

The Netherlands Bike & Boat: Springtime in Holland, Aboard the Lena Maria

Bike Vacation Only

Nobody does springtime in Holland quite like VBT. We've planned you an itinerary of cycling past windmills and polder villages followed by relaxing on your group's private Dutch barge. As your cozy ship floats along Holland's network of canals, you'll cycle easy paths past massive fields of blossoms, stopping to learn about the history of tulips, daffodils, and other bulbs at the unique garden museum Hortus Bulborum. Visit the family home of farmers in Gouda—and learn about the famous cheese-making traditions there. During this exceptional springtime bicycling vacation, your experienced VBT trip leaders and dedicated barge crew will open the doors to Holland's most celebrated season.

Cultural Highlights

- Learn how historic windmills work and how they are used to reclaim land called “polders.”
- View rare and historic flower bulbs at the flower garden museum, Hortus Bulborum.
- Explore the living catalogue of spring flowers at Keukenhof Gardens.
- Explore Holland's “Green Heart,” a rural and peaceful nature zone.

What to Expect

This tour is rated Easy, and both hybrids and E-bikes are offered. Riding is primarily on paved roads and paths with very few hills, although wind may increase the difficulty factor since there is often little or no shelter. Cyclists may stay on the barge on windy days if they wish, but they will miss out on some of the incredible scenery, which is best viewed while pedaling. Vehicle support is not available on the bike path sections of the ride.

Tour Duration: 8 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 15 - 25 miles

Group size: 24 max

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

Mar 48°/37°, Apr 53°/40°, May 61°/46°

Average Rainfall (in.)

Mar 3.5, Apr 1.5, May 2

DAY 1: Embark barge / Cruise to Zaanse Schans

You are responsible for making your way to our barge, arriving between 12:30 and 12:50 p.m. Please note that you cannot embark before this time, as the barge is being prepared for your arrival. If you are late, you must contact the barge as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements because we will set sail promptly at 1:00 p.m. The barge will be moored in Oosterdok, near the entrance to the NEMO museum, which is located behind Amsterdam's Centraal Station. Please refer to the information listed in the tour handbook for your barge contact number.

You will board the barge around 12:30 p.m. for a 1:00 p.m. departure. At the docks, meet the barge crew and your VBT trip leaders, who will welcome you aboard with light refreshments. Then, cruise out of Amsterdam, sailing along the Noordhollands—the waterway connecting Amsterdam to the North Sea—passing the recently built movie museum EYE.

After a brief sail, the barge moors near Zaanse Schans, next to a working sawmill that is run purely on wind power. You will pedal along the Zaan river on your warm-up ride, rejoining the barge at the mooring. Cycling past traditional green painted houses, warehouses, and windmills, you're sure to feel as if you are pedaling through bygone centuries.

This evening, gather on board with the group for a welcome dinner.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Zaanse Schans Warm-up — 5 km (3 miles)

What to Expect:

The route provides a glimpse into Zaandam's industrial heritage on a mix of streets, bike lanes, and bike paths. Continue to a small neighborhood of traditional houses. This is a good opportunity to practice reading the signs of the Dutch Bike Network System. Take time to explore the clog maker at the end of your ride.

Cumulative Distance Range: 5 km (3 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2: Cycle to De Rijp / Visit Schermerhorn Windmill Museum / Alkmaar

Today, your barge continues along the River Zaan and the Knollendammer Canal to the town of Alkmaar, famed for its cheese trade. After breakfast, you will cycle past lakes and water-management systems to the beautiful town of De Rijp. Once there, you'll understand why the famous water engineer Jan Adriaanszoon Leeghwater referred to it as "the finest village in Holland." Centuries of history can still be seen in De Rijp's wooden facades, as well as its beautiful church complete with stained-glass windows dating to 1655, lock, and town hall.

From here, continue across the Beemster Polder, an almost untouched piece of low-lying land reclaimed from the water. In 1612, Dutch engineers, using a system of dikes and windmills, drained lake, and converted the land into pasture. Today, the Beemster Polder is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Nourished by sea water, the clay soil is nutrient and mineral-rich, with a distinctive slate-blue color. Grass grown in this soil is especially lush and makes the milk produced by cows that graze here unusually sweet and creamy. The local Beemster cheeses are celebrated for their exceptional flavor.

Your next stop is the former windmill complex of the Schermer Polder, which includes the Schermerhorn Windmill Museum. The museum provides you with complete access, from top to bottom, allowing you to follow the fascinating mechanics of the mill in a unique setting. A short ride takes you to a local "care farm," where people with special needs are employed and where you will enjoy a picnic lunch.

Continue cycling along this delightfully flat land to Alkmaar. The town was once known as a Dutch cheese city, but that is only a small part of its story. As you explore the streets this evening, you'll be amazed by the beauty of Alkmaar's Old Town, with its well-preserved 17th-century buildings and narrow, winding canals.

