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

Bike Vacation Only

A Netherlands bike tour will excite all your senses. Traveling by bicycle, you'll inhale the fragrance of a multitude of flowers and salty sea breezes, feast your eyes on the colorful blossoms, and listen to the calls of songbirds. You'll even get the chance to view Holland's iconic windmill and dike systems up close. Each exhilarating day is complemented by the leisurely pace of your barge, as it drifts through scenic canals and into the heart of local life. It's the perfect way to discover the sights, sounds, and aromas of this captivating country.

## Cultural Highlights

• Learn how historic windmills work and how they are used to reclaim land called "polders"

• View rare and historic flower bulbs at the flower garden museum, Hortus Bulborum

• Explore the living catalogue of spring flowers at Keukenhof Gardens

• Witness the action at the world's largest flower auction in Aalsmeer

• Explore Holland's "Green Heart," a rural and peaceful nature zone

## What to Expect

This tour is rated Easy and both hybrids and E-bikes are offered. Riding is primarily on paved roads and paths with very few hills, although wind may increase the difficulty factor since there is often little or no shelter. Cyclists may stay on the barge on windy days if they wish, but they will miss out on some of the incredible scenery which is best viewed while pedaling. Support vehicle assistance is not available on the bike path sections of the ride.

**Average Daily Mileage:** 15 - 25 miles
**Average Cycling Time:** 01:00 - 04:00

# Climate Information

**Average High/Low Temperature (°F)**

Mar 48º/37º, Apr 53º/40º

**Average Rainfall (in.)**

Mar 3.5, Apr 1.5

## DAY 1: Embark barge / Cruise to Zaandam

You are responsible for making your way to our barge, arriving between 1:00 and 1:30 p.m. Please note that you cannot embark before this time, as the barge is being prepared for your arrival. If you are late, you must contact the barge as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements because we will set sail promptly at 2:00 p.m. The barge will be moored at Buiksloterweg pier which is located to the north of Amsterdam's Centraal Station. Besides traveling by taxi, the barge is easily accessible by foot from Amsterdam Central Station by taking the free passenger ferry to Buiksloterweg. Please refer to the information listed in the tour handbook for your barge contact number.

Following a short lunch break in Amsterdam, you will board the barge around 1:30 p.m. for a 2:00 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 a brief sail, the barge moors in Zaandam. You will disembark for a scenic warm-up loop through the Twiske nature reserve.

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

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon Zaandam Warm-up Loop — 19 km (12 miles)

What to Expect:

The route takes you into the Twiske nature reserve, where you will ride alongside scenic, green peat bogs.

Cumulative Distance Range: 19 km (12 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 2: 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, you will cycle past lakes and water management systems to the beautiful town of De Rijp. Once there, you'll understand why the famous water engineer Jan Adriaanszoon Leeghwater referred to it as "the finest village in Holland." Centuries of history are can still be seen in De Rijp's wooden facades, as well as its beautiful church complete with stained glass windows dating back to 1655, lock, and town hall.

From here, continue across the Beemster Polder, an almost untouched piece of low-lying land reclaimed from the water. In 1612, Dutch engineers, using a system of dikes and windmills, drained marshes and bogs, and converted the land into pasture. Today, the Beemster Polder is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Nourished by sea water, the clay soil is nutrient and mineral-rich, with a distinctive slate blue color. Grass grown in this soil is especially lush and makes the milk produced by cows that graze here unusually sweet and creamy. The local Beemster cheeses are celebrated for their exceptional flavor.

Your next stop is the former windmill complex of the Schermer Polder which includes the Schermerhorn Windmill Museum. The museum provides you with complete access, from top to bottom, allowing you to 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 and you can enjoy a picnic lunch.

Continue cycling along this delightfully flat land to Alkmaar. The town is known as a Dutch cheese city, but that is only a small 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.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning Zaanse Schans to Lunch — 24 km (14 miles)

Afternoon Lunch to Alkmaar — 17 km (10 miles) | Additional Bergen Loop — 18 km (11 miles)

What to Expect:

After a guided visit to the Het Jonge Schaep sawmill, your route follows the Dutch windmill theme. We depart Zaanse Schans and ride along the Zaan River, stopping at Spijkerboor for the local ferry across the dike. From here, cycle to the pretty town of De Rijp. Soon, you will see many of the windmills for which The Netherlands are known. In Schermermolen, you can stop to learn about the inner workings of one of those windmills. From there, it's a short jaunt to the "care farm" where you will enjoy your picnic lunch. If you wish, you can take the shuttle to Alkmaar, but those continuing to ride will enjoy scenic open countryside all the way to your destination.

The extra-long option today includes a loop to picturesque Bergen before arriving at your barge in Alkmaar.

Cumulative Distance Range: 24 – 59 km (14 - 35 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 3: Guided tour of Hortus Bulborum / Cycle to the North Sea coast and Haarlem

After an early breakfast you'll 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 blossom throughout the museum's five-plus acres of flowerbeds. Each spring, they burst forth in a dazzling array of fragrances and colors, as you'll discover on a guided tour.

