



Three Countries Tour

Holland Belgium France

The bike ride from Maastricht to Paris will take you along (small) country roads, towpaths, paved forest trails and the occasional cobblestone road. The tour will start in Holland, continue through Belgium and the North of France towards its final destination Paris. In Belgium we will cycle through the Ardennes, beautiful green countryside in the Eastern part of the country. In the Ardennes we will ride along the banks of rivers and canals in order to make your ride comfortable with less traffic and fewer hills.

In France we will follow country roads and the occasional bike path.

Approaching Paris the terrain sometimes becomes hillier.

The tour from Paris to Maastricht will be slightly different but basically program, routes and distances are the same.

The mileage

Our Maastricht to Paris program is made for experienced bike riders who can keep up with an average speed of 8 to 9 miles p/h under normal circumstances (flat terrain and no wind) and who have no problem with a number of hills.

This way it is possible to complete the whole tour, leaving enough room for stops and visiting points of interest. When possible we will provide the opportunity to shorten the tour and meet the group later during the day by covering some of the mileage by boat. It is also possible to intensify your tour and make it physically more challenging by adding more miles in an individual program.

As always, it will be possible to stay on board and enjoy the boat ride.

Maastricht

Thursday 9 miles / 14 km

Arrival on board of the Elodie in Maastricht where the crew will welcome you with a nice cup of coffee or tea. After an introduction to the crew and all necessary information has been provided we will go on a short bike ride in order to make you comfortable with your bike and adjust your gear to your requirements where necessary.

Maastricht - Huy

Friday 20 miles / 32 km

Today we will pass the border to Belgium on our way to Fort Eben-Emael which we will visit. This fort was built after 1932 as a part of 17 subterranean connected fortifications for the defense of Liège against the Germans. At about 200 feet distance from the fort there is a sculpture garden with modern art for those of you who are interested.

After Eben-Emael we will visit the locks of Lanaye, an impressive complex that surmounts 36 feet and marks the starting point of the Albert Canal and further passage of the river Maas through Belgium. Leaving Lanaye, we continue our way to Liège where the Elodie will be waiting for you to sail to Huy. After dinner we will take an evening walk through this historical city with its beautiful cathedral and citadel.

Huy – Namur**Saturday 22 miles / 35 km**

Huy is the starting point of our biking route to Namur.

Namur is famous for its blue hardstone. During our tour you will bike through the valley of these blue rocks and we will also see prehistorical caves along the route. We will end our cycling day in the city of Namur which has an enchanting city centre with an impressive citadel overlooking the city. In the afternoon you will have time to visit European's biggest fortification and the museum at the top. After dinner we will walk around in the lively university town where also the rivers Maas and Sambre meet. Along the many small streets and squares you will find plenty of terraces for having a refreshing drink – or try one of the 150 beers Belgium is famous for.

Namur – Charleroi**Sunday 31 miles / 50 km**

We will leave the river banks of the Maas and start to follow the river Sambre. From village to village, following old railway tracks, through fields and forests we will gradually make our way to Auvelais.

Our first stop will be in Gembloux where you will have time to walk around in the small town with its medieval castle, abbey and bell tower. From there we will bike back to the river Sambre where the Elodie picks us up in Auvelais to sail to Charleroi where she will moor for the night.

Charleroi - Strépy**Monday 32 miles / 52 km**

The Elodie brings us out of town through the Borinage, a part of Belgium that inspired Vincent van Gogh for becoming a painter. A lot of his drawings of mine workers were made in this area. The remains of this impressive industrial area are often used in films and for safaris through forgotten forests and ruins of industrial buildings.

After this we will bike to Strépy.

Along our way there are four ship elevators, listed by the UNESCO as industrial heritage. They were built in 1888, impressive examples of craftsmanship and engineering, and still in working order today. After this visit we will meet the modern equivalent of the old elevators where the Elodie will be waiting for you. A gigantic elevator that surmounts in only one single descent the 220 feet (73 meters) altitude difference which formerly required the use of four elevators. You can enjoy the panoramic view from this interesting place and visit the most impressive engine room of the elevator and museum.

Strépy – Mons**Tuesday 18 miles / 29 km**

Today we will be travelling in one of the World Wonders of Modern Times as the lift of Strépy will bring us down into the valley where we can start following the bike trails to Mons. In the morning you can choose for an extra short ride to Cuesmes. In this village young Vincent van Gogh worked as a priest with the poor people of the mines. It is here where he made up his mind about becoming a painter. In his former house there is a small museum where they show a film about his time in the Borinage.

The rest of the day you will have time to discover the beautiful, charming and lively city of Mons. Mons was awarded the title Cultural Capital of Europe in 2015, because of its interesting museums and the beauty of the city centre.

Mons – Antoing- Tournai**Wednesday 34 miles / 55 km**

Following canals and meeting old villages we will get to Antoing. Antoing is an old

skippers' village on the banks of the Upper Schelde river. With its characteristic castle that can be seen from far it is the Belgian centre of the traditional chalk industry. Along the river, as we cycle towards Tournai you can see the old ovens which were used to make chalk and cement. The ovens remarkably resemble old fortresses.

Tournai is the oldest city in Belgium with a long and interesting history. We will take a walk through the centre there. You will have the opportunity to climb the Belfort (bell tower) and watch the carillon playing.

Tournai – Arleux

Thursday 31 miles / 50 km

Early in the morning the Elodie starts sailing to Blehais where our biking tour begins. Today we will be crossing the second border of our trip as we enter the north of France. We will pass many typical mineworkers' villages which served as a décor for the movie CHTI. We will offer the opportunity to see this movie on board on the Elodie.

