

## Holland & Belgium Bike & Boat: Amsterdam to Bruges

### Bike Vacation + Air Package

Explore the Low Countries at an easy pace on a vacation that combines a barge cruise, biking, and Amsterdam. Begin your discoveries in the Dutch capital, then head into the countryside to meander along rivers and canals, pedal through lush farmlands and quaint neighborhoods, and view windmills straight out of a storybook. Your course is dotted with medieval cities and coastal villages, where warm welcomes and delicious Dutch treats await. And end each day with a relaxing drift aboard a barge that's been specially designed to cater to your comfort.

### Cultural Highlights

Sample delicious cheese on a visit to a working dairy farm

Enter the spirit of local life over a visit to 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 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:** 10 - 39

**Average Cycling Time:** 01:00 - 03:30

### Climate Information

**Average High/Low Temperature (°F)**

May 61°/46°, Jun 66°/52°, Jul 69°/55°, Aug 70°/55°, Sep 64°/51°, Oct 57°/46°

**Average Rainfall (in.)**

May 2, Jun 2.4, Jul 2.9, Aug 2.4, Sep 3.2, Oct 4.1

## DAY 1: Depart from home / Fly overnight to Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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

## DAY 2: Arrive in Amsterdam

Upon arrival at the Amsterdam airport, claim your luggage and clear customs. If your luggage is 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 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, who will be holding a VBT sign and who will make arrangements for your transfer via taxi or minibus to your Amsterdam hotel (transfer time is approximately 20 minutes, depending on traffic).

Important: Transfers are provided by Schiphol Taxi, who will be looking for you and carrying a VBT signboard. You may be approached by other companies offering a transfer. Please use only Schiphol Taxi, telephone +31 654 354 601 or +31 681 299 101. Transfers provided by any other company will be at your own expense.

Please note: If you cannot find the VBT representative, or have been delayed in customs because of lost luggage or another reason, please follow the signs and wait at the Meeting Point in the main arrival hall. The Meeting Point is across from Burger King and in between the entrances to train platforms 3/4 and 5/6. You can also go to one of the yellow information desks in the main hall and ask if they will telephone Schiphol Taxi (using the number above) on your behalf.

Note: The hotel check-in time is 3:00 p.m., but they will do their best to get you to your room as soon as possible. After checking in, you have free time to explore Amsterdam. VBT provides you with City Information that includes recommendations on what to see and do in Amsterdam.

Try one of Amsterdam's wonderful restaurants for dinner on your own.

Hotel: Mercure Hotel Amsterdam Centre Canal District

Please note: Mercure Hotel Amsterdam Centre Canal District is a cash-free hotel, so any extras must be paid by credit or debit card.

## DAY 3: Embark barge / VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Cruise to Vianen

After breakfast, make sure your luggage is packed and ready to be transported to the barge. At 9:30 a.m., meet one of your VBT trip leaders in the hotel lobby for a guided walking tour of Amsterdam, visiting many of the city's highlights and taking some free time for lunch on your own. You will board the barge at 1:45 p.m. and depart at 2:00 p.m. At the docks, meet the barge crew and your second VBT trip leader, who will welcome you aboard with refreshments. Cruise out of Amsterdam on the IJ waterway, catching glimpses of houseboats and floating houses.

You will dock before dinner for our warm-up ride, which follows the river Vecht. This evening, gather with the group for a welcome dinner on board. You moor overnight in Vianen, a small city on the river Lek.

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 onboard, VBT also recommends that you download your VBT Maps & Route Notes from a WiFi zone prior to arrival on the boat 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: 17 km (10 miles)

Afternoon

Nigtevecht to Breukelen Warm-Up: 17 km (10 miles)

What to Expect: The warm-up ride starts at Nigtevecht, at the connector between the old river and the modern Amsterdam-Rhine canal. Although the road is quiet, it is narrow, and you will encounter some light traffic. You will cross the original Brooklyn Bridge into Breukelen town, the home of the first settlers in New Amsterdam (New York).

