



Top row from left: Le Havre's André Malraux Museum of Modern Art, Mont-Saint-Michel, Oscar Niemeyer's Volcano and the coastal town of Étretat.

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Bottom row from left: Omaha Beach, golden sand in Deauville, Jerome Dupont of Domaine Dupont and beautiful architecture in Rouen

IT MIGHT NOT HAVE THE GLITZ AND GLAMOUR OF REGIONS IN SOUTHERN FRANCE, BUT NORMANDY IS A GEM WORTH CARVING OUT TIME TO VISIT

Words: TRISTAN PARKER

W

hen there's talk of visiting France, it's the south of the country that so often steals the limelight. And while there's plenty to love about the

likes of Marseille, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Nice and the Alps, Northern France offers anything and everything you could possibly ask for in a European holiday – stunning sandy beaches, captivating history, iconic art and local tipples that you won't be able to get enough of.

Arguably capturing the essence of this magical northern region most is Normandy, whose size and geography mean that it's a place of variation, architecturally, scenically and culturally.

But just what exactly is it that makes Normandy so appealing? Let's start with the headliners: tucked away in a remote bay, the tidal island of Mont-Saint-Michel, with its towering medieval abbey is something out of a fairy tale and is one of France's most-visited tourist sites.

Then there's Étretat, a coastal town characterised by dramatic white chalk cliffs looming above peaceful beaches, a sight which enchanted impressionist painters Claude Monet, Charles-François Daubigny and Gustave Courbet.

Paris-born Monet is to thank for another of Normandy's top attractions – his colourful home and gardens in Giverny, which are open to the public to visit. You can explore rooms such as his sunflower-yellow dining room, intricately tiled blue kitchen and wood-panelled studios, and you can even admire the green Japanese bridge in his water garden, still surrounded by water lilies, which was the inspiration for some of his most famous paintings.

For culture elsewhere in Normandy, delve deeper into the impressionism period at the André Malraux Museum of Modern Art in Le Havre, which is home to some classic pieces by Monet, Renoir, Degas and Manet.

Alternatively, step right back into the 11th century at the Museum of the Bayeux Tapestry, where you can view the impressive, 70-metre-long embroidery depicting William the Conqueror's invasion of England in 1066.

Then there's Les Franciscaines in the hip seaside town of Deauville, which is a cultural centre set in a former convent, housing an art museum, cinema, library, restaurant and a series of photography exhibitions and performance spaces.

Even if the arts aren't your thing, it's still worth making the journey to Deauville. Rachel Brainin, Head of Business Development at Les Franciscaines, explains, 'Deauville is a chic seaside resort, with a famous wooden boardwalk and a long, sandy beach punctuated by multicoloured umbrellas and sublime villas dating back to the Belle Époque. It's a city that lives to the rhythm of great cultural and sporting events, making it one of the most prestigious seaside resorts in France.'

Speaking beyond Deauville, Brainin also suggests sampling the local cider and calvados (apple brandy). Normandy is renowned for both (as well as other apple delicacies, including the heralded French dessert tarte tatin) thanks to the region's abundance of orchards. 'Follow the



Clockwise from top: Monet's yellow dining room, Les Franciscaines in Deauville, inside St. Joseph's Church in Le Havre and the pretty streets of Rouen.

DANS LE NORD

NORTHERN FRANCE OFFERS EVERYTHING YOU COULD ASK FOR IN A HOLIDAY



Normandy cider route (a picturesque 25-mile-long trail taking in over 20 cider farms) to taste our many specialties and observe the rich landscapes of the Pays d'Auge,' Brainin says.

Another of Normandy's essential visits – though for very different reasons – can be found on a long and winding stretch of coastline, approximately 100 kilometres northwest of Pays d'Auge: the D-Day landing beaches. It was across these beaches that numerous treacherous battles were fought during World War II, as Allied forces landed on the shores to begin liberating Western Europe, in what became known as the Battle of Normandy. Over 400,000 lives were lost during the conflict. This dark but significant chapter of history is marked at sites around the coast, most prominently at the American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer, which spans 172 acres and contains 9,386 graves.

