Cycling study trip to the Netherlands in September 2015

STATUS: Booking flights and accommodation



Are you a city or county councillor, cycling campaigners, or professional with a focus on cycling? Are you interested in a cycling study trip to the Netherlands? If you are please email cian.ginty@gmail.com or you can get me on 087 2513706

When?
September: Tuesday 15th to Friday 18th



Where to?
The main focus will be on Utrecht (pictured right), including cycling to the nearby Houten, with a secondary focus on Eindhoven and 's-Hertogenbosch (informally known as Den Bosch). Officials from Utrecht, Eindhoven and 's-Hertogenbosch have all confirmed that they will show us around and highlight the work they are doing.



Who is this for?
Main aim is to attract city and county councillors, and campaigners, but also open to: planners, engineers, consultants, NGOs, government bodies with an interest in cycling.

What's the goal?
To showcase everyday Dutch cycling -- from the culture to cycle networks and everything in between. Giving councillors, campaigners and professionals an up-to-date Dutch insight into what is and isn't good quality.

Study tour to include

- Talks / tours from / one-to-one contact with Dutch experts (ie councillors, engineers, planners, campaigners, etc)

- Key elements of Dutch cycle paths and networks
- How Utrecht handles large volumes of buses and bicycles
- Examples of multi-lane streets/roads which have been reduced
- Examples of city centre streets made one-way for cars, kept two-way for bicycles
- Parking in city centres, train stations large and mid-sized - including Utrecht's new 4,200 unit, first of 22k spaces to be built (pictured, right)



- Dutch bicycle priority roundabouts
- Bicycle / service streets
- At least one Fietssnelweg (bicycle highway)
- Dutch schools: street layout, restrictions, and bicycle parking etc
- Dutch residential streets
- Cycling Utrecht-Houten (9km) may be a good way to see both areas
- Any other suggestions?

Why Utrecht?

- High quality cycling infrastructure
- Mix of restricted city centre core and wider roads
- Excellent example of cycling in a city with large volumes of buses / BRT
- Good example of combining rail and bicycle, with new high-quality railway bicycle parking
- Linked to Houten which an excellent commuter town example of rail/bike integration and low car impact environment.
- Large university campus focused on cycling and bus priority

Why Eindhoven and 's-Hertogenbosch?

Both are close to Utrecht, on the same railway line, are examples of different and smaller cities, and have a fairly high standard of cycling infrastructure. Eindhoven has the Hovenring floating bicycle roundabout as well as a general high quality network.

Outline of trip:

- Fly from Dublin to Amsterdam Schiphol Airport
- Train to Utrecht
- Three nights in Utrecht
- Split Wednesday or Thursday between Eindhoven and 's-Hertogenbosch
- Fly back to Dublin via Amsterdam Schiphol Airport on Friday

Accommodation



THIS NEEDS A REPLY ASAP:
If you want to be included in the group hotel booking please email me to confirm; if you will be booking a hotel etc independently please let me know; or if you are no longer interested in the trip please let me know.

For the hotel booking: We will be staying three nights in Utrecht - Tuesday 15th, Wednesday 16th, and Thursday 17th -- checking out on Friday.

I'm awaiting a final quote from two hotels but I've gotten a few down to around €126 to €135 per night (from a high starting point of ~€150 per night, they all say September is still their busy season!). I'm negotiating with the final hotels on price and the option for the ability to pay in September. The book now price on booking.com etc may be a cheaper option or some going on the trip are also look at using AirBnB.

Flights

You will need to book your own flights! It is not a requirement of going on the trip to use these flight times, but they are a guide as to when you need to be in Utrecht.

FROM DUBLIN:

The best option I can find is to fly to Amsterdam Schiphol Airport with Aer Lingus. From Schiphol it takes just 45 mins to get to Utrecht. At the moment the Aer Lingus flights on Tuesday and Friday combined amount to a total of €151.98 (as of 10-02-2015). The best times which allow us to make the most of the trip are:

- Tuesday 15th September at 09:40 or earlier (ie 06:00)
- Friday 18th September at 16:40 or later (ie 20:30)

The Ryanair option is around €50 cheaper but is not recommended, mainly because of the flight times. The only option with Ryanair is a midday flight out of Dublin on Tuesday and a pre-midday return flight on Friday -- this would mean Tuesday and Friday would be or would be close to writeoffs. It's also longer (1 h 20 mins) to get from Eindhoven to Utrecht by train.

