

# Holland & Belgium Bike & Boat: Bruges to Amsterdam

## Bike Vacation + Air Package

Enjoy the privacy of VBT's exclusive barge as you journey through the charming canals of Holland and Belgium. Unpack only once, then relax in the comfort of your floating home—including a comfortable lounge and dining area—as you watch the scenery float past from the splendid sundeck. By day, cycle easy bike paths past Holland's windmills and polder villages—rubbing elbows with bike-commuting locals along the way. In the evenings, enjoy delicious meals of local specialties prepared by your boat's on-board chef—plus special treats such as a Belgian beer tasting, and a night of festive camaraderie at the home of our Dutch friends. With VBT's deep roots in Holland and Belgium, there are many opportunities to experience the region's rich cultural heritage with the people who live here.

## Cultural Highlights

- Cycle along tranquil rivers and past meadows, dairy farms, quaint villages, and polder countrysides.
- Get acquainted with local people — and local life — during a visit to a family home.
- Join a local guide for a boat tour of Ghent, whose history dates to around 600 AD.
- View the famous Kinderdijk windmills, a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- Sip authentic Belgian beer during a special tasting on board.

## 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 vehicle is available every day at designated points for those who need assistance.

**Tour Duration:** 12 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 11-36 miles

**Average Cycling Time:** 2-4 hours

**Group size:** 14-22 max

## Climate Information

### Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 61°/46°, June 66°/52°, August 70°/55°, September 64°/51°

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

May 2, June 2.4, August 2.4, September 3.2

## **FLIGHT DAY: Depart from the United States or Canada**

Your vacation is about to begin! Spend your first night aloft and arrive ready for an unforgettable trip.

## **ARRIVAL DAY: Arrive in Brussels / Travel to Bruges**

A VBT representative will greet you at the airport to start your adventure off right. A complimentary car service will whisk you to your centrally located hotel in Bruges. From here, you are perfectly positioned to explore this charming city at your leisure.

## **ARRIVAL DAY: Independent exploration of Bruges**

From your centrally located hotel, walk the cobbled streets of this enchanting town. Be sure to go to the top of the Belfort Tower for a panoramic view of the splendid medieval cityscape. You may want to visit the 12th-century Basilica of the Holy Blood, said to contain a small vial of Christ's blood that was brought to Bruges from the Holy Land in 1149. Or stop by the Memling Museum, housed in one of the oldest surviving medieval hospitals in Europe.

Tonight, try one of Bruges' wonderful restaurants for dinner on your own using VBT's city information as your guide.

## **DAY 1: Embark barge / Warm-up ride and cruise to Ghent**

After an included 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 one of your VBT trip leaders in the hotel lobby and walk together to your barge in time for a 2:00 p.m. departure. At the docks, meet the barge crew and your 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 near Ghent, one of Belgium's most beautiful cities.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Keersluis Beernem to Aalterbrug Warm-up — 21 km (13 miles)

#### What to Expect:

After disembarking and bike fitting, the warm-up ride follows the Ghent-Bruges Canal. Getting comfortable on your bike and following the route notes, you will ride on asphalt and bike paths with sections of quiet roads. At the end of the ride, the barge picks you up and sails to the mooring site near Ghent.

Cumulative Distance Range: 21 km (13 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 2: Tour Ghent / Cycle to Dendermonde and St. Amands

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 Scheldt and Leie rivers, this "City of 200 Bridges" was founded around 600 AD. Many of its beautiful buildings date 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*. Lunch is on your own in Ghent.

After lunch, enjoy a scenic ride out of the city. Your bike path parallels the Scheldt 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 Scheldt, where you will cross the Dender River locks system and rejoin your barge. Cycle to Dendermonde, a centuries-old city with a Benedictine abbey and pretty market square at its center. Your destination today is St. Amands, where the barge will dock on the banks of the Scheldt River. Dinner is on board tonight. This evening, enjoy a Belgian beer tasting.

## Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Melle to Dendermonde — 29 km (18 miles)

Afternoon: Dendermonde City Tour Loop — 2 km (1 mile)

## What to Expect:

The route immediately crosses the Scheldt River at Melle town and joins a beautiful bike path along the northern bank of the river. After around 6.8 miles (11 km), the route diverts from the river to meander through the countryside and a few small settlements. Upon returning to the river, cross by the ferry and then continue along the southern banks on a bike path leading to the large Dender River Locks. After meeting the barge, there is the option for a loop ride to explore the small city of Dendermonde. Then cruise on to St. Amands where the barge will moor for the night.

Cumulative Distance Range: 29 – 31 km (18 – 19 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 3: Cycle from St. Amands / Continue ride to Antwerp

Cycle from St. Amands 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. Enjoy lunch on your own. Later, arrive in Basel 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.

