

Holland & Belgium Bike & Boat: Bruges to Amsterdam

Bike Vacation Only

Pastoral landscapes, centuries-old towns, a welcoming people—Holland and Belgium have it all. Cycling along easy bike paths, you'll witness picturesque landscapes of farmlands and meadows ingeniously reclaimed from the sea, spin along a legendary dike, explore quaint villages and historic cities, view the iconic Kinderdijk windmills, and meet local families in their homes. On returning to a well-appointed barge designed specifically for bike tours, you'll enjoy savory, chef-made meals and a Belgian beer tasting. Watch the scenery unfold from a comfortable viewing area or from the window of your spacious cabin. And enter a spirit of camaraderie a larger ship can't offer. It's the ultimate up-close experience you can expect when you bike and barge Europe with us.

Cultural Highlights

Cycle along tranquil rivers and past meadows, dairy farms, quaint villages, and polder countrysides

Get acquainted with local people—and local life—during a visit to a family home

Join a local guide for a boat tour of Ghent, whose history dates to around 600 AD

Enjoy time at leisure to explore Antwerp, Belgium's "Diamond City" and inspiration for artist Peter Paul Rubens

View the famous Kinderdijk windmills, a UNESCO Heritage site

Sip authentic Belgian beer during a special tasting on board

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: 8 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: Embark barge / Warm-up ride and cruise to Ghent

You are responsible for making your own way to meet the barge, between 1:00 and 1:45 p.m. Please note that you cannot embark before this time, as the barge is being prepared for you. If you are late, you must contact the barge as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements. The barge will be moored next to bus parking Buiten Katelijnevest in central Bruges. It sails at 2:00 p.m.

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. 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.

Accommodation: Barge *Fiep*

Included Meals: 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 2: 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. Many of its beautiful buildings date 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.

Accommodation: Barge *Fiep*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today’s Ride Choices:

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 3: Cycle from Dendermonde / Continue ride to Antwerp

Cycle from Dendermonde via Temse along the Scheldt 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.

Accommodation: Barge *Fiep*

Included Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choices:

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 trip 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 4: 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

Accommodation: Barge *Fiep*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 5: 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.

Accommodation: Barge *Fiep*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choices:

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 6: 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 cycling along the old windmills, continue 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 (1.8 meters) 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.

Accommodation: Barge *Fiep*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

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 at 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 7: 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 Vecht and Amstel rivers, 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.

Accommodation: Barge *Fiep*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

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 8: Depart Barge / Explore Amsterdam

After breakfast, your tour ends. It is important that you leave the barge no later than 9:00 a.m. so the crew can prepare for their next guests.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Barge Fiep (Days: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7)

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.