

## Holland & Belgium Bike & Boat: Bruges to Amsterdam

### Bike Vacation + Air Package

On this popular itinerary we bike and boat through a serene landscape of canals and dikes, gardens and windmills with fields of fattened cows and sheep. Pausing often to explore medieval cities and villages, you will cruise at a gentle pace that lets you linger in the moment – chocolates and all. Enjoy a picnic lunch at the locks, find out why we bike below sea level, and cruise by boat through Ghent's medieval canals plus a few other Low Country treats. And, what could be better than sampling Belgian beer? Sampling it often.

### Cultural Highlights

- Spend time with a local family in their home
- Visit Antwerp the "Diamond City" and admire the art of Peter Paul Rubens
- Cycle along rivers, through lush farmlands, on top of dikes and along canals
- Spend leisurely time in the medieval Belgian cities of Bruges and Ghent
- Cross the original "Breukelen Bridge" by bike
- Visit the ancestral hometown of the Roosevelt family
- Taste Dutch cheese on a working dairy farm
- Learn how Dutch engineers "reclaim" land from the sea
- Visit the historic 19th century Kinderdijk windmills, a UNESCO site
- Enjoy a classic VBT picnic lunch alongside historic locks
- Take a guided boat excursion to medieval Ghent's historic center
- Sample Belgian beer and chocolates

### 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 points for those who need assistance.

**Tour Duration:** 11 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 10 - 38

**Average Cycling Time:** 01:00 - 03:30

## Climate Information

### **Average High/Low Temperature (°F)**

May 61°/46°, Jun 66°/52°, Aug 70°/55°, Sep 64°/51°

### **Average Rainfall (in.)**

May 2, Jun 2.4, Aug 2.4, Sep 3.2

## DAY 1: Depart from home / Fly overnight to Brussels

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

## DAY 2: Arrive in Bruges

Upon arrival at the Brussels airport, claim your luggage and clear customs. If any portion of your luggage appears to be lost, fill in a PIR form before leaving the customs area — VBT representatives are not allowed into the customs area. (Please note: Also make certain that 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 holding a VBT sign. Please wait here while your representative helps make arrangements for your transfer via taxi or minibus to your Bruges hotel (transfer time is approximately 1 hour, depending on traffic). The transfer company's name is Taxi Snel, telephone number +32 50 36 36 49.

Please note: Hotel check-in time is 3:00 p.m. There will be a VBT group checking out of the hotel, so please do not plan for your room to be available earlier. VBT and the hotel appreciate your understanding and cooperation. You may leave your bags with reception while you explore Bruges. There is so much to see and do just around the corner. VBT provides you with City Information that includes recommendations.

Seek out a restaurant for dinner on your own tonight.

Hotel: Hotel Navarra

## DAY 3: Embark barge / VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Warm-up ride and cruise to Ghent

VBT Air Package and Pre-Trip Extension guests: After breakfast, spend more free time in Bruges. Make sure your luggage is packed and ready to be transported to the barge before 9:45 a.m. At 12:30 p.m., join our VBT Trip Leader in the hotel lobby and walk together to our barge in time for a 2:00 p.m. departure. At the docks, meet the barge crew and our second VBT Trip Leader, who welcome you aboard with refreshments.

You will cruise out of Bruges on a charming canal. The barge stops before dinner so you can join your Trip Leaders for a warm-up ride into the heart of Flanders.

This evening, enjoy a welcome dinner on board and learn a bit of Flemish and Dutch during a fun language class. You will moor in Ghent, one of Belgium's most beautiful cities.

