

BELGIUM & FRANCE – BRUGES to PARIS or v.v. *EARLY BOOKING ESSENTIAL*
15-day / 14-night Easy to moderate **PREMIUM PLUS** Bike & Barge cycling cruise



We start in the city of Bruges, possibly the most beautiful of the historical Flemish cities, famous for its many museums and hand-made **Bruges** lace. There is time to explore with the mooring place just a short walk from the centre. 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. The route follows the River Seine upstream passing the Louvre and Eiffel Tower, ending in **Paris**, the *city of light*.

The bike ride from Bruges will avoid the traffic wherever possible, taking small country roads, towpaths, paved forest trails and the occasion cobblestone road in cities and major towns. Daily cycling distances are 20km – 55km and on certain days there may be the option for shorter distances or on a self-guided basis. In Belgium and in northern France the route offers relatively flat to undulating country mostly along river banks or towpaths. In France the route follows country roads and the occasional bike path. Towards Paris the terrain will get hillier and of course traffic will increase. You can always avoid traffic by staying on the barge to enjoy the cruising!

Well-maintained multi-geared bikes with panniers 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 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. A free rest day is included mid-way in the lovely city of Peronne. There is free time at each day's destination. On a fully booked barge, there will be two guides aboard and therefore opportunities to reduce or extend cycling distances on many days. A limited number of E-bikes are available for a surcharge and must be booked well in advance.

Bike & Barge cruises combine two popular ways of exploring Europe (cycling & river cruising), allowing partners of different abilities and interests to holiday together (trips are just as interesting for leisure cyclists OR enthusiasts). 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, and can relax on-board during the day and enjoy the cruise, or make their own arrangements for sightseeing whilst the riders are out cycling.

Departs:	Bruges to Paris 14 th May, 23 rd July 2022	Paris to Bruges 24 th September 2022
Cost from:	\$4885 per person twin share	\$4710 per person twin share
	Single cabin supplement \$2255	Single cabin supplement \$2170

Includes: 14 nights' accommodation in twin-share cabin (lower beds) with a shower/toilet; 14 buffet breakfasts, packed lunch on cycling days, 13 dinners, hybrid bike rental with pannier, water bottle, helmet & bike insurance, cycle tour guide, Armistice museum visit, Chantilly castle entry, Oudenaarde town hall visit, ferry fares, route maps (1 set per cabin)

Not included: Other entrance fees for museums etc; transfer to and from the barge, drinks on board, travel insurance and personal expenses.

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Suggested itinerary: cycling and cruise days/times can vary at the discretion of the captain and cycling guide.
The route operates in the reverse direction on some departures.

Day 1: Saturday: Bruges

warm-up ride

Welcome aboard our hotel barge between 1.00pm – 2.00pm near the centre of Bruges. Bruges is UNESCO listed and famous for its lace-work, canals and chocolates. After making yourself at home, join our guide on a short introductory warm-up ride. After dinner you may like to explore the many monuments and well-preserved medieval streets of the impressive city of Bruges, the capital of the province of West-Vlaanderen, dating back to the second half of the 9th Century

Day 2: Sunday: Bruges - Ghent

cycling @ 35 - 45km

After breakfast we cycle through fields and woods, past quiet villages and castles to Aalterbrug, on the Ghent-Bruges canal. We sail the canal into Ghent which is one of Flanders' major cities and a delight to explore on foot or by bike. Ghent lies at the confluence of the Leie and Scheldt Rivers and is capital of the province of Oost-Vlaanderen (East Flanders). It has a lively, fascinating historic centre with impressive buildings dating back to the Middle Ages.

Day 3: Monday: Ghent - Oudenaarde

cycling @ 45 - 55km

After breakfast there is some time to explore Ghent's city centre, then we follow the river through rural farmland to Oudenaarde. Oudenaarde, called the pearl of the Flemish Ardennen, is 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 beer at one of the town's many breweries. Famous Belgian brewery *Liefmans* with its wonderful strawberry or traditional beers is conveniently located just opposite the barge's usual mooring point.

Day 4: Tuesday: Oudenaarde – Doornik/Tournai

cycling @ 45km

We start the day with a guided visit of Oudenaarde's town hall. After, we cycle along the Schelde 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 and city gates are well worth visiting.

Day 5: Wednesday: Doornik/Tournai - Arleux

cycling @ 40 - 55km

During breakfast we cruise in the direction of the French-Belgian border. Our cycle route from the border village of Bleharies takes us through farmland and past tiny mining and quarrying villages to Arleux, a small town in the French region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

Day 6: Thursday: Arleux - Ruyaulcourt Tunnel

cycling @ 35 - 50km

We visit Cambrai, once a Roman provincial capital and site of several battles in World War 1. Charles V's Citadel, now restored, is worth a visit. We cycle through the countryside before re-joining our barge on the Canal du Nord, just before the famous Ruyaulcourt Tunnel.

