

The Netherlands Bike & Boat: Springtime in Holland, Aboard the Princesse Royal

Bike Vacation + Air Package

There is nowhere like Holland in springtime with its explosion of color, intoxicating scents, and crisp breezes. Cows and sheep graze on juicy grasslands crisscrossed by willowy canals and shiny draw bridges. Our days conclude with easy living aboard our deluxe barge. You'll drift through this garden of eden, taking leisurely breaks while sampling the bounty of land, sea – and distillery. It's a birding paradise of marshlands punctuated by windmills, dikes, Renaissance cities, and coastal villages sprinkled with salty mariners. Explore gardens where flowering tulips unfurl by the millions. A trip of truly museum quality, come celebrate spring in the sweetest place on earth.

Cultural Highlights

Cycle flat terrain on dedicated bike paths over dikes, draw bridges and canals
Learn how historic windmills work and are used to reclaim land called "polders"
View rare and historic bulbs at the flower garden museum Hortus Bulborum
Ferry across the North Sea Canal
Tour Harlem's cobbled streets, romantic canals, cool cafés and shops
Explore the living catalogue of spring flowers at Keukenhof Gardens
Sample delicious Dutch cheeses at a family farm
Ride along the North Sea through sandy dunes with lunch at a beachfront café
Witness the trading action at the world's largest flower auction in Aalsmeer
Visit historic Leiden, the hometown of Rembrandt
Ride along a section of the Old Rhine River
Visit Gouda's cheese market and home of the famous sweet Stroopwafels
Explore Holland's "Green Heart" a rural and peaceful nature zone

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 waypoints for those who need assistance.

Tour Duration: 11 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 15 - 35

Average Cycling Time: 01:00 - 04:00

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

Mar 48°/37°, Apr 53°/40°

Average Rainfall (in.)

Mar 3.5, Apr 1.5

DAY 1: Depart from home / Fly overnight to Amsterdam

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

DAY 2: Arrive in Amsterdam and transfer to Den Haag

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 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 holding a VBT sign. They will make arrangements for your transfer, via taxi or minibus, to our hotel in Den Haag (transfer time is approximately 35 minutes, depending on traffic).

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

If you cannot find the VBT representative or have been delayed in customs because of lost luggage or another reason, please go to the airport's Red & White Meeting Point in the main arrival hall and wait there. You can also go to one of the yellow information desks in the main hall and ask if they will telephone Schiphol Taxi Service (using the number above) on your behalf.

Hotel 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, you have the rest of the day to relax or to begin your exploration of the city. VBT provides you with City Information that includes recommendations about what to see and do in Den

Haag.

Later, try one of Den Haag's wonderful restaurants for dinner on your own.

Hotel: Mercure Hotel Den Haag Central

Alternate Hotel: Hotel Corona

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

VBT Air Package and Pre-Trip Extension guests: After breakfast, make sure your luggage is packed and ready to be transported to the barge. At 9:30 a.m., meet one of our VBT Trip Leaders in the hotel lobby for a guided walking tour of Amsterdam, visiting many of the city's highlights.

You will board the barge at 12:30 p.m. for a 1:00 p.m. departure. At the docks, meet the barge crew and your second VBT Trip Leader, who will welcome you aboard with refreshments. Then cruise out of Amsterdam, sailing along the Noordhollands—the waterway connecting Amsterdam to the North Sea—passing the recently built movie museum EYE.

After this brief sail, the barge moors in Zaandam. You will disembark the barge here and ride along the canal on your warm-up ride to Zaanse Schans, returning the same way. Cycling past traditional green painted houses, warehouses, and windmills, you're sure to feel as if you are pedaling into an earlier century.

This evening, gather with the group for a welcome dinner onboard.

