

The Netherlands: Holland Harbor Towns & the Wadden Sea

Bike Vacation Only

Discover the pleasures of cycling North Holland's tulip country from Enkhuizen on the scenic IJsselmeer to historic Haarlem. This colorful canvas boasts stunning brushstrokes—serene canals spanned by quaint bridges, urban centers dotted with Renaissance architecture and thriving ports. Here, tranquil paths and roadside lanes were made for biking, crisscrossing blissful meadows, tidy farms and breathtaking fields of springtime blooms, a vast secret garden far from tourist crowds. Ride the historic triangle where Dutch merchants prospered during the Golden Age. Trace untouched dunes and pine forests along the North Sea to the chic artists' haven of Bergen. And linger as you wish during this Self-Guided Bicycling Vacation in the Netherlands at cheese markets in Hoorn, Schagen and Alkmaar or over coffee and cake in a charming windmill.

Cultural Highlights

Ride in a country where bicycles are woven into everyday life, following a network of planned bike paths and lanes along a flat landscape.

Stay in historic Enkhuizen, threaded with narrow canals and quaint bridges, Renaissance architecture, and a pretty port overlooking the IJsselmeer.

Explore the "Golden Age" city of Haarlem, anchored by Grote Markt, called Holland's prettiest square, and its splendid Grote Kerk.

Pedal the tranquil Dutch countryside past meadows, tended gardens, tulip fields, fertile farms and windmills, all linked by waterways and bike paths.

Enjoy the springtime blooms in North Holland where the locals enjoy them, far from the overcrowded bloom centers of the south.

Cycle to North Sea beaches and follow bike paths into a national park framed by dunes, pine forests and grassland.

Sample cheeses and other products of North Holland as we've timed your visit to coincide with market days in Hoorn, Schagen, Alkmaar, and Haarlem.

What to Expect

This tour is easy and is ideal for beginning and experienced cyclists, with wind creating any challenge. Routes are either dedicated bike lanes (alongside streets) or dedicated bike paths, traversing tulip fields and dunes and following the IJsselmeer Lake and canals. The traffic is busiest when entering and exiting the cities of Haarlem and Hoorn. Please verify your bike selection for this tour as it is not always possible

to change bikes once you arrive on tour. Travel with your friends and family—we can accommodate multiple guests on this self-guided vacation. Our 24/7 support system is available if needed.

Tour Duration: 6 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 11 - 43

Average Cycling Time: 01:30 - 03:00

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 2.0, Jun 2.4, Jul 2.9, Aug 2.4, Sep 3.2, Oct 4.1

DAY 1: Welcome orientation / Enkhuizen loop

Make your own independent travel arrangements to Enkhuizen. We suggest arriving in The Netherlands at least one day prior to the tour start date as your tour begins at 1:00 p.m. For details, refer to your VBT Handbook. Meet your VBT local host at 1:00 p.m. (after lunch), along with any other VBT guests arriving on the same day, for your Welcome orientation in the lobby of the Villa Enkhuizen (Snouck, van Loosenpark 1, Enkhuizen, Tel +31 0651 435 036). Please be dressed and ready for cycling. Your local host will be carrying a VBT sign and/or wearing a VBT garment.

The Welcome orientation with your VBT local host includes:

- An overview of the itinerary
- Bike fitting and equipment familiarization
- Review of the Ride with GPS navigation app
- Important contact information in case you need to reach your VBT local host
- Safety briefing
- Local suggestions (restaurants, things to do, etc.)

Enkhuizen was one of the most prosperous cities in The Netherlands in the 17th century. During this Golden Age of Holland, the Dutch East India Company ruled the waves from here, particularly the trading routes to Africa, India and Indonesia, where merchants filled their ships with textiles, spice and coffee—and their coffers with profits. Today, it is a beautiful little port on the IJsselmeer, called the largest lake in Western Europe. In truth, it is a massive inland bay created in 1932 when a small sea, the Zuiderzee, was closed off from the North Sea by the 19-mile Afsluitdijk, part of the massive works project

that, still today, keeps the North Sea waters at bay. The IJsselmeer is just 15-19 feet deep.

Today's ride introduces you to the famous Dutch polder landscapes, a patchwork of low-lying swathes of land bordered by dikes. This tranquil and colorful canvas of agricultural fields, tidy small farms, and wide-open skies hosts a profusion of birdlife in its meadows and waterways.

