



ACADEMY
TRAVEL

TAILORED
SMALL GROUP
JOURNEYS

HIGH ART IN THE LOW COUNTRIES

BRUSSELS, BRUGES, DELFT, AMSTERDAM

OVERVIEW

Discover a Northern Renaissance of cultural brilliance, artistic innovation and unique regional identity in the Low Countries, from Brussels to Bruges, Delft, Haarlem and Amsterdam.

Explore the visual worlds and distinctive religious and political identities of the Low Countries on this 14-day tour, going beyond the clichés of windmills and wooden shoes with art historian Dr Sophie Oosterwijk. In outstanding and recently renovated museums of world-class art, including Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum and Brussels' Museum of Fine Arts, understand how Flemish masters from van Eyck to van der Weyden and Rubens to Rembrandt revolutionised Western painting, and admire their masterworks in public, domestic and church settings.

Appreciate cityscapes that are largely unchanged since the glory days of the Dutch Golden Age, from the iconic canals of Bruges and Amsterdam to Brussel's and Antwerp's grand squares. Trace the Low Countries' reputation for innovation down to the modern age, surveying Horta's Art Nouveau architecture, Magritte's surrealist canvases and Vincent van Gogh's impact on contemporary art.



TOUR LEADER

Dr Sophie Oosterwijk is a Dutch art historian specialising in medieval, Flemish and Dutch art. She previously taught at St Andrews and has led cultural tours since 1998.

TOUR DATES

May 2-15, 2025 | 14 Days

TOUR PRICE

\$11,880 per person, twin share
\$2,180 single supplement

TOUR DEPOSIT

A **\$1,000** non-refundable deposit is required per person to confirm your booking on tour.

GROUP SIZE

Maximum number of **15** in group
Please note the smaller group size due to the maximum group size allowed in museums and galleries.

ITINERARY

Brussels (3 nights), Bruges (3 nights),
Delft (3 nights), Haarlem (4 nights)

INCLUSIONS

13 nights' accommodation in centrally located 4-star hotels. All breakfasts, 2 lunches and 5 dinners. Services of an expert tour leader and an experienced tour manager throughout. All ground transport, entrance fees and tipping.



DETAILED ITINERARY

Start & Finish

The tour starts at 4.00pm on Friday 2 May, at the Novotel Brussels City Centre, Brussels. The tour ends after breakfast on Thursday 15 May, at Grand Hotel Frans Hals, Haarlem.

Included meals are indicated with B, L, D.

Friday 2 May

Arrive

We gather this afternoon at our hotel with tour leader Dr Sophie Oosterwijk. After time to introduce ourselves, we take a walking tour of Brussels' historic centre, first visiting the Cathedral of St. Michael and St. Gudula before making our way to the World-Heritage listed Grand Place lined with palaces of the city's medieval guilds. Dinner this evening is at a local restaurant. Overnight Brussels (D)

Saturday 3 May

Brussels' Museum of Fine Arts

Flanders and Brabant were the economic heart of northern Europe in the Middle Ages and the centre of an artistic revolution in the 15th-17th centuries. After a talk in the hotel, we visit Belgium's Royal Museums of Fine Arts to explore its magnificent collection of Old Masters, including works by van der Weyden, Bosch, Bruegel and Rubens. We then enjoy lunch in a restaurant inside one of Brussels' most striking Art Nouveau buildings. In the afternoon, there will be free time to visit the renovated Magritte Museum, which holds the most comprehensive collection of the surrealist artist's work, and the reopened Fin-de-Siècle Museum located in the Royal Quarter. The evening is at leisure. Overnight Brussels (B, L)

Sunday 4 May

Victor Horta and Leuven

Victor Horta was one of the leading lights of Art Nouveau architecture, and this morning we have a private guided visit of his house and studio. The building is innovative and delightfully playful in its use of materials, decorative motifs and division of spaces to facilitate a modern lifestyle. Travelling by coach to Leuven, a historic university town outside Brussels, we explore its beautiful Gothic church and treasury. Returning to Brussels, the evening is at leisure. Overnight Brussels (B)

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Golden Age Art

Understand the artistic revolutions of the Dutch Golden Age at the Rijksmuseum and Mauritshuis, with works by Vermeer, Rembrandt and a host of equally magnificent masters.

