkmaar, a town famed for its historic cheese trade. Along the way, you'll pass picturesque lakes and water-management systems before reaching the beautiful town of De Rijp.

Once there, you'll understand why the renowned water engineer Jan Adriaanszoon Leeghwater called it "the finest village in Holland." Centuries of history are still visible in De Rijp's wooden facades, its charming lock, and its beautiful 17th-century church, complete with stunning stained-glass windows dating to 1655.

From De Rijp, cycle to the Nic Jonk Museum and Sculpture Garden, where you'll enjoy a picnic lunch. After lunch, your next stop is the former windmill complex of the Schermer Polder, home to the Schermerhorn Windmill Museum. The museum offers full access from top to bottom, allowing you to observe the fascinating mechanics of a working mill in an authentic setting.

Continue cycling across this scenic, flat landscape to Alkmaar. While the town is historically known for its cheese trade, there is much more to discover. As you explore Alkmaar's Old Town this evening, you'll be captivated by its well-preserved 17th-century buildings and charming, narrow canals.

Tonight, dine on your own at one of Alkmaar's many local restaurants before returning to the barge.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Zaanse Schans to Lunch — 20 km (12 miles)

Afternoon: Lunch to Alkmaar — 21 km (13 miles) OR Lunch to Alkmaar via Bergen PLUS — 43 km (27 miles)

What to Expect:

After a guided visit to the Het Jonge Schaep sawmill, your route continues along the Dutch windmill theme. Depart Zaanse Schans and ride along the Zaan River, stopping at Spijkerboor to take the local ferry across the Noordhollands Canal. From there, cycle to the charming town of De Rijp. As you continue, you'll begin to see the iconic windmills that make the Netherlands famous. Stop at the Nic Jonk

Museum for a picnic lunch. After lunch, you may choose to take a shuttle to Alkmaar. Those who continue cycling will pause in Schermermolen to explore the inner workings of a traditional windmill. Afterward, enjoy a scenic ride through open countryside all the way to the final destination. For those opting for the extra-long route, the journey includes a loop through the picturesque town of Bergen before arriving at your barge in Alkmaar.

Cumulative Distance Range: 20 – 63 km (12 – 39 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 3: Guided Tour of Hortus Bulborum / Cycle to the North Sea Coast and Haarlem

After an early breakfast, cycle to the Hortus Bulborum, a unique garden museum dedicated to preserving rare and historic bulbs. Spanning more than five acres of flowerbeds, the museum showcases over 4,000 varieties of tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, and other flowers. Each spring, they bloom in a dazzling display of color and fragrance, as you'll experience on a guided tour.

From there, it's a short ride to the beach, where you can enjoy lunch on your own at one of the beachfront cafés. Take in the sweeping coastal views before continuing along bike paths through the sand dunes of the North Sea coast to the town of Beverwijk, where you can choose to shuttle or cycle to Haarlem. A local car ferry will then carry you across the North Sea Canal, a major shipping route.

Haarlem is a charming city known for its cobblestone streets, historic buildings, canals, grand churches, cozy bars, top-notch restaurants, and antique shops.

This evening, dinner will be served aboard the barge, which will remain moored in Haarlem overnight. Afterward, consider a leisurely stroll to the historic city center to soak in its timeless charm.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Alkmaar to the Beach — 29 km (18 miles)

Afternoon: Beach to Haarlem — 36 km (22 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride—the first of two flower-filled days—takes you through blossoming fields and sand dunes. The first bulbs appear soon after leaving Alkmaar, and you'll have the opportunity to admire them in Limmen at Hortus Bulborum. In Castricum, enjoy lunch on your own at one of the beachfront cafés, where you can take in the stunning North Sea views. Afterward, burn off those calories as you continue cycling through the sand dunes before boarding a ferry across the North Sea Canal. Continue riding on paved bike paths through National Parc Kennemer dunes into Haarlem city center to meet the barge.

Cumulative Distance Range: 29 – 65 km (18 – 40 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4: Keukenhof Flower Park / Leiden

Today begins with an early start so you can witness the flowers opening in the soft morning light. Cycle through gorgeous, blooming bulb fields on your way to Keukenhof, the most beautiful spring garden in the world. Spanning 80 acres (32 hectares), this breathtaking park features more than 9 miles (14.4 km) of footpaths winding among over 7 million tulips, hyacinths, daffodils, and other flowers, all designed to delight the senses in a truly stunning setting. Enjoy a packed lunch at your leisure during your visit.

From there, continue cycling through more vibrant bulb fields toward Oude Wetering, where you will board the barge and sail into Leiden. This lively town, bisected by picturesque canals, is lined with charming guild houses. Leiden is the birthplace of the Dutch master Rembrandt and home to the Netherlands' oldest university. The town also holds an important place in colonial American history. In the early 17th century, Protestants fleeing persecution in the Low Countries, France, and England found refuge in Leiden. Among them was a group led by John Robinson, who would later sail to America aboard the *Mayflower*.

