

# The Netherlands: Holland Harbor Towns & the Wadden Sea

Bike Vacation Only

## Cultural Highlights

- Unpack once and sail the stunning waters of the Wadden Sea aboard a beautiful wooden sailing boat, pitching in as voluntary crew if you wish.
- Explore the authentic Wadden Sea islands of Texel and Terschelling, dotted with charming villages, long sandy beaches, and untouched natural areas.
- Ride in a country where bicycles are woven into everyday life, following a network of planned bike paths and lanes along a flat landscape.
- Explore the historic IJsselmeer port city of Enkhuizen, lined with narrow canals, quaint bridges, and Renaissance architecture.
- Pedal the tranquil Dutch countryside past serene waterways, meadows, tended gardens, tulip fields, fertile farms, and windmills.

## What to Expect

This tour is easy and is ideal for beginning and experienced cyclists, with wind creating the only challenge. Routes are either dedicated bike lanes (alongside streets) or dedicated bike paths, traversing dunes and following the IJsselmeer Lake and the Frisian Sea and its islands. The traffic is busiest when entering and exiting the towns of Enkhuizen, Medemblik, and Harlingen. 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

**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 / Embark sailboat / Enkhuizen loop warm-up ride

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 3:00 p.m. For details, refer to your VBT Handbook. Meet your VBT Local host at 3:00 p.m., along with any other VBT guests arriving on the same day, for your Welcome Orientation at the embarkation area of the *Leafde fan Fryslân*. The boat is open for boarding at 2:00 p.m. Your Local host will be carrying a VBT sign and/or wearing a VBT garment.

Enkhuizen was one of the most prosperous cities in The Netherlands in the 17th century. From here, during this Golden Age of Holland, the Dutch East India Company ruled the waves, 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 warm-up 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. Indoors, browse an exhibit about the history of the region. Outdoors, explore 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.

Before dinner on board, the skipper will join you for an aperitif and provide an overview of what to expect on the journey, details about the ship and important safety measures on the vessel.

### Today's Ride Choices

Enkhuizen-Lelystad dike — 28 km (17 miles)

What to Expect:

Ride across the dike that connects Enkhuizen with the town of Lelystad to the east. This 17-mile-long dike was constructed in the late 1960s and early 1970s to separate 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 signs to Trintelhaven, the harbor halfway across with a small bar and restaurant (note that it closes at 2:00 p.m.). This ride is best for calmer days without a strong wind.

Included Meals: Dinner

## **DAY 2: Cycle to Medemblik / Sail to Den Oever and Texel Island**

After breakfast on board, grab your bikes and cycle the IJsselmeer coast. As you pedal your seaside bike path, you come to appreciate the beauty and ingenuity of Dutch polders, low-lying tracts of land enclosed by the area's famous dikes. Here, it's the Omring Dike that does the work of holding back the sea, built by monks in the 14th century to prevent flooding. Breathe in the crisp North Sea air as you ride and take in the patchwork of reclaimed fields all around you.

Later, you arrive in Medemblik in West-Frisia. A wealthy trading town since 1282, this vibrant sailing port boasts a charming and picturesque Old Town lined with 17th- and 18th-century houses. The Radboud Castle is even older, dating 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. For insight into a considerably older source of energy, take time to stop at the Medemblik Steam Museum. Set in a former pumping station on the water, it is part of the European Route of Industrial Heritage.

Your ship meets you at a pier in Medemblik. Embark and continue sailing to the mainland town of Den Oever, whose name simply translates into "the shore." This former fishing village was founded in the Late Middle Ages, when the land upon which it rests—Wieringen—was an island cut off from the rest of Holland by catastrophic storm floods. A drainage and landfill project reconnected it to the mainland in 1932.

Depending on the weather this evening, the ship will cross the lock into the Wadden Sea, part of the North Sea, and sail to Texel, the first of the Frisian islands you visit.

Stretching from The Netherlands all the way up the western coast of Denmark, the Wadden Sea, a UNESCO World Biosphere reserve, is the world's largest area of uninterrupted intertidal sand and mudflats—a massive blend of ever-changing tidal channels, shoals, sea-grass meadows, mussel beds, sandbars, marshes, estuaries, beaches and dunes. Its unrivalled diversity lures a profusion of marine

mammals and millions of birds.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Enkhuizen to Medemblik short option — 24 km (15 miles) | Enkhuizen to Medemblik long option — 40 km (25 miles)

#### What to Expect:

##### Short option:

Depart Enkhuizen along the flat bike path closest to the IJsselmeer. After about 23 km (14 miles), you arrive in the ancient town of Medemblik, marked by its giant modern wind turbine.

