

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

Bike Vacation + Air Package

Netherlands bike tour like no other. Traveling by bicycle, you'll inhale the fragrance of colorful blossoms and salty sea breezes, hear the trill of birdsong, and view up close the marvel of Holland's windmill and dike systems. Each exhilarating day is complemented by the leisurely pace of your private barge, as it drifts through scenic canals and into the heart of local life. It's the perfect way to discover this captivating country—and have a bloomin' good time!

Cultural Highlights

Experience Holland's unique countryside as you cycle along waterways, sand dunes and flower fields

Discover how dikes and windmills were engineered to reclaim land from the sea

Fill your senses with a profusion of fragrances and colors at a unique garden museum

Marvel at the profusion of blossoming bulbs as you wander the footpaths of Keukenhof flower park

Meet dairy farmers and sample their delicious farm-made cheese

Witness the energy of the world's largest flower auction from special gallery seats

View the canals and guild houses of Leiden, Rembrandt's birthplace

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: 3 - 50

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, who will be 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 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 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: Hotel Corona

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

Zaandam

After breakfast, make sure your luggage is packed and ready to be transported to the barge. At 11:30 a.m. meet a VBT representative in the hotel lobby and transfer to meet the barge. Please ensure you have a snack for lunch as the next included meal is dinner.

You will board the barge around 12:30 for a 1:00 p.m. departure. At the docks, meet the barge crew and your VBT trip leaders, who will welcome you aboard with light 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 do a scenic warm-up loop through the Twiske nature reserve.

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

Please note regarding WiFi on board 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 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 *Magnifique I*

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 km (12 miles)

Afternoon

Zaandam warm-up loop: 19 km (12 miles)

What to Expect: The route takes you into the Twiske nature reserve, where you ride along peat bogs lakes.

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, we head to Zaanse Schans and enjoy a visit of a sawmill generated only by wind power. Afterwards cycle 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. A short ride takes you to a local "care farm" where people with special needs are employed. Enjoy a picnic lunch here.

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 afternoon, 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 your barge this evening.

Hotel: Barge *Magnifique I*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 30– 47 km (19 - 29 miles)

Morning

Zaandam to Schermerhorn: 30 km (19 miles)

Afternoon

Schermerhorn to Alkmaar: 17km (11miles)

What to Expect: After a short bike ride to Zaanse Schans for a guided visit to Het Jonge Schaep sawmill, your route follows the Dutch windmill theme. During the ride, practice reading the signs of the Dutch Bike

Network System. We depart Zaanse Schans on a bike path and ride along the Zaan River, stopping at Spijkerboor for the local ferry across the dike. From here, cycle on quiet rural lanes to the pretty town of De Rijp. After Eilandspolder, you'll see one windmill after the other. In Schermermolen, stop for a visit and talk to a miller. About one-third of a mile (500 meters) after this windmill, you arrive at a "care farm" and enjoy your picnic lunch. After lunch, you may shuttle to Alkmaar. Or continue riding, enjoying scenic open countryside on quiet country lanes all the way. From Alkmaar we take a short motor coach ride to our mooring place.

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

Rise to an early breakfast this morning, and after a short motor coach ride, start cycling 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 on 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

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 26 – 60km (16 - 38 miles)

Morning

Alkmaar to lunch: 26 km (16 miles)

Afternoon

Lunch to IJmuiden Ferry 18 km (11 miles)

IJmuiden to Haarlem: 16 km (10 miles)

What to Expect: Your ride leads on both roads and bike paths through fields of spring flowers and sand dunes. It is the first of two real flower days. We start cycling outside Alkmaar, where you encounter the first flower-bulb fields, stopping in Limmen at Hortus Bulborum. In Castricum, you have an included lunch in one of the beachfront cafés with stunning North Sea views. From here, continue riding through the dunes to the more industrial Beverwijk, where you'll cross the North Sea Channel by ferry. Back on land, you may join a support vehicle shuttle to meet the barge in Haarlem, or continue cycling on an extra-long option that cuts through the dune area and on into Haarlem center to meet the barge.