## Today's Ride Choices

Morning: St. Amands to Rupelmonde — 32 km (20 miles)

Afternoon: Rupelmonde to Antwerp — 26 km (16 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride offers variation. For starters, your trip leaders guide you across the Scheldt River on a small ferry. The first part of the ride is on bike paths decorated by willow trees and carp ponds. After the village of Moerzeke, you'll cross the river by ferry. Cycle through the city of Temse, once a trading center. Continue on to Rupelmonde, a good place for lunch on your own. The second part of the ride passes through Basel, with the oldest suspension bridge in Belgium and Wissekerke Castle. The last part of the ride leads you through agricultural lands until Antwerp Cathedral comes into view. To reach the city, you cycle through a long and exciting bike-and-pedestrian tunnel under the river. You'll find the barge at one of the historic docks.

Cumulative Distance Range: 26 – 58 km (16 – 36 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 4: 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, the Netherlands. After dinner on board 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.

Today's Ride Choices

What to Expect:

Non-biking day: Explore Antwerp, then cruise to Tholen, the Netherlands.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 5: 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.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Tholen to Willemstad — 45 km (28 miles)

Afternoon: Willemstad City Tour — 2 km (1 mile)

### What to Expect:

Today's ride sets off through the town of Tholen. From here, small country lanes lead through relatively "new" agricultural lands to the village of Oud-Vossemeer, the ancestral home of the Roosevelt family. Cross the river shortly afterward, and follow a bike path along the river before meandering through the countryside to Willemstad, an ancient stronghold of the Orange family. After you meet the barge, you will have the option of taking a short but enjoyable ride around this remarkable 16th-century fortified city.

Cumulative Distance Range: 45 – 47 km (28 – 29 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

## DAY 6: Cruise to Alblusserdam / Cycle to Kinderdijk / Schoonhoven / Vianen

During breakfast, you will sail the River Noord to Alblasterdam where you will begin riding to Kinderdijk, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Here, 19 of Holland's famous windmills—some more than 260 years old—adorn the horizon. After cycling along the old windmills, continue by crossing the river Lek by ferry and ride through the beautiful canal-and-meadow landscapes of Krimpenerwaard to Schoonhoven, or "Silver City," renowned for its long silversmithing tradition. Here re-board the barge and enjoy an included lunch. Afterward, 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 (1.8 meters) below sea level. The 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. Dinner is on board tonight.

#### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Kinderdijk to Schoonhoven — 32 km (20 miles)

Afternoon: Schoonhoven to Vianen — 26 km (16 miles)

#### What to Expect:

Disembark the barge at Alblasterdam and start cycling to Kinderdijk, where you will pause for a visit. From here, continue your ride along this legendary dike, surrounded by 19 traditional windmills. The ride features lovely bike paths and dairy farms with typical Frisian black-and-white cows. Later, cross the River Lek by ferry and arrive in the small city of Schoonhoven, famous for its silversmithing industry. After lunch, continue cycling through the Krimpenerwaard Polder. Another ferry takes you back across the Lek River to medieval Vianen.

Cumulative Distance Range: 26 – 58 km (16 – 36 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 7: 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 Vecht and Gaasp rivers, 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 your last dinner on board.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Breukelen to Weesp — 23 km (15 miles)

Afternoon: Weesp to Diemen — 9 km (6 miles) | Diemen to Amsterdam — 12 km (7 miles)

### What to Expect:

The first part of today's ride follows the River Vecht on small country lanes to Weesp. Here, enjoy a picnic lunch between two windmills before having the option to shuttle in the support vehicle to meet the barge in Amsterdam. Or continue cycling through Weesp and along the River Gaasp en route to Diemen. Here, this is another option to shuttle to meet the barge in Amsterdam. If you wish to cycle further, the route continues along the Amsterdam-Rhine canal all the way into the city. The barge docks close to the central railway station.

Cumulative Distance Range: 9 – 44 km (6– 28 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 8: Depart Barge / Explore Amsterdam

After an included breakfast, your tour ends. Walk to a nearby dock for a canal boat tour in Amsterdam. It is important that you leave the barge no later than 9:00 a.m. so the crew can prepare for their next guests.

The rest of the day is yours to explore Amsterdam's canal-lined streets and enjoy lunch on your own. Later, walk to your hotel for check-in—rest up in the hotel, head back out for dinner at a local restaurant, or dine at the hotel restaurant. We provide detailed city information to help you plan your day.



Included Meals: Breakfast

## DEPARTURE DAY: Departure

After an included breakfast this morning, complimentary transportation to the Amsterdam airport will be provided (an approximately 40- to 60-minute drive, depending on traffic) for your departing flight.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

### Hotel Navarra (Days 1-1)

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 La Mar (Days 1-7)

A cozy and spacious, two-deck, 22-passenger barge with a homelike atmosphere, the La Mar 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 *La Mar*. 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.

### Mövenpick Hotel Amsterdam City Centre (Day 8)

The Mövenpick Hotel Amsterdam City Centre is a modern, 4-star hotel located on the edge of the River IJ,

near the Oosterdok canal and the Amsterdam Central Station. Its spacious rooms provide stunning views of Amsterdam city and the harbor. This luxury property is also within walking distance of downtown and many of Amsterdam's renowned attractions. Plus, free WiFi and air conditioning are available throughout the hotel.