## DAY 4: Cycle to Kinderdijk / Cruise to Dordrecht

After breakfast, cycle along the small canals of the rural region of Krimpenerwaard. You will trace the

route of the river Lek through Schoonhoven, known as the “Silver City” for its long silversmithing tradition. Continue to Kinderdijk, a UNESCO World Heritage site where 19 of Holland’s famous windmills — some more than 260 years old — adorn the horizon. Then you can ride (or cruise, if you prefer) to Dordrecht, one of Holland’s oldest towns and birthplace of the state of The Netherlands, founded by William of Orange. Take some time to stroll through the city’s historic center to get a glimpse of its rich past. This evening, your barge captain will give a short talk and introduce the crew. Enjoy dinner on board in Dordrecht, where the barge moors overnight.

Hotel: Barge *Fiep*

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today’s Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 16 – 77 km (16 - 48 miles)

Morning

Vianen to Schoonhoven: 26 km (16 miles)

Afternoon

Schoonhoven to Kinderdijk: 27 km (17 miles)

OR

Kinderdijk to Dordrecht: 24 km (15 miles)

What to Expect: Today’s ride starts in Vianen. First, you cross a big bridge over the River Lek. The next stretch leads you through villages in the Krimpenerwaard Polder, where a small *fietspad* (bike path) takes you through private backyards. In the small old city of Schoonhoven, choose a restaurant for lunch on your own. You can board your barge, disembark, or continue riding here.

From Schoonhoven, you’ll cross the River Lek by ferry. The route continues to Nieuwpoort town and into the Alblasserwaard Polder. This is mainly dairy farming and pasture land with black-and-white Frisian cows and variety of water fowl. Your *fietspad* continues through Kinderdijk amid the country’s largest collection of traditional windmills.

## DAY 5: Cruise to Willemstad / Cycle to Tholen

This morning, enjoy a short language lesson while sailing to Willemstad, an old fortified town on the Haringvliet. Its 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. Enjoy time at leisure here to explore.

Then cycle to Tholen, once an island in the middle of the large Zeeland streams where many people fished for a living. Today, it is connected to the mainland, but it remains a picturesque village with relics of an eventful past. Pedal through its quiet farmlands, and pause for a picnic lunch at historic locks before arriving in Tholen. Here, you will rejoin the barge and enjoy dinner on board. 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.

Hotel: Barge *Fiep*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 24 – 67 km (15 - 42 miles)

Morning

Willemstad to Dintel Locks: 24 km (15 miles)

Afternoon

Dintel Locks to Tholen: 22 km (14 miles)

OR

Additional Tholen Island Loop: 21 km (13 miles)

What to Expect: Ride through the relatively “new” rural agricultural corner of western Brabant province. It is a country of potatoes and sugar beets. You'll enjoy a picnic lunch at the historic Dintel River Locks. Afterward, cross the bridge to Tholen, a former island in Zeeland province reaching Oud-Vossemeer, the home of the Rooseveltdt family. Finally, arrive in Tholen, the tiny island capital.

## DAY 6: Cruise to Antwerp, Belgium

Today is a non-biking day. This morning, take time to relax on board during a morning cruise to the impressive port of Antwerp. After lunch on board, you have the rest of the afternoon to explore. Antwerp is known as the “Diamond City” and the native city of painter Peter Paul Rubens. You may wish to visit the Cathedral of Our Lady and the Market Square, lined with beautiful historic townhouses. Tonight, enjoy dinner on your own in a local restaurant.

Today's Ride Choice:

Non-biking Day: Cruise to and explore Antwerp

Hotel: Barge *Fiep*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## DAY 7: Cycle to Dendermonde

After cruising out of Antwerp, you will dock and mount your bike for a ride along the Scheldt River to Temse, pausing along the way for lunch on your own near Wissekerke Castle in Basel. In the afternoon, enjoy magnificent river views as you cycle to Dendermonde, the centuries-old city with a Benedictine abbey and pretty market square at its center. Before dinner on board tonight, you can learn more about Belgian beer during an onboard beer tasting.

