

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

### Bike Vacation + Air Package

Pastoral landscapes, centuries-old towns, a welcoming people—Holland and Belgium have it all. Experience Amsterdam, then bike along easy paths and byways, through river locks, and along a dike. Along the way, you'll witness picturesque landscapes, explore ancient alleyways, and pass historic windmills—even pausing to picnic beneath their lazy blades. Returning to your well-appointed barge at the end of an exhilarating day, you'll enjoy savory, chef-made meals, comfortable areas to view an ever-shifting landscape, a spacious cabin, and a spirit of camaraderie a larger ship can't offer. We've even added exclusive extras, including a Belgian beer tasting, a language lesson, and a convivial evening with local families in their homes. It's a cyclist's dream tour!

### 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
- 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 vehicle 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

**Group size:** 22 max

## 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

## FLIGHT DAY: Depart from the United States or Canada

All you have to do is get to the airport. On our Air Packages, we'll take care of the rest, handling all the logistics, so you can travel with peace of mind. Spend your first night aloft and arrive refreshed for an unforgettable trip.

## ARRIVAL DAY: Arrive in Amsterdam

Start off your first day in Amsterdam right by having a VBT representative greet you at the airport. A complimentary car service will whisk you to your centrally located hotel. From here, you are perfectly positioned to explore this charming city at your leisure.

## DAY 1: Embark barge / Cruise to Vianen

After an included 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 walk to the barge, passing some 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.

Today's Ride Choices

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).

Cumulative Distance Range: 17 km (10 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 2: 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.

Today’s Ride Choices

Morning Vianen to Schoonhoven – 26 km (16 miles)

Afternoon Schoonhoven to Alblasserdam via Kinderdijk – 30 km (19 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 waterfowl. Your *fietspad* continues through Kinderdijk amid the country’s largest collection of traditional windmills.

Cumulative Distance Range: 26-56 km(16-35 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 3: 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. Afterward, we've invited for 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 Choices

Morning Willemstad to Dintel Locks – 24 km (15 miles)

Afternoon Dintel Locks to Tholen – 22 km (14 miles) OR 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.

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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 4: 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## **DAY 5: 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, a 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.

Today's Ride Choices

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 Kruikebeke 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.

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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 6: 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.

### Today’s Ride Choices

Morning Dendermonde to Ghent – 36 km (21 miles)

#### What to Expect:

Today, there is only a morning ride. After crossing the modern Dender Locks, cycle to Appels ferry for another river crossing. From the village of Berlare, 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. In the afternoon, you will visit Ghent.

Cumulative Distance Range: 36 km (21 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## **DAY 7: Arrive in Bruges**

During breakfast, your barge cruises to Bruges. The barge will briefly dock farther along the waterway at Aalter Bridge, where the day’s cycling begins. The barge rejoins the main canal and meets us all in Bruges in the late afternoon. Alternately, if you have chosen the longer ride option, you will cycle to Bruges with an extra countryside ride via Damme.

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 (106.7-meter), 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.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning-Afternoon Aalterburg to Bruges — 32 km (19 miles) OR Aalterburg to Bruges via Damme — 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.

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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 8: Disembark Barge / Discover Bruges**

After an included 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. 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **DAY 9: 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 using VBT's city information as your guide.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **DEPARTURE DAY: Departure**

After an included breakfast this morning, complimentary transportation to the Brussels airport will be provided (an approximately 1 to 1.5 hour drive, depending on traffic) for your departing flight.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **Accommodations**

May vary depending on departure date.

### **Movenpick Hotel Amsterdam (Day: 2)**

The Mövenpick Hotel Amsterdam City Centre is a modern, 4-star hotel located on the edge of the River IJ, near the Oosterdok canal, and the Amsterdam Central Station. Its spacious rooms provide stunning views of Amsterdam city and the harbor. This luxury property is also within walking distance of downtown and many of Amsterdam's renowned attractions. Plus, free WiFi and air conditioning are available throughout the hotel.

### **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 2 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.   
  
 [Click here to view deck plans](https://www.vbt.com/content/uploads/2019/02/barge-fiep-2.jpg)

### **Hotel Navarra (Days: 8,9)**

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.