This evening, enjoy dinner on board, followed by a special hour-long post-dinner boat tour (around 8:00 p.m.) through historic Leiden. You may choose to disembark in the city center and walk back to the barge at your own pace. The barge will be moored in Leiden overnight.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Haarlem to Keukenhof Gardens — 26 km (16 miles)

Afternoon: Keukenhof Gardens to Oude Wetering — 18 km (11 miles) OR Keukenhof Gardens to Oude

Wetering PLUS – 32 km (20 miles)

What to Expect:

Ride on country roads through flowering fields on your way to world-famous Keukenhof Gardens. After leaving Haarlem, your bike route touches the ancient Manpad at the foot of the dunes before moving farther inland through an older flower-growing area. Midway to Oude Wetering, enjoy an included visit to Keukenhof Gardens, where you can explore at your leisure and enjoy a packed lunch during your visit. Afterward, continue cycling through blooming bulb fields, pass through Warmond's narrow main street, and ride to Oude Wetering, where you will board the barge and sail into Leiden. *(If you choose the longer ride this afternoon, you will have less time at Keukenhof Gardens. Please inform your trip leaders if you plan to take the PLUS option.)*

Cumulative Distance Range: 44 – 58 km (27 – 36 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5: Cheese Farm Visit / Gouda

This morning, ride out of Leiden, passing through verdant pastures and small farms renowned for their cheese production. Stop at a family-owned farm to learn about the cheese-making process and enjoy a tasting of their delicious cheeses.

Continue cycling through the open polder landscapes to Hazerswoude-Dorp. The bike path out of town has an intimate feel, winding through residential gardens before leading you to Boskoop, where you'll have lunch on your own. From there, continue riding all the way to Gouda.

Gouda's namesake cheese is one of the Netherlands' most famous exports. The town's compact center, entirely ringed by canals, offers a charming setting for exploration. This evening, take a leisurely stroll through Gouda's spacious market square and admire the grand Gothic town hall. You may also visit the main church of Gouda, devoted to Saint John, which is world-famous for its stunning stained-glass windows.

Your early-afternoon arrival provides plenty of time to explore before finding a local restaurant for dinner on your own.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning + Early Afternoon: Leiden to Gouda with Van Veen Cheesemaker — 38 km (24 miles) OR
Boskoop to Gouda via lakes with Van Veen Cheesemaker — 52 km (32 miles)

What to Expect:

After breakfast on the barge, begin riding from Leiden to Zoeterwoude and Weipoort. After a short ride, you'll tour a cheese farm with the opportunity to taste their wares. The rest of your ride is through the region of Hazerswoude and Boskoop, where plants and young trees are commercially grown. Your ride will end when you meet the barge in Gouda, an old cheese-market city of international fame, where you'll have plenty of free time to explore the area.

Cumulative Distance Range: 38 – 52 km (24 – 32 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: Gouda / Alphen aan den Rijn

Take the morning to further explore Gouda and enjoy lunch on your own at your leisure.

In the afternoon, choose to cycle or cruise through the scenic *Groene Hart* (Green Heart), a picturesque region of lush meadows, tranquil peat lakes, and abundant birdlife.

If you opt to cycle, depart from Gouda, pedaling alongside peat lakes before reaching the narrow banks of the Rhine River. Continue to Alphen aan den Rijn, where the barge will be moored overnight.

This evening, enjoy dinner aboard the barge.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Gouda to Alphen aan den Rijn via Meije PLUS — 65 km (40 miles)

Afternoon: Gouda to Alphen aan den Rijn After Lunch — 39 km (24 miles)

What to Expect:

After a morning of exploration and lunch on your own in Gouda, today's ride takes you through Reeuwijkse Plassen, a scenic lake district formed by centuries of peat digging. Passing through Bodegraven, follow the Old Rhine River to Alphen aan den Rijn, where you will meet the barge. This route offers rural, picturesque cycling through the Green Heart of Holland, featuring charming towns and serene peat rivers.

Cumulative Distance Range: 39 – 65 km (24 – 40 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7: Oude Wetering / Amsterdam

After enjoying your morning beverage with breakfast on the barge, cycle along a canal and scenic peat lakes to De Veense Volkstuin, a local community garden, for a brief visit.

Continue cycling to Oude Wetering, where you will rejoin the barge and enjoy a sailing lunch featuring Dutch delicacies as you cruise to your mooring in the heart of Amsterdam.

This evening, enjoy a final dinner on board.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Alphen Rijn to Oude Wetering – 27 km (17 miles)

What to Expect:

Cycle along a scenic route, following a canal and passing through peat lakes and the villages of Langeraar before meeting the barge in Oude Wetering. Along the way, take a ferry crossing, then cycle through greenhouses, stopping for a guided visit and explanation at a local community garden.

Cumulative Distance Range: 27 km (17 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 8: Disembark Barge / Your VBT Vacation Ends

After an included breakfast, bid farewell to your barge crew and trip leaders as your tour comes to a close. Please ensure you disembark no later than 9:00 a.m.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Barge Lena Maria (Days 1-7)

The *Lena Maria* started her new life as a passenger barge in 2006. Built by Hans de Lange, who had previously built and operated similar vessels, the ship offers plenty of room for up to 24 passengers. All 12 cabins offer 2 lower beds and private bathrooms with a shower and toilet. Windows can be opened, and the cabins have central heating. Common areas include a dining area, a lounge with a bar, and a sun deck at the bow. The barge moors each night.

Drinks of all types are available for purchase at the bar on board the *Lena Maria*. It is not customary for guests to bring their own wine and liquor on board; your understanding is appreciated. Onboard meal menus are set, though the chef is happy to accommodate vegetarians and those on restricted diets for health reasons.