

Holland & Belgium Bike & Boat: Bruges to Amsterdam

Bike Vacation + Air Package

European bike and barge vacation. You'll glide along a latticework of tranquil canals and rivers by ferry, boat, and barge, then disembark to spin past dairy farms, villages, and marshes ingeniously reclaimed from the sea. Step into history on the cobbled streets of medieval towns, and view the silhouette of Holland's most famous windmills against the sky. A picnic fanned by windmills, dinner in a family home, a Belgian beer tasting, and more round out your experience of a region that's perfect for bicycling.

Cultural Highlights

Sample delicious cheese on a visit to a working dairy farm

Enter the spirit of local life over a visit in a family home

Follow your whims in Antwerp, the inspiration for artist Peter Paul Rubens

View marshy grasslands, dairy farms, tiny villages and meandering rivers as you ride

Discover Holland's most iconic windmills at Kinderdijk, a UNESCO World Heritage site

Glide through the heart of medieval Ghent on a guided boat tour

What to Expect

This tour offers easy terrain on bike paths and roads through both urban and rural areas. You will encounter traffic, especially in urban areas. Some of the bike paths are unpaved and the terrain can lack shelter from the wind. Our VBT support shuttle is available every day at designated points for those who need assistance.

Tour Duration: 12 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 11 - 36

Average Cycling Time: 01:00 - 03:30

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 61°/46°, Jun 66°/52°, Aug 70°/55°, Sep 64°/51°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 2, Jun 2.4, Aug 2.4, Sep 3.2

DAY 1: Depart from home / Fly overnight to Brussels, Belgium

Depart from home for Belgium. The particulars of your arrival overseas are detailed with your flight itinerary.

DAY 2: Arrive in Bruges

Upon arrival at the Brussels airport, claim your luggage and clear customs. If any portion of your luggage appears to be lost, fill in a PIR form before leaving the customs area — VBT representatives are not allowed into the customs area. (Please note: Also make certain that your VBT luggage tags are affixed to your bag so your VBT representative can identify you.)

After exiting customs, enter the arrival hall and look for your VBT representative holding a VBT sign. Please wait here while your representative helps make arrangements for your transfer via taxi or minibus to your Bruges hotel (transfer time is approximately 1 hour, depending on traffic). The transfer company's name is Taxi Snel, telephone number +32 50 36 36 49.

Please note: Hotel check-in time is 3:00 p.m. There may be a VBT group checking out of the hotel, so please do not plan for your room to be available earlier. VBT and the hotel appreciate your understanding and cooperation. You may leave your bags with reception while you explore Bruges. There is so much to see and do just around the corner. VBT provides you with City Information that includes recommendations.

Seek out a restaurant for dinner on your own tonight.

Hotel: Hotel Navarra

DAY 3: Independent exploration of Bruges

From your centrally located hotel, walk the cobbled streets of this enchanting town. Be sure to go to the top of the Belfort Tower for a panoramic view of the splendid medieval cityscape. You may want to visit the 12th-century Basilica of the Holy Blood, said to contain a small vial of Christ's blood that was brought to Bruges from the Holy Land in 1149. Or stop by the Memling Museum, housed in one of the oldest surviving medieval hospitals in Europe.

Tonight, try one of Bruges' wonderful restaurants for dinner on your own.

Hotel: Hotel Navarra

Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4: Embark barge / VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Warm-up ride and cruise to Ghent

After breakfast, spend more free time in Bruges. Make sure your luggage is packed and ready to be transported to the barge before 9:45 a.m. At 12:30 p.m., join our VBT trip leader in the hotel lobby and walk together to our barge in time for a 2:00 p.m. departure. At the docks, meet the barge crew and our second VBT trip leader, who welcome you aboard with refreshments.

You will cruise out of Bruges on a charming canal. The barge stops before dinner so you can join your trip leaders for a warm-up ride into the heart of Flanders.

This evening, enjoy a welcome dinner on board and learn a bit of Flemish and Dutch during a fun language class. You will moor in Ghent, one of Belgium's most beautiful cities.

Please note regarding WiFi on board the barge: Due to the nature of the barge movements, Internet access is not always available. As such, if stable Internet access is critical to you, VBT recommends that you purchase your own bundle before traveling overseas.