From there, it's a short ride to our lunch spot, a café situated 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. A local ferry will take you across the North Sea Canal which is a major shipping route. 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-notch restaurants, and antique shops. After coasting into town, you'll enjoy a short walking tour through the historic city center with your trip leaders. You'll dine on your own tonight at any of the local establishments before returning to the barge which is moored in Haarlem overnight.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning Alkmaar to Lunch — 29 km (18 miles)

Afternoon Lunch to IJmuiden ferry — 18 km (11 miles) | IJmuiden ferry to Haarlem — 16 km (10 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride, the first of two days filled with flowers, passes through blossoming fields and sand dunes. The first bulbs emerge soon after leaving Alkmaar and you'll have the opportunity to admire them in Limmen at Hortus Bulborum. In Castricum, we'll all have lunch together at one of the town's beachfront cafés with stunning North Sea views. You'll burn off those calories by continuing the ride through sand dunes before boarding a ferry which will cross the North Sea Channel. If you're still feeling energetic, there is an additional cycling loop through the dunes into the city of Haarlem but others may opt for a van shuttle to the barge.

Cumulative Distance Range: 29 – 63 km (18 - 39 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## DAY 4: Keukenhof Flower Park / Leiden

Today is another day with an early start, the better to catch the flowers opening in the early morning light. You'll 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 over 7 million tulips, hyacinths, daffodils, and other flowers, designed to excite the senses in a truly beautiful setting.

From there, you'll cycle through more blossoming bulb fields on your way to Leiden, a vibrant town bisected by canals and filled with attractive guild houses. The birthplace of the Dutch master Rembrandt, Leiden is home to The Netherlands' oldest university. The town also has a connection to Colonial American history. In the early 17th century, Protestants fleeing persecution elsewhere in the Low Countries, France, and England found a warmer welcome in Leiden. 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 where the barge will be moored overnight.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning Haarlem to Keukenhof Gardens — 23 km (14 miles)

Afternoon Keukenhof Gardens to Leiden — 19 km (12 miles)

What to Expect:

Ride on country roads through flowering 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 an older flower-growing area. Midway to Leiden you have an included visit to Keukenhof Gardens. The ride continues through more fabulous Dutch flower fields, then passes through the narrow main street of Warmond village. After a ferry crossing, you'll continue cycling 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.

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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 5: Cheese farm visit / Gouda

This morning, cruise out of Leiden and start your ride through verdant pastures and small farms, famous for cheese production. Near Zoeterwoude, you can stop 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. The bike path out of town has an intimate feel as it passes through residential gardens, leading 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.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning Zoeterwoude to Boskoop optional Lunch — 25 km (15 miles)

Afternoon Boskoop to Gouda — 10 km (6 miles) | Gouda to Haastrecht Loop — 10 km (6 miles)

What to Expect:

You'll enjoy breakfast on the barge along the Old Rhine River as you head to the start of today's adventure. After a short ride, you'll tour a cheese farm with the opportunity to taste their wares. The rest of your ride is through the region of Hazerswoude and Boskoop where plants and young trees are commercially grown. Your ride will end when you meet the barge in Gouda, an old cheese market city of international fame, and you'll have plenty of free time to explore the area. If you want to continue cycling, you can add an extra loop that leaves directly from the barge to Haastrecht, an ancient little town with a famous bike shop (Slingerland).

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

Included Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 6: Gouda / Alphen / Oude Wetering

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

Afterwards, 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 Uithoorn.

Enjoy dinner aboard our barge this evening.

Today's Ride Choices

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

Afternoon Alphen aan den Rijn to Tolhuissluis — 24 km (14 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 will 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 on board your mobile home or continue on cycling through lush meadows and lakes on a pretty route touching the village of

Langeraar, Rijnsaterwoude, Leimuiden, and the hamlet of Bilderdam before finishing the journey along canals heading to the Tolhuissluis Locks at the Amstel River confluence.

Cumulative Distance Range: 26 – 50 km (16 - 30 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 7: Aalsmeer flower auction / Amsterdam

Rise early today and, after sipping your morning beverage of choice, shuttle to Aalsmeer, the world's largest flower auction. The early start is worth the effort, as you'll experience the frenetic energy inside the auction warehouse. Watch 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 auction from a special gallery, you'll be at the very heart of international flower trade.

After the auction you'll cycle to Uithoorn for breakfast before continuing on your final day of cycling. Today's riding options enable you to enjoy another day in the countryside, traveling along the Amstel River and through Amsterdam Forest. 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.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning Flower Auction to Uithoorn — 8 km (5 miles) | Uithoorn to Amsterdam — 24 km (14 miles) | Via Abcoude Loop — 43 km (26 miles) | Via Ouderkerk Loop — 32 km (20 miles)

What to Expect:

After the auction visit, cycle to Uithoorn for breakfast in a local hotel. Afterwards, 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.

Cumulative Distance Range: 8 – 43 km (5 - 31 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 8: Depart Barge / Discover Amsterdam

After an included breakfast, say goodbye to your barge crew and trip leaders as your tour comes to a close. It is important that you leave the barge no later than 9:00 a.m. Please refer to the information listed in the tour handbook.

Included Meals: Breakfast

# Accommodations

**May vary depending on departure date.**

### Barge Princesse Royal (Days: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7)

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.