Later, walk through Enkhuizen's historic center and admire its numerous villas, canals, churches and city walls—legacies of the 17th-century mercantile wealth. Today or tomorrow, visit the fascinating Zuiderzeemuseum, home to an indoor exhibit about the history of the region and a 15-acre open-air museum that features restored buildings, gardens, demonstrations of fish-smoking and rope-making, and a large collection of wooden ships from all over Holland.

For dinner, stroll to one of the inviting outdoor cafés or restaurants in the pedestrian-only Old Town.

Today's Ride:

Enkhuizen-Lelystad dike: 26.7 km (16.5 miles)

What to Expect: Best for calmer days without a strong wind for the entire ride, you can ride out in the middle of the body of water along the dike or dam connecting Enkhuizen with the town of Lelystad to the east. This 17-mile-long dike constructed in the late 1960s and early 1970s separates the Markermeer to the west and IJsselmeer to the east. The bike path stays on the northern side of the highway. You can turn around whenever you choose or follow the cues to Trintelhaven, the harbor halfway across with a small bar/restaurant (please note, it closes at 2:00 p.m.).

Accommodation: Villa Enkhuizen, Enkhuizen

DAY 2: Enkhuizen to Hoorn loop or return by train / Stay Put Day

Enkhuizen is surrounded by remarkably preserved fortifications, transformed into a park with walking trails overlooking the moat and several gates. You may choose to admire the harborside Drommedaris, the city's landmark plump tower named for its resemblance to a camel. Or browse the 500 volumes of the Netherland's only remaining 17th-century library located in the impressive Westerkerk church.

If you'd like to explore by bicycle, enjoy a ride in the scenic region of North Holland that is described as a historic triangle—with the towns of Enkhuizen, Hoorn and Medemblik as its three points. Cycle to Hoorn, "the pearl of the IJsselmeer," traversing flower fields and farmland. Like Enkhuizen, Hoorn prospered from the bustling trade of the Dutch Golden Age and boasts a remarkably preserved historic pedestrian center;

see its 16th-century defense tower, the Hoofdtoren (or Head Tower), the 1609 weighing house known as De Waag where cheese was weighed for centuries, and the Oosterkerk, its steeple crowned with a ship weathervane. Stroll the piers past masterfully restored sailboats, peruse the many shops and take a break at an outdoor café or restaurant. If you are here from mid-June to August, be sure to visit the Tuesday afternoon cheese market in Rode Steen Square, a festive celebration featuring West Frisian folklore dancers and cheese carriers dressed in white hoisting enormous wheels of cheese. On the third Tuesday in August, you can enjoy the lively atmosphere of an annual cheese festival instead.

Return to Enkhuizen by bike or, if you'd like to spend more time in Hoorn, you can catch the train back to Enkhuizen; it's a 26-minute ride that delivers you just a short distance from your hotel. Just look for the train compartment marked with a bicycle.

Back in Enkhuizen, enjoy a drink or dinner overlooking the port.

Today's Ride:

Enkhuizen to Hoorn one way (return by train): 42 km (26 miles)

What to Expect: Important: review guidelines for bringing your bike on the train in the Road Book. After exiting the city gate of Enkhuizen, you ride with little traffic through farmland, hamlets and towns, sometimes on dedicated bike paths and sometimes along the road in the bike lane. Encounter some busier traffic as you enter and ride through Hoorn. Return to Enkhuizen via the train (at your own expense).

Enkhuizen Loop: 64.8 km (40 miles)

What to Expect: After exiting the city gate of Enkhuizen, you ride with little traffic through farmland, hamlets and towns, sometimes on dedicated bike paths and sometimes along the road in the bike lane. Encounter some busier traffic as you enter and ride through Hoorn. Departing Hoorn, you follow the coastal bike path along the IJsselmeer with the water on your right. As you ride, you may notice that the water here is higher than the land! Weather permitting, you could stop for a swim.

Accommodation: Villa Enkhuizen, Enkhuizen

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: Enkhuizen to Schagen / Move on Day

Begin today with another spin through the historic triangle, this time tracing a seaside bike path along the

IJsselmeer. The Omring Dike that holds back the sea here was built by monks in the 14th century to protect this flood-prone land. Soon, you arrive in Medemblik. This vibrant sailing port boasts a small picturesque Old Town lined with 17th- and 18th-century houses. Its Radboud Castle on the east bank of the harbor dates to the 13th century. This modest fortress served as a hiding place for Rembrandt's renowned painting *The Night Watch* during World War II. Today, the town's most impressive sight is the 426-foot wind turbine—one of the largest in Europe. Gain insight into a considerably older source of energy if you stop at the Medemblik Steam Museum.

