

BELGIUM & FRANCE - BRUGES TO PARIS or RETURN

15-days / 14-nights Easy to moderate **STANDARD** cycling cruises through the Somme



For 2027, we have a limited number of cabins available on a unique hotel barge cruising between the beautiful city of Bruges in Belgium and Paris, France. With a friendly, cosy atmosphere and comfortable twin-share cabins, this cycling cruise combines varied countryside, historic towns, local culture, beer and regional produce.

A highlight for Australians is the two-night stop at Péronne in the Somme region of Northern France, close to Villers-Bretonneux, where ANZAC Day is commemorated. This provides an excellent opportunity to explore World War One Western Front battle sites and memorials, with free time to visit Amiens, Albert, Villers-Bretonneux, Fromelles or Bullecourt using local transport or a local tour operator.

In Belgium, we visit historic centres including Ghent, Oudenaarde and Tournai, following the River Scheldt through mostly flat countryside and cycling along riverbanks and towpaths. In France, we follow the River Oise and visit Auvers, where Van Gogh once lived. The route continues through royal forests and national parks, passing beautiful French chateaux including Chantilly and the chateau-museum of Malmaison, former home of Napoleon and Joséphine. As we approach Paris, the landscape becomes hillier. We visit Compiègne and the forest clearing where the 1918 armistice was signed, explore the parklands of the Palace of Versailles and finally cruise into Paris past the Eiffel Tower.

Departs: Bruges to Paris: 10 May, 7 June, 16 August, 13 September 2027
Paris to Bruges: 24 May, 5 July, 30 August, 27 September 2027

Cost from: \$6755 per person twin share Premium twin cabin supplement from \$655 per person twin share
Single use bunk cabin supplement from \$1220 (only two per tour)

Includes: 14 nights in twin or double bed cabin with ensuite; 14 breakfasts, picnic lunches, 12 dinners; coffee and tea whilst on board; multi-gear hybrid bicycle hire (including bike insurance, a pannier, lock, water bottle, repair kit and helmet); daily route information; ferry tickets en-route; English speaking cycling guide.

Not included: Arrival/departure transfers to and from the barge; meals not mentioned; drinks; items of a personal nature; travel insurance; gratuities for the guide or crew; special diets; entrance fees or other excursions.

E-Bikes: A limited number of **E-Bikes are available** for hire at an additional cost – ask for details.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 03 5750 1441 for details or reservations

Grade: Where possible, cyclists can choose to remain on the barge for more challenging sections. The route avoids traffic wherever possible, using quiet country roads, towpaths, forest trails and bike paths, with some busier roads in larger towns and cities. Belgium is generally flat, with occasional cobblestones, while France includes some hills and varied terrain.



Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Bruges

Cycling @ 18km

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

Bruges is the capital of the province of West-Vlaanderen and dates to the 9th Century. There are many monuments and well-preserved medieval streets to explore. Bruges is famous for its lacework and chocolates. The city's canals are floodlit at night making it a beautiful and exciting place to walk in the evening.

Day 2: Bruges - Ghent

Cycling @ 40km

Every morning, we serve you a substantial breakfast and you choose your own picnic lunch from the buffet. After breakfast you can choose to stay on the boat and enjoy the cruise or join our guide for the cycle tour to Ghent. Later, enjoy afternoon tea aboard the barge and after dinner explore the city. Ghent is one of the major cities of Flanders and 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 3: Ghent - Oudenaarde

Cycling @ 45km

After breakfast our proposed cycling route follows the River Scheldt 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 Begijnhof and the town hall, with its fascinating museum. You can also see several churches, Liedts Castle or sample one of the town's many typical brown or strawberry beer breweries.

Day 4: Oudenaarde - Tournai

Cycling @ 50km

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 town square and city gates are well worth visiting.

Day 5: Tournai - Bouchain/Arleux

Cycling @ 50 or 65km

Today we cycle through the oldest regional park of France: The Scarpe-Escaut. The park is mostly forested, but also has open pastures with many cycling and walking paths. If time allows, we may visit the Mining Museum in Lewarde which plunges visitors into the world of coal mining with many exhibitions on different themes and a guided tour of the mines. Our destination today, depending on the barge's progress, is either Bouchain or Arleux, both small villages of about 5000 people in the French region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

Day 6: Bouchain/Arleux - Hermies

Cycling @ 50km

Between Arleux and Péronne the barge follows the Canal du Nord. The canal has many locks and our overnight mooring places are dependent on the lock keepers and canal traffic. In this section of the route we may need up to two days of cruising. If not, there may be a spare day in the second half of your tour.

