

PASSPORT

A valid passport is needed to enter Europe, and it should be valid 6 months beyond your intended departure date, meaning the end of your visit. We suggest you take a photo of your passport and email it to yourself in case it is ever lost or stolen. If it is lost or stolen, try to find the nearest embassy to get a temporary passport before you head to the airport.

CURRENCY

- **The Euro is the currency**
- **Use credit and debit cards during your trip** – many places accept foreign credit and debit cards. Notify the card companies that you will be using your card in Europe.
- **Have euros in your pocket** – Make sure to get at least a little cash out, and carry some with you. Many small restaurants and some grocery stores don't take credit cards, especially for small purchases. Many places do not take American Express.
- **Don't exchange money, get cash from an ATM** - the exchange rate comes directly from the bank. Check with your bank about the international foreign ATM fee before leaving. A \$4-10 fee won't matter if you get 200-400 euros out at one time. You might only have access to your checking account, not savings account.
- **Find a bank's ATM** - "Independent" ATMs charge outrageous fees.

VOLTAGE

- **The electrical current in Europe is 220 volts** - this is twice as strong as US and Canada.
- **Outlets take the "europlug"** - two round prongs. Bring an **europlug adapter** with you. These are easy to find online or at a travel store.
- **Do NOT bring a US or Canadian hairdryer** - These require a voltage converter. The 220 volts of European outlets will short-circuit your blow dryer. Cell phone, iPad, and laptop chargers all have a little box with the plug that automatically converts the voltage, so for most electronics a voltage converter isn't necessary, only an adapter.

CELL PHONES

- **Get an international plan** – This is the simplest option. Call your phone provider before leaving to inquire about a temporary international plan.
- **Buy a SIM card upon arrival** – For you tech-savvy folks with an unlocked phone, this is usually the most economical option. You can buy a SIM card with a data plan (to use internet) at the airport or convenience stores.
- **Just use the WIFI** - If you don't feel you will need phone coverage all the time, and you have a smart phone, then you could simply use the WIFI at hotels, cafes, and restaurants. Use a program like "Skype" to make cheap calls to your loved ones.
- Check out Rick Steve's page for more advice: <https://www.ricksteves.com/travel-tips/phones-tech>

MAKING PHONE CALLS WITHIN EUROPE

Using your cell phone in Europe: If someone is trying to reach you from the US or Canada, as long as you have cell service, you can be reached at your usual phone number. (Call your provider before leaving home to ask about international plans.)

To Call a European number: (sample phone number +33 (0) 2222 4444)

1. Dial 00 or enter + from any mobile phone
2. Dial the country code 33
3. Dial the phone number, excluding the zero

Example: 003322224444 or +3322224444

To Call the US or Canada:

- Dial the phone number as usual, just don't forget the 1 before the area code

If you use a local European phone:

- Dial the zero then dial all the numbers after the zero

Example: 022224444

TRANSPORTATION AROUND EUROPE

- **Train travel** – this is the most convenient and speedy way of travel in Europe. High-speed trains generally require reservations but local trains do not and tickets can be purchased at the train station upon arrival. Generally tickets cannot be purchased more than two months in advance.
- **Busses** – a cheaper alternative to trains, especially for travel between two countries.
- **Car Rental** – this can be a great way to see the countryside, especially when you would like to visit smaller villages and towns where train connections are limited. Usually one-way car rental within the same country charges no extra fee, but if you want to pick up the car in one country and drop it off in another, there is a hefty fee.
- **Logistical Wizard** - A *fantastic* resource for travel logistics is www.rome2rio.com. Plug in your departure and arrival information and they will tell you which planes trains busses or ferries you could take to get from one place to another, even with small towns!

TIPPING AT RESTAURANTS

Tip in cash and hand it to the waiter, don't leave it on the table.

- **Italy & Austria** – Check the bill to see if service is included. If not, leave a tip of 10-15%.
- **France & Belgium** – Service is included. If it was superb, feel free to leave a few euros.
- **Netherlands & Germany** – Tip 5-10%, or rounding up is common, for example €37 to €40.

GRATUITY FOR THE GUIDE

Tipping is not expected, but is always appreciated. The average gratuity for one couple is 50 euros for a one-week tour, given to the guide. There is a general range of 40-100 euros. If you also wish to tip the crew, you should do this separately, giving it to one member of the crew who will share it among the others.

OPENING HOURS - SHOPS

Generally shops operate from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m Monday through Saturday and are closed on Sunday. Most towns and villages also have an open-air market day once per week.

TAXIS

Taxis from Schiphol airport to the city center will cost you 40-50 euros. Because of traffic the trip will generally take about the same time as taking the train.