Hotel: Barge *Fiep*

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 34 – 59 km (21 - 37 miles)

Morning

Antwerp to Temse: 34 km (21 miles)

Afternoon

Temse to Dendermonde: 25 km (16 miles)

What to Expect: Your route begins with a spin through a special bike-and-pedestrian tunnel under the Scheldt River. Afterward, crisscross through agricultural and quiet suburban areas to reach Kruibeke with its Wednesday market. You'll arrive back at the Scheldt after passing through Rupelmonde, with 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. Continue on to the city of Temse, once a trading center. The second part of the ride is most scenic, crossing the river three times, then over the Temse Bridge to ride on the Scheldt Dike to the Mariekerke ferry. Dendermonde is reached by another huge bridge.

## DAY 8: Tour Ghent

After breakfast, cycle from Dendermonde to Ghent. 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. After a leisurely lunch on board the barge, embark a local boat for an excursion into the center of Ghent with a guide. You'll also have time to explore this attractive medieval canal city on your own. Many old patrician houses have been preserved in the city center. One historic building is the 1425 Cloth Makers' Hall, where textile

merchants met and traded. 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*. Try one of the local restaurants for dinner on your own.

Hotel: Barge *Fiep*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 36 km (21 miles)

Morning

Dendermonde to Ghent: 36 km (21 miles)

What to Expect: Today, there is only a morning ride. In the afternoon, you will visit Ghent. After crossing the modern Dender Locks, cycle to Appels ferry for another river crossing. After Berlare village, you'll divert through more quaint villages and scenic agricultural lands to the lovely town of Schellebelle. After some pedal strokes on the river dike, you'll follow a suburban stretch to the large locks of Merelbeke. Here, you'll embark for lunch on board while the barge sails to its canal mooring site.

## DAY 9: Arrive in Bruges

During breakfast, your barge cruises to Bruges. Alternately, if you have chosen the longer ride option, you will begin your ride as the barge sets off. The barge will briefly dock farther along the waterway at Aalter Bridge, where the day's shorter cycling route begins. The barge rejoins the main canal and meets us all in Bruges in the late afternoon.

Regarded by many as Europe's best-preserved medieval city, Bruges is laced by a network of canals lined by beautiful houses built by wealthy textile merchants. A 350-foot, 13th-century belfry tower, which houses Europe's most famous carillon, presides over the city's Market Square. You have ample time to marvel at the medieval ambiance of this lovely city and to walk its winding streets. Dine on the barge one last time this evening.

Hotel: Barge *Fiep*

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 32 - 57 km (19 - 34 miles)

Morning-Afternoon

Aalterburg to Bruges: 32 km (19 miles)

Aalterburg to Damme to Bruges: 57 km (34 miles)

What to Expect: After an early-morning barge cruise, disembark at Aalterburg to start biking. This route leads along the World War II Moerbrugge Monument, then on to Bruges. The longer option diverts through the countryside via an old abbey and Damme, an ancient literary town and former Bruges harbor.

## **DAY 10: Disembark Barge / Discover Bruges / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends**

After breakfast, say goodbye to your barge crew and one trip leader, then walk through Bruges's winding streets to the hotel with your second trip leader, enjoying an orientation of the historic city center along the way. Please note that 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.

Bruges was northern Europe's leading trade center between the 13th and 15th centuries, driven largely by its thriving wool and textile industries. The city has been famous for its fine lace for 500 years; you may wish to visit one of the small cottage industries revolving around lace-making. Enjoy dinner on your own tonight.

Hotel: Hotel Navarra

Meals: Breakfast

## **DAY 11: 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 12: Depart for home

After breakfast,\* meet in the hotel lobby for your transfer to the Brussels airport and your flight home.\*\* Be sure that 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: 10,11)

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: 3,4,5,6,7,8,9)

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: 2)

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.