Dinner will be served on our barge this evening.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Zaanse Schans to Lunch — 24 km (14 miles)

Afternoon: Lunch to Alkmaar — 17 km (10 miles) | Additional Bergen Loop — 18 km (11 miles)

What to Expect:

After a guided visit to the Het Jonge Schaep sawmill, your route follows the Dutch windmill theme. You depart Zaanse Schans and ride along the Zaan River, stopping at Spijkerboor for the local ferry across the Noordhollands canal. From here, cycle to the pretty town of De Rijp. Soon, you will see many of the windmills for which The Netherlands is known. In Schermermolen, you can stop to learn about the inner workings of one of those windmills. From there, it's a short jaunt to the "care farm" where you will enjoy your picnic lunch. If you wish, you can take the shuttle to Alkmaar, but those continuing to ride will enjoy scenic open countryside all the way to your destination.

The extra-long option today includes a loop to picturesque Bergen before arriving at your barge in Alkmaar.

Cumulative Distance Range: 24 – 59 km (14 – 35 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 3: Guided tour of Hortus Bulborum / Cycle to the North Sea coast and Haarlem

After an early breakfast, you'll cycle to the Hortus Bulborum, a unique garden museum dedicated to the preservation of rare and historic bulbs. More than 4,000 tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, and other flowers blossom throughout the museum's five-plus acres of flowerbeds. Each spring, they burst forth in a dazzling array of fragrances and colors, as you'll discover on a guided tour.

From there, it's a short ride to the beach, where you can enjoy lunch on your own at one of the beachfront cafés. Admire the sweeping views before continuing on bike paths through the sand dunes of the North Sea coast to the town of Beverwijk. A local car ferry will take you across the North Sea Canal, a major shipping route. Back on land, you can choose to shuttle or cycle to Haarlem.

Haarlem is a pretty city of cobblestone streets, historic buildings, canals, grand churches, cozy bars, top-notch restaurants, and antique shops. After coasting into town, you'll enjoy a short walking tour through the historic city center with your trip leaders. You'll dine on your own tonight at any of the local establishments before returning to the barge, which is moored in Haarlem overnight.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Alkmaar to the beach – 29 km (18 miles)

Afternoon: Beach to IJmuiden Ferry – 18 km (11 miles) | IJmuiden Ferry to Haarlem – 16 km (10 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride, the first of two days filled with flowers, passes through blossoming fields and sand dunes. The first bulbs emerge soon after leaving Alkmaar; you'll have the opportunity to admire them in Limmen at Hortus Bulborum. In Castricum, enjoy lunch on your own at one of the town's beachfront cafés with stunning North Sea views. You'll burn off those calories by continuing the ride through sand dunes before boarding a ferry that will cross the North Sea Canal. If you're still feeling energetic, there is an additional cycling loop through the dunes into the city of Haarlem, but you may opt for a van shuttle to the barge instead.

Cumulative Distance Range: 29 – 63 km (18 – 39 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4: Keukenhof Flower Park / Leiden

Today is another day with an early start, so you can catch the flowers opening in the early morning light. You'll ride through gorgeous blooming bulb fields to Keukenhof, the most beautiful spring garden in the world. The 80-acre (32-hectare) park boasts more than 9 miles (14.4 km) of footpaths winding among more than 7 million tulips, hyacinths, daffodils, and other flowers, designed to excite the senses in a truly beautiful setting.

From there, you'll cycle through more bulb fields on your way to Leiden, a vibrant town bisected by canals and filled with attractive guild houses. The birthplace of the Dutch master Rembrandt, Leiden is home to the Netherlands' oldest university. The town also has a connection to colonial American history. In the early 17th century, Protestants fleeing persecution elsewhere in the Low Countries, France, and England found a warmer welcome in Leiden. Notable among these Protestants was a group led by John Robinson, who would later sail to America aboard the *Mayflower*.

This evening, join your trip leaders for a short walk into Leiden for dinner on your own. The barge will be moored in Leiden overnight.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Haarlem to Keukenhof Gardens – 23 km (14 miles)

Afternoon: Keukenhof Gardens to Leiden — 19 km (12 miles) | Additional Keukenhof Loop — 14 km (9 miles)

What to Expect:

Ride on country roads through flowering fields on your way to world-famous Keukenhof Gardens. After leaving Haarlem, your bike route touches the ancient *Manpad* at the foot of the dunes before moving farther inland through an older flower-growing area. Midway to Leiden you have an included visit to Keukenhof Gardens. The ride continues through more bulb fields, then passes through the narrow main street of Warmond village. After a ferry crossing, you'll continue cycling a bike route along the Zijl River. In Leiden, you'll join the barge at its mooring site. If you wish to add a longer loop option, you'll spend less time in Keukenhof Gardens. Please advise your trip leaders if you are riding the extra loop and let them know when you return to the Keukenhof parking lot.

