

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

Bike Vacation + Air Package

A Holland tulip 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 private 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

Cycle flat terrain on dedicated bike paths over dikes, drawbridges and canals
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
Ferry across the North Sea Canal
Tour Haarlem's cobblestone streets, pretty canals, cool shops and cafés
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 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 treat *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 - 25

Average Cycling Time: 00:30 - 04:00

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

Mar 48°/37°, Apr 53°/40°, May 61°/46°

Average Rainfall (in.)

Mar 3.5, Apr 1.5, May 2

DAY 1: Depart home / Fly overnight to Amsterdam

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

DAY 2: Arrive in Amsterdam / Transfer to Den Haag

Upon arrival at the Amsterdam airport, claim your luggage and clear customs. After exiting customs, enter the arrival hall and look for your VBT representative holding a sign. Make certain your VBT luggage tags are affixed to your bag so your representative can identify you. Please wait here while your representative helps make arrangements for your transfer via taxi or minibus to your hotel in Den Haag (transfer time is approximately 35 minutes). If any portion of your luggage appears to be lost, file a PIR form before leaving the customs area. VBT representatives are not allowed inside the customs area.

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. You are on your own for dinner but there are many, many wonderful restaurants to choose from.

Accommodation: Hotel Corona

DAY 3: Embark barge / Cruise to Zaanse Schans

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 the barge. Be sure to pack a bite for lunch as the next included meal is dinner.

You will board the barge around 12:30 p.m. 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 a brief sail, the barge moors near Zaanse Schans, next to a working sawmill which is run purely on wind power. You will pedal along the canal on your warm-up ride, rejoining the barge at the mooring. Cycling past traditional green painted houses, warehouses, and windmills, you're sure to feel as if you are pedaling through bygone centuries.

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

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 dependable 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 which are available on tour.

Accommodation: *Barge Lena Maria*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choice:

Afternoon

Zaandam Warm-up: 5 km (3 miles)

What to Expect: The route provides a glimpse into Zaandam's industrial heritage as it passes along local cocoa and peanut factories. Continue to a small neighborhood of traditional houses. This is a good opportunity to practice reading the signs of the Dutch Bike Network System

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, 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.

Accommodation: *Barge Lena Maria*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

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

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.

DAY 5: 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.

Accommodation: *Barge Lena Maria*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today's Ride Choices:

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

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.

DAY 6: 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 seven 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.

Accommodation: *Barge Lena Maria*

Included 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 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.

DAY 7: 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.

Accommodation: *Barge Lena Maria*

Included Meals: Breakfast

Today's Ride Choices:

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

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).

DAY 8: Gouda / Alphen / Tolhuissluis

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 Tolhuissluis, then cruise along the River Amstel to the next overnight mooring point at Uithoorn.

Enjoy dinner aboard our barge this evening.

Accommodation: *Barge Lena Maria*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

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

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

DAY 9: 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 brunch 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.

Accommodation: *Barge Lena Maria*

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today's Ride Choices:

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

Morning

Flower Auction to Uithoorn: 8 km (5 miles)

Uithoorn to Amsterdam: 24 km (14 miles)

Via Abcoude Loop: 43 km (26 miles)

What to Expect: After the auction visit, cycle to Uithoorn for breakfast onboard your barge. 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.

DAY 10: Depart Barge / Discover Amsterdam

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.

Accommodation: Mercure Hotel Amsterdam Centre Canal District

Included 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

Fly home or continue your journey with an optional post-trip extension in Amsterdam.

Find detailed itineraries at vbt.com.

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.

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 Lena Maria (Days: 3,4,5,6,7,8,9)

The Lena Maria started her new life as a passenger barge in 2006. Built by Hans de Lange, who had previously built and operated similar vessels, the ship offers plenty of room for up to 24 passengers. All 12 cabins offer 2 lower beds and private bathrooms with a shower and toilet. Windows can be opened, and the cabins have central heating. Common areas include a dining area, a lounge with a bar, and a sun deck at the bow. The barge moors each night. Drinks of all types are available for purchase at the bar on board the Lena Maria. It is not customary for guests to bring their own wine and liquor on board; your understanding is appreciated. Onboard meal menus are set, though the chef is happy to accommodate vegetarians and those on restricted diets for health reasons.