We are now entering one of the most important agricultural regions of France, a gently rolling landscape with small villages and a variety of crops. The Great War of 1914-1918 (WW1) left many traces here.

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Day 7: Hermies - Péronne**Cycling @ 45km**

After breakfast we reach the *Riqueval Tunnel* (5670 metres) en-route to Péronne. Those who wish can stay on the barge as it is pulled through by electric chain-tug (to avoid fumes). Alternatively, the cycle route passes around this tunnel perhaps visiting the memorial to the Australian Fourth Division near Bellenglise.

Day 8: Péronne**Free day**

Today is a free day to relax on the boat or explore the surroundings by bike or on foot. You may arrange a guided tour or taxi to visit Amiens or Ypres to visit WW1 memorials, military cemeteries and battlefields or Villers Bretonneux with its *Victoria School* and strong ties still to Australia. The Museum of the Great War in the ancient chateau in Péronne is a "must see" for those interested in the history of this period.

Day 9: Péronne - Pont l'Evêque/Noyon**Cycling @ 55km**

After breakfast we follow the Somme valley through rich rolling farmland to Noyon, a small but historic French town in the Oise department of Picardy. Noyon is home to the Notre-Dame Cathedral and a museum about the reformer John Calvin. You can still see the remains of sections of the town walls built by the Romans.

Day 10: Pont l'Evêque/Noyon - Compiègne**Cycling @ 40km**

A hillier route as we cycle through the forest of Compiègne. In the forest is the Rethondes Armistice Clearing where the WW1 armistice agreement was signed by the French, German and British. Compiègne has a very lovely church, the Eglise Saint-Antoine, with a collection of Greek porcelain.

Day 11: Compiègne - Creil**Cycling @ 40km**

We continue our tour through the forest and typical French countryside visiting the lovely village St Jean-aux-Bois and the castle of Pierrefonds, perhaps the most majestic, fortified castle of France. As time allows we may visit Pierrefonds Castle with its fascinating museum and ever-changing display of trebuchet and medieval war machines, bicycles, tapestries, original furniture and a beautiful ballroom. Depending on the schedule we may re-join the barge cruising to Creil with its Gothic church (13th Century interior and 16th Century tower) and perhaps to visit the museum with 19th Century *provincial* furniture, pottery and paintings.

Day 12: Creil - Auvers sur L'Oise - Pontoise**Cycling @ 50km**

Cycle to the famous chateau of Chantilly located in one of the largest forests near Paris. It has one of the finest museums of historical paintings in France, a library, beautiful gardens and a horse museum. Re-join the barge and cruise to Pontoise via Auvers sur l'Oise, 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.

Day 13: Pontoise - Bougival**Cycling @ 45km**

We sail to Conflans-Ste-Honorine where the Oise joins the River Seine. On our way to Bougival is the chateau de Saint-Germain-en-Laye, a French royal palace, which houses the national archaeological museum and has very beautiful gardens. Bougival has been the home of many 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. A further 4km away for those who wish to continue cycling is the chateau and gardens of Malmaison (home to Napoleon's first wife Joséphine in the early 1800s).

Day 14: Bougival - Paris**Cycling @ 45km**

We cruise via Versailles into Paris. Our schedule and the frequent queues don't allow us to spend much time in the magnificent parkland, fountains and gardens and you should plan to return here after the tour finishes. The Chateau de Versailles is one of the largest castles of the world and is UNESCO heritage listed. We cruise the Seine triumphantly past great buildings and monuments to our final mooring in the city of Paris.

Day 15: Paris

Tour arrangements end after breakfast at 10.00am in Paris.



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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.



Bike & Barge cruises are ideal for partners with different abilities and interests. Whether you are a leisure cyclist or an enthusiast, you can enjoy the holiday together, unpack once and return each evening to your floating hotel. Well-maintained, multi-gear bicycles with panniers are provided. They are comfortable, easy to ride and well suited to the route.

Outdoor Travel offers Bike & Barge cruises in many regions of France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Romania, in Austria along the Danube, to the islands of Croatia, Greece and Turkey or Vietnam.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations:

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