DAY 6: Keukenhof flower park / Leiden

Breakfast is slightly earlier again today. Afterward, 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 (14.4 km) 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

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 23 – 56 km (14 - 35 miles)

Morning

Haarlem to Keukenhof Gardens: 23 km (14 miles)

Afternoon

Keukenhof Gardens to Leiden: 19 km (12 miles)

Additional Keukenhof Loop: 14 km (9 miles)

What to Expect: Ride on country roads through pretty flower-bulb fields on your way to world-famous Keukenhof Gardens. After leaving Haarlem, your bike route touches the ancient Manpad at the foot of the dunes, before moving further inland through the older flower-growing area. Midway to Leiden you have an included visit to Keukenhof Gardens. The ride continues through famous Dutch flower fields, then passes through the narrow main street of Warmond village. After a ferry crossing, you'll continue cycling along a bike route along the Zijl River. In Leiden, you'll join the barge at its mooring site. If you wish to add a longer loop option, you'll spend less time in Keukenhof Gardens. Please advise your trip leaders if you are riding the extra loop and let them know when you return to the Keukenhof parking lot.

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 opportunity to taste 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

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 35 – 45 km (21- 28 miles)

Morning

Zoeterwoude to Gouda: 35 km (22 miles)

Afternoon

Gouda to Haastrecht Loop: 10 km (6 miles)

What to Expect: Today, you sail during breakfast along the Old Rhine River, avoiding traffic in Leiden. After a short ride through polder country, you tour a cheese farm with a tasting. The rest of your ride is through the region of Hazerswoude and Boskoop where plants and young trees are commercially grown. Once in Boskoop, cycle or shuttle to Gouda, a world-renowned cheese city. Meet the barge here, and enjoy free time to explore. If you want to continue cycling, there is an extra-long loop option from the barge to Haastrecht, an ancient little town with a famous bike shop (Slingerland).

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 the barge this evening.

Hotel: Barge *Magnifique I*

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 26 – 50 km (16- 31miles)

Morning

Gouda to Alphen aan den Rijn: 26 km (16 miles)

Afternoon

Alphen aan den Rijn to Oude Wetering: 24 km (15 miles)

What to Expect: The first part of the ride passes through Reeuwijkse Plassen, a lake area created by peat digging. After passing the town of Bodegraven, you continue along the Old Rhine River for a barge lunch in the city of Alphen aan den Rijn. After lunch, feel free to relax and enjoy the afternoon sailing. Or cycle along a pretty route passing more peat lakes and touching the villages of Langeraar before meeting the

barge at Oude Wetering.

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

Today's Ride Choices:

Cumulative Distance Range: 7 – 44 km (4- 27 miles)

Morning

Auction to Uithoorn: 7 km (4 miles)

Uithoorn via Ouderkerk to Nieuwe Meersluis: 37 km (23 miles)

What to Expect: After the auction visit, cycle to Uithoorn for brunch in a local hotel. Afterward, cycle along the Amstel River before cutting across polder into Amsterdam Forest to meet the barge at Nieuwe Meersluis. From here the barge sails back to Amsterdam this evening.

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

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.

Hotel: Mercure Hotel Amsterdam Centre Canal District

Alternative Hotel: W Amsterdam

Meals: Breakfast

Note: The 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.

Boutique Hotel Corona (Day: 2)

The Boutique Hotel Corona is a fine boutique property and the oldest 4-star hotel of the International City of Peace and Justice. Its elegant common rooms and guest rooms occupy three historic 17th-century buildings. High ceilings and grand chandeliers give the lobby an airy feel. Located in the center of Den Haag in a former forecourt of the Buitenhof (Dutch Parliament), it boasts an illustrious past. The Boutique Hotel Corona is only 650 feet (198 meters) from the Centrum tram stop. 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.