##### Long option:

Depart Enkhuizen along the flat bike path closest to the IJsselmeer. Your route then heads slightly inland through to the charming hamlet of Twisk, straddling the banks of a creek. Nominated one of the most beautiful villages in West Friesland, its buildings and farmhouses date to the 1600s. The route circles back to the coast to the town of Medemblik, marked by its giant wind turbine.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### DAY 3: Cycle Texel Island loop

Awake in the port of Oudeschild to a hearty shipboard breakfast, featuring Dutch cheeses and cold cuts. Then set off on a loop ride to explore the largest of the West Frisian Islands, lush with green vistas, endless ocean panoramas, villages steeped in Dutch charm, and bicycle-friendly pathways.

Texel (pronounced "Tessel") really is a cyclist's dream. You follow well-marked cycling routes to farmlands, pristine coastlines, cream-colored dunes, and quaint villages. We suggest a loop ride that delivers you to several small seaside hamlets, where lunch options abound. As you ride, it will be worth your while to stop at the Ecomare seal sanctuary in De Koog, where you can learn about the ecosystems thriving in the Wadden Sea. You might also pause to explore the tranquil Dunes of Texel National Park, and have lunch at a traditional beer brewery near your dock.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Texel Island loop short option — 46 km (29 miles) | Texel Island loop long option — 51 km (32 miles)

What to Expect:

Short option:

From the port of Oudeschild, enjoy a loop ride along dedicated bike paths through farmland and past hamlets, starting with Oosterend with its medieval church. Continue to De Koog, the main seaside town with more shops. Then, you find the dunes, Ecomare center and beach on the island's west side and circle back to the ship through the island's largest town of Den Burg.

Long option:

From the port of Oudeschild, enjoy a loop ride along dedicated bike paths through farmland and past hamlets, starting with Oosterend with its medieval church. Continue to De Koog, the main seaside town with more shops. The route then continues south to the hamlet of Den Hoorn before winding back north to the ship's mooring.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 4: Texel Island to Terschelling Island / Sailing Day**

Take today to relax on board as you cruise to the island of Terschelling on your sailing ship. Your captain sets sail on your 5–6-hour journey as the tide and weather permit. As you ply the waters of the Wadden Sea, keep watch for seals lounging on the sandbars and do some lounging yourself while on deck, easing into the slow rhythm of your sea crossing. Savor an extensive lunch as you cruise. You arrive on Terschelling sometime this afternoon. At about 19 miles long, this is one of the largest of the West Frisians, dotted with lovely villages, polders, and gentle sand dunes. This evening, you can make yourself a picnic to enjoy in the open air on board or on shore, or venture to one of your port's nice restaurants for dinner on your own.

Non-biking Day: Relax on board the sailing ship as you journey to Terschelling Island.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## **DAY 5: Terschelling Island loop / Sail to Harlingen**

Get back out on your bike today to explore another stunning West Frisian Island. Terschelling boasts a wide network of bike paths that total some 42 miles. Pedal your way through the island's picturesque villages. Admire plentiful barns and farmhouses, some of which were built with masts recovered from shipwrecks over the centuries. Stop to see some of the cranberry farms; the berries established themselves here after a barrel of them washed ashore in 1840. Explore the heath lands of the Boschplaat nature reserve, a rich ecosystem of high dunes, sand plains, and swamps. And keep an ear open for the

three unique—and endangered—Frisian languages still spoken here.

West Terschelling is the largest village on the island and offers numerous inviting shops and pubs. From many points on the island, you can see the Brandaris lighthouse, the oldest in The Netherlands, built in 1594. Throughout your day, you might spot ducks, black-winged stilts, large colonies of spoonbills and great black-backed gulls. After a day of cycling, relax in comfort back on board.

Late this afternoon, depart Terschelling to sail the Wadden Sea once again, this time to the mainland city of Harlingen, the most important harbor in the province of Friesland.