Modern masters

Survey the Low Countries' reputation for modern excellence, with in-depth explorations of work by van Gogh, Magritte and Art Nouveau pioneer Victor Horta.

Cosmopolitan Amsterdam

Discover Amsterdam's long reputation as a centre for radical thinking, innovative art and a relaxed lifestyle, in this World Heritage-listed city.

Medieval cityscape of Bruges

Enjoy the beautifully preserved and vibrant town of Bruges, with three nights in the historic centre and masterpieces by Jan van Eyck, Michelangelo and Memling.

Small towns and their gems

Admire small town treasures, from the van Eyck brothers' altarpiece in Ghent to Vermeer's Delft, the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp and the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem.



Ghent Altarpiece



Bruges

Monday 5 May

Ghent

Ghent was one of medieval Europe's largest cities and home to one of the 15th-century's most revolutionary artworks: the so-called *Ghent Altarpiece* by Hubert and Jan van Eyck, housed in the Cathedral of St Bavo. Research undertaken during its recent restoration has revealed much about the luminous use of oil paint and other techniques used by the two brothers, especially Jan van Eyck. After our visit, we tour the city and enjoy time for lunch. In the early afternoon we continue to Bruges, where dinner is in a local restaurant. Overnight Bruges (B, D)

Tuesday 6 May

Bruges

Bruges was a magnet for medieval European merchants, and towards the end of the 14th century it became part of the rising state of Burgundy and the centre of an artistic revolution by artists such as Jan van Eyck, Gerard David and Hans Memling. After a talk this morning, we explore Bruges' historic cityscape, visiting the excellent Groeninge Museum which has two of Van Eyck's paintings, including the celebrated *Madonna of Cardinal van der Paele*, and works by Bosch and Gerard David. Later, there will be a guided tour of St Salvator Cathedral and Treasury, followed by afternoon tea. Before returning to the hotel we explore the tranquil Begijnhof, offering a glimpse into the lives of the beguines and the role they played in Bruges' history. Evening at leisure. Overnight Bruges (B)

Wednesday 7 May

Gruuthuse & Memling Museums

We depart on foot this morning, first stopping at the Basilica of the Holy Blood, traditionally believed to harbour a vial with the blood of Christ that is said to have been brought back from the Second Crusade in 1150. We then make our way to the nearby Gruuthuse Museum, housed in one of the few remaining 15th-century city palaces, where we take a guided tour of the extensive collection. Our next stop – and a highlight of the day – is the Church of Our Lady, containing the only statue by Michelangelo to go north of the Alps in the artist's own lifetime. After a break for lunch, we then visit the Memling Museum in the medieval St John's Hospital, home to an impressive collection of works by the painter Hans Memling. Following this visit, the rest of the afternoon and evening are at leisure. Overnight Bruges (B)

Thursday 8 May

Antwerp

Today we travel to Antwerp, Europe's largest port and richest city in the 16th century following the decline of Bruges. The vibrance of the city is reflected in the guildhalls of Grote Markt, whose architecture influenced a young Gaudí, and also in the paintings by Rubens, displayed in the magnificent cathedral. Our tour of the city also includes a visit of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts (KMSKA) housing a collection of paintings,



Delft



Vermeer's Milkmaid

sculptures and drawings from the 14th to the 20th centuries. In the afternoon, we continue on to Delft, our base for the next three nights. Dinner this evening is in a local restaurant. Overnight Delft (B, D)

Friday 9 May **Delft**

Delft was a prosperous town in the 17th century, today best known among English speakers as the hometown of Vermeer. This morning we explore the Nieuwe Kerk, where most of the members of the House of Orange are buried, and the Vermeer Centrum – highlighting the life and works of the 17th-century master of light. After a break for a leisurely lunch, we visit Hofwijck, the 17th-century estate of the poet, composer and secretary of state, Constantijn Huygens. The evening is at leisure. Overnight Delft (B)

Saturday 10 May **The Hague**

Today we visit The Hague, a city whose fascinating history is inseparable from the House of Orange and today the seat of the International Court of Justice. The great prize of our visit, however, is the extraordinary collection in the Mauritshuis, including Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* and *View of Delft*, Fabricius' *The Goldfinch*, and many excellent portraits by Rembrandt and others. After a guided visit of the gallery, we break for lunch before visiting the *Panorama Mesdag* – an extraordinary 120m-long painting depicting the Dutch coastline at Scheveningen. Our final stop is the Kunstmuseum, housed in an impressive Art Deco building and home to the world's largest collection of Dutch artist Piet Mondrian. In the late afternoon we return to Delft, with the evening at leisure on arrival. Overnight Delft (B)

