

Travel tulip country and Belgium by river boat

BY NORMA AND WENDY SCHONWETTER
CORRESPONDENTS

IF YOU GO

- Viking River Cruises, www.vikingcruises.com, (877) 668-4546
- Vantage Travel, www.vantagetravel.com, (888) 652-7103
- Grand Circle Travel, www.gct.com, (800) 221-2610

Springtime in the Netherlands and Belgium is awesome. We associate the Netherlands with tulips, and river cruises are a great way to see them. Stops include Keukenhof with almost 80 acres of floral displays in a park-like setting.

We embarked on our 11-day river cruise aboard the Viking Pride in Amsterdam. Before leaving, we visited the Rijksmuseum with its splendid collections of European art, especially Dutch painters from the 15th to 19th centuries. Works by Rembrandt, Vermeer and Franz Hals are stunning and plentiful.

If you like Greenfield Village, you'll love the Open Air Museum. Over 80 characteristic Dutch buildings (barns, farmhouses, windmills and village shops) have been relocated from various regions of the country.

Nijmegen is the oldest city in the Netherlands. Located on the Waal River, it was founded by the Romans in the second century. There are ruins of an old church built in O.A.D. with a still-intact chapel built in 1054. St. Stephan's Church,

also still standing, was started in 1254 and completed in the early 15th century.

BELGIUM

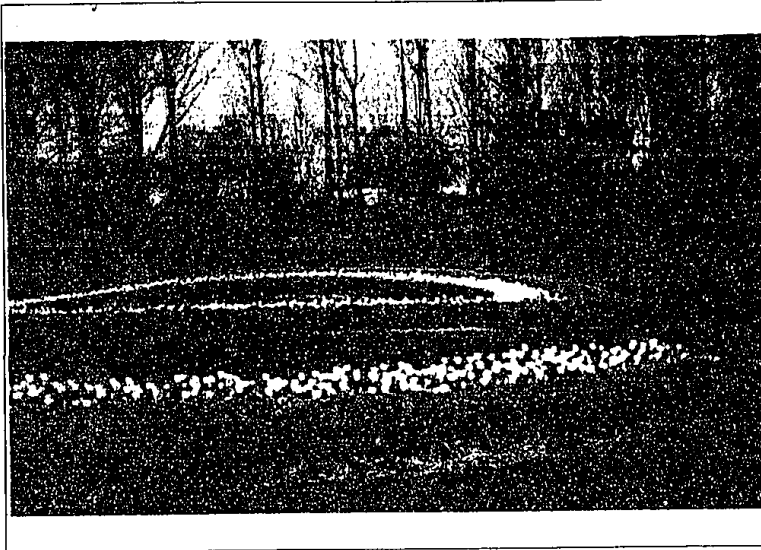
There are two national languages in Belgium, Flemish and French, although some people still speak German. Every city has a different dialect, which causes lots of "interesting" conversations. They have five governments and fly five flags. It was too confusing to truly comprehend.

The most famous mascot in Brussels is the 1619 fountain of a little boy, Mannekin-Pis, that attracts tourists from all over

the world. Just around the block is Grand Place (City Hall), which is surrounded by baroque-style guildhouses. This light-hearted city is the capital of the European Union and NATO. The narrow old streets are filled with quaint shops overflowing with beautiful, expensive, handmade Belgian lace and Belgian chocolates, pralines and truffles.

Belgians also pride themselves in having the best beer and healthcare system in the world.

Antwerp, home of Peter Paul Rubens and the fifth-largest harbor in the world, is also the site of



Keukenhof is chock full of tulips that will dazzle your eyes.

the biggest Catholic church in Belgium, The Tower Cathedral.

Bruges, founded in the 10th century, and one of the richest cities in the world, is considered "the Venice of the North" because of its romantic canal system. Start your sightseeing at the main square, called the Markt, dominated by a 13th-century cathedral.

Although windmills became obsolete in the 19th century, Kinderdijk, with its 19 windmills, most built around 1740, shows how the Dutch began reclaiming their country from the sea. It was a slow process—damming, then draining off-sea water with windmills.

Rotterdam, one of the busiest ports in the world, is a departure from the quaint old-

country charm we encountered on most of the trip. Because it was completely destroyed in World War II everything in Rotterdam is modern. Having no pretense about recreating the past, it sports futuristic bridges and architecture. We stepped in Delft for a tour of the Royal Delft factory, where the famous blue tin-glazed pottery is produced.

AMSTERDAM

Unless your river cruise affords you extra days in Amsterdam it is well worth spending time there before or after. It is a friendly, lively, safe, easy to navigate, city where most of the people speak English.

There are moderately priced hotels away from the center of the city, but near the museum area.