Please note regarding Ride With GPS: Due to the limited WiFi on board, VBT also recommends downloading your VBT Maps & Route Notes from a WiFi zone prior to arrival on the barge if you wish to use Ride with GPS on your smartphone. During your vacation, you will be able to follow these route notes on your smartphone with turn-by-turn voice navigation as you ride. This option is in addition to VBT's traditional printed maps and route notes available on tour.

Hotel: Barge *Fiep*

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 km (11 miles)

Morning

Keersluis Beernem to Aalterbrug Warm-Up: 19 km (11 miles)

What to Expect: After disembarking and bike fitting, the warm-up ride follows the Gent-Bruges Canal. Getting comfortable on your bike and following the route notes, you will ride on asphalt and bike paths with sections of quiet roads. At the end of the ride, the barge picks you up, and we sail to the mooring site near Gent.

DAY 5: Tour Ghent / Cycle to Dendermonde

After breakfast, embark a local boat excursion to the center of Ghent with a guide, then explore on your own. Located at the confluence of the Scheldt and Leie rivers, this “City of 200 Bridges” was founded around 600 AD and boasts many beautiful buildings dating to medieval times, when the textile industry brought great wealth to Ghent’s merchants. Many old patrician houses have been preserved in the city center. One historic building is the Cloth Makers’ Hall, built in 1425. The city’s major church is St. Baaf’s Cathedral, constructed and enhanced in various styles over many centuries. In the cathedral, admire a number of masterpieces of medieval painting, including Jan van Eyck’s famous *Adoration of the Lamb*. (On Sunday morning, there is a service in the cathedral, and it is not possible to see this famous painting—only the replica.) Lunch is on your own in Ghent.

After lunch, enjoy a scenic ride out of the city. Your bike path parallels the Scheldt River. You will cycle through small “polder” villages and past marshy grasslands, ponds and picturesque creeks. A Berlare-Appels ferry takes you to the south shore of the Scheldt, where you will cross the Dender River locks system and rejoin your barge. Your destination today is Dendermonde, a centuries-old city with a Benedictine abbey and pretty market square at its center. Return to the barge for dinner on board. This evening, enjoy a Belgian beer tasting and crew presentation.

Hotel: Barge *Fiep*

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today’s Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 29 - 32 km (18 - 20 miles)

Morning

Melle to Dendermonde: 29 km (18 miles)

Afternoon

Dendermonde City Tour Loop: 3 km (2 miles)

What to Expect: The route immediately crosses the Scheldt River at Melle town and joins a beautiful bike path along the northern bank of the river. After around 6.8 miles (11 km), the route diverts from the river to meander through the countryside and a few small settlements. Upon returning to the river, cross by ferry and then continue along the southern banks on a bike path leading to the large Dender River Locks. After meeting the barge, there is the option for a loop ride to explore the small city of Dendermonde.

DAY 6: Cycle from Dendermonde / Continue ride to Antwerp

Cycle from Dendermonde via Temse along the Sheldt River. You will ride through the village of

Rupelmonde, pausing to admire its unique tidal watermill and statue of the mathematician and mapmaker Mercator. He was the world's premier geographer in the 16th century and created both the terrestrial and celestial globes. Arrive in Basel for lunch on your own, with time to explore its picturesque church square and Wissekerke Castle. Continue cycling through farmland and tiny villages to Antwerp, Belgium's second-largest city.

Meet the barge at one of Antwerp's historic docks in the afternoon, then walk into town to dine on your own in one of the many restaurants and enjoy a free evening.

Hotel: Barge *Fiep*

Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 25 – 59 km (16 - 38 miles)

Morning

Dendermonde to Temse: 25 km (16 miles)

OR

Temse to Basel: 12 km (8 miles)

Afternoon

Basel to Antwerp: 22 km (14 miles)

What to Expect: Today's ride offers variation. For starters, your tour leaders guide you across Scheldt River bridge. The first part of the ride is on bike paths decorated by willow trees and carp ponds. After the village of Moerzeke, you'll cross the river by ferry. Once a trading center, the city of Temse is a good place to buy a sandwich for lunch. The second part of the ride passes through Rupelmonde and onto Basel, with the oldest suspension bridge in Belgium and Wissekerke Castle, and a nice place to eat your sandwich. The last part of the ride leads you through agricultural lands until Antwerp Cathedral comes into view. To reach the city, you cycle through a long and exciting bike and pedestrian tunnel under the river. You'll find the barge at historic Willemsdok.

