



## Gastronomic Belgium & the Netherlands

Food, wine, art & architecture

**3–10 June 2026 (MM 978)**

8 days

Lecturer: Gijs van Hensbergen

Historic cities, unspoilt coastline, bucolic countryside and parks of the Low Countries.

Wide-ranging menus from local delicacies to Michelin-starred meals; sparkling Dutch wines and aged Belgian beers.

Outstanding art, from the Early Renaissance to Post-Impressionism, but with particular focus on the 17th-century masters.

Led by Gijs van Hensbergen, Dutch art historian and author of books on art and food.

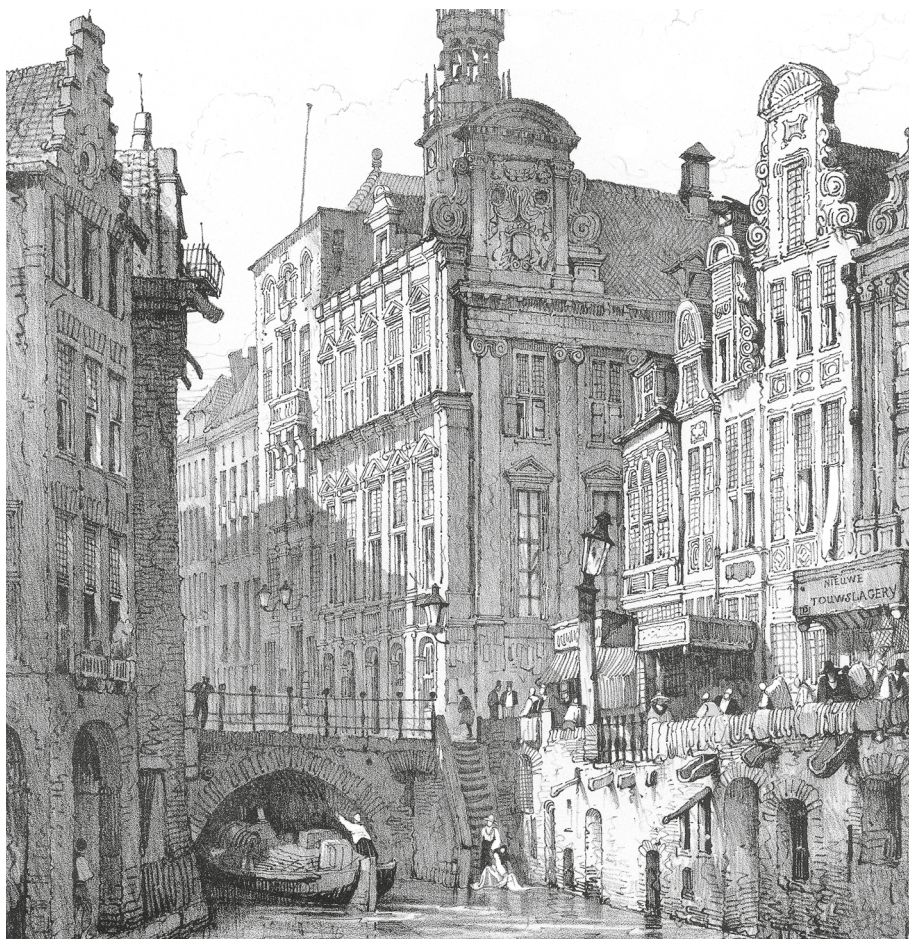
The 17th-century banquet masterpieces from the Low Countries have always attracted our gaze. Their carefully orchestrated bounty of golden ripe cheeses, oysters, bright red lobsters and the ubiquitous peppercorns twisted up in the faded page of an old almanac are set off against a cornucopia of blushing fruit and the sparkling glass flute of finest Moselle wine.

Our eyes and taste buds, in anticipation, are teased by the graceful curve of a twisted lemon peel; sharp, refreshing, beguiling. Or, perhaps, we are offered instead a humble bread roll, a pickled herring and a frothy glass of beer that speaks to us of other times. Belgians, they proudly boast, live to eat.

Vermeer's hypnotic *Milkmaid* or the contrast of a riotous gathering by Jan Steen or perhaps Snyder's extravagant bounties of game provide a lexicon of potential flavours yet to come. For centuries, one of gastronomy's best kept secrets has been hiding in the clear light of day, singing out to us from the gallery walls.

In pursuit of the flavours of this period, we uncover masterpieces of craft from the Michelin 3-star chef Jannis Brevet at Inter Scaldes. Built around this, the tour is a series of privileged encounters with passionate providers of utterly exquisite food, from oyster farmers and beer fanatics, to chocolate artisans and cheese makers.

From the feasting of the Burgundian Dukes we move north via the sparkling wines of Zeeland to Utrecht and embark on a glorious feasting journey to Indonesia, courtesy of the legendary VOC East Indies Company. If God made the world, so the saying goes, it was the Dutch who made Holland. And, after tasting some of the Netherlands' finest cheeses, you finally understand why the country was



Utrecht, lithograph c. 1830 after Samuel Prout.

transformed into the larder of the world.