Part of the tour will be through the Regional National Park Scarpe-Escaut.

The park was created in an old coal mining area. Cycling through this park, it is hard to imagine that after WWI this was a black and desolated area with no tree left due to the devastating effects of constant shelling. We will end up in Arleux, famous for its smoked garlic. When it is the saison, we will pay a visit to one of the garlic farms.

Arleux – Péronne

Friday 25 miles / 40 km

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 at the "Canal du Nord" are an exceptional experience.

Today the Elodie will pass 12 locks and a 3.5 mile tunnel on her way to Péronne. Each lock will take the Elodie about 11 meters higher. From one of the locks we will cycle away from the river and head for Péronne, the town where we will spend a full day.

Péronne

Saturday 0 miles / 0 km

Today is the perfect day to make your own plans as the Elodie will stay in the little but remarkable town of Péronne. Péronne has a pretty town centre, a long history which dates back to early Medieval times, a big park and a very interesting museum:

Located in the remains of the "Château de Péronne" from the 9th century you will find the "L'Historial de la Grande Guerre", the museum of the Great War, right in the middle of town. Together with cities like Albert and Bapaume, Péronne formed the triangle in which the battle of the Somme took place. Péronne and its museum have therefore been appointed by the French government as a historical monument for the military history of France.

On this day there will be no dinner on board, so there is no need to go back to the Elodie. If you want to stay a little bit longer in another town and enjoy a French meal in one of the local restaurants you will not miss one of our chef's meals.

Péronne – Pont l'Evêque

Sunday 31 miles / 50 km

Today we go on a cycling trip along the Canal du Nord and through countryside towards Noyon. Le Noyonnais, the area around the city is the French "capital of red fruit", where

most of the country's red berries for delicious Sorbet are grown. We will follow the valley and the towpaths as the country around us becomes hillier again.

Noyon has been the birthplace of John Calvin, a pastor and reformer during the Protestant Reformation who has been of great influence particularly in Holland.

The Picardie has been the cradle for Gothic arts and architecture. In Noyon you can find a beautiful example of this period, the Gothic Cathedral "Nôtre-Dame de Noyon" – very much worthwhile visiting and admiring.

Pont l'Evêque – Compiègne

Monday 25 miles / 40 km

Through the forests of Dom Dourscam and Dom de Laigue we will continue through a more hilly terrain. Our first goal is the site of "Compiègne Wagon", the railway carriage where World War I was practically ended by the First Armistice of Compiègne in 1918 and where in 1940 Nazi Germany forced France into another armistice treaty during World War II. The site has later been demolished on Hitler's orders and the original carriage was taken to Berlin and destroyed by SS troops. A replica of the carriage can be visited today, along with the restored site.

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

Compiègne – Creil

Tuesday 26 miles / 42 km

Through the royal hunting fields and forest of Compiègne we will cycle towards the beautiful forest village Pierrefonds, named after the fairytale castle reconstructed by order of Napoleon III by the architect Violet le Duc.. This castle has been used as a setting in various films. Among them there was the BBC sequel Merlin. There is also the possibility to enjoy the delicacies of a very good local bakery.

If we are lucky we can meet the hunters with their dogs or some wild pigs during the hunting season. As we continue on our route through the forest we will pass by the Abbey of Saint-Jean-aux-Bois. In Verberie the Elodie will be waiting for us to bring us to Creil

Creil – Auvers-sur-Oise

Wednesday 26 miles / 42 km

"A hilly day" lies ahead of us but the reward will be great. Château de Chantilly is one of the most beautiful castles along our route. The castle itself as well as its' surrounding gardens are scenic and they offer sometimes breathtaking views. We will spend some time here, so you will also be able to admire the former princely residence from inside and possibly visit the Condé Museum.

We will spend the night in Auvers-sur-Oise. Throughout the 19th century a number of painters lived and worked in Auvers-sur-Oise, including Paul Cézanne, Charles-François Daubigny, Camille Pissarro, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and of course – Vincent van Gogh. Van Gogh created a number of his famous paintings here and spent the last two months of his life in Auvers. He was buried in the local graveyard which is open to visitors.

Auvers-sur-Oise – Bougival

Thursday 26 miles / 42 km

Today we will ride through the "banlieus" of Paris, the suburbs of the French capital. Unexpectedly close to Paris you will find a "green" path that will lead us to our next stop

in Bougival. Along our way we will pass Saint-Germain-en-Laye, birthplace of famous composer Claude Débussy. The town is also home of the National Museum of Archeology. A glimpse of the great city that lies ahead of us can be seen from a terrace near Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Here you can enjoy a nice panoramic view towards Paris with its remarkable Eiffel Tower before we get back to the river and the little town of Bougival where we will spend the night.

Bougival – Versailles – Paris**Friday 24 miles / 39 km**

On our last cycling day before we reach the centre of Paris we will visit Versailles. Today we will cycle uphill to one of the biggest palaces in the world. This incredible building, once inhabited by the King of France, 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 take a stroll in the magnificent gardens and admire the palace from there.

After Versailles we will "descend" to the river Seine to embark on the Elodie for a boat tour to the centre of Paris – one of the absolute highlights of the tour.

Paris**Saturday 0 miles / 0 km**

The cycling tour has come to an end and you can now enjoy the wonderful city of Paris, knowing 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 cyclists only!

Your visit to Paris will never be the same again.

Paris**Sunday**

We take leave of you after breakfast around 09.00AM

All distances mentioned are approximate and subject to change due to weather, road or water conditions or other circumstances that might occur during the tour and were not foreseen at the moment of offering this tour.