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TWO COUNTRIES

The Low Countries Grand Journey

“Golden Age canals, Rotterdam’s Cube Houses, the Grand Place, medieval Bruges and the Ghent Altarpiece”

10

DAYS

2

COUNTRIES

4

UNESCO SITES

2000

BELGIAN CHOCOLATIERS

FROM

\$11,800

PER PERSON

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Overview

A grand tour of the Low Countries — from Amsterdam's Golden Age canals to Rotterdam's futuristic skyline, from the guildhalls of the Grand Place to the medieval streets of Bruges, and finally to Ghent, which is the one everybody misses. Two nations with a shared history and very different tempers, plus chocolate, beer and some of the finest painting in Europe.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Three nights at the Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam, across six canal palaces on the Herengracht
- The Jordaan, the Begijnhof and the Nine Streets on foot
- Rotterdam's Markthal, Cube Houses and Erasmus Bridge
- A Belgian chocolate-making workshop in a country with over 2,000 chocolatiers
- The Groeninge Museum's Flemish Primitives — Van Eyck and Memling
- A private canal cruise through the UNESCO-listed Grachtengordel
- Zaanse Schans, Volendam and Marken in one countryside day
- The Grand Place — among the most beautiful squares in Europe
- Bruges: the Belfry, Burg Square, the Basilica of the Holy Blood and a canal cruise
- Ghent, Gravensteen Castle and Van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece in Saint Bavo's

Golden Age canals, Rotterdam's Cube Houses, the Grand Place, medieval Bruges and the Ghent Altarpiece

The Itinerary

01

AMSTERDAM

Day 1 | Arrival in Amsterdam

Land at Schiphol and transfer to the Waldorf Astoria, which spans six 17th- and 18th-century canal palaces on the Herengracht inside the UNESCO-listed canal district, and has the largest private garden in the city behind it. The evening starts at Dam Square, where the city began — the site of the original dam on the Amstel that gave Amsterdam its name. The Royal Palace beside it was built in the 17th century as the town hall, at a scale intended to make a point about Golden Age wealth. Then the Nieuwe Kerk, Kalverstraat and the narrow lanes of the Grachtengordel. Dinner is Dutch: bitterballen, Gouda and aged farmhouse cheese, herring with onions, stamppot, and apple pie with a thick buttery crust.

- Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam
- Dinner

02

AMSTERDAM

Day 2 | Canals & the Old City

A private walking morning through the parts of Amsterdam that reward slowness. The Jordaan was built in the 17th century for labourers and artisans and is now the most desirable address in the city, all narrow streets, independent shops and hidden courtyards. The Begijnhof is one of the oldest inner courtyards in Amsterdam, dating to the 14th century, once home to the Beguines — a community of religious women who took no formal vows — and still improbably silent a minute from the shopping streets. Then the Nine Streets, and the canal ring itself. The afternoon is a private canal cruise, which is genuinely the right way to understand the city: gabled merchant houses, houseboats and the Skinny Bridge, with the Golden Age explained from the water it was built on. Dinner beside the canals.

- Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam
- Breakfast, Dinner

03

ZAANSE SCHANS & VOLENDAM

Day 3 | Zaanse Schans & the Dutch Countryside

A private countryside day. Zaanse Schans is an open-air museum where the 18th and 19th centuries are kept running — the Zaandam region once held over a thousand windmills, and several here still work, grinding spices, sawing timber and pressing oil and paint. The green-and-white timber houses of the Zaan region stand alongside them, with traditional cheesemaking at the Catharina Hoeve farm and a clog workshop where the carving is demonstrated rather than described. Then Volendam, a fishing village on the IJsselmeer with coloured houses, a working harbour and traditional costume still worn by some of its older residents. If time allows, Marken — a former island of houses built on stilts, connected to the mainland by causeway since 1957.

- Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam
- Breakfast, Lunch

04

ROTTERDAM

Day 4 | Amsterdam » Rotterdam

An hour by train south to Rotterdam, a city that was flattened in 1940 and rebuilt into something no other Dutch city resembles. Check in at the Mainport on the waterfront, then explore. The Markthal is a horseshoe of apartments wrapped around a market hall, with an enormous mural of fruit and vegetables across the inner ceiling. Piet Blom's Cube Houses are tilted 45 degrees and were meant as a village raised above the city. Then the Erasmus Bridge — the Swan — across the Nieuwe Maas, and the Oude Haven, where the historic harbour sits surrounded by contemporary towers. Dinner is modern Dutch.

- Mainport Hotel Rotterdam
- Breakfast, Dinner

05

BRUSSELS

Day 5 | Rotterdam » Brussels

A high-speed train south, about an hour and forty-five minutes, from the Netherlands into Belgium. Check in at Hotel Amigo, a Rocco Forte hotel a few steps from the Grand Place, and one that leaves Tintin and Milou figures in the rooms and Belgian chocolates by the bed each night. The afternoon begins at the Grand Place, a UNESCO site and by common consent one of the most beautiful squares in Europe — gilded guildhalls on every side and a Gothic town hall on one. Then the Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert, a 19th-century glazed arcade full of chocolate shops; the Manneken Pis, which is smaller and funnier than anyone expects; and the Mont des Arts for the view. The evening is Belgian: chocolate, waffles, frites with mayonnaise, moules-frites, and beer chosen from a list that runs to hundreds.

