

HOLLAND & BELGIUM – FROM AMSTERDAM TO BRUGES or RETURN 8-days / 7-nights – **PREMIER** easy to moderate cycling or a cruising only holiday



Departs: Amsterdam to Bruges 2nd June, 28th July, 25th August 2012
Bruges to Amsterdam 9th June, 4th August, 1st September 2012

Cost: AU\$1795 per person twin share. Single cabin supplement AU\$740 per person

Included: Premier barges with twin-bedded cabins with en-suite shower/toilet, breakfast daily, packed lunch, 3-course dinners, bed linen & towels, bicycle hire and experienced cycle tour guides.

Not Included: Entrance fees to any museums, castles, breweries, or the cheese farm.

Highlights: Amsterdam – Vianen – Dordrecht – Tholen – Antwerp – Dendermonde – Ghent – Bruges

One of our most popular routes with several barges to choose from we offer mostly flat, easy cycling visiting historical Flemish cities, Antwerp, Ghent and Bruges **and** a very beautiful part of Holland. Leaving Amsterdam we cycle beside the winding River Vecht passing many impressive castles. We visit a traditional Dutch cheese farm, where cheese is still produced by traditional methods and see the iconic Dutch windmills of Kinderdijk. From the fortified town of Willemstad, situated on the impressive wide expanses of Zeeland, we spend the night in Antwerp, the birthplace of Rubens (whose paintings we can view in the Cathedral Of Our Lady). We cycle to Ghent along the beautiful tidal River Nidderfchelde, with time to visit the old town centre with its impressive Bell tower and Saint Baafs' Cathedra where we can admire the famous triptych painting by Jan van Eyck. Our final destination is Bruges, with its picturesque town centre, possibly, the most beautiful of all historical Flemish cities.

The daily cycling will average 40-60km but it is possible for you to cycle part of the route and stay aboard for rest of the day. Cycling in Belgium and Holland is very easy; there are lots of sealed cycle paths and the rural scenery wonderful. These cycling cruises are led by experienced guides to make sure you see the many interesting places along the route. However, you don't have to cycle with the group. You will find a detailed map with cycle routes are most welcome to plan your own cycling day, meeting the barge at the next destination.

Bike & Barge cruising combine two popular ways of exploring Europe (cycling and river cruising), it allows partners of different abilities & interests to holiday together (trips are just as interesting for non-cycling partners, leisure cyclist OR even enthusiasts), you unpack once & come 'home' each night to a wonderful meal and a comfortable cabin with your own bathroom.

Non-cycling passengers are welcome on these departures but note that whilst there are guided walks in the evenings there are no sightseeing program for non-cyclists during the day.

Well-maintained multi-gearred bikes are provided (you can bring your own if you prefer) for up to 20-cyclists. The cycling is varied and fascinating with mostly flat terrain, exquisite woodlands, open river valleys, small country towns and villages. There are opportunities to reduce or extend the cycling distances each day, as you prefer.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations



Suggested itinerary: (the daily route may be subject to change at the discretion of the captain or cycle guide)

Day 1 (Sat): Amsterdam – Vianen (Cycling @ 15km)

Plan to arrive by 1.00pm to allow a 1.30pm departure. The barge will be docked close to the Central Station in Amsterdam. We cruise to Nichtevecht and begin cycling to Breukelen, situated on the River Vecht and close to the Loosdrechts Plassen, a nature reserve area with several lakes. In the 17th century many merchant families built lavish mansions along the river here. We visit a Dutch cheese farm and rejoin the barge at the end of the afternoon for the cruise to the small-fortified town of Vianen on the River Lek. During the middle ages, Vianen was a 'free-city' and a haven for felons and escaped serfs (enslaved peasants). There were three castles built over history and of these three, Castle Batestein was said to be the most beautiful in the Netherlands. All that remains are a 17th century brick gate and water-pump. Dinner will be onboard at @ 6.30pm.

Day 2 (Sun): Vianen – Dordrecht (Cycling @ 50km)

This morning we have a beautiful ride to Schoonhoven, a town famous throughout Holland for its silverware. In Schoonhoven there is a medieval entrance gate, the *Veerpoort*, beside the river Lek. This *Veerpoort* has protected Schoonhoven from the flooding of the River Rhine and from the sea (particularly the North Sea flood in 1953). It is still a fully functional water barrier today. From Schoonhoven we continue to Kinderdijk, situated in a polder (a low-lying tract of land enclosed by dikes) called the Alblasserwaard, at the confluence of the Lek and Noord Rivers. To drain the Alblasserwaard, a system of 19-windmills was built in around 1740. These mills are the largest collection of old windmills in the Netherlands and we have scheduled time for a visit to one of the mills.

The barge will then cruise to Dordrecht, the largest and most important city in the Drechsteden, which is also part of the Randstad: the main conurbation in the Netherlands.

We spend the night in the historic port of Wolwevershaven and after dinner there is the opportunity for a walk through the city with its many outstanding churches: the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwe-Kerk ('Our Dear Lady Church'), the Augustijnenkerk ('Church of the Augustins') and the Nieuwkerk ('New Church') to name just a few.

