



C'est la Vie Tour from Bruges to Paris

This unique 14-day tour will take you through Belgium and France and also through „Holland“, as Belgium and the French part north of the river Somme once belonged to the Netherlands. The lion in the flags of Belgian and French provinces still bears witness of those days. The tour takes you on a journey through two of the major „gourmet“ countries of the world, and of course there will be more than one opportunity to try or shop the local and regional delicacies. The „C'est la Vie“ (such is life) attitude of the French and Belgians surely finds strength in some of these.

Picardie, the northern province of France, once was the cradle of the Gothic period which can still be seen in various places we will visit. This area and especially the Somme river valley also suffered a lot during the Great War. In almost every little town there are memorials to commemorate those who have died in this war. If you are interested in this part of history you may take the opportunity to visit the war museum at Peronne where we will spend a whole day. It is surely worthwhile visiting. There are also some impressive memorials for the soldiers of France, Great Britain, Australia, U.S.A. and South Africa who fought in the battles of the area.

Our daily rides will take you along sometimes small country roads, towpaths, paved forest trails and occasionally a cobblestone road. While entering cities and towns you will meet more traffic. In Belgium we will cycle through rather flat country, and a large part of the tour will follow tow paths that were best described by Dan Gamber on his website: “If you like to ride on good pavement but away from car traffic, the towpaths of Belgium offer some of the best cycling in the world. Much of the way is through pleasant farmlands or nature reserves, with the loudest noise bird songs or the engine of a barge.”

In the French countryside we will follow country roads and the growing number of bike paths. Towards Paris the terrain will be more hilly and there can be more traffic.

On some days there is the opportunity to hop off later in order to shorten the tour. Our guide will point these out to you. As always it will also be possible to stay on the boat and enjoy the boat ride.

Day 1 Bruges 16 km / 10 miles

Arrival on board the Elodie in Bruges where the crew will welcome you with a nice cup of coffee or tea. Introduction to the crew, traffic rules, safety onboard and general explanation of the program. Afterwards we will take a short tour to Damme, a small historical town in the area of Bruges. Now you can get comfortable with your bike and make necessary adjustments. Bruges can be considered an open air museum in every aspect. An evening stroll through this beautiful town is worthwhile.

Day 2 Bruges - Gent 45 km / 28 miles

This day brings us along towpaths, green pastures and picturesque little towns of the Flemish countryside. An excellent track to warm up the muscles for the days to come. It is also part of the Santiago de Compostela pilgrims route that we will more or less follow all the way to Compiègne.



Gent, once one of the largest and richest cities in Northern Europe, still shows some impressive architecture from the Middle Ages, including the Belfry, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Today it's a vivid University Town with a great atmosphere.

Day 3 Gent - Oudenaarde 40 km / 25 miles

From Gent we will continue upstream on the Schelde/Escaut to the South and Southwest. We will ride along river towpaths, through farmland, nature preserves and the occasional small port. The route is mostly flat. The locks along this part of the stream in most cases cover a rise of only about one meter. The towpaths are mostly well paved, with short sections of street riding in Gent and Oudenaarde. Oudenaarde is the capital of the Flemish Ardennes. Centuries old, it is famous for its beer breweries and wall carpets.

Day 4 Oudenaarde - Tournai 46 km / 29 miles

The cycle path to Tournai again follows for a large part the towpaths we are already used to. We will now enter the Wallonie, the French speaking part of Belgium. The difference in culture will be immediately noticeable. The Wallonians not only speak the French language but have also adopted the French culture.

Tournai, the oldest city in Belgium is considered to be one of the most important cultural sites of the country. The Cathedral Nôtre-Dame de Tournai in mixed Romanesque and Gothic style and the belfry, the oldest in Belgium, are another UNESCO World Heritage Site. Inside the cathedral, the Châsse de Notre-Dame flamande, a beautifully ornamented 12th-century reliquary, is a reminder of Tournai's wealth in the Middle Ages.

Day 5 Tournai - Arleux 55 km / 34 miles

Through the Parc naturel régional Scarpe-Escaut (a regional nature preserve) we cycle towards Denaing. The park was created in an old coal mining area. Cycling through this park today it is hard to believe that after WWI this was a black and desolated country with no trees left. We will also be passing the famous cycle race tracks of Paris – Roubaix and the notorious Wallers – Arenberg trench. This tour is called "the hell of the North" because of the extremely bad conditions of the road the race was held on in the past. Of course we will let our wheels touch the grounds of this famous race but you mustn't worry: We will not follow the paths which gave the tour its name. A little further down the river at Arleux we will find the Elodie.

Day 6 Arleux - Peronne 35 km / 22 miles

Early in the morning the Elodie will start heading for the locks and while you are enjoying your breakfast the first locks will be passed. The small and narrow locks along the "Canal du Nord" are a truly special experience. Today the Elodie will pass 12 locks and a 3.5 mile tunnel on her journey to Peronne. Each lock will take the Elodie about 11 meters higher. At one of the locks we take leave of the ship and head for Peronne by bike - unless you opt for the „tunnel experience" and spend this part of the journey onboard.



