

## FRANCE & BELGIUM – PARIS TO BRUGES or return 15-day / 14-night *Premium* Bike & Barge canal and river cruises



**Departs:** **Paris to Bruges** 14<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> April & 13<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> October 2012 (low season)  
**Paris to Bruges** 21<sup>st</sup> July – 4<sup>th</sup> August & **Bruges to Paris** 1<sup>st</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> September 2012 (high season)

**Cost:** \$2995 (low season) per person twin share. \$3495 (high season). Single cabin supplement \$1485

**Included:** Breakfast, packed lunch, dinner onboard most nights, bed linen and towels, bike rental and experienced tour guide.

The price does not include: entrance fees of museums etc; transfer to and from the barge, drinks on board, bike helmets, travel insurance and personal expenses.

**Highlights:** Paris – Royal palace in Compiègne – Basilica of St. Quentin – WW1 memorials - Tunnel of Riqueval – Belfort in Ghent – Belgian beer tasting - the canals of Bruges – history & Culture.

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. **Non-cycling 'cruisers' are welcome on these departures.**

Well-maintained multi-gear bikes are provided (you can bring your own if you prefer). The cycling is varied and fascinating with undulating hills, exquisite woodlands, open river valleys and small country towns and villages. A free rest day is included mid-way and there is free time at each day's destination. There are opportunities to reduce or extend the cycling distances each day.

We start in **Paris, the city of light** and capital of France, where our meeting point is near Notre Dame Cathedral. We follow the River Seine downstream passing the Louvre and Eiffel Tower to Conflans. From here we cruise the valley of the River Oise to Compiègne. In the Middle Ages this part of France was the centre of power in France and we will see many chateaux and palaces of the French kings and lords.

We follow the wonderful old St. Quentin canal to the historical city of St. Quentin, where the gothic basilica and the town hall are worth a visit. We cruise through the tunnel of Riqueval and cross the border into Belgium where we visit Doornik, once an important stopping place for pilgrims, and Oudenaarde which has a beautiful town hall. We also visit Ghent, with its many ancient streets and buildings. Here too you can admire the beautiful triptych by the famous Dutch painter Jan van Eyck.

The city of Bruges is possibly the most beautiful of the historical Flemish cities, famous for its many museums and hand-made Bruges lace.

**Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations**

**Suggested itinerary:** cycling and cruise days/times can vary at the discretion of the captain and cycling guide.

**Day 1 (Saturday): Paris**

Meet at Port d'Arсенal in central Paris (next to the Place de la Bastille) at 4.00pm for a welcome drink and to meet fellow passengers and crew. Adjust your bikes and dinner at 6.30pm followed by a guided city walk – options may include Montmartre and the Sacré-Coeur.

**Day 2 (Sunday): Paris – Conflans Cruising Cycling distance @ 35km (@ 6.5 hours)**

We start the day cruising or cycling through the centre of Paris, past the Louvre, Musée d'Orsay and Eiffel tower. We follow the River Seine through industrial suburbs Gennevilliers, Bologne-Billancourt and Ile Sequin, home of the Renault car factories. Finally we arrive at Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, where the River Oise and the River Seine merge. Conflans has been an important centre for shipping and river traffic in Northern France since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century – see its history at the museum Municipal de la Batellerie. Overnight and dinner onboard.

**Day 3 (Monday): Conflans – Creil Cycling distance @ 45-55km (@ 7.5 hours)**

After breakfast we begin our cycling from Conflans following the River Oise to Auvers-sur Oise, where Vincent van Gogh painted the church and cornfields and spent the last days of his life (an area many impressionist painters visited). You can visit his grave beside that of his brother Theo. We pass the abbey of Royaumont and Chantilly with its dramatic and imposing chateau and racecourse. Our destination is Creil, a country town, famous in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century for its fine pottery – much of which can be seen in the museum Gallée Juillet.

**Day 4 (Tuesday): Creil – Compiègne Cycling distance @ 45km (@ 5 hours)**

After breakfast we cycle to Pont-St-Maxence where there was a bridge over the Oise. Pont-St-Maxence became the place to stay for kings and merchants on their way to Flanders. We pass the beautiful abbey of Moncel founded in 1309 by King Philips de Schone. We stay the night in the beautiful town of Compiègne, which owes its architectural wealth to its proximity to Paris and the enormous woods where a succession of the French kings and courtiers loved to hunt. The Chateau de Compiègne with its magnificent gardens are spectacular, as is the town hall (built 1498 – 1530), the national horse stud farm and the Tour Jeanne d'Arc.

**Day 5 (Wednesday): Compiègne – Noyon Cycling distance @ 35km (@ 6 hours)**

Leaving the River Oise we continue along the canal system connecting France and Belgium. We spend the night in Noyon, a town where the coronation of King Charlemagne took place. Later Noyon became an important Episcopal town and the cathedral (dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> Century) is well worth visiting.

