

BELGIUM & FRANCE - FROM BRUGES TO PARIS or RETURN - *VALUE CRUISE* 15-days / 14-nights Easy to moderate **STANDARD** Bike & Barge cruises

Departs: From Bruges to Paris on Saturday 7th July to Saturday 21st July, 2012
From Paris to Bruges on Saturday 13th October to Saturday 27th October 2012

Cost: AU\$2665 per person twin share (single cabin supplement \$935)

Includes: Breakfast, dinner on board (most nights), picnic lunches, cycling tour guide & bicycle hire

Highlights: Bruges, Ghent, the Ardennes, the Somme, Wallonia, Chateau de Chantilly, Auvers-sur-l'Oise, Palace of Versailles, forests, woodlands, rolling hills, canal tunnels, great food & a night in Paris



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

For 2012 we have secured a very limited number of berths on several unique hotel barges to cruise from the beautiful city of Bruges in Belgium to Paris or return. Our Standard class barge cruises offer a high standard of meals and comfortable if simple twin or bunk-style cabin accommodation (all with ensuite bathrooms) plus the opportunity to explore this varied and interesting countryside, with visits to historic and cultural centres, sampling the wine, beer and local produce that makes this part of Belgium and France famous. Each day you can join our cycle-guide on a bike-tour, go by yourself by bike and meet up with the group at the boat or stay on the boat to enjoy the cruise. In the evenings our guide will often offer a city-walk or a suggestion of other activities.

Well-maintained multi-geared bicycles with panniers are provided – comfortable, easy to ride and ideal for this route – and a fascinating and varied guided cycling program with free time to explore each day's destination.

The bike ride from Paris or Bruges will avoid the traffic wherever possible, taking small country roads, towpaths, paved forest trails and the occasional cobblestone road in cities and major towns. In Belgium we will cycle through relatively flat country mostly along river banks or towpaths. In France we follow country roads and the occasional bike path. Towards Paris the terrain will get hillier and of course traffic will increase. It may be possible to avoid the traffic by staying on the barge or by taking public transport if you prefer.

A highlight of this route for Australians will be the two-night stop in Peronne, a small town in the Somme region of Northern France, just 35km from Villers-Bretonneux where ANZAC Day was celebrated for the first time in 2008. These two nights will allow access to the many important World War One 'Western Front' battle sites and memorials. There is also free time to visit Amiens, Fromelles and Bullecourt possibly using local transport.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations

Suggested itinerary – itinerary may be offered in reverse:

DAY1: SATURDAY: BRUGES - cycling distances up to 16km

Welcome aboard our hotel barge at about 2.00pm near the centre of Bruges. After making yourselves at home, join our guide on a short introduction bike ride to nearby Damme. Damme is a very small town about 8km from Bruges. It used to be the port of Bruges & there are some interesting buildings to see as you cycle along the canal.

Bruges itself is the capital of the province of West-Vlaanderen and it dates back to the second half of the 9th century. There are an enormous number of monuments and well-preserved medieval streets to explore. Bruges is famous for its lace-work and chocolates. The city-canal is floodlit at night making it exciting to walk, cycle or take a water taxi.

DAY 2: SUNDAY: BRUGES – cycling distances up to 60km

Every morning we serve you a good breakfast and you can make your own picnic lunch from the buffet table. Today is spent exploring Bruges and there is so much to see. Or, if you prefer, you can join the tour guide for a ride to the Dutch border before returning to the boat.

DAY 3: MONDAY: BRUGES - GHENT - 45km

After breakfast you can choose to stay on the boat and enjoy the cruise or join our guide for the cycle tour to Ghent. In the afternoon enjoy a nice cup of homemade soup aboard the barge and after dinner explore the city. Ghent is one of Flanders major cities; it is the capital of the province of Oost-Vlaanderen. The city is lively and has a small historic centre with impressive buildings dating back to the Middle Ages.