Cumulative Distance Range: 23 – 56 km (14 – 35 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5: Cheese farm visit / Gouda

This morning, ride out of Leiden through verdant pastures and small farms, famous for cheese production. Near Zoeterwoude, you can stop to visit one such farm and meet the owners, Karin and Sjaak van Veen, and their animals. The farm has been in their family for more than 100 years. Here, you will learn about the cheese-making process—and enjoy the opportunity to taste the results.

Continue through open polder landscapes to Hazerswoude-Dorp. The bike path out of town has an intimate feel as it passes through residential gardens, leading you all the way to Gouda.

Gouda's namesake cheese is among the Netherlands' best-known exports. The town's compact center is entirely ringed by canals, and this evening you can stroll its spacious market square and see the grand Gothic town hall. The main church of Gouda, devoted to Saint John, is world famous for its stained-glass windows. Your early-afternoon arrival gives you plenty of time to explore and find a local restaurant for dinner on your own.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Leiden to Gouda — 35 km (22 miles)

Afternoon: Gouda to Haastrecht Loop – 10 km (6 miles)

What to Expect:

After breakfast on the barge, begin riding from Leiden to Zoeterwoude and Weipoort. After a short ride, you'll tour a cheese farm with the opportunity to taste their wares. The rest of your ride is through the region of Hazerswoude and Boskoop, where plants and young trees are commercially grown. Your ride will end when you meet the barge in Gouda, an old cheese-market city of international fame, where you'll have plenty of free time to explore the area. If you want to continue cycling, you can add an extra loop that leaves directly from the barge to Haastrecht, an ancient little town with a famous bike shop (Slingerland).

Cumulative Distance Range: 35 – 45 km (22 – 28 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: Gouda / Alphen / Oude Wetering

Leave Gouda this morning and pedal alongside peat lakes and onto the banks of the narrow Rhine River to Alphen aan den Rijn, where you will board the barge for lunch.

Afterward, you have the option to either cycle or cruise through a pretty stretch known as the "Groene Hart" (Green Heart)—a rural region of lush meadows, tranquil peat lakes, and abundant birdlife. If you are cycling, you will meet the barge at Oude Weterings, then cruise along the River Amstel to the next overnight mooring point at Uithoorn.

Enjoy dinner aboard our barge this evening.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Gouda to Alphen aan den Rijn – 30 km (19 miles)

Afternoon: Alphen aan den Rijn to Oude Wetering – 27 km (17 miles)

What to Expect:

The first part of the ride passes through Reeuwijkse Plassen, a lake area created by peat digging. After

passing the town of Bodegraven, you continue along the Old Rhine River to a barge lunch in the city of Alphen aan den Rijn. After lunch, feel free to relax and enjoy the afternoon on board your mobile home, or continue cycling through lush meadows and lakes. This pretty route touches the villages of Langeraar, Braassemermeer, and Oude Wetering, where you will board the barge and have dinner while we cruise to our mooring point at Uithoorn.

Cumulative Distance Range: 27 – 57 km (17 – 36 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7: Aalsmeer / Amsterdam

After sipping your morning beverage of choice at breakfast on the barge, shuttle to Aalsmeer, home to the world's largest flower auction. An astonishing volume of beautiful flowers are traded from more than ten countries for export throughout the world.

From here, you'll cycle to Uithoorn. Today's riding options enable you to enjoy another day in the countryside, traveling along the Amstel River and through Amsterdam Forest. Rejoin the barge and cruise into Amsterdam, sampling local Dutch delicacies along the way. Your barge's mooring couldn't be more convenient: It's right in the center of city.

Dine on the barge one last time this evening.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Aalsmeer to Uithoorn – 8 km (5 miles) | Uithoorn to Amsterdam – 24 km (14 miles) | Via Abcoude Loop – 43 km (26 miles)

What to Expect:

After the shuttle to Aalsmeer, begin cycling to Uithoorn. Afterward, cycle along the Amstel River before cutting across polder into Amsterdam Forest to meet the barge at Nieuwe Meersluis. From here, the barge sails back to Amsterdam.

Cumulative Distance Range: 8 – 43 km (5 – 31 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 8: Depart Barge / Discover Amsterdam

After an included breakfast, say goodbye to your barge crew and trip leaders as your tour comes to a close. It is important that you leave the barge no later than 9:00 a.m. Please refer to the information listed in the tour handbook.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Barge Lena Maria (Days: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7)

The Lena Maria started her new life as a passenger barge in 2006. Built by Hans de Lange, who had previously built and operated similar vessels, the ship offers plenty of room for up to 24 passengers. All 12 cabins offer 2 lower beds and private bathrooms with a shower and toilet. Windows can be opened, and the cabins have central heating. Common areas include a dining area, a lounge with a bar, and a sun deck at the bow. The barge moors each night. Drinks of all types are available for purchase at the bar on board the Lena Maria. It is not customary for guests to bring their own wine and liquor on board; your understanding is appreciated. Onboard meal menus are set, though the chef is happy to accommodate vegetarians and those on restricted diets for health reasons.