

## NORTHERN EUROPE



After a flood in the early 20th century, the village of Ransdorp joined the municipality of Amsterdam to rebuild its infrastructure and save historic buildings, including the church on the right. Pictures: Suzanne Morphet

# Pedal power key to exploring treasures

SUZANNE MORPHET goes on an active tour which starts in one of the world's best cycling cities and ends in another



**I**move by bicycle," says 74-year-old Marijke Overeem. After decades working in Africa, she has returned to Amsterdam and is a host with Servas, an international hospitality and peace-building network.

For, even after those years away, she hasn't forgotten what every Dutch person knows — how to cycle.

Soon after arriving at Marijke's home in mid-April, my husband and I pedal after her along a tree-lined canal, the sun in our faces and the wind in our hair.

We want to be as active as possible on what I'm calling our "grand tour of northern Europe" and how better to see Amsterdam, and be immersed in the culture, than on two wheels?



Marijke Overeem and Suzanne's husband, Kit Spence, pause for a photo in Ransdorp, a popular place for day cyclists from Amsterdam.

Pulpit Rock attracts many visitors every day.



As we cycle away from the historic centre, the city's human-made landscape looms ever larger and more impressive. Along the Amsterdam-Rhine Canal we pass the Nesclobrug, a curving, 800m-long suspension bridge designed exclusively for cyclists and pedestrians that's high enough for cargo ships to pass under.

At the city's eastern edge, we cycle around one of Amsterdam's recently raised islands — Centumeland — where a car-free "green" neighbourhood with 1700 homes is under construction.

But "old" Amsterdam is far more idyllic than "new", I decide, when we reach Durgerdam, a former fishing village of clapboard houses built atop a centuries-old dyke. Its church dates from 1687 and sailboats rest on the shoreline of the lake that was once a saltwater inlet.

At Ransdorp, another old village surrounded by fields and grazing cows, we stop for sandwiches in a restaurant where locals are playing cards and drinking beer.

Back in the heart of Amsterdam a couple of hours later, we pass near the home of Anne Frank,



## ON BOARD VIKING VELA

The next day we bid Marijke farewell and board a Viking cruise ship bound for Bergen, Norway. We like Viking for its mix of active excursions. Over eight days we'll have the chance to cycle, kayak and walk almost daily. And when we're not on shore exploring, it's easy to keep fit in the ship's well-equipped gym and two swimming pools — indoor and out. (Viking's "no kids onboard" policy makes these amenities even more enjoyable.)

Our first port is Skagen, Denmark, a former fishing village where the North Sea collides with the Baltic Sea and houses are painted a cheery yellow. Cycling around, it's easy to see why this dreamy landscape of sand dunes and moorlands attracted a group of impressionist artists — the Skagen Painters — in the late 19th century. It's also where Danish author Karen Blixen wrote *Out of Africa*.

In Oslo, we walk from the port to the city's architecturally original Opera House, where we climb its gently sloping marble roof. Next door, the Munch Museum has

now a museum. "There's nothing to see," Marijke tells us with typical Dutch directness. I might have found it interesting, but I can read Anne Frank's diary any time. This is my only chance to cycle through this remarkable city with Marijke.



This ship ferries people and vehicles overnight between Oslo and Copenhagen.



## NORTHERN EUROPE

FROM PAGE 14

Norway's most famous natural features. "We always say 'no rain, no rainbow!'" smiles my guide, Mats, as clouds threaten, making the landscape of exposed granite and lush wetlands even more dramatic. The "pulpit" is the flat top of a cliff jutting 604m above the blue waters of the Lysefjord. Stunning!

### BERGEN TO COPENHAGEN — BY LAND AND SEA

Leaving our ship in Bergen, we board a train for a seven-hour journey to Oslo, the longest we'll sit still on this trip.

The Bergen railway follows a deep fjord inland, tunnels through numerous mountains, and crosses the Hardangervidda — Europe's largest high mountain plateau — before descending into valley and farmland.

The scenery is riveting, and this popular train is packed with people, including schoolboys on a ski trip.

From Oslo, we take an overnight ferry to Copenhagen, our ultimate destination.

The first thing we notice here, as in Amsterdam, are the wide and busy bike lanes. More people wear helmets here, but the egalitarian ethos is the same. Rich or poor, young or old, you get around by bike.

"You can go anywhere, anytime of the day and night," says Alex Martin, my guide on a three-hour cycling tour through Copenhagen's clean and quiet city core.

