



# BIKE & BARGE HOLIDAYS IN EUROPE

2011

## FRANCE BELGIUM HOLLAND - FROM PARIS TO MAASTRICHT or return 15-days / 14-nights Easy to moderate Bike and Barge cruise – with **self-guided** cycling

- Departs:** From Maastricht Saturday 24th September arriving Paris Saturday 8th October 2011  
From Paris Friday 14th October arriving Maastricht Friday 28th October 2011
- Cost:** AU\$2725 per person twin share (plus €98 harbour tax paid locally) Single cabins on request
- Includes:** Breakfast, dinner on board (most nights), picnic lunch, and bike hire
- Highlights:** Maastricht, Namur, Huy, the Ardennes, the Somme, Wallonia, Noyon, Compiègne, Bougival plus 2-nights under the Eiffel Tower in central Paris

For 2011 we have secured a very limited number of berths (just **5-double/twin cabins**) on a unique former 'Gentleman's Yacht' built in 1926. Extensively renovated and restored to a very high standard as a hotel barge, the Miro cruises from the beautiful city of Maastricht in Holland, bordering with Belgium to Paris.

These cruises offer a **high standard of meals and very comfortable cabins** plus the opportunity to explore this varied and interesting countryside, with visits to historic and cultural centres and time to sample the wine, beer and local produce that makes this part of Belgium and France so famous. Each day we offer you the freedom of a **self-guided cycling** route – with detailed maps and route description - to a predetermined meeting point or you can stay on the boat the barge to enjoy the cruise.

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

Each day the route ahead will be discussed in detail. The bike route suggested from Maastricht or Paris 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 Holland / Belgium you will cycle through relatively **flat country mostly along riverbanks or towpaths**. In France you can follow country roads and the occasional bike path. Towards Paris the terrain will get hillier and of course the traffic will increase so you may prefer to avoid the traffic by staying on the barge or by taking public transport into the city.



Bike and Barge cruises combines two popular ways of exploring Europe (cycling and river cruising), it allows partners of different abilities and interests to holiday together (trips are just as interesting for non-cycling partners, leisure cyclist OR enthusiasts), you **unpack once and come 'home' each night** to a wonderful meal and a comfortable cabin with your own bathroom. We'll pass more than 160 tunnels, locks and bridges (most locks are automatic but sometimes you may be asked to lend the lock-master a helping hand!)

Also along the route are delightful (Nordic) walking routes for those who want a change from the cycling. These cruises are particularly spectacular in autumn when the parks, forests woods and orchard leaves are changing colour and the beer and cider harvests are celebrated in many towns and villages along our route

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Our hosts, Captain Mart and Miss Elly's motto is *'Holiday with Friends'*, and they will offer a hearty welcome. The route takes us from Maastricht to Liege and Namur, through Charleroi to Strépy where the ship will be lifted by a special elevator across a river. We'll sail through long tunnels where a small locomotive will pull us through the dark corridors - a truly unforgettable experience! We'll visit old French cities such as Vallancienne, Noyon, Compiègne Creil and Pontoise, gorgeous garden cities where the various Napoleons and French kings built their country homes. We'll sail over through **the Somme with its WWI memorials** and Flanders Fields. We will cruise the gorgeous River Oise and the magical River Seine.

In Paris we'll dock in the middle of the city so that you will have more time to discover and explore this enchanting city. Your skipper knows Paris like the back of his hand, and the cook is a real chef who uses his experience and knowledge of the region to ensure a fabulous gastronomic experience, serving a selection of delicious French wines and renowned French cheeses.

The Miro has just **five luxuriously appointed 2-person cabins**, finished in the finest cherry wood, each with its own separate bathroom with shower, toilet and so forth (we offer towels and bed linen and a daily maid service). There is a cozy seating area, satellite color TV, a safe, 220 volt electricity network, fax, telephone. The yacht is equipped with internet access, heating for those cooler nights and air-conditioning for warm summer days. You'll also find on board a BBQ, various games, darts, Jeux de boules and so forth.

We provide twelve fine 3 or 4-course dinners prepared by our onboard chef (there are 3-days where you are free to find a restaurant of your choice for dinner at your own expense), with breakfast and a packed lunch, afternoon coffee, tea and fruit each day. The staff and guides are multi-lingual. Personal expenses and bar drinks are not included but we do supply first class 8-gear touring bikes with helmets, a poncho and panniers. Each day we provide maps and a tour briefing for those who want to go cycling or, on some days, walking.

### **Suggested itinerary:**

#### **Day 1: Saturday: Arrive Maastricht - Liege**

Plan to arrive at 12.00pm. After an introduction to your crew, the boat and cabin and a glass of Champagne there is time for a test ride before we leave for the cruise to Liege. We will pass the Maas's highest lock system (an ascent of 18-metres). Dinner is served on board. On arriving in Liege you can join a guided walk to explore the many delights of this city with a rich history. Follow in the footsteps of legendary writer George Simenon and his equally famous Commissary Maigret and perhaps enjoy a fine Belgian beer at the famous Cafe Chantant Le Jardin des Olivette.