### Itinerary

**Day 1: Ghent.** Depart late-morning from London St Pancras by Eurostar for Lille, and drive to Ghent. Introduction to this most beautiful city via its waterways. A traditional stew follows. First of four nights in Ghent.

**Day 2: Ghent, Lo-Reninge, Vleteren.** Begin at Ghent cathedral to see the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* polyptych by Hubert and Jan van Eyck, one of the masterpieces of Netherlandish painting. Drive out to the rural west for lunch in a family-run establishment in Lo-Reninge. In the surrounding Belgian hop fields and the shadow of Ypres, a group of friends age golden beers to perfection in Ardbeg whisky casks or limousin oak barrels that once hosted Châteauneuf du Pape. Upon return to Ghent a

tasting of exquisitely refined chocolate.

**Day 3: Antwerp.** The great port on the Scheldt has an abundance of historic buildings. Visit the house and studio Rubens built for himself, fascinating and well stocked with good pictures; also the small, outstanding collection of Old Masters at the Snijders & Rockox House. Tastings follow, of the curated cheeses of the world's best 'affineur,' van Tricht, and of the rarest air-dried beef.

**Day 4: Yerseke, Kruieningen.** Cross into the Netherlands to the watery landscapes of the Eastern Scheldt. Tour and tasting at a family-run mussel and oyster farm at Yerseke. From here to lunch at Inter Scaldes (2 Michelin stars), contemporary creations in a beautiful country estate. Return to Ghent for the final night.

**Day 5: Etten-Leur, Utrecht.** Back in the

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continued

Netherlands, visit a winery and asparagus farm, another family endeavour. Continue to Utrecht, a beautifully preserved historic city, its canals flanked by unbroken stretches of 17th-century houses. Dinner is an opportunity to explore some of the Netherlands's best *rijstafel* (Indonesian rice table). First of three nights in Utrecht.

**Day 6: Rotterdam, Leiden.** In Rotterdam's Delfshaven from where the Pilgrim Fathers set sail we taste lightly cured herring and the freshest of baby brown shrimp. Drive to Leiden and visit the Museum De Lakenhal, reopened in 2019 after radical refurbishment. An early dinner nearby is a chance to feast on the national dish – *hutspot*.

**Day 7: Lunteren, Zwolle.** In homage to the Netherlands's dairy culture we visit the Remeker farm to taste the only 100% grass-fed Jersey herd that produce a quite incredible cheese; complex, creamy, crystals of natural salt, deep and totally profound. In the Veluwe forest we lunch at Het Koetshuis, with 1 Michelin star. From there to the Hoge Veluwe National Park, home to the Kröller-Müller Museum, with an outstanding collection of Van Goghs.

**Day 8: Amsterdam.** At the Rijksmuseum we feast our eyes and our appetites on Holland's culinary past. Our visit concentrates on the major works in its unrivalled collection of 17th-century paintings, Rembrandt's *Night Watch* and four Vermeers among them. A final meal in the museum restaurant, Rijks (1 Michelin star), where chef Joris Bijdendijk celebrates gloriously modest Dutch produce. Fly from Amsterdam Schiphol to London Heathrow, arriving in the evening.

*We have decided to fly back to London as, unfortunately, Eurostar has changed their schedule and the available return trains from Amsterdam to London are either in the morning or late afternoon, which do not align with our planned schedule for the day. Trains involving a change en route are also not ideal as it can be risky in case of delays.*

## Speaker

**Gijs van Hensbergen.** Art and food historian and author specialising in Spain and the USA. His books include *Gaudi*, *In the Kitchens of Castile*, *Guernica* and most recently, *La Sagrada Familia*, and he has published in the *Burlington Magazine* and *Wall Street Journal*. He read languages at Utrecht University and Art History at the Courtauld, and undertook postgraduate studies in American art of the 1960s. He has worked in England, the USA and Spain as exhibitions organiser, TV researcher and critic and is a Fellow of the Cañada Blanch Centre for Contemporary Spanish Studies at the LSE.

## Practicalities

**Included:** travel by private coach for transfers and excursions; hotel accommodation; breakfasts, 4 full lunches, 3 tasting lunches and 3 dinners with wine, water and coffee; all wine, spirit and food tastings; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the expert speaker and tour manager.

**Accommodation.** **Pillows Grand Hotel Reylof** ([pillowshotels.com](http://pillowshotels.com)): renovated 4-star boutique hotel, located in a Louis XIV style townhouse near Ghent's historic centre. **The Grand Hotel Karel V, Utrecht** ([karelv.nl](http://karelv.nl)): installed in a 19th-century hospital within the city walls. Rated locally as 5-star. We have reserved Empire rooms for double occupancy and Deluxe rooms for sole occupancy.

**Dietary restrictions** are not easily catered for on this tour, especially fish and shellfish allergies. Please discuss any restrictions with us before booking.

**How strenuous?** There is a lot of walking and standing on this tour, and it would not be suitable for anyone who has difficulties with everyday walking or stair-climbing. There is also a lot of driving. Average distance by coach per day: 87 miles.

**Group size:** between 10 and 22 participants.