Please note regarding Wi-Fi onboard the barge: Due to the nature of the barge movements, internet access is not always available. As such, 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 Wi-Fi on board, VBT also recommend downloading your VBT Maps & Routes Notes from a Wi-Fi 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 Fiep

Meals: B (included for Air Package guests only), D

Daily Options: 12 miles (19km)

## **DAY 4: Tour Ghent / Cycle to Dendermonde**

After breakfast, embark a local boat excursion to the center of Ghent with a guide, then explore on your own. Located at the confluence of the Schelde and Leie rivers, this "City of 200 Bridges" was founded around 600 AD and boasts many beautiful buildings dating to medieval times, when the textile industry brought great wealth to Ghent's merchants. Many old patrician houses have been preserved in the city center. One historic building is the Cloth Makers' Hall, built in 1425. The city's major church is St. Baaf's Cathedral, constructed and enhanced in various styles over many centuries. In the cathedral, admire a number of masterpieces of medieval painting, including Jan van Eyck's famous Adoration of the Lamb. (On Sunday morning there is a service in the cathedral, and it is not possible to see this famous

painting—only the replica.) Lunch is on your own in Ghent.

After lunch, enjoy a scenic ride out of the city. Your bike path parallels the Schelde River. You will cycle through small "polder" villages and past marshy grasslands, ponds and picturesque creeks. A Berlare-Appels ferry takes you to the south shore of the Schelde, where you will cross the Dender River locks system and rejoin your barge. Your destination today is Dendermonde, a centuries-old city with a Benedictine abbey and pretty market square at its center. This evening, enjoy a Belgian beer tasting and crew presentation.

Hotel: Barge Fiep

Meals: B, D

Daily Options: 18 or 20 miles (28.9 or 31.6 km)

## **DAY 5: Cycle from Dendermonde / Continue ride to Antwerp**

Cycle from Dendermonde via Temse along the Sheldt River. You will ride through the village of Rupelmonde, pausing to admire its unique tidal watermill and statue of the mathematician and mapmaker Mercator. He was the world's premier geographer in the 16th century and created both the terrestrial and celestial globes. Arrive in Bazel for lunch on your own, with time to explore its picturesque church square and Wissekerke castle. Continue cycling through farmland and tiny villages to Antwerp, Belgium's second largest city.

Meet the barge at one of Antwerp's historic docks in the afternoon, then walk into town to dine on your own in one of the many restaurants and enjoy a free evening.

Hotel: Barge Fiep

Meals: B

Daily Options: 15.5, 23 or 36 miles (24.7, 36.3 or 58.4 km)

## **DAY 6: Visit Antwerp / Cruise to Tholen**

Today is a non-biking day. This morning, you will visit Antwerp, known as the "Diamond City" and the hometown of the painter Peter Paul Rubens. In the middle of the city, you'll find the Cathedral of Our Lady and beautiful old townhouses around the Market Square. You'll have plenty of time to explore all of the delights during free time this morning.

After enjoying lunch on your own in Antwerp rejoin the barge and relax while cruising through the impressive port and along the quieter canals to Tholen. After dinner onboard the barge, we've invited some local families to meet you at the barge and accompany you back to their homes for an evening of camaraderie and cultural exchange.

Hotel: Barge Fiep

Meals: B, D

Daily Options: Non-biking day

## **DAY 7: Cycle from Tholen to Willemstad / Cruise to Dordrecht**

This morning, cycle from Tholen to Willemstad through tranquil agricultural land on the western edge of Brabant province, passing through the small town of Oud-Vossemeer. Claes van't Rosevelt, ancestor of the American presidential family, emigrated from this village in 1649 for a better life. Later, you will coast into Willemstad, an old fortified town on the Haringvliet. The massive walls were laid out in the shape of a seven pointed star, each rampart named for one the seven provinces of the Republic of United Netherlands.

Meet your barge here and set sail during lunch to Dordrecht. The barge moors in the city's historic center, making for an easy and delightful afternoon of exploring. Dordrecht is one of Holland's oldest towns and birthplace of the state of The Netherlands, founded by William of Orange. This evening, explore more of the town on your own and find a restaurant for dinner.