Please note regarding WiFi onboard the barge: Due to the nature of the barge's varied docking points, Internet access may not always be 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 onboard, VBT also recommends downloading your VBT Maps & Route Notes 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 *Magnifique I*

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Daily Options: 4 or 8 miles (6.2 or 12.5 km)

DAY 4: Cycle to De Rijp / Visit Schermerhorn Windmill Museum / Alkmaar

Today, your barge continues along the River Zaan and the Knollendammer Canal to the town of Alkmaar, famed for its cheese trade. After breakfast, cycle back to Zaanse Schans and enjoy a visit to a sawmill generated by wind power only. Afterwards, continue your ride past lakes and water management systems to the beautiful town of De Rijp. Upon arrival, you'll appreciate why the famous water engineer Jan Adriaanszoon Leeghwater referred to it as "the finest village in Holland." Centuries of history are still evident here in De Rijp's wooden facades, beautiful church, lock and town hall.

From here, continue across the Beemster Polder, an almost untouched open polder landscape. In 1612, Dutch engineers, using a system of dikes and windmills, drained marshes and bogs and converted the land into pastures. Today, the Beemster Polder is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Nourished by sea water, the clay soil left behind is nutrient- and mineral-rich, with a distinctive slate blue color. Grass grown in this soil is especially fertile and makes the milk produced by cows that graze here unusually sweet and creamy; Beemster cheeses thus are celebrated for their exceptional flavor.

Your next stop is the former windmill complex of the Schermer Polder. Here you can visit the Schermerhorn Windmill Museum. With complete access to the windmill from top to bottom, you can follow the fascinating mechanics of the mill in a unique setting. Enjoy a picnic lunch.

Continue cycling along these delightfully flat lands to Alkmaar. The town is known as a Dutch cheese city, but that tells only part of its story. As you explore the streets this evening, you'll be amazed by the beauty of Alkmaar's Old Town, with its well-preserved 17th-century buildings and narrow, winding canals.

Dinner will be served on our barge this evening.

Hotel: *Barge Magnifique I*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Daily Options: 18.5, 29 or 40 miles (29.7, 46.6 or 64.7 km)

DAY 5: Guided tour of Hortus Bulborum / Cycle to the North Sea coast and Haarlem

Rise to an early breakfast this morning, then cycle to the Hortus Bulborum, a unique garden museum dedicated to the preservation of rare and historic bulbs. More than 4,000 tulips, daffodils, hyacinths and other flowers adorn the museum's five-plus acres of flowerbeds. Each spring, they burst forth in a profusion of fragrances and colors, as you'll discover during a guided tour.

After, you will ride a short distance to our lunch spot, a café right on the beach. Enjoy the sweeping views before continuing on bike paths through the sand dunes of the North Sea Coast to the town of Beverwijk. Here, embark a local ferry and cross the major shipping route of the North Sea Canal. Back on land, you can choose to shuttle or cycle to Haarlem.

Haarlem is a pretty city of cobblestone streets, historic buildings, canals, grand churches, cozy bars, top-class restaurants and antique shops. After coasting into town, join your Trip Leaders on a short walking tour through the historic city center. Afterward, stay in town to enjoy dinner on your own. The barge is moored in Haarlem overnight.

Hotel: Barge *Magnifique I*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Daily Options: 17, 28 or 39 miles (28, 45 or 62 km)

DAY 6: Keukenhof flower park / Leiden

Breakfast is slightly earlier again today. Then, you will ride through gorgeous blooming bulb fields to Keukenhof, famed for its magnificent flower gardens. The 80-acre park boasts more than 9 miles of footpaths winding among more than 7 million tulips, hyacinths, daffodils and other flowers, all designed to excite the senses in a most wonderful setting.

Later, cycle through blossoming bulb fields en route to Leiden, a vibrant town patterned with canals and attractive guild houses. The birthplace of Dutch master painter Rembrandt, Leiden is home to The Netherlands' oldest university. It also has a surprising connection to American history. In the early 17th century, Protestants fleeing persecution elsewhere in the Low Countries, France and England arrived in Leiden to a somewhat warmer welcome. Most notable among these Protestants was a group led by John Robinson, who would later sail to America aboard the Mayflower.

This evening, enjoy dinner on board before joining your Trip Leaders for a short walk into Leiden. The barge is moored in Leiden overnight.

Hotel: Barge *Magnifique I*

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Daily Options: 14, 24 or 34 miles (23, 39 or 55 km)

DAY 7: Cheese farm visit / Gouda

This morning, cruise out of Leiden and start today's ride through verdant pasturelands and small farms famous for cheese production. Near Zoeterwoude, pause to visit one such farm and meet the owners, Karin and Sjaak van Veen, and their animals. The farm has been in their family for more than 100 years. Here, you will learn about the cheese-making process—and enjoy the results.

