

The Netherlands & Belgium: Birds, Art & Architecture Itinerary

[Link: The Netherlands & Belgium: Birds, Art & Architecture](#)

Tour Overview

Although The Netherlands and Belgium (The Low Countries) are densely populated, they harbour a surprisingly rich bird-life. Areas such as Waddenzee, Lauwersmeer, Hoge Veluwe and Oostvaarders Plassen are famed for the sought-after species that can be found there. May is a time when many local birds have started to breed, while migrants are still winging their way north, so the overall list will be excellent. The birding hot-spots are located near historically important cities and towns, where the mix of old and modern architecture is a feast for the eye, and where world-renowned museums await us. From watching Eurasian Spoonbills and White Storks one day, we could be admiring Rembrandt and Vermeer the next. Amsterdam, Brugge, Antwerp and Texel are all on the itinerary. Of special interest will be visits to Keukenhof, considered by many the greatest spring garden in the world, and Kröller-Müller Museum, with its sculpture garden and Van Gogh collection, in a stunning setting at the edge of a national park.

Itinerary

Day 1. Arrival

Our Netherlands & Belgium birding, art & architecture tour begins with arrival at Schiphol (Amsterdam airport) where we take a shuttle bus to a nearby hotel, where we can relax and freshen up. In the evening we will meet at 6:30 in the lobby for dinner. Night near Schiphol Airport

Day 2. Keukenhof Gardens and Wassenaar

Our first full day will be at a relaxed pace. After a brief stroll through the hotel's garden, we board our vehicle and make the short drive to Het Keukenhof, the most spectacular spring flower garden in the world. After lunch we continue to the town of Wassenaar, just north of The Hague, where we will spend the afternoon, visiting two nature areas at the edge of town (Lentevreugd and Meijendel). We will have dinner at the edge of the dunes, after which we head to our hotel in the nearby town of Voorschoten.

Day 3. Travel to Brugge in Belgium

After breakfast we head south to Brugge in Flanders. Our route will take us past The Hague, Delft (we make a brief stop here) and Rotterdam, across the islands of Zeeland and through the Westerschelde Tunnel. We will make a few stops at water-bodies, scanning for shorebirds, gulls and terns and we will see the impressive Deltawerken, a system of dikes, dams and bridges that protects the low-lying southwest of the country from flooding. Time-permitting, we may make a stop at De Braakman, a reclaimed area in Zeeuws Vlaanderen. Overnight near Brugge.

Day 4. Het Zwin and Brugge

Very early in the morning there is an optional visit to Het Zwin, a nature preserve on the coast near the Dutch border. We should get great looks at shorebirds, possibly harriers and Mediterranean Gull, and likely Grasshopper Warbler and Common Nightingale. We then return to the hotel for a late breakfast. The afternoon and early evening will be spent in Brugge, a beautifully-preserved medieval town, where we will make a walking tour and take a boat ride. There will likely be some free time for museum visits. Night near Brugge.

Day 5. Antwerp to Netherlands

After breakfast we drive east and visit Antwerpen for a walking tour of the Market Square with its 1352 cathedral and gabled guild halls and surrounding old city centre. We then continue northeast and enter The Netherlands, driving to the Arnhem vicinity, where we overnight.

Day 6. De Hoge Veluwe National Park and Kröller-Müller Museum

The morning is set aside for exploring National Park De Hoge Veluwe, with its mature deciduous and mixed forests. We may see Honey Buzzard, Eurasian Hobby, Black Woodpecker, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Crested and Coal Tits, Common Redstart, Pied Flycatcher, Wood Warbler and many more forest species. The more open heath lands should produce Woodlark, Northern Wheatear and Yellowhammer. In 2017 we discovered a nest of the rare Middle Spotted Woodpecker. Wild Boar, Moeflon and Red Deer are also possible. In the afternoon we visit Kröller-Müller Museum, renowned for its art collection (including Van Gogh and Mondrian) and also enjoy its sculpture garden. Firecrest and Hawfinch are possible here. Late afternoon we explore a bit of the surrounding countryside. Overnight Arnhem.

Day 7. Giethoorn area

Heading north, our route will take us via Apeldoorn and Zwolle to N.P. Weerribben/Wieden and the Giethoorn area. Extensive marshlands harbour Purple Heron, Eurasian Spoonbill, Great Bittern, Water Rail, Great Reed Warbler, Icterine Warbler and more. The picturesque town of Giethoorn, where we will have lunch and make a brief walk, is sometimes known as the Venice of the North, owing to its canals. A nearby wetland may produce a few species of grebe, Great Bittern, White-winged Tern and more. We then continue north and overnight in the Groningen vicinity.

Day 8. Lauwersmeer and Waddenzee

Today we bird in the Lauwersmeer and Waddenzee area in the extreme north of The Netherlands. The tidal flats, freshwater lakes, marshes and meadows are full of birds: Common Shelduck, harriers, numerous shorebirds, including male Ruffs, Bearded Reedling, larks, pipits, wagtails, Bluethroat and more. An effort will also be made to locate White-tailed Eagle, which has nested here in recent years. We will try and time our arrival at the tidal mudflats of the Waddenzee to coincide with the greatest concentration of birds. Afterwards we drive via Leeuwarden and the Afsluitdijk to the province of North Holland. The Afsluitdijk was completed in the 1930s to protect the north of The Netherlands from flooding and effectively transformed the salt water Zuiderzee into the fresh water IJsselmeer. Overnight at Wieringerwerf.

Day 9. Wadden Islands

After an early breakfast we drive to Den Helder, where we take a ferry to Texel, the largest of the famous Wadden Islands. We'll keep an eye open for Harbour Seals, Common Eiders, gulls and terns while on board. On the island we'll visit a couple of the picturesque fishing villages and few nature areas. Late afternoon we'll return to the mainland and continue to the vicinity of Amsterdam, where we'll overnight.

Days 10 to 11. Amsterdam and Oostvaarders Plassen

Tuesday will be spent exploring Amsterdam, including a canal boat trip, a visit to the Rijksmuseum, optional other museum visits and some free time, followed by a traditional Indonesian meal. On Wednesday we will have a full day of birding at Oostvaarders Plassen, a nature preserve northeast of the city in a reclaimed polder. This area is justly famous for its wildlife. Red Deer, Konik horses and Heck cattle have been introduced in this largest marshland of The Netherlands and the birdlife is spectacular. We hope to see Eurasian Spoonbills, a variety of duck species (including Garganey, Common Pochard and Tufted Duck), White-tailed Eagle, harriers, possibly Black-winged Stilt, Sedge, Savi's and Cetti's Warblers, European Reed Warbler and Golden Oriole, plus many more. Nights near Amsterdam.

Day 12. Departure.

Our Netherlands & Belgium birding, art & architecture tour ends today. You can depart anytime today.

What to Expect

The Netherlands and Belgium are modern countries, with an excellent infrastructure and good hotels. Language is no problem; just about everyone speaks English. Our days will alternate between birding forays and city visits (some of the outings will be optional). Although there may be a few long days, in general the pace will not be too taxing and the walking moderate (Runners or hiking shoes will be fine for the walks).

Spring weather can be variable, but temperatures should generally be moderate. Some rain is likely. Biting insects or poisonous plants are not an issue.

Your guide will have a telescope and field guide(s).

In the evenings we will go over the day's list and we will discuss plans for the next day.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- All accommodation
- All meals
- Ground transportation
- One guide with 4 - 5 participants, and 2 guides with 6 - 10 participants
- Park, conservation and entrance fees

Tour Price Does Not Include

- Flight to and from start/end location
 - Travel Insurance
 - Items of a personal nature
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