These include breakfast and are very accessible to the trams, which are inexpensive and run every few minutes. Buy a strip of tickets to avoid having to always find the proper coinage.

To truly understand the circumstances and life of Anne Frank, a visit to the house where her famous diary was written is a must. The Anne Frank House draws huge crowds so get there early.

Hop aboard a glass-topped canal boat for a cruise through Amsterdam's beautiful canals, where you get the best view of all the gabled houses of Golden Age merchants. It's a

bargain for \$8.50 and a chance to rest your weary feet.

Restaurants are plentiful and diverse. You will find lots of small take-out stands specializing in French fries, others offer Dutch pancakes covered with powdered sugar.

We also visited Café Roux, Dorries, La Rive and Brasserie Noblesse. They were gorgeous and elegant with outstanding service.

Every day was fascinating and filled with rich experiences, colors, sounds and flavors. Do not miss an opportunity to travel tulip country by river boat.

Norma and Wendy Schonwetter are a mother-daughter travel writing team. Norma lives in Farmington Hills and Wendy in Seattle.



Windmills are part of the Dutch landscape and history. Kinderdijk has 19 windmills, including this one. Most were built around 1740.

WIN FREE TICKETS!

Meadow Brook Theatre
OAKLAND UNIVERSITY'S PROFESSIONAL THEATRE COMPANY

THRILLER
When Evil Visits, Turn Out The Lights
WAIT UNTIL DARK
By Frederick Knott
MAR 19 - APR 13
"...a first rate shocker...the suspense drama we've long waited eagerly."
— The New York Times

Tickets start at just \$19!
MEET BOB O'BRIEN
(248) 377-3300
GROUP DISCOUNTS (248) 370-3316
www.mbtheatre.com

Sponsored by **LEAR**
O'Hareville's **RESTAURANT**
COUPLES NIGHT! Buy one ticket, get second half price Wed, Thurs & Sun nights.
MEET RATINGS: Suitable for middle school age and older.

WIN TICKETS TO SEE
WAIT UNTIL DARK

See today. Call (248) 377-3300. Seating 7:00, 8:00, and 10:00. For the evening on Sat. Seated packages with the evening concert your choice. Seating 6:00, 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00. Reservations: 248-377-3300. The last Broadway production of WAIT UNTIL DARK is being produced by Meadow Brook Theatre. The last Broadway production of WAIT UNTIL DARK is being produced by Meadow Brook Theatre. The last Broadway production of WAIT UNTIL DARK is being produced by Meadow Brook Theatre.

Less than.

Consolidate debt with one of the lowest equity rates in town.

3.50% 3.75% 4.25%

Greater than.

Plus, get a \$50 Gift Card.**

You don't have to be a math whiz to see the financial advantages of Standard Federal's Home Equity Line of Credit. Whether you're using it for home renovations or to reduce credit card debt, it gives you one of the lowest rates around, plus you pay no closing costs* and your interest may be tax deductible.* And for a limited time, you'll receive an added

bonus: A \$50 Gift Card.** So consolidate debt and add purchasing power. Stop by any Standard Federal branch, visit standardfederalbank.com, or call 1-877-732-8240.

Standard Federal Bank
Member ABN AMRO Group
standardfederalbank.com

Member FDIC
© 2003 Standard Federal Bank, Inc.

*The APR is based on the highest Prime Rate as published in the "Money Rates" section of The Wall Street Journal on the last publishing day of the calendar month immediately preceding the locking cycle. On January 31, 2003 Prime was 4.25% and the Annual Percentage Rate (APR) on Standard Federal's Home Equity Line of Credit products varied between 3.50% and 7.75% depending on your approved commitment amount and product. Prime is a variable rate, as it changes, the APR on your account will change. The maximum APR is 21%. A balloon payment will result at the end of the first year (36 periods). Standard Federal's Home Equity Lines of Credit are limited to owner-occupied 1-4 family principal residences and are subject to no cash flow and are not to be used for investment purposes. You must carry insurance on your property. You must carry insurance on the loan. Flood insurance is required if necessary. Closing and a 1-3% fee in no cash flow and are not to be used for investment purposes. Consult your tax advisor concerning the deductibility of interest. There is a \$50 annual fee for the first year of the Standard Federal Bank's Home Equity Line of Credit. After making an initial draw of closing of \$15,000 or more on your new Standard Federal Home Equity Line of Credit, you will qualify to receive a \$50 Gift Card worth \$50. The \$50 Gift Card will be mailed within 30 days of closing. Limit of one Gift Card per bank loan or credit. Initial draw amount of \$15,000 or more, you will qualify to receive a \$50 Gift Card worth \$50. Additional restrictions apply. **The \$50 Gift Card may be used for personal expenses for you or your family. MasterCard is a registered trademark of MasterCard International, Inc.