Day 7 Peronne 0 km / 0 miles

Today is the perfect day for making your own plans as the Elodie will stay in Peronne with its picturesque, old town center, a big park and the museum of the Great War which is situated in a 12th century castle. There will be no dinner onboard tonight, so there is an opportunity today to try some French cuisine in one of the local restaurants.

Day 8 Peronne - Pont l'Évêque 55 km / 35 miles

Today our cycle trip takes us further along the Canal du Nord and through country side towards Noyon, the French capital of the red fruit. As the country around us becomes more hilly we will follow the valley and the towpaths. Noyon has also been the birth place of John Calvin, the theologian who has been of great influence for the Protestant Reformation movement and founder of Calvinism. In Noyon you can also find a beautiful monument of the Roman Catholic Church - the Cathedral Nôtre-Dame de Noyon, an impressive example of transition from Romanesque to Gothic architecture.

Day 9 Pont l'Évêque - Compiègne 36 km / 23 miles

Through the forests of Dom Dourscam and Dom de Laigue we will continue through a more hilly terrain. Our first goal today is the site of the „Compiègne Wagon“ on a clearing in the forest where World War I was ended by signing the armistice of Compiègne in a wooden railway restaurant car and where later Nazi Germany forced France into another armistice treaty during World War II. The original site had been demolished on Hitler's orders and the carriage was taken to Berlin and destroyed by SS troops. Today a carefully decorated replica of the carriage can be seen on the meanwhile restored site.

From here it is not very far to our second and final goal of the day, the town of Compiègne. This town is famous for its horse races and its Castle, a preferred summer residence for French monarchs, built for Louis XV, and restored by Napoleon.

Day 10 Compiègne - Creil 53 km / 33 miles

In the morning we will start cycling towards Chateaux Pierrefonds to pay a visit to this remarkable Castle. Continuing our tour we will cycle through the park regions Pays de France. This park belongs to a network of 45 parks all over France. These parks are a mix of natural and cultural sites combined with local community life. This means we will not be entering a park in the traditional way but rather experience a green inhabited area which is particularly beautiful and pleasant. Thus forests, hills, small towns and rivers will mark our route towards the small town of Creil.

Day 11 Creil - Auvers-sur-l'Oise 55 km / 34 miles

Chateaux de Chantilly is one of the most beautiful castles along our route - and it's today's reward after we've mastered a few hills. The castle as well as its surroundings are scenic and breath-taking. We will spend some time here so you will be able to admire the Castle from inside and possibly visit the Musée Condé.



We will spend the night in Auvers-sur-l'Oise. Throughout the 19th century a number of painters lived and worked in this little town, including Paul Cézanne, Charles-François Daubigny, Camille Pissarro, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and of course, Vincent van Gogh. Vincent finished quite a number of his famous paintings here and spent the last days of his life in Auvers. After he died under mysterious circumstances he was buried in the local graveyard - along with his brother Theo who died shortly after him. Their grave is humble but usually you will find it decorated with sunflowers, one of Vincent's most famous motives.

Day 12 Auvers-sur-l'Oise - Bougival 36 km / 23 miles

Today we will ride through the outskirts of Paris. Unexpectedly close to Paris you will find a "green" path that will lead us to our next stop in Bougival. Along the way we will pass St. Germain-en-Laye, birth place of the famous composer Claude Debussy. A view of the great city that lies ahead of us can be seen from a terrace near the Chateau de St. Germain-en-Laye, a former residence of the French kings which today hosts the National Museum of Archeology. After we've enjoyed a nice panoramic view across Paris with its remarkable Eiffel tower we get back to the river and on to the small, peaceful town of Bougival where we will spend the night.

Day 13 Bougival - Versailles - Paris 20 km / 13 miles

On our last cycling day we will visit Versailles. Our route takes us uphill to one of the most famous and largest palaces in the world - and yet another UNESCO World Heritage Site. This incredible building, once inhabited by the French kings, is a museum today. Although it can be very busy we will try to spend enough time here for you to visit the palace. If you do not want to go inside you can spend time in the magnificent gardens and admire the palace from there.

After Versailles we will "descend" to the river Seine where we will get back onboard the Elodie for a unique and scenic boat tour into the centre of Paris - yet another highlight of this tour. And your opportunity for enjoying the „C'est la Vie" feeling whilst sailing along the Eiffel Tower - so close that you feel tempted to try and touch it.

Day 14 Paris 0 km / 0 miles

The cycle tour has come to an end in one of the most beautiful cities in the world and you can now enjoy everything Paris has to offer. You can be sure that you belong to the very few who came to visit this city on a bicycle. An experience normally reserved for the Tour de France riders only!

Day 15 Paris

It's time to say „Au revoir" - we take leave of you after breakfast.

Please note: Daily mileages and tour planning may change according to weather or other circumstances.