FROM CORK:

The Cork flight is slightly more expensive at €165.98 (as of 10-02-2015). There's only one fight in each direction per day from Cork so if you're planning on flying from Cork on Tuesday and return on Friday your flight out is at 06:00 and your return is at 21:25.

Trains
Please budget for €60 -- estimate includes Schiphol to Utrecht and return; day which will include Eindhoven and 's-Hertogenbosch and return to Utrecht that evening;

Bicycle rental
Bicycle rental will be extra -- I will confirm options closer to the travel dates. To get a real grip on how the Dutch do it, I'm looking at possibly getting group access to OV Fiets -- the railway-linked Dutch bike rental scheme -- but it might be a long shot! OV Fiets is €10 per year and €3.15 per 24 hours (it's designed for all-day use). Normal bike rental from bicycle shops is €7+ per day.

Any expressions of interest, questions or comments?
Email cian.ginty@gmail.com or you can get me on 0872513706.

FAQ based on feedback on the following pages…

FAQ responses based on feedback

How much will it cost?
See estimates above.

More about cycling in the Netherlands
Yes, the brilliant 'Bicycle Dutch' website has videos and information on Utrecht, Den Bosch, and Eindhoven.

But Ireland can't possibly catch up with the Netherlands. We're 30 or 40 years behind!
Maybe not, but according experts on Dutch cycling, most of the cycling infrastructure in the Netherlands has been built or rebuilt in the last 15 years.

Why not Amsterdam?
The original suggestion included Amsterdam and Utrecht but the feedback was that Amsterdam should be dropped for two reasons: That Amsterdam is not the best example of Dutch cycling infrastructure, and that it is more expensive -- flying into Eindhoven is notably more affordable, as is accommodation outside the capital (the former has on balance been shown to be less of the case than first thought).

Why am I doing this?
Mainly because nobody else is and its worthwhile to showcase what the Dutch do.

Who am I and what do I know about cycling?
I'm the editor of IrishCycle.com (formally CyclinginDublin.com), covering cycling and related news and comment in Ireland; I've written about cycling as transport for nearly every Irish national newspaper, and was recently on a Dutch government/induestry sponcored cycling tour for journalists. I've written a good deal about Dutch cycling, but the trip won't be focused on my knowledge -- it will be focused on showcasing local experts and their knowledge.

Why not go on a David Hembrow tour?
Originally because of what Amsterdam and Utrecht has to offer -- for example, Utrecht is building the largest train station bicycle parking (and are eager to show this off), and because the similarity between Amsterdam and Dublin is striking (around the same population, population density, both capitals, both have similarly restricted city centre street network). Following that, the cost of a Hembrow tour (over €400pp for the three days, excluding accommodation or travel) would be too expensive for most campaigners and for any councillor or others self-funding the trip. However, if you have the money you can find more details at http://www.hembrow.eu/studytour/ -- if all goes well with this first tour and there's interist in a second in a year or two, then we might look for a group discount?

“Officials and councilors have already been to the Netherlands but learned nothing”
The focus is not on officials alone, but rather also mainly on councillors and campaigners. From feedback which I’ve received, few current councillors or campaigners have gone on such cycling study trips where local counterparts cover everything from history to best practice. Most of those who have been to the Netherlands say they were there as tourists, or on other business. Many say they have only been to Amsterdam (which is far from the best example and people tend to only or mostly see the city centre which is only half the story).

Why bother, Ireland will never be like the Netherlands?
Progress in most of Ireland has been painfully slow but on the other hand in recent history there has never been such a public or political hunger for cycling and cycling provision. But there has never been a time when the Dublin City manager has stood up and said a cycling route on the quays is going to happen. But it's not just Dublin, Cork is transferring a notable amount of city street space to cycling. DublinBikes has pushed cycling further into the minds of the Dublin public and the hope the same will be repeated across other Irish cities. Greenways are going to be built across the country.

Even in my car-centric home town of Ballina in Mayo, there's a small but growing amount of people cycling their children to school and around town -- unheard of for most of my life. I can't recall a single parent cycling their children when I was a teenager. Thing are changing, do we want to make the best of the change or not?