

Cruising Guide to The Netherlands & Belgium – First Edition

By Kieran Flatt and Hilary Keatinge

Published by Imray

To compile a pilot book for Belgium and The Netherlands is a mammoth undertaking. There are so many ports, rivers canals and lakes to describe and so many different users to satisfy. Kieran Flatt and Hilary Keatinge have a wealth of knowledge and experience in this area and have built on Brian Navin's books to produce a cruising guide that is even more comprehensive and accessible.

The first 32 pages give a good introduction to this cruising ground and include details of the apps that are both necessary and helpful when sailing in this area. This section briefly describes routes for reaching this coast and the entry and exit formalities once you get there. Including Belgium in this guide is a great bonus and covers not only the coastal harbours but inland ports such as Brugge, Antwerp and Brussels.

The pilot needs to cater for a diverse range of cruising types. Skippers passing through on the way to the Baltic either by the coastal route or the inland standing mast route want quick simple instructions. Whereas those lucky enough to spend time exploring this cruising heaven want more detail and information about out of the way places to explore. The authors have achieved a good balance with an organised, clear and consistent style. As one would expect from an Imray publication the planning charts are well presented and there are plenty of them. Likewise, the detailed plans of harbours are beautifully clear and uncluttered. Also, the key facts for each port are condensed into a highlighted section for each harbour.

The majority of the guide covers The Netherlands and is divided into nine sections which work from Breskens in the south to Delfzijl in the north. The Schelde-Maas-Rhine Delta, which is the largest section of the book, is described in detail and includes the entry points from seaward to this mass of inland water with its variety of commercial and recreational centres. The standing mast route from Vlissingen to Gouda is well described but I would have liked a chart showing this route through the Delta for additional clarity. The rest of the mast up route all the way to Delfzijl is so well charted. The "Heart of Holland", Rotterdam to Amsterdam describes the route via Haarlem and the night convoy through Amsterdam. The city itself is covered in a separate chapter.

The chapter on the Markermeer, IJsselmeer and Randmeren is the second largest section and I now realise how much I missed when I sailed from Lemmer to Amsterdam at speed in 2023. Photography in this section and throughout the book is good and useful. I like the short description of each place that may include a bit of history and local knowledge, which is so helpful for deciding where to visit.

Friesland and Groningen Province are covered in two chapters and include details of the final mast up routes to Lauwersoog or Delfzijl. Here, and in the rest of the pilot, details of bridge openings are comprehensive and indicate the amount of detailed work that has gone into preparing this book as well as assembling so many good photos.

Coastal harbours and passage planning are covered in two short chapters. On the west coast the text and charts are excellent. My enduring memory of sailing up this coast in May 2023 is persistent grey sea and sky mostly covered in fog and the photographs taken on grey days of this low-lying coast reflect this and are the least good, perhaps more aerial shots would help in the next edition.

The final chapter is The Waddenzee, Den Helder to Delfzijl. First each Zeegat is described then the Wadden routes behind the islands as far as Ameland. Finally, the harbours are described in a separate section so when approaching from seaward it is necessary to do a bit of flipping backwards and forwards in the book to reach your destination. This is minor criticism of a book that is well thought out and a pleasure to use. It will become essential for happy and safe pilotage in a difficult cruising ground. It is a delight to read, it inspires confidence for the navigator and I hope encourages others to explore Belgium and The Netherlands.

Simon Butler, July 2025



Cruising Guide to The Netherlands & Belgium (1st Edition), by Kieran Flatt & Hilary Keatinge

Published by Imray at £37.50

ISBN: 978 1786790 53 8

Link: <https://store.imray.com/products/cruising-guide-to-the-netherlands-and-belgium>



ROYAL CRUISING CLUB
PILOTAGE FOUNDATION