TAKING THE TRAIN from SCHIPHOL AIRPORT to AMSTERDAM

We recommend taking the train from the airport to central station and then either walking or taking a tram to your hotel.

- **Trains are underneath airport** – There are 6 platforms located directly below the main level of the airport. Follow signs towards “trains” as you move around the airport. Check the monitors on the main level to see which trains
- **Trains leave every 15 minutes** – To get to the center, get on a train bound for Amsterdam Central Station. The trip takes about 15 minutes.
- **Buy tickets at the counter NOT the kiosks** – Buy train tickets from the “Train Tickets and Services” counter located in the central area of the airport. They will accept cash or credit cards, and they speak English very well. The kiosks in main area of the airport only accept euro coins or Dutch credit cards.
- **Find your train to Central Station** - look at the monitors. On the main part of the screen, it will show the destinations, but this will NOT be Central Station. You have to look below or to the right, where it will say “via” and then scroll through the stops along the way. The stop for Amsterdam Central will be “**Amsterdam C.**”
- **Late night** - Between 1:00 and 5:00 AM there is a train every hour.

TRAMS and BUSES in AMSTERDAM

Amsterdam is easily explored on foot, but trams and buses are also a great way to get around. You can buy 24, 48 or 72-hour tram tickets directly from the tram operator. Remember to check in and check out! Use google maps or www.9292.nl (they also have an app) to help plan your trip.

I AMSTERDAM CITY CARD/MUSEUMKAART

- **I Amsterdam City Card** - is a great way to explore the city at a discounted rate. You get free and discounted rates on museums, a free canal tour, free tram, bus, and metro rides, and many other discounts. You can buy 24, 48 or 72-hour cards. Take a look at what's included to see if the card is worth it for you: <http://www.iamsterdam.com/en/i-am/i-amsterdam-city-card/what-is-included>.
- **Museumkaart** – a good option if you don't plan on using the tram. Check to see which museums are included: <http://www.amsterdam.info/museums/museumkaart/>

VISITING ANNE FRANK HOUSE, VAN GOGH MUSEUM, AND RIJKSMUSEUM

April, May, and June are the busiest months for tourism in Amsterdam. There is no way to avoid the crowds if you plan on visiting the museums, but you can give yourself a little more elbow room if you plan accordingly.

- **Anne Frank House** – book tickets two months in advance or as soon as you book your travel. Otherwise you may have trouble finding tickets.
- **Van Gogh Museum** – pre-purchase tickets. This will save you time in the queue. Try visiting the museum early in the morning (opens at 9), or go late on a Friday, when the museum is open until 10 pm.
- **Rijksmuseum** - Arrive early, at 9 am, and you may beat some of the crowd.

TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICES

There are over 400 tourist offices in The Netherlands. Look for the triangular VVV sign or a big “i” for “information”.

GET OUT OF THE CITY CENTER

Amsterdam is getting busier every year with tourism. We recommend staying in a hotel outside of the city center. It is also really nice to take a walk in the less populated areas of the city to get a real feel for city life. Try checking out these neighborhoods just to enjoy the charming streets, canals, and architecture of Amsterdam:

- **Museumkwartier** – walk southwest of the Van Gogh and Rijksmuseum to visit this prosperous neighborhood. Walk through the large (but crowded) Vondelpark to get a feel for what Dutch people love to do when the sun is out – sit outside.
- **Oosterpark** – a smaller but charming park away from the crowds. (Unless the weather is superb and then you will be surrounded by Dutchies and their mini BBQs.)
- **Jordaan** – Walk west and north from the Anne Frank House to enjoy a neighborhood known for its charming houses and original restaurants.
- **Get out of the rings** – There are 4 canals that encircle the city center of Amsterdam. Get yourself out of those in any direction and you will find fewer crowds and charming surroundings.

TRAIN TRAVEL in the NETHERLANDS

Trains are clean and on time in the Netherlands. You do not need to reserve ahead of time unless you are traveling to another country. It is possible to check the train schedule at www.ns.nl. You can also check bus and train schedules at www.9292.nl.

TRAIN TRAVEL between BELGIUM and the NETHERLANDS

You cannot purchase tickets more than four months in advance, but the earlier you reserve, the cheaper the ticket is. You can find information about the trains at nshispeed.nl or www.b-rail.be.

- **Bruges and Amsterdam** - there are trains that run with one change in Brussels or Antwerp. The trip takes 3-4 hours, depending on the speed of train you choose. Tickets should be purchased ahead of time.
- **Amsterdam and Brussels** - the trip takes 2-3 hours and should be reserved ahead of time.

