

Your Bike & Barge Holiday

Bruges to Amsterdam



FBA 2012

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The Dutch Golden Age in the 17th century and the prosperity of the Flemish trading cities are now combined in one route. The remains of these days can be seen while cycling through the green, Dutch polder landscape with its rich waterways, silent roads, villages and a world of islands in Zeeland with fields, creeks, winding embankments and dams. Also to be seen is the picturesque countryside between the Flemish cities Bruges and Ghent in Belgium. These cities flourished long before the rise of the Dutch leaving the cities with beautiful paintings and architecture. Not to be forgotten on this route are the big rivers in these regions of the Netherlands and Belgium and of course one of the seven Wonders of the World: the Dutch Delta Works, showing the everlasting battle against the rough sea.

SATURDAY: Bruges, embarking at 4 p.m., tour 15 km.

The cycle trip starts in Bruges. The origin of Bruges dates from Gallo-Roman times (2nd-3rd century). Even in those early days there were trading contacts with Gaul and England. In the 9th century the counts of Flanders built a fortified castle here. In the 11th century Bruges became an international trading centre due to easy access to the sea. Its high quality cloth was well-known and traded all over Europe. Around 1350 the city had more than 40,000 inhabitants, twice as many as there are now in the old city centre. It was in those days that the second city wall was built. Four windmills were later built on the wall.

In the 15th century Bruges came under the rule of the dukes of Burgundy who brought luxury and prosperity to the city: bloom of the arts and banking. Much has remained of those days: the Town Hall, the many 'nation houses', diocese churches, the mausoleums of Maria of Burgundy and Karel de Stoute in the O.L.V. (Our Beloved Lady) Church. The flowering period ended when the House of Burgundy left Bruges at the end of the 15th century. Silting of the coastal waters made it impossible for large ships to sail to Bruges and Antwerp took over the leading position. In 1584 the city was captured by the Spaniards. Religious wars and the inaccessibility from the sea caused an economic decline. In the 19th century Bruges had become a poor city without any industry. Then, however, Bruges started its revival. It became known as a city of arts (described as such in the novel 'Bruges la Morte' by G.Rodenbach, 1892) and as a tourist centre. Some of the many sights of the city: O.L.V. Church, Belfort, Hallen, Gruuthusemuseum and Kant Centrum (Lace Centre).



SUNDAY: Bruges – Ghent, 52 km.

Starting off the city walls of Bruges for a trip to Ghent. You will mostly be following the canal between Bruges and Ghent which offers a beautiful, peaceful cycle route with an unexpected variety of experiences. Around noon, you will arrive in Ghent, leaving you enough time to discover the old and characteristic city centre.



Ghent is a big city with some 250,000 inhabitants. The name is said to have originated from the Celtic *Ganda*, meaning 'mouth, confluence'. Indeed, the rivers Leie and Schelde flow together in the centre of the town. In 630 the Holy Amandus founded St Baaf's Abbey. In the Middle Ages Ghent became one of the most influential cities of Europe (approx. 56,000 inhabitants in 1350), due to the cloth industry. From the 14th to the 16th centuries there were many conflicts with the lords of Flanders as well as within the city itself.

Economic decline set in, in 1584 when the town was captured by the Spaniards during the rebellion of the Netherlands against King Philips II and lasted for several centuries. The revival only came in the 19th century, when Ghent developed into an industrial town - and became a socialist stronghold at the same time. The city has many well-preserved guild's and patricians' houses as well as old warehouses, Gravensteen (a mediaeval castle), St Nicholas Church (with 13th century foundations), St Baaf's Cathedral (14th century, with the famous painting 'De Aanbidding van het Lam', 'The Mystic Lamb' by the Van Eijck brothers) and the 'Belfort' (Belfry; 14th century).

The city of Ghent is proud of its rich past, but is much more than just a museum town. This lively city with its numerous squares and cosy pubs is an excellent mixture of mediaeval edifices, stylish shopping streets, splendid mansions, working-class quarters from the beginning of the 20th century which now often house students and busy little squares where people eat out till the wee hours on a sultry summer night...



MONDAY: Ghent – Middelburg, 73 km or boarding in Terneuzen, 41 km

Today we will be leaving Belgium, arriving in the Netherlands. Following a cycle route through the countryside of East-Flanders, you will ride to Breskens from where a ferryboat can be taken to Vlissingen (crossing takes approximately 20 minutes).

Vlissingen is an important harbor to the mouth of the Westerschelde, situated on the former island of Walcheren. From there, you will cycle to Middelburg. The route takes you through the wide land of Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, with a few villages, winding roads over embankments and the remains of many creeks.