Continue cycling inland to the charming village of Twisk, straddling the banks of a creek. Heralded as one of the most beautiful villages in West Friesland, its buildings and farmhouses date to the 1600s. Perhaps pause for lunch here at Rempt, a modest shop serving grilled cheese and apple pie, all prepared with local ingredients! You can also pick up some snacks for later at the grocery here. Later, pass by the quaint historic town of Kolhorn. Steeped in charm, this village was once a fishing port, but dike construction sent its waters into retreat and it is now 12 miles inland on a canal. Its surrounding farmlands are the source of millions of Holland's famed tulips, with more than 500 types grown here. Fields here stretch as far as the eye can see.

Your destination today is Schagen, a pretty village boasting a lovely town square overlooked by an historic church. This warm, friendly town hosted a horse market in the 1600s and a cattle market in the 1800s. Settle into your hotel, occupying a small castle beloved to the locals, then head out for a stroll and your well-earned dinner.

Today's Ride:

Enkhuizen to Schagen: 68.5 km (43 miles)

What to Expect: Depart Enkhuizen along the flat bike path closest to the IJsselmeer. After about 25 km (15 miles), you arrive in Medemblik, marked by its giant wind turbine. Turn inland and in 5 km (3 miles) ride the 2 km (1.5 mile) long main street of Twisk, passing its historic farmhouses. You wind past the town of Winkel and the historic former fishing village of Kolhorn, then ride to your hotel in the center of Schagen.

Accommodation: Slot Hotel Schagen, Schagen

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4: Schagen to Bergen / Move on Day

After breakfast, you may head to the traditional Thursday morning market, where you may sample

cheeses and other delicious treats produced locally. Activities and performances change each week during July and August, so you never know what you'll stumble upon—perhaps folkloric dancing, handicraft demonstration, theater performances or costume displays. It's a rich and vibrant celebration of West Friesland culture! During other months, browse a selection of Dutch cheeses, the day's catch at a fish market and other local treasures.

Later, head out on a ride into tulip country. The prime blooming season is late April and early May, but our route into *De Kop van Noord Holland* (the top of North Holland) is beautiful and invigorating any time of year. You ride flat roads to the small town of Anna Paulowna, named for the 19th-century Russian wife of the Dutch king. This is where the charms of the Dutch countryside come to life: a bucolic canvas of windmills, deep-green fields, cows and traditional houses.

Later, you arrive at the North Sea coast and follow it south, passing miles of dunes, quaint towns and low forest. Your destination is the seaside village of Bergen, a well-to-do town nestled among seascapes and woodlands. An artist community at the turn of the last century, the Bergen School of painters evolved here in the 1920s and 30s. Today, it is home to inviting galleries, cafés, restaurants and the respected Kranenburgh Art Museum, where the works of regional painters and sculptors is collected. You can also explore the Park Meerwijk neighborhood, lined with unique thatched "Amsterdam villas."

Today's Rides:

Schagen to Bergen short option: 31.7 km (19.6 miles)

What to Expect: Depart Schagen, heading west. After about 5 km (3 miles), this short option continues straight toward the North Sea coast. In the spring, enjoy the fabulous bloom display. Your route gets to the coast at about 13 km (8 miles), on a combination of separate bike paths and bike lanes along the road. Continue through sand dunes and low forests planted to combat erosion. At Camperduin, ride inland through forest and small rolling dunes to the town of Bergen.

Schagen to Bergen long option: 63 km (39 miles)

What to Expect: Depart Schagen through the town of Oudesluis ("old lock"). After about 15 km (9 miles), arrive in the town of Anna Paulowna; in the spring, enjoy the fabulous bloom display here. Your route winds its way to the coast at about 32 km (20 miles), then turns south to parallel the North Sea coast on a combination of separate bike paths and bike lanes along the road. In the spring, the road is lined with about 10 miles of blooming tulip fields! Continue through sand dunes and low forests planted to combat erosion. At Camperduin, ride inland through forest and small rolling dunes to the town of Bergen.

Accommodation: Villa Breeburg, Bergen

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5: Bergen to Haarlem / Move on day

Depart Bergen on bike paths through pretty upscale neighborhoods and green parks. The first stretch of the day's ride is short—just five miles—and delivers you to the town of Alkmaar. This charming Dutch community of gabled houses has been making cheese since at least 1635. Over time, its market grew so much that town officials tore down some buildings in the main square to make room for cheese makers and other vendors. Today, this historic market runs most Fridays, perfectly timed for your visit.