### Today's Ride Choices

Terschelling options — up to 42 km (26 miles)

### What to Expect:

On this 19-mile-long island, you follow a variety of dedicated bike paths through villages, seascapes and dunes. The route keeps the historic lighthouse in view as you make your way across flat open heathland and circle back to the ship's mooring.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 6: Ride from Harlingen to Franeker and Makkum**

Disembark with your bike and ride through Harlingen's cycle-friendly streets. Leaving the city, you traverse vast Dutch farmland and soon arrive in Franeker, one of the Eleven Frisian Cities through which, every winter as the cold weather allows, ice skaters skim over canals, rivers, and lakes on a 120-mile course. Franeker is also home to the fascinating Eise Eisinga Planetarium, well worth your time. One of the top 100 Dutch heritage sites, it features a remarkable 18th-century working mechanical model of the solar system built into the timber roof of its living room.

After, cycle through the beautiful wide Frisian countryside, passing several rural villages before arriving in the small harbor of Makkum on the eastern bank of the IJsselmeer. This former fishing village came into its own during the Golden Age, thriving on an industry of brick works, saw and paper mills, and shipyards.

You meet your ship in Makkum.

## Today's Ride Choices

Harlingen – Franeker – Makkum short option – 45 km (28 miles) | Harlingen – Franeker – Makkum long option inland – 46 km (29 miles)

### What to Expect:

#### Short option:

From the harbor of Harlingen, you head east on bike paths into Frisian countryside to the town of Franeker. Then wind back toward the coast to the town of Makkum.

#### Long option:

From the harbor of Harlingen, you head east on bike paths into Frisian countryside to the town of Franeker with several historic landmarks from the 14th to 18th centuries. Then loop south through farmland and wetlands, and continue west, passing through villages, to the coast and the town of Makkum.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 7: Ride to Hindeloopen and Stavoren / Sail to Enkhuizen**

Arise in Makkum to a delicious shipboard breakfast. Then you have two options for your ride today. The shorter option follows more spectacular Dutch farming landscapes that hug the IJsselmeer. You coast into the old trading town of Hindeloopen. Another of the Eleven Frisian Cities, this coastal gem was enriched by the Dutch Golden Age, its sea captain houses marked by anchors hanging on their facades. The town is renowned for its namesake style of decorative painting, a beguiling and lush folk-art style. The First Frisian Museum of Ice Skating is also here—home of silver skates, ancient skates, and the largest skate in the world. After time here, you continue to Stavoren to meet your ship.

Today's long option leads you to several Frisian lakes, revealing a different side of North Holland's serene landscapes—beautiful watery expanses nestled among swathes of farmland. There are 24 lakes in total and they attract boaters from all over The Netherlands. Your ride concludes in Stavoren, where your ship awaits.

Once on board, you sail late this afternoon, crossing the IJsselmeer to Enkhuizen.

## Today's Ride Choices

Makkum – Hindeloopen – Stavoren – 30 km (19 miles) | Makkum – Frisian Lakes - Stavoren – 48 km (30 miles)

What to Expect:

From Makkum on the banks of IJsselmeer, ride slightly east and inland among farming fields until you reach the outskirts of the town of Workum, filled with historic buildings. Then head back to the coast and Hindeloopen, a small port, and hug the coast to Stavoren harbor, where your ship awaits.

From Makkum on the banks of IJsselmeer, ride slightly east and inland among farming fields until you reach the Frisian Lakes, a series of lakes nestled in fields. Then return to the coast via Workum, with its historic buildings, and after Hindeloopen hug the shore to Stavoren harbor, where your ship awaits.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 8: VBT Self-Guided Bicycle Vacation ends / Enkhuizen**

Enjoy your last breakfast on board your ship and depart from the port on your own for your onward travels. For details, refer to your VBT Handbook. Depending on 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.

### **Ship Leafde Fan Fryslan (Days: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7)**

A beautiful and extravagant three-masted schooner with a capacity of 24 passengers, the Leafde fan Fryslân was built in 1960 as a freight ship and completely renovated in 2017. Each of the 12 comfortable cabins offers 2 lower beds, a private bathroom with shower and toilet, and a porthole window that can be opened. Common areas include a salon that also serves as a restaurant and the wheelhouse bar with breathtaking views through a large, panoramic window. There is ample outdoor seating. The ship's sail can be operated either by hand or motor. Complimentary Wi-Fi/WLAN connection is available throughout the ship, but only while in harbor. The ship moors each night.