Hotels in Amsterdam

Van Gogh Tours' clients have recommended the following hotels in Amsterdam:

CANAL HOUSE****

16 min. walk to Central Station

A charming, 17th century canal house on the Keizersgracht close to the Anne Frank House and other downtown sights. This is one of the loveliest hotels in its price class in Amsterdam with unique furnishings and a wonderful breakfast room overlooking an enclosed garden.

<https://www.canalhouse.nl/>, Tel.: +31 (0) 20 622 51 82 , E-mail: reservations@canalhouse.nl

AMBASSADE HOTEL****

18 min walk to Central Station

Located among ten 17th century canal houses on the imposing Herengracht in the heart of Amsterdam. Walking distance to museums and restaurants. Nicely furnished with antiques.

www.ambassade-hotel.nl, Tel.: +31 (0) 20 555 0222, E-mail: info@ambassade-hotel.nl

BOTEL***

31 min. ferry and walk to Central Station

A floating hotel in the center of Amsterdam, close to Central Station. In between the hotel and Central Station there is a free ferry that takes 14 minutes and runs every 15-30 minutes. Ask for rooms overlooking the water! Very reasonably priced; great breakfast buffet.

<http://www.botel.nl>, Tel.: +31 (0) 20 626 42 47, E-mail: info@amstelbotel.nl

THE TOREN****

15 min. to Central Station

Situated in two 17th century historical buildings and peacefully located at the prestigious Keizergracht. In the picturesque Jordaan district, near the Anne Frank House. Features an intimate atmosphere with lush decorations and heritage going back to 1618.

<http://www.thetoren.nl/en/>, Tel: +31 (0) 20 622 63 52, Email: info@thetoren.nl

AMERICAN HOTEL****

15-min. tram or 30-minute walk to Central Station

The American Hotel is a landmark within the city of Amsterdam. The hotel is a listed monument since 1975, with 175 rooms in Art Nouveau and Contemporary style. The hotel is walking distance to museums, main shopping streets, Vondelpark, and Anne Frank house.

<https://www.hampshirehotelamsterdamamerican.com/>

Tel.: +31 (0) 20 677 72 17, Email: info.american@edenhotels.nl

PULITZER AMSTERDAM*****

22 min. walk to Central Station

A luxury hotel on the Prinsengracht in central Amsterdam. Renovated in 2016, every one of the rooms and suites has been uniquely decorated with different works of art, and many have a magnificent view over the canals or the gardens in the hotel's private inner courtyard. A unique blend of traditional and modern Dutch craftsmanship.

<https://www.pulitzeramsterdam.com/>

Tel.: +31 (0) 20 523 5235, E-mail: info@pulitzeramsterdam.com

HOTEL ESTHEREA****

15 min. walk to Central Station

Boutique hotel Estheréa is on the Singel, Amsterdam's oldest major canal. Dam square, museums, theaters and nightlife are all within walking distance. The rich, colorful interior includes woolen carpets, crystal chandeliers, mahogany paneling, luxurious fabrics, extravagant wallpapers, flowers and plants.

<http://www.estherea.nl>, Tel: +31 (0) 20 624 5126, E-mail: frontoffice@estherea.nl

THE HOXTON****

15 min. walk to Central Station

On both the Herengracht and Singel Canal, the building was once home to the Mayor, back in the 17th century. Rooms have high ceilings; some have double showers and views of the canal.

<https://thehoxton.com/holland/amsterdam/hotels>

Tel: +31 (0) 20 888 55 55, Email: book.amsterdam@thehox.com

HOTEL CLEMENS**

16 min. walk to Central Station

A small hotel in the heart of Amsterdam near many museums and Dam Square. They receive praise for their friendly, helpful staff and a variety of rooms, all on the small side.

<http://www.clemenshotel.nl/en/>, Tel: +31 (0) 20 624 6089, Email: info@clemenshotel.nl

AVENUE HOTEL, SINGEL HOTEL and CITADEL HOTEL***

5 min. walk to Central Station

Three small hotels in the bustling center of Amsterdam. Rooms are small but reasonably priced.