DAY 4: TUESDAY: GHENT - OUDENAARDE 33km

After breakfast our proposed cycling route will follow the river through rural farmland to Oudenaarde. Oudenaarde, called the pearl of the Flemish Ardennen, is well known for its carpets, tapestries and silverware. There are over a hundred protected monuments including two that are UNESCO listed: the Begijnenhof and the town hall (with a fascinating museum). You can also see several churches, Liedts Castle or sample one of the town's many typical brown beer breweries.

DAY 5: WEDNESDAY: OUDENAARDE - TOURNAI - 50km

Today we follow well-paved town paths to Tournai, one of the oldest cities of Belgium. Tournai belongs to Romance Flanders; it is a French-speaking town that used to be one of the greatest cultural and economic centres of the region. Our lady's Cathedral, Saint-Brice's church, the 13th century Scheldt bridge and the main square & city gates are well worth visiting.

DAY 6: THURSDAY: TOURNAI - BOUCHAIN - 40km

Today we cycle through the oldest regional park of France: the Scarpe-Escaut. The park is mostly forested or with open pastures with miles of cycling and walking paths. Our destination today, Bouchain, is a small town of about 5000 people in the French region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

DAY 7: FRIDAY: BOUCHAIN - PERONNE - 40km

After breakfast we cycle to Lewarde where we find one of the biggest mine-museums in the world. There is time to explore the old mine by train before rejoining our barge to sail through a 6km tunnel towards Peronne.

Peronne is near to where the major military battles of the Somme took place during World War 1. The Museum of the Great War in the ancient chateau is a "must see" visit for those interested in the history of this period. The city of Peronne has an interesting town centre, there is a beautiful church and you can visit the Alfred Danicourt museum with one of the finest collections of early Gallic coins and antique gold jewellery.

DAY 8: SATURDAY: FREE DAY IN PERONNE

Today the barge will stay in Peronne. You can relax on the boat or explore the surroundings by bike or on foot. You can also arrange a taxi to Amiens or Ypres to visit WW1 memorials, military cemeteries and battlefields including Villers Bretonneaux with the Victoria School and its strong ties to Australia.

DAY 9: SUNDAY: PERONNE - NOYON - 50km

After breakfast we again follow the river through rich rolling farmland to Noyon, a small but historic French town in the Oise department of Picardy. It has a lovely cathedral the Notre-Dame, a museum about John Calvin and you can still see the remains of sections of the walls built by the Romans.

DAY 10: MONDAY: NOYON - COMPIEGNE – 40km

Today's route is hillier as we cycle through the forest of Compiègne, visiting the lovely village St Jean-aux-Biox and the castle of Pierrefonds, perhaps the most majestic fortified castle of France. The castle has a museum with an ever-changing display of old bicycles, the original furniture and a beautiful ballroom. The castle is also the traditional starting point of the famous *Paris - Roubaix* cycling-race. In the forest nearby is the Rethondes Armistice Clearing where the World War 1 armistice agreement was signed by the French, German and British. Compiègne has a very lovely church, the Eglise Saint-Antoine with a collection of unique Greek porcelain.

DAY 11: TUESDAY: COMPIEGNE - CREIL - 42km

Today we continue our tour through the forest and typical French countryside to the city of Creil with its Gothic church (with a 13th century interior and 16th century tower). Here there is a chance to visit the museum with 19th century *provincial* furniture, pottery and paintings.

DAY 12: WEDNESDAY: CREIL - AUVERS SUR L'OISE - 42km

We will cycle again through forests to the famous castle of Chantilly. This chateau, located in one of the largest forests near Paris, has one of the finest museums of historical paintings in France, a well-stocked library, beautiful gardens and a museum to (live) horses. We rejoin the barge at Auvers sur l'Oise. This is a village where many famous *impressionist* artists used to live and work. Van Gogh created over 70 paintings in and around the village and he and his brother are buried here (there is a chance to make a pilgrimage to his grave site near to the river). In the Auberge Ravoux is a small museum where Van Gogh lived and worked.