Day 3 (Mon): Dordrecht – Tholen (Cycling @ 35-50km)

We begin cruising before breakfast to Willemstad, an old and fortified town on the Haringvliet. From here we cycle along the impressive complex of locks 'de Volkerak', on one of the busiest waterways in Europe (between Rotterdam and Antwerp) to Tholen. Tholen was once an island for fishermen in the middle of Zeeland; nowadays agriculture and mussel farming offer an important income for the region. Tholen was built in the 13th century around the Eendracht tollhouse (a canalized branch of the river Scheldt), where ships navigating from the river Scheldt towards the Volkerak (or the other direction), had to pay a toll. In 1452 a large fire devastated the city. In 1953 the city was seriously damaged by the North Sea floods. The most important buildings that survived the fire of 1452 can still be admired today, including the town hall, the former hospital chapel and the De Hoop mill (The Hope Mill).

Day 4 (Tue): Tholen – Antwerp (Cycling @ 35km)

Today we cycle through the magnificent forest area known as 'Wouwse Plantage', towards the south and rejoin the barge for the cruise to the impressive port of Antwerp where we moor near the city centre. Antwerp, a city known for its diamond trading is the birthplace of one of the greatest Flemish artists of the 17th century: Peter Paul Rubens. In the Cathedral Of Our Lady you can admire some of his most famous pieces, *The Raising of the Cross* and *The Descent from the Cross*. This is a city of beautiful town houses from a rich past many of which are situated near this church and the Market Square. An evening city walk will follow dinner.

Day 5 (Wed): Antwerp – Dendermonde (Cycling @ 30 or 55km)

After breakfast we have a choice of riding options as we leave the port en-route to Zeeschede. You can cycle along this beautiful but unpredictable tidal river upstream to Dendermonde (the landscape surrounding the Schelde is magnificent) and rejoin the barge halfway to Temse or continue all the way to Dendermonde. In Dendermonde we visit the beautiful town hall and make time for a little beer tasting. An evening city walk will give you the chance to unwind and explore after dinner.

Day 6 (Thu): Dendermonde – Ghent (Cycling @ 35km)

After breakfast we cycle along the River Schelde to Ghent, a lively university city, again with a rich history. The city has its origins in Roman times, at the junction of the River Leie and River Schelde. From the 11th until the 12th century Ghent arose to become an important trade center and for the production of cloth woven from imported of English wool. In 1178 Count Philip of Alsace granted Ghent its first privileges and transformed the wooden fortification into the impressive stone castle. In 1886 the Royal Academy of Language and Literature was founded here and in 1930 the Ghent University became a Dutch-language university. Today, Ghent has a population of around 250,000 inhabitants and is the capital of the Belgian province of East-Flanders.

This afternoon we have the opportunity to relax, explore the city or go shopping in the lively centre. You can immerse yourself in the culture and history of Ghent by exploring the myriad abbeys, churches, castles, historic landmarks, and museums strewn throughout the city. Ghent's major church, Saint Baafs' Cathedral, was created in various styles and is a place where you can admire a number of masterpieces of medieval painting including the 'Adoration of the Lamb' by Jan van Eyck. We will spend tonight moored in Ghent.

Day 7 (Fri): Ghent – Bruges (Cycling @ 45km)

Our final day of cycling through the pleasant countryside of Western-Flanders will start on the outskirts of Ghent. Our final destination is Bruges, the capital and largest city of the province of West-Flanders, often know as the *Venice of the North*. This city may quite possibly be the most beautiful of all Flemish cities. The historic city centre, which dates back to the Middle Ages, is a prominent UNESCO World Heritage listed site and it is still almost completely intact. Bruges has always been a centre for trade and art. Bruges has had a significant economic importance thanks to its port and at one time it was the one of the world's major commercial centres. A city walk after dinner will give you the chance to explore Bruges at your own pace – perhaps for a coffee on one of the many squares.

Day 8 (Sat): Bruges

The tour ends after breakfast in central Bruges – the main railway station is a short walk away.



Outdoor Travel offers Bike & Barge or Bike & Boat cruises to many areas of Europe including the Loire Valley & Burgundy or Provence in France, several routes in Holland, Germany – along the Rivers Saar, Moselle & Rhine, in Italy on the Po near Venice or the Bay of Naples, the River Danube in Austria or Romania, island hopping on the spectacular Dalmatian coast of Croatia or to the many islands of Greece & Turkey.

We also offer inn-to-inn guided or self-guided cycling holiday in many destinations in Europe & in many destinations across the world.

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- Call Toll free: 1800 331 582 or (03) 57551743 or Fax (03) 57501020
- Email: info@outdoortravel.com.au
- Web: <http://www.outdoortravel.com.au>
- Mail: Outdoor Travel Pty Ltd, PO Box 286, Bright VIC 3741, Australia
- Travel Agent Licence No: 31102