**Day 6 (Thursday): Noyon – St Quentin Cycling distance @ 45km (@ 8 hours)**

We cruise on the St. Quentin Canal past Chauny and Tergnier. Our destination today is St. Quentin a city founded in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century on a junction of two important Roman roads. This lively provincial capital of the Aisne flourished as a destination for Christian pilgrims to the grave of St. Quentin. The Gothic basilica here was built between 1230 and the 15<sup>th</sup> Century and has a unique double transept and windows from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Century. The city hall dates back to 1500 and is in the flamboyant French Gothic style.

**Day 7 (Friday): St. Quentin Free day – optional cycling**

Today is a **free day** in St. Quentin. You can relax or explore the city further or go shopping. Perhaps visit Laon, once the capital of the French empire with a wonderful 12<sup>th</sup> Century cathedral. You can also take a train or 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 and the museum Peronne.

**Day 8 (Saturday): St. Quentin – Honnecourt Cycling distance @ 30km (@ 7 hours)**

The Canal de St. Quentin was commissioned in Napoleon's time to carry coal. The canal passes through many tunnels, the longest being the tunnel of Riqueval at 5670m. Today, as in former years, ships are still pulled through the tunnel by an electric towboat (it takes about 2-hours). High above the tunnel is the watershed of the Escaut (Schelde) River and River Somme. Overnight in the small village of Honnecourt.

**Day 9 (Sunday): Honnecourt - Cambrai – Pont Malin Cycling distance @ 30km (@ 6 hours)**

We continue along the banks of the canal de St. Quentin. Cambrai was once a Roman provincial capital and an important destination for pilgrims. Worth seeing are the impressive restored buildings of the city fortress, built under Charles V and the old city gate which dates from the late 12<sup>th</sup> Century. In the afternoon we join the Canal du Grand Gabarit to Pont Malin, where we spend the night.

**Day 10 (Monday): Pont Malin – Doornik Cycling distance @ 55km (@ 8 hours)**

Following the canal du Grand Gabarit at Montagne we cross the French border and at Bleharies we cross into Belgium. We sail through the so-called 'white land' to the charming fortress town of Antoing. Our destination is Doornik (in French: Tournai), one of the oldest cities of Belgium. Here we are in the region known as

Wallonia, where towns and villages have both a French and a Flemish name. Ruled by the French from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century this was the centre for tapestry and cloth weaving. Now these industries are in decline but in the various museums excellent examples of both industries can be seen. In 1940 the entire city centre was destroyed after a German air raid, however, the town has been extensively rebuilt including the cathedral of Notre Dame (12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Century) and the Belfort which was built in about 1200.

**Day 11 (Tuesday): Doornik (Tournai) – Oudenaarde Cycling distance @ 45km (@ 5.5 hours)**

We cruise downstream on the River Schelde, crossing the language barrier into the Flemish region. From here onwards Flemish is the spoken language. Our destination today is Oudenaarde a place that, because of its border location, was involved in many wars. Oudenaarde has always had someone on lookout and we can see the statue of the most famous watchman, Hanske de Krijger in the city hall. Built in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century this city hall was built out of sandstone in a Brabantine late Gothic style and it is one of the most beautiful in Flanders. Oudenaarde is also known as the town of the tapestry weavers.

**Day 12 (Wednesday): Oudenaarde – Ghent Cycling distance @ 45km (@ 7 hours)**

We continue on the Schelde towards Ghent, a lively university town with a rich history. The town, founded by the Romans, is at the place where the rivers Leie and Schelde merged. This favourable location brought on quite some wealth peaking in the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> Century when the cloth weaving industry was a source of great riches. In the city itself many patrician residences have been preserved. Visits should include the Lakenhalle (1425AD) where the cloth traders gathered and St. Baafs cathedral where you can see several masterpieces of mediaeval art including "The worship of the Lamb of God" by Jan van Eyck.

**Day 13 (Thursday): Ghent – Bruges Cycling distance @ 45km (@ 6 hours)**

Continuing through the pleasant countryside of Western Flanders we arrive at our final destination, a city also called the Venice of the North. Bruges is perhaps the most beautiful of all Flemish cities. Its old city centre dates from the Middle Ages and is almost completely intact.

**Day 14 (Friday): Bruges**

Breakfast and a **free day** to relax or explore the city. Dinner is served onboard at 6.30pm.

**Day 15 (Saturday): Bruges**

Tour ends after breakfast.



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, the Danube in Austria or island hopping on the spectacular Dalmatian coast of Croatia or to the islands of Greece & Turkey.

We also offer inn-to-inn guided or self-guided cycling holidays in many destinations across Europe.

**Contact Outdoor Travel for more details, travel brochures and reservations – early bookings essential**

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