World War II also affected other areas of Normandy, including Le Havre, a port city that acts as a doorway to the region for many visitors (it's where the Seine meets the English Channel). Le Havre was heavily bombed during the war, but

*LE HAVRE IS A TRENDY SEASIDE CITY, WITH BARS, CAFÉS AND COLOURFUL SCULPTURES*

was dramatically reconstructed by French architect Auguste Perret, whose striking concrete designs, including the town hall and St. Joseph's Church, won the city UNESCO World Heritage status in 2005.

'Le Havre is a city unlike any other,' says Ben Collier, a Marketing Manager at Normandy Tourism Board. 'Highlights include the amazing St. Joseph's Church, cultural centre Oscar Niemeyer's Volcano and the apartment of French architect Auguste Perret, which demonstrates what post-war modernity looked like. Le Havre is now a trendy seaside city, with cool bars and cafés, and colourful sculptures all along the seafront.'

So, while balmy temperatures, an abundance of rosé and the Mediterranean sea may beckon you south, there's so much to see, do and swig on just a hop over the English Channel. As soon as you take that first sip of crisp, orchard-fresh cider, you'll know that a Normandy adventure was a very wise decision.

*you mustn't miss*

Overwhelmed with 11,825 square miles to explore? For starters, here's our Normandy hotlist



**Dieppe Market**

Dieppe's weekly market isn't just Normandy's largest, but it was also voted France's best market in 2020. Every Saturday morning, the centre of this busy port city fills up with stalls selling fresh fruit, vegetables, crusty bread, buttery pastries, handmade French chocolate and Dieppe's lauded apple caramel spread. Don't leave without buying a jar.



**Famille Dupont**

You can't visit Normandy without sampling some of the region's premium apple-based drinks. Take a trip to family-run Domaine Dupont, where you can wander its elegant grounds and sip on cider, calvados, sweet wine and apple juice, which are all made with fruit harvested from the estate's 74 acres of orchards.



**Omaha Beach**

The most well-known of Normandy's D-Day beaches, Omaha Beach, is a truly moving place to visit. Many of its surrounding attractions pay tribute to those who died during the war, including the Memorial Museum of Omaha Beach, the Overlord Museum (the Battle of Normandy was also known as Operation Overlord) and *Les Braves*, a striking steel sculpture protruding from Omaha's sands.



**Museum of Impressionism**

See Monet's masterful use of colour and light come to life just minutes away from his house in Giverny, alongside work by other key artists from the movement. In spring and summer months, find time for a wander around the museum's gardens too, where around 22,000 flower bulbs come into bloom.

Photographs: Xxxxxxxxxx Adias abo. Re. cor.acipiet volenis citatquo quattem que etur sunti renis re perit odit vollest fuga.



**Porte d'Aval**

This towering archway is perhaps the most dramatic sight among Étretat's many enchanting cliff-top vistas. Standing at a mighty 51 metres high, the white flint marvel juts out into the ocean, leaving a gap through which the sun shines at certain times of day. This bewitching scene was captured perfectly by – you guessed it – Monet in 1885, but nothing quite beats seeing it first-hand.



**Rouen**

It's impossible not to be struck by the historic credentials of this picturesque medieval city. Make a beeline for Notre-Dame Cathedral (not to be confused with Paris' Notre-Dame), a Gothic masterpiece and the tallest cathedral in France but leave time for at least one of Rouen's cosy cafés and restaurants, and enjoy a wander around the 17th-century botanical garden, Jardin des Plantes.



**GET TO KNOW NORMANDY**

Discover Le Havre and beyond on these itineraries



**12-NIGHT BRITISH ISLES WITH ORKNEY ISLANDS**

Featured ports: Le Havre, Dublin, Orkney Islands

Departures in 2022/2023

Le Havre's St. Joseph's Church contains 12,768 panes of coloured glass, created by French artist Marguerite Huré.



**22-NIGHT GRAND EUROPEAN EXPLORER**

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Departure in 2023

André Malraux Modern Art Museum has the second largest set of impressionist paintings in France.

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