Continue through open polder landscapes to Hazerswoude-Dorp. From here, the bike path gets so intimate you actually cycle through people's gardens. The route takes you all the way to Gouda.

Gouda's namesake cheese is among The Netherlands' best-known exports. The town's compact center is entirely ringed by canals, and this evening you can stroll its spacious market square and see the grand Gothic town hall. The main church of Gouda, devoted to Saint John, is world famous for its stained-glass windows. Your early afternoon arrival gives you plenty of time to explore and find a local restaurant for dinner on your own.

Hotel: Barge *Magnifique I*

Meals: Breakfast

Daily Options: 14, 22 or 27 miles (23, 35 or 44 km)

DAY 8: Gouda / Alphen / Oude Wetering

Leave Gouda this morning and pedal alongside peat lakes and onto the banks of the narrow River Rhine to Alphen aan de Rijn. Here you will rejoin the barge for lunch.

Afterward, you have the option to either cycle or cruise through a pretty stretch known as the "Groene Hart" (Green Heart)—a rural region of lush meadows, tranquil peat lakes and abundant birdlife. If you are cycling, you will meet the barge at Oude Wetering.

Enjoy dinner aboard our barge this evening.

Hotel: Barge *Magnifique I*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Daily Options: 16 or 31 miles (26 or 50 km)

DAY 9: Aalsmeer flower auction / Amsterdam

Rise early today and, after a hot drink, shuttle to Aalsmeer, the world's largest flower auction. The early start is worth the effort, as you'll experience the frenetic energy within the auction warehouse as crates of flowers are transported to the auction floor, where traders bid against the clock. Marvel at the astonishing volume of beautiful flowers being traded daily from more than ten countries for export throughout the world. Watching the entire auction from a special gallery, you'll be at the very heart of international flower trade.

Enjoy a late breakfast this morning after the auction visit before heading out on a final day of cycling. Today's cycling options enable you to enjoy another day in the countryside. Rejoin the barge and cruise into Amsterdam, sampling local Dutch delicacies along the way. Your barge's mooring couldn't be more convenient: It's right in the center of city.

Dine on the barge one last time this evening.

Hotel: Barge *Magnifique I*

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Daily Options: 4, 19 or 26 miles (7,30 or 42.8 km)

DAY 10: Depart Barge / Discover Amsterdam / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

VBT Air Package guests and Post-Trip Extension guests: After breakfast, say goodbye to your barge crew and Trip Leaders, then take a short transfer to your Amsterdam hotel. After checking in, you have free time for independent exploration. Please note that your room may not be ready at this time, in which case the hotel will store your luggage. Enjoy dinner on your own tonight. VBT provides you with City Information that includes recommendations about what to see and do in Amsterdam.

Please note: April 27 is King's Day, a public holiday and celebration to honor the Dutch King Willem-Alexander, so Amsterdam will be busier than usual on this day and on the evening before.

Hotel: Mercure Hotel Amsterdam Centre Canal District

Meals: Breakfast

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 11: Depart for home

After breakfast,* transfer to the airport for your flight 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.

Mercure Amsterdam Centre Canal District (Day: 10)

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.

Barge Princesse Royal (Days: 3,4,5,6,7,8,9)

The premium barge Princesse Royal is 207 feet (63 meters) long, accommodates 30 guests, sails under the Dutch flag and management. The ship offers 11 twin cabins (approximately 118 square feet or 11 square meters, and 4 premium twin cabins (approximately 151 square feet or 14 square meters). All

cabins have fixed portholes, en-suite bathroom with shower and toilet, individually regulated air conditioning, flat-screen satellite TV, a small safe, and a hair dryer. The upper deck has, among other amenities, a tastefully furnished salon with restaurant, bar, lounge area with wide-screen TV, large windows, and WiFi. The aft deck features two partly covered teak wooden sun decks with chairs and tables, a whirlpool/Jacuzzi, and a barbecue.