After sampling cheeses and perhaps purchasing some for a snack later, continue cycling through small towns and fertile farmland. Later, you arrive at the busy North Sea Canal. This massive engineering project—built between 1865 and 1876—acts as a groundwater management system for western Holland. Critically for commerce, it links the North Sea to Amsterdam. After crossing the canal, you skirt the Zuid Kennemerland National Park, a stunning protected coastal land of dunes and bogs. The pine forests and marram grasses were planted here to fix the dunes in place. You then coast into the chic Haarlem suburb of Bloemendaal, one of the wealthiest places in The Netherlands. Your ride concludes at your hotel in the center of Haarlem.

Haarlem was the prolific center of linen manufacturing and flower cultivation from the 15th to the 17th centuries. Its prosperity was bolstered by its location on the Spaarne River, a serene waterway that lends the city a tranquil air. Your accommodations put you within walking distance of the Grote Kerk, or Great Church of St. Bavos, where both Handel and Mozart are said to have played the organ. This impressive 15th-century church rests on Grote Markt, the Great Market square, also home to the City Hall and a statue of Laurens Coster, whom the Dutch will tell you invented printing a decade before Gutenberg. There are many options on Grote Markt for dinner this evening.

Today's Ride:

Bergen to Haarlem: 53.1 km (33 miles)

What to Expect: Depart Bergen on a bike route that takes you due south through a mixture of neighborhoods and parkland. You ride on dedicated bike paths, bike lanes alongside streets, and quiet neighborhood lanes. As you enter and leave the town of Alkmaar, and as you cross the busy North Sea Canal, be aware of signs and traffic. After skirting the coastal Zuid Kennemerland National Park and the suburb of Bloemendaal on bike lanes and paths, you follow well signed bike lanes into the center of Haarlem. Again, you will share the road with traffic as you ride to your hotel near the city's main cathedral

and square.

Accommodation: Amrâth Grand Hotel Frans Hals, Haarlem

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends / Haarlem

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel and depart on your own on your onward travels. For details, refer to your VBT Handbook. Depending upon your destination, it may not be possible to depart for the U.S. on the last day of the tour. Please check airline schedules carefully. If you plan to schedule return flights immediately following the tour's conclusion, please call your airline directly for specific check-in requirements.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Amrath Grand Hotel Frans Hals (Day: 5)

Located just off the Haarlem's Grote Markt main square and around the corner from the magnificent Grote Kerk, the Amrâth Grand Hotel Frans Hals is a lovely 4-star hotel. The city's Saturday market in the square—known as one of the prettiest in Holland—is just steps away, as is a wide selection of restaurants serving Dutch and international cuisine. The charming lounge and hotel bar are ideal places to enjoy a drink after a day of exploring. Each of the luxurious classic rooms is well-appointed with air conditioning, colors that create an intimate air and beautiful artwork inspired by the city's famed artist Frans Hals.

Villa Breeburg (Day: 4)

The Villa Breeburg is a warm and inviting hotel located near Bergen's lovely town center. The charms of this beautiful old villa begin with its proprietors, a local family proud to host you and eager to make you feel completely at home. Situated on biking and walking route, the owners have ensured that bicyclists—and their bicycles!—feel welcome. Comfortable air-conditioned rooms are designed in a minimalist style in nautical colors that reflect Bergen's seaside locale while the inviting restaurant and outdoor terrace invite you to linger after a day of exploring.

Villa Enkhuizen (Days: 1,2)

Situated opposite Enkhuizen's scenic Buitenhaven, or Outer Harbor, the historic Villa Enkhuizen boasts a

lovely yard and beautifully manicured gardens that abut a city park, the Snouck van Loosenpark. This 19th-century villa, listed as an historic landmark, served as the house of the Snouck van Loosens, a philanthropic merchant family who long oversaw the park. The villa exudes all the charms of a Dutch country home, despite its city locale. Each of its four rooms offer a mix of historic period details and modern comforts. Note that the Villa Enkhuizen is not air-conditioned.

Slot Hotel Schagen (Day: 3)

The lovely Slot Hotel Schagen occupies a historic former castle just on the edge of the Schagen town square. The entire hotel has been lovingly restored for the modern age with new and newly renovated rooms. The minimalist design and clean lines allow the historic qualities of the castle to shine through, while some plush touches bring a bit of indulgence to a truly welcoming space. A private terrace overlooks the moat while each air-conditioned room features all the amenities you need for a comfortable stay.