



FLANDERS TODAY

Channel Cruising

With a waterway network of more than 1,300 kilometres, Flanders is best navigable by boat



Sightseeing doesn't get any more relaxed than sitting back and taking in the views aboard a cruise boat, and there are many options to choose from in Flanders. There are evening cruises, all-day gourmet experiences and trips that take you way back in time, showing you places you might not otherwise get to see. And of course, this being Belgium, you can expect food and drink to play a big role in your cruising experience.

Nieuwpoort-based Seastar is a third-generation family business focused on offering inland cruises across Flanders Fields between Nieuwpoort, Diksmuide and Ypres.

The company, which operates one 26-metre boat with a capacity for 100 passengers, recently started its Captain's Cruise. Leaving Nieuwpoort at 11.00 each Sunday during the summer months, the boat heads for the city of Diksmuide – a journey of one-and-a-half hours. The cruise takes passengers through a historic landscape that reveals some of the memorials of the First World War, such as the Ijzertower and the Trenches of Death.

"Now that the government has completed the dredging of the channels, we can expand our cruises deeper inland and travel as far as Ypres," explains Captain Olislagers. "We are the only company with a vessel that can sail between the battlefields and the tourist cities in this area."

A full lunch menu is served on the outbound journey, which includes an aperitif with cava and nibbles and a main course with a choice of hot and cold buffet, including unlimited grilled steak and fries. Passengers are seated comfortably at tables of six, making it a sociable affair, and all seats in the dining area have full view of the scenery through large panoramic windows.

A professional guided tour of Diksmuide can be arranged or passengers are free to walk around by themselves. At 15.00 the boat sets sail back to Nieuwpoort, while passengers are treated to afternoon tea and freshly baked cake. The cost of this day tour is €49 per person.

Whisky lovers will be happy to hear that Seastar is planning a special Whisky Cruise along the same route come October. Under the guidance of Filip J Verleye, Belgian Whisky Ambassador in 2007 and 2009, passengers can sample eight single malts en route to Diksmuide. On arrival, a full lunch is served, including Scottish salmon with a whisky bacon sauce. The second part of the whisky tasting takes place on the return journey back to Nieuwpoort, including a range of dessert whiskies. The cost of this cruise is €77.

After the summer months, starting in September through to June, the company also offers an extended cruise between Diksmuide and Ypres, as well as short Cruising cruises around Nieuwpoort, taking in the dunes of the Ysermonde nature reserve and Albert I monument.

If you are looking to take a cruise in any other part of the region, there is one company that is bound to have a trip for you. Rivertours offers more than 15 different departure points across Belgium. Operating six boats, the company charts 700 cruises annually – last year they welcomed 38,000 guests on board.

The company navigates between Antwerp and Brussels on the Sea Canal, and between Leuven and Mechelen on the Leuven-Dijle canal.

"Navigating these Flemish canals also means passing through different ship locks, which is an interesting experience," says Linda Presburg of Rivertours. "The fleet also navigates on the part of Scheldt between Dendermonde and Antwerp. In the area of Dendermonde, we see natural river banks, small creeks and authentic villages."

For anyone wanting to get up-close and personal with the container ships, the tour to Antwerp is a must-see. Passengers will experience Antwerp's container ports in full activity, with the huge container ships steaming up to the docks.

There is also a tour on offer taking in the beautiful Dender River between Aalst and Geraardsbergen. It's not surprising that this is one of the company's most popular routes, as it passes a number of remarkable hand-operated locks and tilt bridges.

Another popular route is along the Scheldt River. Guests have the option of taking one of two short routes or combining these into one long cruise. Departing from Temse at 14.00 for the one-hour-and-45-minute round trip, the cruise heads in the direction of Sint-Amands – the native town of writer and poet Emile Verhaeren, who is buried there. Bird lovers will enjoy this very scenic tour, and the crew will be happy to point out flora and fauna amid the stunning landscape.

"In summer the picturesque villages along the Scheldt, with their outdoor cafés, attract a lot of tourists. The region is known for its culinary speciality of stewed eels in chervil sauce. The dikes along the Scheldt are also perfect for a walk or a bicycle tour and we accept bikes on board so our guests are able to take time to explore the river banks," explains Presburg.

Once the boat returns to Temse, guests are able to stay on board for the second short tour in the late afternoon, heading in the direction of Rupelmonde. The route passes under the bridge of Temse – the longest car and railway bridge over the river Scheldt in Flanders (measuring 365 metres). The whole region was previously known for its brickyards, and the old quarries between Steendorp and Rupelmonde can be seen from the boat. At the Rupel estuary the boat turns back, passing by the charming village of Hingene and the nature reserves of Wimsbroek on the right bank. A little further, the Notelaar, an ancient hunting pavilion of the Dukes of Ursel, can be seen.

On these cruises guests are able to bring their own picnic, but a cold buffet is also served on board. A full bar service is also available throughout the trip.

Rivertours is planning some special one-off cruises for this summer, including an evening cruise departing from Temse. Taking place on 28 and 29 August only, this cruise sails for three hours and offers guests a gourmet experience, with a great menu including paella and traditional eels. A live band will also be on board and guests can watch a fireworks display take place in Temse from the deck of the boat. With a total capacity for 300 passengers there is sure to be a party on board.

www.seastar.be

www.rivertours.be

Diana Albiol

(August 4, 2010)

Your feedback is important to us!


Would you be willing to give us a short (1 minute) feedback?


Yes

No

[Remind me later](#)

Thank you for helping us improve our website

Feedback Analytics by  Kampyle

 What is this?