DAY 7: Visit Antwerp / Cruise to Tholen

Today is a non-biking day. This morning, you will visit Antwerp, known as the "Diamond City" and the hometown of the painter Peter Paul Rubens. In the middle of the city, you'll find the Cathedral of Our Lady and beautiful old townhouses around the Market Square. You'll have plenty of time to explore all of the delights during free time this morning.

After enjoying lunch on your own in Antwerp, rejoin the barge and relax while cruising through the impressive port and along the quieter canals to Tholen, The Netherlands. After dinner on board the barge, we've invited some local families to meet you at the barge and accompany you back to their homes for an evening of camaraderie and cultural exchange.

Today's Ride Choice:

Non-biking Day: Explore Antwerp, cruise to Tholen, The Netherlands

Hotel: Barge *Fiep*

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 8: Cycle from Tholen to Willemstad / Cruise to Dordrecht

This morning, cycle from Tholen to Willemstad through tranquil agricultural land on the western edge of Brabant province, passing through the small town of Oud-Vossemeer. Claes van't Rosevelt, ancestor of the American presidential family, emigrated from this village in 1649 for a better life. Later, you will coast into Willemstad, an old fortified town on the Haringvliet. The massive walls were laid out in the shape of a seven-pointed star, each rampart named for one the seven provinces of the Republic of United Netherlands.

Meet your barge here and set sail during lunch to Dordrecht. The barge moors in the city's historic center, making for an easy and delightful afternoon of exploring. Dordrecht is one of Holland's oldest towns and birthplace of the state of The Netherlands, founded by William of Orange. This evening, explore more of the town on your own and find a restaurant for dinner.

Hotel: Barge *Fiep*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 45 – 47 km (27 - 28 miles)

Morning

Tholen to Willemstad: 45 km (27 miles)

Afternoon

Willemstad City Tour: 2 km (1 mile)

What to Expect: Today's ride sets off through the town of Tholen. From here, small country lanes lead through relatively "new" agricultural lands to the village of Oud-Vossemeer, the ancestral home of the Roosevelt family. Cross the river shortly afterward, and follow a bike path along the river before meandering through the countryside to Willemstad, an ancient stronghold of the Orange family. After you meet the barge, you will have the option of taking a short but enjoyable ride around this remarkable 16th-century fortified city.

DAY 9: Cruise to Alblasserdam / Cycle to Kinderdijk / Schoonhoven / Vianen

During breakfast, you will sail the River Noord to Kinderdijk, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Here, 19 of Holland's famous windmills — some more than 260 years old — adorn the horizon. After your visit, cycle through the beautiful canal-and-meadow landscapes of Alblasserwaard to Schoonhoven, or "Silver City," renowned for its long silversmithing tradition. Here re-board the barge and enjoy an included lunch. Afterward, you have the option to cycle or cruise to Vianen.

If you choose our longer option, you will pass a landscape of wide polders separated by numerous canals. These patches of land reclaimed from the sea average an elevation of six feet below sea level. An afternoon route leads through a series of villages and hamlets, where your trails skirt the backyards of locals. You will also ride along the Lek River dike and gain clear views of the different water levels.

Spend the night in Vianen, a small city on the River Lek. Dinner is on board tonight.

Hotel: Barge *Fiep*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 32 – 58 km (20 - 36 miles)

Morning

Alblasserdam to Schoonhoven: 32 km (20 miles)

Afternoon

Schoonhoven to Vianen: 26 km (16 miles)

What to Expect: Disembark the barge near Kinderdijk, the western corner of the Alblasserwaard Polder. From here, start your ride along this legendary dike, surrounded by 19 traditional windmills. The ride features lovely bike paths and dairy farms with typical Frisian black-and-white cows. Halfway through the ride, you cross the River Lek by ferry and arrive in the small city of Schoonhoven, famous for its

silversmithing industry. After lunch, continue cycling through the Krimpenerwaard Polder. Another ferry takes you back across the Lek River to medieval Vianen.