Avenue: <http://www.avenue-hotel.nl/>

Tel.: +31 (0) 20 530 9530, E-mail: info@avenue-hotel.nl

Singel: <http://www.singelhotel.nl/en/index.html>

Tel.: +31 (0) 20 626 3108, E-mail: reservations@singelhotel.nl

Citadel: <http://www.hotelcitadel.nl/>

Tel.: +31 (0) 20 627 3882, E-mail: hotel.citadel.ams@wxs.nl

Packing Tips

- **Pack lightly!** – you will thank yourself as you lug your suitcase around the airport, on trains, busses, up staircases when your European hotel has no elevator.
- **Use ziploc bags or packing cubes** - These make it easy to stay organized.
- **Wash clothes in the bathroom sink** – While in most towns you can find a Laundromat, it is also convenient to wash out t-shirts or bike pants in your hotel or barge bathroom. Ring them out, the roll them in a dry towel and press the water out of them. Hang to dry! Washing a few items during your trip will help keep your luggage light.
- **Spring cycling** – this can be unpredictable. It is not a bad idea bring warm gloves, hat/helmet liner, and socks. Check the weather forecast.
- **Layer!** - Even during the summer months or in a warm climate you may have some cool or wet days. Bring a lightweight base layer that will wick away moisture. Next wear a layer of insulation for cool weather conditions. Finally you need a windproof and waterproof shell to protect you from the elements.
- **Bring accessories you love** – have a gel cover that you love to use? Like to have a clip-on rearview mirror? Bring them. If you are accustomed to riding with certain items, you will feel more confident and comfortable riding in a foreign place if you have them with you. Ask us before bringing pedals or bike seat.
- **Wear padded bike shorts** – This helps tremendously to keep your sit bones happy.
- **Take a photo of your passport** – email it to yourself. If lost, you'll save time replacing it.

Suggested Packing List

One-week cycling tours

BIKING GEAR

- 1-3 pairs of biking shorts
- 4-5 t-shirts or biking jerseys
- 1 pair of long comfortable pants
- 1-2 long-sleeved shirts or jerseys
- Sweatshirt or fleece pullover
- Waterproof jacket (a must!)
- Shoes to cycle in (sneakers are fine)
- Sunglasses (a must!)
- Water bottle (at times provided)
- Rain legs (optional)
- Helmet (**many times provided!**)
- Cycling gloves (optional)

CLOTHES

- Regular shoes or sandals
- Socks
- Underwear
- Casual outfits for the evening
- Bathing suit (*optional*)

TOILETRY KIT

- Deodorant
- Toothpaste, toothbrush
- Comb, brush, shaver or razor
- Shampoo/conditioner

FIRST-AID KIT

- Sunscreen
- Band-Aids
- Aspirin or Ibuprofen
- Digestive aid
- Lip balm with sunscreen
- Butt butter (optional)*

MISCELLANEOUS

- Passport (and copy)
- Earplugs
- Reading glasses & reading material
- Headphones
- Europlug adapter
- Printed final documents**
(Emailed ~40 days before departure)

Tips on Getting in Shape

You'll enjoy your cycling vacation a whole lot more if you take the time to get reasonably fit. You will also decrease the possibility of an injury while on tour. Please consult your physician if you have any health concerns that might make strenuous exercise a risk.

- **Gradual training** - strengthen your body incrementally so you won't become injured from the stress of cycling.
 - Take some fun rides two months prior to the tour.
 - Build your distance gradually.
 - Stretch and loosen up your muscles before and after each ride.
- **Get your sit bones in shape!** – Even if you are good physical shape, your sit bones won't be. If you put in consistent time on the bike (2-5 times a week!) your caboose will thank you later.
- **Go at an easy pace** - 9-12 miles per hour is an excellent sightseeing speed. Stop at 1-hour intervals and take a water break. You'll be stopping at least that often to photograph a windmill, visit a castle or simply behold a beautiful field of sunflowers. You'll also be stopping for lunch, snacks or a museum break!
- **Don't over train** - take rest days to allow yourself to recover. Your body is damaged by exercise and it's during the rest that follows the exercise that you get stronger.
- **Ride someplace fun** - Structure your bicycling workouts so they're enjoyable. Ride to a destination with friends if that is motivating.

VGT General Information

PAYMENTS

Full payment by credit card is due 70 days before trip departure. An invoice will be sent about 90 days before departure date. VGT will regard reservations canceled when payment of the balance is not received when due.

CANCELLATION POLICY

For TULIP TOURS:

After reservation and up to 90 days prior to departure: 20% of total tour cost

From 89 to 60 days prior to departure: 35% of total tour cost

From 59 to 30 days prior departure: 60% of total tour cost

From 29 days prior to departure date to arrival day: 100% of total tour cost

For All Other Tours:

After reservation and up to 90 days prior to departure: 10% of total tour cost

From 89 to 60 days prior to departure: 35% of total tour cost

From 59 to 30 days prior departure: 60% of total tour cost

From 29 days prior to departure date to arrival day: 100% of total tour cost

CHANGES TO THE ITINERARY

Due to unforeseen circumstances VGT on rare occasions must alter accommodations or routes from those mentioned in the itinerary. All efforts are made to select a hotel of the same high quality and keep route changes to a minimum.

VGT CANCELLATION OF TOURS

VGT reserves the right to cancel a tour for any reason. In the unlikely event that this happens a refund of all money received will be made.