



## **Roundtour Belgium & northern France**

**2020**

### **Brussels - Bruges – Brussels**

**mps Mecklenburg**

Art-lovers, cycling enthusiasts and beer aficionados will love this unforgettable bike & barge tour through Belgium and northern France.

The tour starts in the heart of Brussels and heads for Wallonia and northern France. As in the old days the waterways are leading our way. Prosperity in this area came along in the 19th century when very rich layers of coal were found in Northern France and Wallonian Belgium. Mons, Valenciennes and Douai, old capitals of the former duchy Hainaut, developed into centers of mining. After the last coal mines closed around 1960 the government invested a lot in landscape and culture like in the metropole of Lille, capital of French Flanders, transformed into a site of national pride.

The second week of the tour leads us through Belgium Flanders, where the historical centers of Flemish cities like Kortrijk, Ghent and Bruges can be admired. A day trip to the World War I Flanders fields close to Yper is on the program.

The landscapes on this tour vary a lot. There are pastoral rolling hills, but also beautiful tree lined valleys, like the Regional Park of the rivers Scheldt and Scarpe and the valley of the Lys that brings us back to flat but beautiful Flemish Flanders.

The waterways infrastructure is spectacular with the inclined plane of Ronquières, where the Mecklenburg is cog wheeled up the hill. Equally amazing is the ship-elevator of Strépy-Thieu. The tour has a lot to offer but when all the heritage and history is getting too much, there is always the Flemish beer! In Westvleteren we will visit the Sint-Sixtus abbey, where Westvleteren beer is brewed by the monks. This hard to buy beer is said to be one of the best beers in the world.

**Daily bike tours will be between 40 and 55 km.**



### **Day 1 (sat): Brussels**

The adventure begins in the Brussels harbor where you'll check-in at 2 pm after which the crew will welcome you and fit you with the perfect bike. After a delicious dinner onboard, your tour leader will take you for a night-time stroll through the center of town.

Take our advice though – come to Brussels one or two days before we embark to experience more of what this magnificent city has to offer.

### **Day 2 (sun): Brussels - Lot – Ronquieres - Strepy-Thieu**

During breakfast you will join the ship through Brussels. At the lock of Lot, your first bike tour starts through the friendly countryside of Belgium. This region south of Brussels was an important industrial center in the 19th century, where much coal was extracted. To transport the coal, canals were constructed with special locks and lifts to overcome the differences in height. In 1998 this inland shipping heritage gained UNESCO status. Around lunch time we meet the Mecklenburg at the inclined plane of Ronquieres, where the ships start rolling. Later in the afternoon we visit a number of historic ship lifts, which were replaced in 2002 by the huge funicular boat lift of Strépy-Thieu.



### **Day 3 (mon): Strépy-Thieu - Mons (Bergen) - Antoing**

Today's bike tour first brings you to the city of Mons. Mons is a beautiful city in Wallonia (the French speaking part of Belgium). It has a lively historic center. It is built on a hill, and on the top of the hill lies the famous Belfry, one of the three UNESCO sites in the small town of Mons. Today's tour ends in Antoing on the French – Belgium border. This area is called the "white land", where (white) limestone has been quarried since Roman times.



#### **Day 4 (tue): Antoing– Pont Malin – Arleux**

During breakfast the barge will bring you to the village of Mortagne, right at the border. Here the bike tour starts. You will bike right through the regional nature park Scarpe-Escaut with her mining landscapes, forests, wetlands and countryside towns and villages. In the afternoon you will pass Lewarde, where a mining museum can be visited. You will spend the night in Arleux, a little French village.



#### **Day 5 (wed): Arleux – Douai – Lille**

Also, today the barge will start early and bring you to Douai, where the today's bike tour starts. The bike tour goes in northern direction and brings you to the dynamic city of Lille. In the afternoon you can stroll around the old market square and the Vauban citadel or go shopping in the architectural paradise of the Euro Lille quarters. Lille houses the Fine Arts museum, the second-most important museum in France after the Louvre in Paris.

#### **Day 6 (thu): Lille – Kortrijk (day trip per bus to Yper / Flanders fields)**

Today there is no bike tour planned. A bus will take you on a day tour through the Flanders fields around the WWI battlefields of the Great War (1914-1918) close to Yper. In the afternoon a visit is planned of the Saint Sixtus abbey in Westvleteren where the world-famous Westvleteren Trappist beer is brewed by the monks. At the end of the afternoon the bus will bring you back to the ship in Kortrijk. In the Middle Ages, Kortrijk grew significantly thanks to the flax and wool industry with France and England and became one of the biggest and richest cities in Flanders.





