

Our Glorious AFS Itinerary

April 27 - Depart on an overnight flight to the Netherlands

Most people go a day early on own to rest and relax.

April 28 - Purmerend

Flights to Amsterdam are quite easy to book and reasonably priced. (See Trip Tips) Arrive Amsterdam where you will be met by our guide around 10:30am.

You will be taken by coach outside the city to the incredible **Museum-Village de Zaanse Schans**. Colorful 18th-century frame houses are built of timber because the ground is too soft to support stone. A klompenmaker (maker of wooden shoes) still plies his trade nearby, and in his shop you can buy some beautiful painted wooden shoes. Stroll the grounds to photograph the iconic windmills. Our lunch here will introduce you to fluffy **Dutch pancakes**. Then we coach back to board our barge.

On board and settled in, you will spend the afternoon **sailing to Purmerend** in the province of Noord Holland. Meanwhile, your guide will provide a full briefing and fit each bicycle to its individual rider. Before our welcome dinner, the captain will discuss onboard safety measures.

The good ship Fiep is exactly that. A cargo ship built in 1912, it's generous spaces have been converted to passenger travel in the 21st century and now consist of two sundecks with awnings, tables and chairs, a sitting lounge and a dining area, plus 10 comfortably furnished twin-bedded cabins. It's so great to have a nice place to come back to each night, only unpacking once for the entire trip.

April 29 - Alkmaar

After breakfast and a briefing then we're off on quiet bicycle paths to Alkmaar, our destination for the night. We are traveling on polder, land reclaimed from the sea, and will make a stop at Schermerhorn to see a house so small it is famous. Following dinner, our guide will take us on a walk through the **medieval section of Alkmaar**, where the street layout has barely changed through the centuries and old merchant houses line the canals.

Although Alkmaar is known as a **Dutch cheese city**, the title covers only part of what it has to offer. There's a cheese museum, beer museum, and other quaint venues. It's also one of the best shopping cities in the Netherlands. As you wander through the streets with their impressive monuments you will be amazed at the beauty of the old town. It's just fifteen minutes from the beach.

Biking Distance: 20 miles

April 30 - Haarlem

Buildings aren't the only old things in Holland. A grand selection of very old tulips will be in bloom at the private garden we visit this morning, in Limmen. We may bicycle past fields of tulips on the way, as we go through an area close to the dunes that is ideal for bulb growing. A fortuitously placed pancake house will provide lunch before we enter the dunes where we'll find marvelous biking on beautiful bicycle trails, with no cars and only a few Dutch bikers and walkers. After leaving the dunes we stop in **Wijk-aan-Zee** for coffee and a stroll on the **North Sea beach**, after which we bicycle to Beverwijk where our barge is waiting. Relax on deck with a drink as we barge to Haarlem.

After dinner there'll be time to look around **Haarlem**. The historic city is the tulip capital of the world. The charming, medieval city offers tourists a lively culture scene, oodles of atmosphere, excellent shopping and nightlife. See St. Bavo's Church, the statue of Koster, the huge Grote Market, the little red light district which is a warm up for the brazen one in Amsterdam and much more.

Biking Distance: 24 miles

May 1 - Leiden

Home to the Netherlands' oldest university and the birthplace of **Rembrandt**, Leiden also served as a several-year stop-off between England and the New World for America's Pilgrims in the 17th century. Today, lovely Leiden boasts the second-largest Dutch city center after Amsterdam. The National Museum has an impressive collection of Egyptian artifacts. The **Hortus Botanicus**, established in 1590, was the site of the planting of Holland's first tulip bulbs in 1593. It's a great place to explore on foot.

Fields of flowers stretch in all directions as we cycle south to Leiden. Today's ride takes us through the center of what seems to be the world's heart of flowers. Everyone's camera is out and put to good use. Even the piles of discarded floral stalks, blooms drooping, have a luxurious scented air, indicating these fields are dedicated to bulb cultivation. Flowers for decoration are protected in greenhouses.

Late morning we stop at the spectacular public garden, **Keukenhof**, a showcase for bulb growers that reaches dazzling heights every spring. Its 74 acres, planted with seven million bulbs, offer a plethora hard to imagine but extraordinary to see. In the Keukenhof bulb shop you can order bulbs for shipment home. Our barge will reach Leiden before we do and have dinner ready for us.

Biking Distance: 22 miles

May 2 - Gouda

A pleasant morning ride takes you past bucolic fields with cows and sheep grazing as farmers tend their crops. Arrive in **Gouda**, a small town famous for its cheese and beautifully designed gothic town hall. After lunch in the market square, we'll visit St. John's Church to learn about the 400-year-old stained glass windows depicting biblical scenes or the Goudse Waag that houses the Cheese and Crafts Museum. For those interested, we'll take you to a small cheese shop where, after sampling different cheeses, the owner will shrink-wrap your choice for your trip home.

Gouda is a historic unique town with more than 70,000 inhabitants. Situated centrally between the urban centers of The Hague, Utrecht and Rotterdam. The old town of Gouda radiates a vitality that blends remarkably with its century-long history. Gouda is world famous for its cheese, caramel waffles, pipes and pottery.

Biking Distance: 20 miles

May 3 - Amsterdam

Back on the bicycle again, we ride along the **Old Rhine River** and through a region of greenhouses cultivating plants and flowers. We will visit one of the growers, and learn something about what he grows and where he sends his products. The afternoon allows us full enjoyment of the area's bicycle trails, through fields and along canals, until we meet up with the barge to motor into **Amsterdam**.

Biking Distance: 20 miles

May 4 - Amsterdam

You have the morning and afternoon free to explore the exciting city of Amsterdam. There are museums, the **Anne Frank House**, Van Gough and Rembrandt museums, Coster Diamond factory, **Delft porcelain**, the **Heineken Brewery**, bustling outdoor cafes and the infamous **Red-light district** are some of the city's highlights.

Tonight will be our farewell dinner.

May 5 - Departure

Group transfer by coach to the Amsterdam Schiphol Airport.

Fitness Level Two - I have no trouble walking and if necessary, can walk for 3+ miles. Uneven surfaces are not a problem. I do not need a cane or walking device.