"I have seen young girls wearing beautiful dresses and high heels on their bicycles going back home at three in the morning after partying all night. Yeah, it's normal."

Cycling really took off following the oil crises of 1973 and '79. The government built separate cycling lanes and, in places, removed car lanes. Today, Copenhagen has five times more bikes than cars and more than 200km of "cycling super-highways", where cyclists get priority.

I know I'll be cycling a lot more when I get home, inspired by these active Danes, including Alex's grandmother, who cycled into her 90s. "She used to say, 'Life is like riding a bicycle,'" he recalls with a grin. "You have to keep moving to stay balanced."



Cargo bikes replace the family car in Copenhagen. Pictures: Suzanne Morphet

**Suzanne Morphet was a guest of Viking and received support from Visit Copenhagen. They have not influenced this story, or read it before publication.**

### fact file

- Viking Shores & Fjords is an eight-day itinerary from Amsterdam to Bergen and is offered multiple times each spring and summer. It is from \$8045 in 2027. [vikingcruises.com.au](http://vikingcruises.com.au)
- Servas is a non-profit network connecting travellers with local hosts. [servas.org](http://servas.org)
- In Copenhagen, Suzanne stayed at Coco, a four-star hotel in the city centre close to the main train station. Guests have access to its fleet of bicycles. [coco-hotel.com](http://coco-hotel.com)
- Amitylux offers a guided three-hour cycling tour in Copenhagen. [amitylux.com/tour/copenhagen/copenhagen-biking-tour](http://amitylux.com/tour/copenhagen/copenhagen-biking-tour)
- The Bergen to Oslo train runs half a dozen times daily. [norwaytrains.com/bergen-to-oslo](http://norwaytrains.com/bergen-to-oslo)
- Go Nordic is an overnight ferry from Oslo to Copenhagen with daily departures. Standard cabins are tiny but include private washrooms. [gonordiccruiseline.com](http://gonordiccruiseline.com)
- To hike to Pulpit Rock, you need to book an excursion yourself since Viking does not offer this. The writer recommends Lysekammen, which will pick you up and return you to where the ship docks in Stavanger. \$222 per person (€136.65). [lysekammen.no](http://lysekammen.no)

## CRUISING



Crown Princess is sailing from Sydney back to Fremantle.

## Fly and stay free on epic Aussie sail

STEPHEN SCOURFIELD  
with details on an almost-sold-out trip

**F**ly to Sydney, stay a night and sail for 11 nights back to Fremantle, from \$5475 per person. It's a neat idea for West Australian travellers and a chance to call at Newcastle, Melbourne, Adelaide, Albany and Busselton for Margaret River.

And, of course, sail the stunning southern coast of Australia.

The 11-night Southern Australia Explorer voyage is on Crown Princess, with all onboard meals and entertainment included.

The October 2026 voyage is mostly sold out — but Holidays of Australia has secured five cabins on the ship, which departs Sydney on October 7.

And they are offering a "fly free, stay free" package from Perth.

The economy flight from Perth to Sydney is on October 6, 2026, and there is one night's accommodation in a Sydney four-star hotel for two people.

The travellers board Crown Princess the next day (it leaves at 6.45pm) to sail back to Fremantle, arriving on Sunday, October 18.

And it is all from just \$5475 per person, twin share, in a balcony cabin (that is a saving of \$1000 per person on the usual price).

### THE VOYAGE

**Southern Australia Explorer**

**Day 1** Depart from Sydney.

**Day 2** At sea.

**Day 3** Newcastle.

**Day 4** At sea.

**Day 5** Melbourne.

**Day 6 & 7** At sea.

**Day 8** Adelaide.

**Days 9 & 10** At sea.

**Day 11** Albany.

**Day 12** Margaret River (Busselton).

**Day 13** Fremantle.

### PORT HIGHLIGHTS

**Newcastle** Walk along the Bathers Way or relax at Nobbys Beach.

**Melbourne** Explore laneways, cafes and shopping areas.

**Adelaide** Tour the vibrant city centre or take a wine-tasting trip to the Barossa Valley.

**Albany** Enjoy our southern town and visit the National Anzac Centre.

**Busselton** Stroll down the Busselton Jetty, or take a short drive out to the wineries of Margaret River.

**For more information and to book one of the now-rare cabins, call 1300 854 897 or visit [holidaysofaustralia.com.au](http://holidaysofaustralia.com.au).**



A parking lot for bicycles in Copenhagen is well used.