### **Day 7 (fri): Kortrijk – Deinze**

This stage between Kortrijk and Deinze goes through the Lys valley. The countryside is beautiful and the many car-free cycling paths of the Lys Valley make it an ideal cycling region. On our way to Deinze we pass the Flanders Field American Cemetery in Waregem. In the afternoon you can opt for a few extra kilometers to visit the Ooidonk Castle. The Ooidonk water castle is one of the most beautiful castles in Belgium, a jewel of 16th-century Flemish-Spanish architecture. It looks out on an old bend of the River Lys and is surrounded by a beautiful 45-hectare park.

### **Day 8 (sat): Deinze – Bruges**

From Deinze to Bruges another great bike tour awaits you through the landscape park Bulskampveld. This park is the largest connecting forest area in the province and covers no less than 90 km<sup>2</sup>. The castle domain Bulskampveld is located at the center of the area with a visitors' center.

In the afternoon we reach Bruges, widely described as the 'Venice of the North' and arguably the most beautiful of all the Flemish cities.



### **Day 9 (sun): Bruges**

Today the barge stays in Bruges. You can join a short bike tour to the quaint village of Damme, or spend the day in Bruges, Bruges attracts more than two million visitors every year who come to see the picturesque medieval town center of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed historic city and a long list of historic attractions. An outstanding example of a medieval historic settlement, Bruges has managed to maintain its historic fabric as it has evolved over the centuries, with the result that today the city's original Gothic buildings form an integral part of the town's identity. While you are here you can visit one of Bruges many museums or simply take in the stunning beauty and culture of this unforgettable city from the comfort of a sidewalk café.

Dinner tonight (not included) will be in town in a restaurant of your choice (recommendations available on board).

### **Day 10 (mon): Bruges – Ghent**

Today's cycling journey begins along the Ghent canal as you glide through the peaceful Flemish landscape toward Ghent. Once there, be sure to head through to the historical city center where the abundance of architectural richness is truly staggering! Fun fact: During the Middle Ages, Ghent ranked as the second largest European city after Paris. We dock for the night in a Ghentish suburb roughly 30 minutes by bike from the city center.

### **Day 11 (tue): Ghent – Dendermonde/St. Amands**

After a delicious breakfast in Ghent you'll cycle through a beautiful and varied landscape, following the Schelde River to Dendermonde. Though words hardly do justice to the landscape along the Schelde River, if forced to choose one, "magnificent" probably comes the closest to describing the surrounding area. It truly is a highlight of the tour. From Dendermonde, you'll head through to St Amands either by bicycle or barge, it all depends on the tides. We dock for the night in St Amands.



### **Day 12 (wed): St. Amands – Temse – Antwerp**

Beginning in St Amands, you will cycle across the Brussels-Rupel canal past the historic brick factory area between Boom and Niel where bricks have been manufactured from the Middle Ages right up to the present day. From there you'll cycle through Rupelmonde and Hemiksem en route to Antwerp.

Antwerp is one of the world's major diamond processing cities and as such has countless highlights, some of which include the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwe cathedral, the medieval Steen Castle and the historic City Square Grote Markt.





### **Day 13 (thu): Antwerp – Lier – Willebroek**

After a delicious breakfast onboard, you'll leave the hustle of the city center as you cycle past the gorgeous villas and manicured gardens of suburban Antwerp en route to the city of Lier which has two UNESCO World Heritage sites – the Beguinage and the Belfry. The former are closed courtyards where widows and unmarried women led an independent, but religiously inspired, life under the leadership of a "grand dame". From there it's on to Willebroek where the ship will await your arrival.

### **Day 14 (fri): Willebroek – Mechelen – Zemst | Zemst – Brussels**

You'll leave the barge to sail over the Willebroek canal as you jump back in the saddle for your last ride through the green, softly slanted countryside of Mechelen to Zemst. Remarkably, Mechelen has over 300 historical buildings in less than three square kilometers, eight of which are churches! After taking in the sights of Zemst, you'll meet the barge en route to Brussels\* where your tour guide will lead you through the fascinating city center to the gothic town hall and impressive guild houses near the Grote Markt.

### **Day 15 (sat): Brussels**

Day 15 marks the end of your epic journey – disembarkation takes place after breakfast up until 9:30 am.





### Included in this tour

- 15 days/14 nights
- 14 x breakfast
- Packed lunches
- 13 x 3-course dinner
- Coffee and tea on board
- Welcome drink
- Use of bed linen and towels
- Daily cleaning of the cabin
- Climate-controlled cabin
- Daily briefings
- Fully guided cycling tours
- Some short walking tours
- Use of a waterproof pannier bag
- Water bottle

### Excluded in this tour

- 1x dinner in Bruges
- Drinks
- Bicycle rental or E-bike rental
- Personal insurances
- Gratuities (at your discretion)
- Entrance fees and excursions
- Transfers to/from the docking place
- Parking fees



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