

## BAC - Paris to Bruges Sept 16-30, 2017

### Our trip

In the second half of September, 2017, we made our way from Paris, France to Bruges, Belgium, covering a total of 577 cycling km en route.

Accommodated on a barge (The Zwaantje), each cycling day began at a new location along the waterways of the Seine and Oise rivers, and canals. From the busyness of central Paris, we worked our way north through a number of small cities and villages. After the first couple of days, we moved further from the influence of Paris, and into rural areas with agricultural landscapes, many WWI graveyards and memorials, and the occasional chateau and hunting parties. Further north, we crossed into Belgium and enjoyed the historical town of Tournai, and then the university center of Ghent before proceeded to charming end point of Bruges. Along the way, we visited abbeys, Roman ruins, cathedrals and well-maintained WW1 memorials and graveyards.



And, it can't be denied, the daily coffee/patisserie stop was much-anticipated and much-enjoyed. Our guides pointed us in the right direction to find amazing treats.

The 21 speed hybrids provided by the Zwaantje were well-suited to dealing with the asphalt, single track forest paths, and cobblestones we encountered.





We rode together as a group, ably led by our knowledgeable guides, over a variety of roadways and paths, but mostly on local rural roads with little car traffic.



## Us

This fully booked trip included 24 cyclists with widely varying cycling trip experiences – from 45 BAC trips for one couple to two newbies on their first excursions. And we came from a variety of North American locales. There were several Californians, some Canadians from British Columbia, one couple from Atlanta and another from Chicago. Our BAC trip leader **was** the indefatigable Birgit Stefani who did a wonderful job of handling all of the administrative details of the trip and liaised with our barge captain and cycling leaders with aplomb.



## Our home

For two weeks we lived aboard the Zwaantje (loosely translated “Little Swan” from Dutch) and got a sense of life on the waterways. The 12 guest staterooms were comfortable and very efficiently laid out – and each had its own bathroom with shower. The top deck stored the bikes when underway and provided a charming outdoor sitting area when the late September sun encouraged us outside. On the middle deck was a large dining room and sitting area for the group to hang out, have a beverage and share tales of the day’s ride. It was fascinating to observe all of the commercial traffic on the waterways and to see the intricacies of maneuvering through the many locks and low bridges!



In the dining room, we enjoyed hearty cycling breakfasts and most delicious family-style dinner fare. The plated appetizers and desserts were works of art!



Another great advantage of the barge was that it served as very comfy sick bay when a number of us were felled by a nasty virus.



## Our guides

The cycling days were led by two energetic and knowledgeable young European cyclists – Christian and Ilaria. They combined great local knowledge with a passion for cycling and the history of the areas we were passing through to make each day a terrific outing. When unexpected delays for the barge necessitated some flexibility in the biking day, our guides were more than up to the challenge of figuring out different choices to reshape a great program. Chris and Ila – a fun and caring couple.



## Our crew

Martyn van Tatenhave is the owner and captain of the Zwaantje. Together with his wife Marjorie (and dog Gaston), they provided a very gracious environment for our trip. From shopping for fresh baguettes every morning, to serving our fabulous food, to keeping our living spaces spotless, to sharing information about life on the waterways, to helping with individual needs, hospitality was very much the name of the game on the barge. The engineer Michael (who also put on a fun beer-tasting event one evening) and the talented Chef, Rick rounded out the crew.

All in all it was a very enjoyable trip. What made it so special was the comradery, the varied trails and roads, the historical and urban information and of course the participants.

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