You have arrived in the Delta region of our greater rivers. Years ago, an open connection existed between rivers and sea. After the disastrous flooding in 1953, the Deltaplan was developed and most tidal outlets were closed from the sea by dams. Most parts of Zeeland were, and still are, under sea level and in 1953 the embankments were too weak and too low, causing this area to be at risk for floodings once in every 80 years. Now, because of the flood barriers, that chance is reduced to less than once every 4000 years. Tomorrow, you will be able to see this Wonder of the World and experience being surrounded by concrete with a guarantee of 200 years. The steel doors, with a length of 45 metres, will rise, causing the tide to rage under your feet.

Middelburg originated around an old 'burg' or 'burcht' (Old English: *burg* or *burh*: 'fortress, citadel', later 'fortified town'; connected to Modern English 'borough'). In the days of the Viking invasions (approx. 800-1000) several 'burchten' were built on Walcheren. The main impetus to the island, however, was the foundation of a monastery in the 12th century. The abbot was a very influential person all over the island and Middelburg followed his suit. Trading added to the prosperity. Easy accessibility of the town via many waterways and the proximity of the sea made Middelburg play an important role in the trading activities of both the United East Indian Company and the West Indian Company (17th and 18th centuries). The merchants were united in powerful guilds and nowadays there wealth is still obvious in the remaining substantial houses in the centre of the city.

Even though many historical buildings were lost as a result of the German bombardments on May 17, 1940 there is still quite a lot to be seen. Several destroyed edifices have been rebuilt and a good part of the 17th century city walls are clearly recognisable. Other attractions are the (gothic) Town Hall on Market Square, the Abbey, Gistpoort (an old entrance gate), the Graanbeurs (Grain Exchange), the VOC (United East Indian Company) building (1616), St Jorisdoolen and several merchants' homes. Another interesting place is Miniature Walcheren. South-east to the city the Kanaal door Walcheren (Canal through Walcheren) was dug, connecting Middelburg to the seaport of Vlissingen.



TUESDAY: Middelburg – Zierikzee, 51 km or cycling to Zandkreekdam en sailing to Zierikzee, 32 km.

Starting off the day, is a trip to the small town of Veere, once an important trading city. From Veere you will cycle over the Veergatdam (opportunity to visit the beach) to Noord-Beveland. Soon you will arrive at the Oosterscheldedam with its beach and dunes, where you will be able to swim at the south-side. About half way, the former workers island Neeltje Jans, offers a variety of activities that have to do with the damming of the sea. All islands in this province are connected to one another since the Deltaworks, they are therefore officially no longer 'real' islands. This does not mean however, that the islands have lost their characteristics.



The current route is a trip for the stronger cyclist, due to heavy winds in this area. Westenschouwen marks the end of this trip on embankments. You will now continue your route to Zierikzee, at the south-side of Schouwen-Duiveland. In case of heavy winds, you can choose for a crossing by ship, from Walcheren to Zierikzee on Schouwen-Duiveland. Then you will continue cycling from Veere to the Zandkreekdam and embark there.

Zierikzee was first mentioned in the 9th century and was granted a charter in 1248. The 14th/15th and later the 17th century formed its prime days and many of the present buildings still remind us of those times. Some of the places worth a visit are Nobelpoort (a 14th century city entrance gate) and flour mills De Hoop (1876) and De Haas (1727). 16th century's Gravensteen first served as a prison and now houses the Maritime Museum.

Two other remaining city gates are Noorderhavenpoort (1532) and Zuiderhavenpoort (same period, different style of architecture). At the latter the remains of the old city wall can be seen. The tower of St Lievens' Church, called Monstertoren was originally planned to be 400 feet high, was, however, never finished and is now only 170 feet high. Lack of money and the weak soil were the cause of breaking off the project.

The prosperity resulting from the trade with the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia, led to the construction of warehouses and fine houses (esp. in Oudehaven). The city can conveniently be explored from the berthing place of the ship.



WEDNESDAY: Zierikzee – cycling to Bruinisse of Willemstad – sailing from Dordrecht, 24/54 km

Today, a beautiful trip on the island of Schouwen-Duiveland is planned. You will cycle to Bruinisse. This village is known for its isolated community, with a relatively large number of youth. Most of the villagers' income is earned by mussel fishing. On the embankment of Grevelingen a statue can be found of an opened mussel. In Grevelingen you will embark to sail to Dordrecht, or you can choose to cycle to Willemstad, an old fortified town. The cycle route to Willemstad takes you by Grevelingendam, via the south of Goeree-Overflakkee and over Hellegatsdam.



You will finish today in Dordrecht, one of the oldest cities of the country, situated on one of the busiest junctions of waterways. In the 11th century it was known as Thuredrech. In 1220 the town was granted a municipal charter by Count William I of Holland. In the middle Ages it became an important port and in 1350 it was given staple right: any goods transported into the city were to be sold there, too. The 15th century was full of catastrophes (siege, flooding, and city fires). Yet, the city survived and was to play an important part in the politics of the Netherlands. In 1572 the first assembly of the Staten (representatives of the people) was held here in the edifice known as the 'Hof' (the Court). This is generally viewed upon as the beginning of independent Holland, or rather Netherlands, as various provinces united to fight the Spaniards. In the 16th century Dordrecht lost its position as the major trading city to Amsterdam and Rotterdam.