#### **Day 2: Sunday: Liege - Namur (34km)**

At 8.00am we serve breakfast and visit the Sunday market at La Batte, the largest street market in Belgium and a veritable treasure trove. The cycling today is to Namur, the capital of Wallonia. where the boat is docked in the very heart of the city. From our mooring we have a beautiful view of the fairytale castle high above the city and its ramparts. Dinner is served at @ 6.00pm, leaving more than enough time for you to explore Namur's romantic streets, coffee shops and bars.

#### **Day 3: Namur - Pont de Loup - Charleroi (32km)**

We cruise over breakfast to Floeffe and, on arrival we can visit its imposing Cathedral and Citadel. Floeffe is the start of a gorgeous cycling route from Pont de Loup to Charleroi.

#### **Day 4: Tuesday: Charleroi – Strépy (35km)**

A breakfast cruise from Charleroi through an industrial landscape the vestiges of the once-booming mining and steel industry. At Strépy Thieu is the gigantic ship elevator on the Canal du Centre; it's as big as a football field with a span of 73m. The fascinating engine room and adjoining museum are open to visitors. Dinner will be served on board and afterwards there is time to enjoy the beautiful nature walks and panoramic views.

#### **Day 5: Wednesday: Strépy – Mons (37km)**

Today our route is from Canal Historique du Centre (where you can visit three smaller antique ship elevators - one of which has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage listed site) to Mons.

#### **Day 6: Thursday: Mons – Antoine (35km)**

After breakfast the cycle route takes us along beautiful old canals mostly along towpaths and through villages.

#### **Day 7 Friday: Antoine - Vallancienne (35km)**

We follow the River Boven Schelde in western Belgium, cycling across the French border to Vallancienne.

### **Day 8 Saturday: Vallancienne - Denain – Arleux (35km)**

Today we will sail along the Upper Schelde river system at a pace determined by the cargo boats and lock keepers. We will cruise or cycle to Souterrain du De Ruyaulcourt and re-board the boat to pass through several shipping tunnels up to 4.35km in length on the Canal du Nord. What we don't finish today, we can always do tomorrow so it's a day for relaxing, perhaps taking a walk, exploring the unique countryside by bike or – in typical French style – enjoying a glass of wine and some delicious food.

### **Day 9 Sunday: Arleux – Noyon (34km)**

The cycling route takes you to Noyon but as you'll be following the boat you can take a break along the way. We pass picturesque French countryside and past typical northern villages. Noyon is an old city, dating to 600 BC with many highlights and monuments that survived the impact of both WWI and WWII. In the evening a sumptuous dinner and wine on the aft deck.

### **Day 10 Monday: Noyon - Compiègne (31km)**

After breakfast you can ride to Compiègne and again there are many points along the route to take a break. Compiègne is known as a *regal* village because traditionally every French king had a summer dwelling here. Once you see it you'll know why. Joan of Arc was captured here and we have free time in the afternoon here with many places to discover.

### **Day 11 Tuesday: Compiègne – Creil (cycling optional @ 35km)**

The boat cruises towards Creil and, those who wish can take a beautiful cycle route along the River Oise passing many small villages to 'l Isle Adam. This is a popular spot for visitors from Paris and the influence of the capital city is obvious.

### **Day 12 Wednesday: Creil – Pontoise – Sainte Honorine (37km)**

We sail on to Conflance - Sainte Honorine, a popular location for weekend boating and sailing. You'll see many beautiful boats, big and small, docked here. The town itself has a lovely ambiance and many skippers retire here to enjoy their twilight years. We spend the night in Sainte Honorine.

### **Day 13: Thursday: Sainte Honorine - Bougival – Paris**

We cruise along the River Seine towards the city and in the afternoon we enter Paris. The Seine offers perfect views of the many fabulous bridges, buildings and monuments of this wonderful city. In Paris we usually dock at Grenelle under the Eiffel Tower with its spectacular light show. After dinner you are free to explore.

### **Days 14: Friday: Free day in Paris**

After breakfast relax or explore the city by bike or public transport. Our guide will be happy to accompany you on a bike tour. And at sunset why not take the opportunity for an unforgettable twilight cruise on the Seine?

### **Day 15: Saturday.**

You'll enjoy one last breakfast on board before your tour ends



The route is subject to changes due to any unforeseen circumstances. Cycling distances shown are approximate and may change if the cruise schedule so demands.

Similar cycling cruises are available in France, Germany, Holland, Croatia, Greece and Turkey, river and canal cruises are available throughout Europe, sailing holidays in Corsica, Tuscany or Sicily, Italy - ask for details:

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

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