Hotel: Barge Fiep

Meals: B, L

Daily Options: 28 or 29 miles (44.8 or 46.8 km)

## **DAY 8: Cruise to Kinderdijk / Cycle to Schoonhoven / Vianen**

During breakfast, you will sail the River Noord to Kinderdijk, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Here, 19 of Holland's famous windmills — some more than 260 years old — adorn the horizon. After your visit, cycle through the beautiful canal and meadow landscapes of Alblasserwaard to Schoonhoven or "Silver City" for its long silversmithing tradition. Here re-board the barge and enjoy lunch. After lunch you have the option to cycle or cruise to Vianen.

If you choose our longer option, you will pass a landscape of wide polders separated by numerous

canals. These patches of land reclaimed from the sea average an elevation of six feet below sea-level. An afternoon route leads through a series of villages and hamlets, where your trails skirt the backyards of locals. You will also ride along the Lek River dike and gain clear views of the different water levels.

Spend the night in Vianen, a small city on the River Lek.

Hotel: Barge Fiep

Meals: B, L, D

Daily Options: 17 or 33 miles (27.3 or 53.1 km)

## DAY 9: Arrive in Amsterdam

During breakfast this morning, you will cruise to Breukelen, a charming little town after which Brooklyn in New York is named. Begin cycling across a white drawbridge, the original "Brooklyn" Bridge, toward Amsterdam. Follow the beautiful rivers Vecht and Amstel, which lead right into the city. Along the river Vecht, pass magnificent 17th-century mansions and country estates built by prosperous Amsterdam merchants. You will stop for a picnic lunch along the way. Tonight, enjoy our last dinner on board.

Hotel: Barge Fiep

Meals: B, L, D

Daily Options: 15, 20 or 27 miles (23.3, 32.2 or 44.2 km)

## DAY 10: Depart barge / Explore Amsterdam / VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

VBT Air Package guests and Post-Trip Extension guests: After breakfast, say goodbye to your barge crew and VBT Trip Leader, then join your other Trip Leader for an orientation walk through Amsterdam's canal-lined streets to your hotel. Please note that check-in time is 3:00 p.m., but the staff will do their best to get you to your rooms as soon as possible. After checking in, explore Amsterdam and enjoy dinner on your own. VBT provides you with City Information that includes recommendations on what to see and do in the city.

Hotel: Hotel Vondel

Meals: B

## DAY 11: Depart for home

After breakfast,\* meet in the hotel lobby to transfer to the Amsterdam airport and your departing flight back 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: B

## Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

### Hotel Navarra (Day: 2)

Ideally located in the historic center of Bruges, near the Market Square with its famous Belfry Tower, the Hotel Navarra offers an intimate and welcoming atmosphere, complemented by excellent service. The elegant, 17th-century mansion occupied by the hotel is listed as a historic monument, yet you'll enjoy modern amenities that include free WiFi, air conditioning, a spa, an indoor swimming pool, a sauna, a gym, and a small garden with sun terrace.

### Barge Fiep (Days: 3,4,5,6,7,8,9)

A cozy and spacious, two-deck, 22-passenger barge with a homelike atmosphere, the Fiep has 12 comfortable cabins—10 twin and two single—with private bathrooms and private showers, and the barge has climate control throughout. Common areas include a dining area and lounge with a bar, and a sun deck at the bow. Smoking is permitted only outside on the sun deck. The barge moors each night. Drinks of all types are available for purchase at the bar on board the Fiep. 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.

### Hotel Catalonia Vondel (Day: 10)

A wonderful boutique hotel set amid charming 19th-century townhouses in the vibrant heart of

Amsterdam, the Hotel Vondel offers easy access to the museum quarter, the bustling Leidseplein, tree-lined Vondelpark, and fine dining, shopping and entertainment. Enjoy the unique, artistic character of the hotel, as well as its cozy bar, attractive garden, and brightly decorated breakfast restaurant. WiFi is free and available throughout the hotel.