In 1618-1619 a very important protestant synod was held in Dordrecht. Within the church a dispute had risen about the interpretation of the religious doctrine. The more orthodox movement won and the 'Dordtse Leerregels' (Canons of Dort) were laid down. At this synod the first translation of the Bible into Dutch was decided upon (the 'Statenvertaling'; States' translation).

Some of the many interesting sights in the city are the Great or Our-Beloved-Lady Church with its tower that was never finished (14th century), a distinctive feature of the city. Another dominating building is the

Groothoofdspoort, an ancient city gate which gives you a wonderful view over the busy river.

THURSDAY: Dordrecht – Vianen, 47 km.

Upon leaving Dordrecht, you will cycle through Alblasserwaard. In this region many villages are stretched out along the winding waterways. Here you will find the peacefulness of the countryside with sheltered roads, panoramas over fields and the well-known mills that characterize the Dutch landscape.



Alblasserwaard's history begins after the last ice age, about 10.000 years ago. Sand dunes were formed by the wind, which are still to be seen today in and around Alblasserwaard. After the prehistoric, the Roman era marked the first period in which this area was widely inhabited again. After the great depopulation in the year 250, the first inhabitants settled permanently in the year 1000. The completion of land cultivation is estimated to be in the fourth quarter of the 13th century.

Before you arrive in Vianen, you will cycle in between the greater rivers in an area called 'Vijfheerenland'. Vijfheerenland, which translates to 'Five Gentlemen's Land', thanks its name to five gentlemen who took measures against water logging. You will continue your route along the canal of Merwede and over the river dike of Vianen.

Vianen is a unique, medieval town. Although the town was already a blooming trading city around the years 1335-1336, it was only then that Vianen received its town privileges. Inside the 14th century town canals and walls, the geometrical street patterns were kept intact, as were many buildings from that time. Originating from the 15th century and the original fortress, is the Lekpoort. This building is entirely intact and absolutely worth a visit. Other must-see monuments are the city hall (1425) and the church (1542).



FRIDAY: Vianen – sailing to Breukelen, cycling to Amsterdam, 48 km.

Friday morning you will leave Vianen by ship for a tour over the Amsterdam-Rijnkanaal to Breukelen. Here you will embark for the last stage to Amsterdam. You will be cycling along the idyllic Vecht river, with beautiful houses and gardens along the side. Following narrow cycling paths, you will arrive in Ankeveen in an area rich of water. In winters, these waters are well-used for skating. Returning at the Vecht, the city of Weesp is visited, leaving only a few kilometers for Amsterdam. Following mostly cycling paths, you will be riding towards the centre of the city. Before reaching the end destination of this vacation, the Maritime Museum is passed. Behind this building a replica of the 18th century ship, the 'Amsterdam' (known for its voyages to the Dutch East Indies) is anchored. The central station of Amsterdam, is built in front of the former water front, where once hundreds of ships moored. These ships nowadays anchor in harbors in West Amsterdam.

Amsterdam:

In the 12th century Amsterdam was nothing more than a simple settlement at the mouth of the river Amstel, directly connected to the sea. Amsterdam was granted its municipal charter between 1300 and 1360 and has since expanded continually. In the 17th century (the Golden Age) Amsterdamers were the most prosperous Europeans. It was in the Golden Age that the famous rings of canals were dug. Powerful merchants had their abundantly decorated mansions built here, thus manifesting their riches.

Amsterdam is a city to be explored on foot and we recommend the following places of interest: the rings of canals, the Jordaan area, with its many pubs, outdoor cafés and quaint shops, Vondelpark with its open air concerts, Leidseplein, Rembrandtsplein, the antique shops in the Spiegel district, Museum Square with the Rijksmuseum (National Museum), Stedelijk Museum (Museum of Modern Art) and the Van Gogh Museum.

Amsterdam is inextricably related to the diamond-cutting industry, which has brought much fame to the city since the 17th century.

Other typical features of Amsterdam are its numerous 'hofjes' (almshouses), the floating flower market, and the hundreds of houseboats lining the canals.

The palace on Dam Square is sometimes called the eighth Wonder of the World as it was built on 13,650 piles.

Did you know that?

- There are 222 trams, 277 buses, 106 underground trains and eight ferries in Amsterdam?
- The Oude Kerk (Old Church) is the oldest edifice of Amsterdam?
- There are 600,000 bicycles in Amsterdam?
- There are 165 canals and 1,281 bridges in Amsterdam?
- There are 2,500 houseboats in Amsterdam?



SATURDAY: Amsterdam, departure after breakfast