DAY 13: THURSDAY: AUVERS SUR L'OISE - BOUGIVAL - 42km

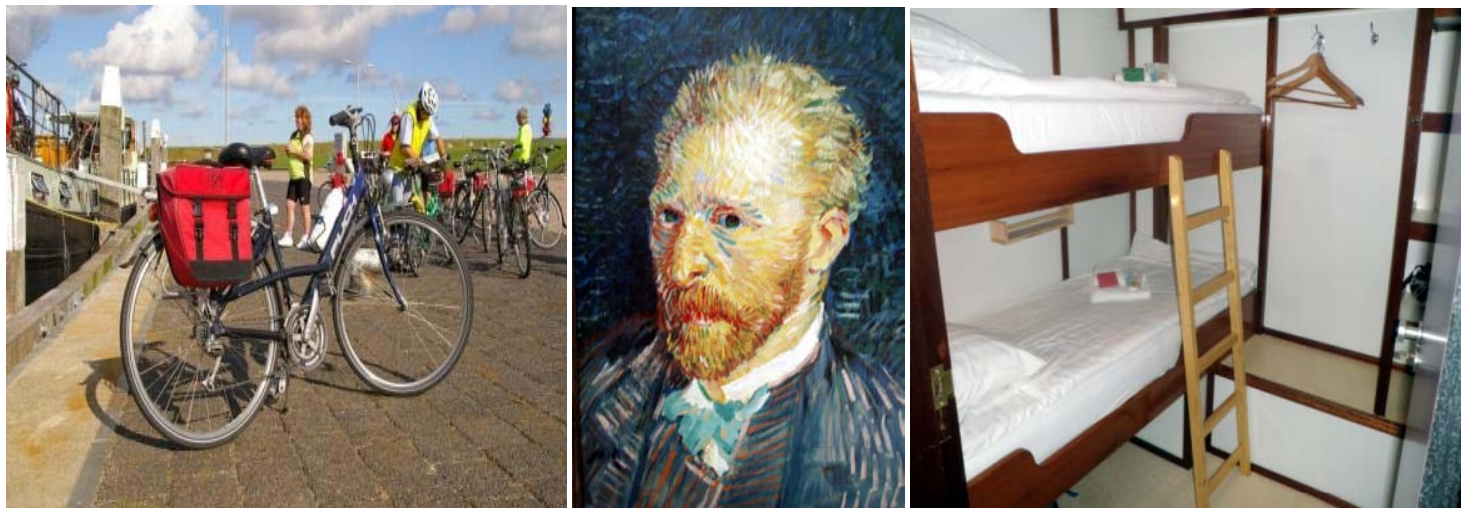
On our way to Bougival we cycle to the chateau de Saint-Germain-en-Laye. This is a French royal palace, which houses the national archaeological museum and has very beautiful gardens. Bougival has been the home of a number of French celebrities over the decades and again was known as the cradle of impressionism. Painters like Monet and Renoir painted the light, the sky and reflections on the river here.

DAY 14: FRIDAY: BOUGIVAL - PARIS - 38km

Today we cycle to Versailles and visit the beautiful palace and its magnificent parkland and gardens. The Chateau de Versailles is one of the largest castles of the world and is UNESCO heritage listed. There is time to tour either inside the many galleries, chambers and grand corridors or to explore the extensive gardens. We then cruise triumphantly or ride through the centre of Paris to our mooring place in the city.

DAY 15: SATURDAY: PARIS

The tour will end after breakfast at 10.00am.



The program is offered in reverse from Paris to Bruges and may be subject to changes due to any unforeseen circumstances. Distances shown are approximate and may change if the cruise schedule so demands.

Other Bike & Barge cruises are available in France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Romania, in Austria along the Danube, to the islands of Croatia, Greece and Turkey or Vietnam. River and canal hotel barge cruises are available throughout Europe (where bicycles are available for passenger use) - ask for details

Contact the experienced staff at Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations:

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