

BELGIUM & FRANCE - BRUGES TO PARIS or RETURN

15-days / 14-nights Easy to moderate **PREMIUM PLUS** Bike & Barge GUIDED cycling cruises



Departs: Bruges to Paris from: 11 May, 12 May, 20 July 2024
Paris to Bruges from: 6 July, 20 September, 21 September 2024

Cost from: \$6010 per person twin share Single cabin supplement on request

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

Highlights: Bruges, Ghent, the Ardennes, the Somme, Wallonia, Chateau de Chantilly, Auvers-sur-l'Oise, deciduous forests, woodlands, rolling hills, canal tunnels, great food and a night in Paris.

Bike & Barge cruises combine cycling and river cruising, allowing partners of different abilities and interests to holiday together – trips are just as interesting for leisure cyclists and enthusiasts. You unpack once and come 'home' each night to a wonderful meal and a comfortable cabin with your own bathroom.

For 2024 we have secured a very limited number of berths on a delightful hotel barge to cruise from the beautiful city of Bruges in Belgium to Paris or return. Our **PREMIUM PLUS** class barge cruises offer a high standard of meals and comfortable cabin accommodation (all with lower twin beds and ensuite bathrooms). All cabins have air-conditioning and a fixed window, and there are also two double cabins which have larger windows that open. On the main deck there is a comfortable, air-conditioned lounge with panoramic windows, dining area, seating corner and a small bar. On sunny days, there is a very spacious sun deck with chairs and tables, where you can relax and enjoy the scenery or join the skipper in the wheelhouse.

Our Bike & Barge cycling cruise is a great opportunity to explore the varied and 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. Each day you can join our cycle guide on a bike tour, cycle independently, or stay on the boat to enjoy the cruise. In the evenings our guide may offer a city walk or other activities.

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 free time to explore each day's destination.

The bike ride from Paris or Bruges will avoid the traffic wherever possible, taking small country roads, towpaths, paved forest trails and the occasional cobblestone road in cities and major towns. Daily cycling distances are between 20 – 60km 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 riverbanks 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!

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations



Suggested itinerary – distance shown are approximate - also offered in reverse for Paris to Bruges:

Day 1: Bruges

warm-up ride

Welcome aboard our hotel barge at 2.00pm near the centre of Bruges. Bruges is UNESCO listed and famous for its lacework, 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: Bruges - Ghent

cycling @ 34 - 44km

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: Ghent - Oudenaarde

cycling @ 46 – 53km

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: Oudenaarde - Tournai

cycling @ 42km

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: Tournai - Arleux

cycling @ 41-53km

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: Arleux - Ruyaulcourt Tunnel

cycling @ 35 - 51km

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: Ruyaulcourt Tunnel - Péronne

cycling @ 39-52km

This morning we 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: near to Péronne

no cycling

This morning the barge will stay near 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: Péronne - Noyon / Pont l'Évêque

cycling @ 39 - 48km

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.

Day 10: Noyon / Pont l'Évêque - Compiègne

cycling @ 35 - 45km

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. Those who want a longer ride can detour to Pierrefonds Castle, perhaps the most majestic, fortified castle of France. If time permits, we can visit the fascinating museum here with its displays of trebuchet and medieval war machines, bicycles, tapestries, original furniture. We finish in Compiègne, which has a lovely church, the Église Saint-Antoine, housing a collection of Greek porcelain.

Day 11: Compiègne – Pont-Ste-Maxence

cycling @ 45 - 55km

We continue our tour through the forest and typical rural French countryside, past the 14th Century Abbey of Moncel before we join the barge in Pont-Ste-Maxence, named after its early bridge across the Oise.

Day 12: Pont-Ste-Maxence - Auvers Sur L'Oise

cycling @ 42 - 57km

We sail to the city of Creil with its Gothic church (with a 13th Century interior and 16th Century tower). We then cycle 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. If time permits, we visit 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: Auvers Sur L'Oise - Conflans - Bougival

cycling @ 40 - 46km

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: 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: Tour ends

The tour will end after breakfast in Paris.

The tour is offered in reverse from Paris to Bruges. The daily suggested itinerary and moorings may be subject to changes due to navigation issues or any unforeseen circumstances at the discretion of the captain. Cycling distances are approximate; the route is determined by the cycle tour guide and may change if necessary.



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

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