Sunday 11 May **Leiden and Haarlem**

This morning we depart Delft for the sophisticated city of Haarlem, our base for the remainder of the tour. Our first stop is Kasteel Duivenvoorde, one of the oldest castles in South Holland. We learn about its history and inhabitants, before continuing to Leiden, a beautiful university town with a rich history as a centre of printing and textiles. A walking tour uncovers the history and architecture of the town, followed by a break for lunch. In the afternoon we continue to Haarlem, with a talk in the hotel this evening, followed by dinner in one of the city's Michelin-star restaurants. Overnight Haarlem (B, D)

Monday 12 May **The Rijksmuseum & Van Gogh**

The Dutch Republic emerged from the religious conflict that reshaped Europe and ushered in its own distinctively modern forms of art. Today we travel into Amsterdam to explore the art and culture of the Dutch Golden Age, starting at the Rijksmuseum. This most extensive collection of Dutch painting includes Rembrandt's *Nightwatch* and Vermeer's *Milkmaid*. After

HOTELS

Brussels, Novotel Brussels City Centre

(3 nights)

all.accor.com

Bruges, Grand Hotel Casselbergh

(3 nights)

www.grandhotelcasselbergh.be

Delft, Hotel Arsenaal Delft

(3 nights)

www.hotelarsenaal.com

Haarlem, Grand Hotel Frans Hals

(4 nights)

www.amrathotelhaarlem.nl

WEATHER

May is a beautiful time to travel in the Low Countries. The long northern days give us plenty of opportunity to enjoy the historic town centres well into the evening. It is likely to rain on some days, so a lightweight waterproof jacket is advisable. Daytime temperatures will usually reach the low twenties, with night-time average minimums in the mid-teens.

FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

Grade Two

This tour is physically demanding. To participate on this tour, you should be able to:

- keep up with the group at all times
- walk for 5-7 kilometres over the day at a moderate pace
- stand and slow walk for up to 90 minutes galleries and museums
- negotiate walking over uneven ground on cobbled streets
- walk up and down steps and slopes
- get on and off a coach with steps unassisted
- move your luggage unassisted

our guided visit, we make our way to the Van Gogh Museum. Vincent van Gogh was one of the modern world's most prolific artists, although recognition of his work only came after his untimely death. Returning to our hotel, the evening is at leisure. Overnight Haarlem (B)

Tuesday 13 May

Rembrandt

This morning we return to Amsterdam and stroll along the city's World Heritage-listed canal belt, its series of timed locks and sluices a new model of rational town planning for a burgeoning city. Our tour takes in the Oude Kerk, one of Amsterdam's oldest buildings, and the Koninklijk Paleis, still in use by the royal family. We then visit Museum Van Loon, an impeccably preserved 17th-century canal house that still exudes the wealth of the Van Loons, who co-founded the Dutch East India Company, followed by coffee and cake in the garden's coach house. The afternoon is spent in Rembrandt's House to explore the life, times and style of the master and to see how art was made and sold to wealthy upper and middle-class patrons. Returning to our hotel, the evening is at leisure. Overnight Haarlem (B)

Wednesday 14 May

Haarlem

Haarlem is one of the gems of the Netherlands, with its quiet streets of boutiques and cafes. The city is brimming with history: brutally sacked by Spanish troops in the 16th century, its rebuilding became a symbol of independence. This morning we explore the history of Haarlem on a walking tour, including visits to its historic almshouses and the Cathedral of St Bavo. We then make our to the Hof, dating back to 1609 and now home to the superb museum devoted to Frans Hals, one of the most endearing portraitists of the Golden Age. Lunch is enjoyed in the museum's excellent cafe before touring the collection. This evening we enjoy a farewell meal at a local restaurant. Overnight Haarlem (B, L, D)

Thursday 15 May

Departure

The tour ends after breakfast this morning. Please consult your individual travel documents for your ongoing journey. (B)

ENQUIRIES & BOOKINGS

For further information or to secure a place, please contact **Sharon Williams** on 9235 0023 (Sydney) or 1800 639 699 (outside Sydney) or email:

lucy@academytravel.com.au