

BELGIUM & FRANCE - BRUGES TO PARIS or RETURN

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



For 2024 we have a limited number of cabins on a unique hotel barge cruising from the beautiful city of Bruges in Belgium to Paris in France or return. With a friendly, cosy atmosphere and comfortable twin share cabin accommodation (all with ensuite shower/toilet) this cycling cruise offers the opportunity to explore the varied and interesting countryside, with visits to historic and cultural centres, sampling beer and local produce. Each day you can choose to join our cycle guide on a guided tour, ride independently and meet up with the group at the barge, or stay onboard to enjoy the cruise. In the evenings our guide may offer a city walk or other activities.

A highlight for Australians will be the two-night stop at Péronne in the Somme region of Northern France, not far from Villers-Bretonneux where ANZAC Day is celebrated. This break will allow access to the many World War One 'Western Front' battle sites and memorials. There is free time to explore, relax or to arrange a visit to Amiens, Albert, Villers-Bretonneux, Fromelles or Bullecourt (using local transport or a local tour operator). We visit historical places in Belgium, such as Ghent, Oudenaarde and Tournai on the River Scheldt.

In France we follow the River Oise visiting Auvers, where Van Gogh once lived. We ride through royal forests, national parks, past French chateaux such as Chantilly, one of the most beautiful in France and the chateau-museum of Malmaison, home of Napoleon and Joséphine. The landscape becomes hilly as we approach Paris and while the sights are worth the effort there is always the option to cruise instead. We visit Compiègne and the forest clearing where the armistice was signed in 1918, visit the parklands at the Palace of Versailles and cruise into Paris past the Eiffel Tower.

This tour avoids the traffic where possible, taking small country roads, towpaths, forest trails and the occasional busier road in cities and major towns. In Belgium we cycle through relatively flat country mostly along river banks or towpaths with some cobblestones in towns and cities. In France we follow country roads and bike paths. Near cities it is sometimes possible to avoid traffic by staying on the barge on some sections.

Bike & Barge cycling cruises combine cycling and river/canal cruising, allowing partners of different abilities and interests to holiday together (trips are just as interesting for leisure cyclists OR enthusiasts), you unpack once and come 'home' each night to a wonderful meal and a comfortable cabin with your own bathroom. Well-maintained multi-gear bicycles with panniers are provided – comfortable, easy to ride and ideal for this route. A limited number of **e-bikes are available** for hire at extra cost, ask when making a booking.

Departs: Bruges to Paris: 11 May, 8 June, 17 August, 14 September 2024
Paris to Bruges: 25 May, 6 July, 31 August, 28 September 2024

Cost from: \$5095 per person twin share Premium twin cabin supplement from \$545 per person twin share. (\$4380 per person in a twin bunk cabin), Single use bunk cabin from \$5815 (two per departure).

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

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations

Suggested itinerary: *all distance shown are approximate only – route offered in reverse for Paris to Bruges:*

Day 1: Bruges

Cycling @ 17km

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 back to the 9th Century. There are many monuments and well-preserved medieval streets to explore. Bruges is famous for its lace-work and chocolates. The city's canals are floodlit at night making it beautiful and exciting place to walk in the evening.

Day 2: Bruges - Ghent

Cycling @ 35 or 60km

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 @ 40km

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 @ 45km

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 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 @ 35 or 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.

Day 7: Hermies to Péronne

Cycling @ 20 or 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 @ 60km

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

Today's route is hillier 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 @ 55km

Today 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 @ 40km

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 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/Auvers sur L'Oise - Bougival

Cycling @ 30, 40 or 55km

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 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. 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

Today we cruise past Versailles into Paris. Our schedule and the frequent queues don't allow us to stop to see 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.



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.

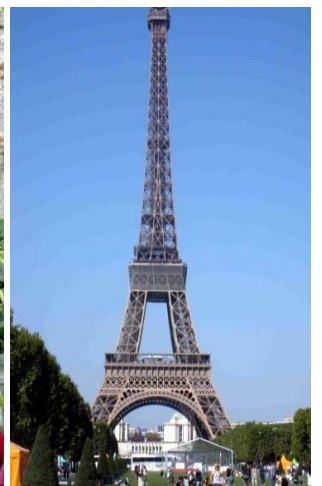
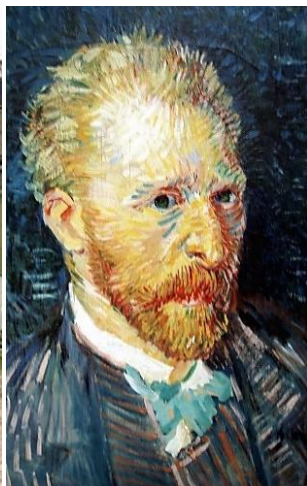
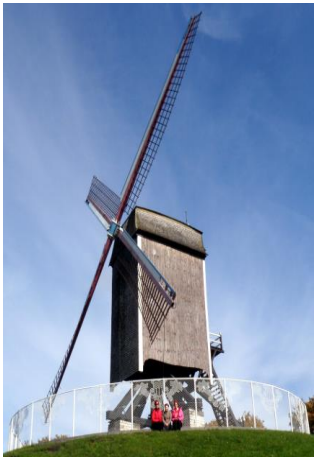
For those short on time, it is possible to book just one week of this two week cruise. Ask for more details.

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. River and canal hotel barge cruises are available throughout Europe (where bicycles are available for passenger use):

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

- Call Toll free 1800 331 582 or (03) 57551743 or Fax (03) 57501020
- Email: info@outdoortravel.com.au
- Web: <http://www.outdoortravel.com.au>
- Mail: Outdoor Travel Pty Ltd, PO Box 286, Bright 3741, Australia

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