- Hotel Amigo, a Rocco Forte Hotel
- Breakfast, Dinner

06

BRUSSELS

Day 6 | Brussels

A private city morning: the Grand Place again in daylight, when the gilding actually reads; the Royal Palace exterior; the Atomium, built for the 1958 World's Fair as an iron crystal magnified 165 billion times; the European Quarter; the Cinquantenaire arch; and the Sablon, with its antique dealers and its church. The afternoon is a chocolate-making workshop. Belgium has over two thousand chocolatiers, and an hour spent tempering, moulding and filling your own pralines explains why they take it as seriously as they do. Dinner at a traditional brasserie in the Sablon.

- Hotel Amigo, a Rocco Forte Hotel
- Breakfast, Lunch

07

BRUGES

Day 7 | Brussels » Bruges

An hour by train to Bruges, and a transfer to the Hotel Dukes' Palace — a 15th-century palace built by the Duke of Burgundy for his royal marriage, now the only five-star hotel in Bruges set inside a former chateau, and holder of a Michelin Key. Bruges genuinely feels frozen. Markt Square is dominated by the Belfry, a UNESCO-listed medieval bell tower whose 366 steps repay the climb. Burg Square holds the Gothic town hall and the Basilica of the Holy Blood, which claims a vial of Christ's blood brought back from the Second Crusade. Rozenhoedkaai is the most photographed corner in Belgium, and a canal cruise under the low bridges shows why the city was laid out the way it was. Dinner overlooking a canal.

- Hotel Dukes' Palace Bruges
- Breakfast, Dinner

08

BRUGES

Day 8 | The Fairytale City

A slower day. The Groeninge Museum holds one of the great collections of Flemish Primitive painting, with Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling at its centre — small panels, extraordinary detail, and the moment oil painting changed. The Begijnhof is a 13th-century courtyard that was a community for lay religious women and is now a walled patch of silence. Minnewater, the Lake of Love, is beside it, and the Church of Our Lady holds Michelangelo's Madonna of Bruges — the only sculpture of his to leave Italy in his lifetime. The afternoon is a chocolate workshop with a master chocolatier. The evening is the point of staying two nights: once the day-trippers have gone, Bruges empties, the canals reflect the lit facades, and the city becomes something else entirely.

- Hotel Dukes' Palace Bruges
- Breakfast

09

GHENT

Day 9 | Ghent

Thirty minutes to Ghent, which is the city most itineraries skip and the one people come home talking about. It has medieval architecture on the scale of Bruges and a large student population, so it is lived in rather than preserved. Gravensteen is a moated castle in the middle of the city, complete with a genuinely disquieting collection of torture instruments. Saint Bavo's Cathedral holds the Ghent Altarpiece — Van Eyck's Adoration of the Mystic Lamb, one of the most important, most stolen and most argued-over paintings in the world. The Graslei and Korenlei quays along the Leie are lined with guildhalls, and the afternoon is Belgian beer and food in a city that does both very well. Back to Bruges for a farewell dinner — mussels, frites, or Flemish stoofvlees.

- Hotel Dukes' Palace Bruges
- Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

10

GHENT

Day 10 | Departure

Breakfast at the hotel and a final walk along the canals or a last chocolate shop, then a private transfer from Bruges to Brussels Airport, about an hour.

-
- Breakfast

INVESTMENT

Pricing & Inclusions

PER PERSON SHARING

\$12,500

SINGLE TRAVELLER SUPPLEMENT

On Request

Pricing is an estimate subject to confirmation based on season, room category, and final accommodation selection.

SEASONAL PRICING

Nov – Mar	BEST VALUE	\$11,800
Quiet cities, museums without queues		
Jun – Aug	PEAK SEASON	\$14,200
Long days, warm seas, busy sites		
Apr – May, Sep – Oct	SHOULDER SEASON	\$13,000
The sweet spot — mild, bright, uncrowded		

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- » Private transfers throughout both countries
- » 9 nights accommodation across four properties
- » First-class rail: Amsterdam – Rotterdam, Rotterdam – Brussels, Brussels – Bruges
- » Daily breakfast, plus meals as detailed in the itinerary
- » Private licensed guides in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Brussels, Bruges and Ghent
- » Private Amsterdam walking tour: the Jordaan, the Begijnhof and the Nine Streets
- » Private Amsterdam canal cruise
- » Private countryside excursion to Zaanse Schans, Volendam and Marken
- » Guided Rotterdam architecture tour
- » Guided Brussels city tour including the Grand Place, the Atomium and the European Quarter
- » Belgian chocolate-making workshop

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- International flights to Amsterdam and from Brussels
- City tourist taxes, payable at each hotel
- Bicycle hire
- Lunches and dinners not listed in the itinerary
- Gratuities for guides, drivers and hotel staff

FINDERS & KEEPERS SAFARIS

Tell us what you have in mind.

This itinerary is a starting point, not a fixed departure. The pace, the lodges, the length, the dates and the party travelling can all be reshaped around you.

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HOURS

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The Low Countries Grand Journey