DAY 10: Arrive in Amsterdam

During breakfast this morning, you will cruise to Breukelen, a charming little town after which Brooklyn in New York is named. Begin cycling across a white drawbridge, the original “Brooklyn” Bridge, toward Amsterdam. Follow the beautiful rivers Vecht and Amstel, which lead right into the city. Along the river Vecht, pass magnificent 17th-century mansions and country estates built by prosperous Amsterdam merchants. You will stop for a picnic lunch along the way. Tonight, enjoy your last dinner on board.

Hotel: Barge *Fiep*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 24 – 44 km (14 - 28 miles)

Morning

Breukelen to Weesp: 23 km (14 miles)

Afternoon

Weesp to Diemen: 9 km (6 miles)

Diemen to Amsterdam: 12 km (8 miles)

What to Expect: The first part of today's ride follows the River Vecht on small country lanes to Weesp. Here, enjoy a picnic lunch between two windmills before having the option to shuttle in the support vehicle to meet the barge in Amsterdam. Or continue cycling through Weesp and along the River Gaasp en route to Diemen. Here this is another option to shuttle to meet the barge in Amsterdam. If you wish to cycle further, the route continues along the Amsterdam-Rhine canal all the way into the city. The barge docks close to the central railway station.

DAY 11: Depart Barge / Explore Amsterdam / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

After breakfast, say goodbye to your barge crew and one of your VBT trip leaders, then join your other trip leader for a transfer walk through Amsterdam's canal-lined streets to your hotel. Please note that check-in time is 3:00 p.m., but the staff will do their best to get you to your room as soon as possible. After checking in, explore Amsterdam and enjoy dinner on your own. VBT provides you with City Information that includes recommendations on what to see and do in the city.

Hotel: Mercure Hotel Amsterdam Centre Canal District

Alternative Hotel: W Amsterdam

Meals: Breakfast

DAY 12: Depart for home

After breakfast,* meet in the hotel lobby to transfer to the Amsterdam airport and your departing flight back home.** Be sure you are waiting at the designated time and transfer location.

*Please note: For guests with early-morning departures, breakfast at the hotel may not be available. Please check with the front desk to verify the times that breakfast is served.

**VBT recommends that you check your transfer time in your "Transfer Reminder." The transfer is prearranged by VBT and is prepaid. VBT transfer times and departure points are finalized in advance and cannot be modified for individual guests. If you extend your stay beyond the scheduled program dates, return transportation to the airport will be at your own expense.

Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Hotel Navarra (Days: 2,3)

Ideally located in the historic center of Bruges, near the Market Square with its famous Belfry Tower, the Hotel Navarra offers an intimate and welcoming atmosphere, complemented by excellent service. The elegant, 17th-century mansion occupied by the hotel is listed as a historic monument, yet you'll enjoy modern amenities that include free WiFi, air conditioning, a spa, an indoor swimming pool, a sauna, a gym, and a small garden with sun terrace.

Barge Fiep (Days: 4,5,6,7,8,9,10)

A cozy and spacious, two-deck, 22-passenger barge with a homelike atmosphere, the Fiep has 12 comfortable cabins—10 twin and two single—with private bathrooms and private showers, and the barge has climate control throughout. Common areas include a dining area and lounge with a bar, and a sun deck at the bow. Smoking is permitted only outside on the sun deck. The barge moors each night. Drinks of all types are available for purchase at the bar on board the Fiep. 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.

Mercure Amsterdam Centre Canal District (Day: 11)

The Mercure Hotel Amsterdam City Centre Canal District is a boutique hotel located near the Prinsengracht canal in the center of Amsterdam. Owned by American travel guide expert Arthur Frommer, it is comprised of 19 converted weavers' houses that were originally built in the 17th century. The hotel is easy to reach by tram, with stops on Vijzelgracht (line 16/24/25) or the Weteringcircuit (line 7/10). Dam Square, the Royal Palace, and the city's most famous museums — the Rijksmuseum, Stedelijk Museum, Van Gogh Museum, and the Anne Frank House — are all within walking distance. Free WiFi and air conditioning are available throughout the hotel.