Day 7: Friday: Ruyaulcourt Tunnel - Péronne

cycling @ 40 - 55km

This morning stay on the barge for a fascinating cruise through the six-kilometre-long Ruyaulcourt Tunnel. This clever feat of engineering, started in Napoleon's time, with its traffic lights and electric bargemen (to avoid a build-up of fumes) certainly offers a unique perspective on barge cruising.

We cycle through the valley of the Somme, an undulating and sparsely-populated landscape to Péronne. This area was the frontline of major military battles at the end of World War 1. In Péronne, the Museum of the Great War in the restored ancient chateau is a "must see" for those interested in the history of this period. The city of Péronne 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: near to Péronne

This morning the barge will stay in Péronne. You can relax on the boat or explore the surroundings by bike or on foot. There is an interesting local market in Péronne on Saturdays. You may also arrange a short tour or taxi to Amiens or Ypres to visit WW1 memorials, military cemeteries and battlefields including Villers Bretonneux with the Victoria School and its strong ties to Australia. Dinner tonight is at your own arrangements; the crew are always happy to make recommendations of where to eat.

Day 9: Sunday: Péronne - Noyon / Pont l'Évêque

cycling @ 40 - 50km

After breakfast we follow the Somme River through rich rolling farmland and past the Art Deco town of Ham, to Noyon, a small but historic French town in the Oise department of Picardy. It has a lovely cathedral, a museum about John Calvin and you can still see the remains of sections of the walls built by the Romans. Noyon is also the end of the Canal du Nord. We moor either in Noyon or nearby Pont l'Évêque.

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Day 10: Monday: Noyon / Pont l'Évêque - Compiègne**cycling @ 35 - 50km**

Today's route is hillier as we cycle through the forest of Compiègne, where French kings loved to hunt. We cross the River Aisne near to the 'Clairière Armistice' where the World War 1 armistice agreement was signed by the French, German and British. There is a small but interesting museum that tells the story, should you wish to know more. Finish in Compiègne, which has a lovely church, the Église Saint-Antoine, housing a collection of Greek porcelain and is also home to the Chateau de Compiègne with its beautiful gardens.

Day 11: Tuesday: Compiègne - Pont-St-Maxence**cycling @ 45 - 55km**

Set off through the forest and typical rural French countryside. The longer ride includes the little town of Pierrefonds, with its "Disney-like" Pierrefonds Castle, perhaps the most majestic fortified castle of France. If time permits visit the museum with its displays of trebuchet and medieval war machines, bicycles, tapestries and original furniture. Just before reaching Pont Ste. Maxence pass by the abbey of Moncel, founded in 1309 by King Philip the Fair. Pont-Ste-Maxence was named after its early bridge, one of the few to across the Oise at the time.

Day 12: Wednesday: Pont-St-Maxence - Creil - Auvers Sur L'Oise**cycling @ 40 - 60km**

Cruise through breakfast to the city of Creil with its Gothic church (with a 13th Century interior and 16th Century tower), then ride through forests to the famous castle and racecourse 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. After a visit, cycle on past the abbey of Royaumont, with its 13th Century cloister and sacristy; the abbey served as a military hospital during WW1. We re-join the barge at Auvers sur l'Oise, a village where many famous Impressionist artists lived and worked. Van Gogh created over 70 paintings in and around the village and he and his brother are buried here (we can visit his gravesite 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 - Conflans - Bougival**cycling @ 45km**

Time this morning to discover Auvers, we then cycle to Conflans-Ste-Honorine, where the Oise joins the River Seine, a centre for boating. There are many lovely spots on our route, including the French royal palace at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, which has very beautiful gardens offering views over Paris. We are now in the suburbs of Paris. We stay tonight in either Bougival or Rueil on the Seine. Bougival has been the home of a number of French celebrities over the decades and was a cradle of Impressionism – painters like Monet and Renoir painted the light, the sky and reflections of the river here. The chateau of Malmaison, at Rueil some 4km from Bougival, was home to Napoleon's first wife Josephine in the early 1800s.

Day 14: Friday: Bougival - Paris**no cycling**

Today we cruise triumphantly into the centre of Paris to our mooring place. Spend your afternoon and evening at leisure, enjoying the wonders of this magical *City of Light*.

Day 15: Saturday: Tour ends - The tour will end after breakfast in Paris.

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 along the Amalfi or Tuscan coast, the Danube in **Austria** or island hopping on the spectacular Dalmatian coast of **Croatia** or **Montenegro** 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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