

DON'T BE A TOURIST  
MINI GUIDE TO

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# Normandy

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## DON'T BE A TOURIST MINI GUIDE

DESTINATION

# NORMANDY

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**Please contact:**

[contact@messynessychic.com](mailto:contact@messynessychic.com)

Since the Belle Époque, Normandie has long been the weekend destination of choice for Parisians looking for a last-minute escape. The region inspired literary and artistic greats and it's the birthplace of some of the best French delicacies of all time, like camembert and calvados. Dramatic and untouched coastlines, fresh fruits de mer, artisanal ciders, fairytale villages and plenty of French nostalgia.



This guide contains five different weekend options and one day trip depending on how you prefer to travel. We recommend taking a drive through the French countryside to get the full experience.



## A WEEKEND ON THE PARISIAN RIVIERA

The Parisian Riviera, on the *Côte Fleurie* (Flowery Coast), gets its name from its proximity to the capital. The prettiest destination towns along the coast like **Honfleur**, **Deauville** and **Trouville-sur-Mer** were thankfully spared from the bombing and battles of World War II and liberated largely without a scratch.

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# Honfleur

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If we had to pick one of these neighbouring coastal towns to stay in for the weekend, it would probably be charming **Honfleur**. It was important to many French artists, writers, and intellectuals. Eugène Boudin, who was born there, was a landscape painter admired by the likes of Monet, Baudelaire and Courbet, and heavily inspired the Impressionists as one of the first French painters to work “en plein air” (outside in the fresh air). You can see his work and some of the paintings he influenced at the [Musée Eugène Boudin](#). The artist would often stay just outside of town at the **Ferme Saint Simeon** with his creative friends. It’s still open today as a five star hotel, but we have a few options for accommodation you should also check out in Honfleur....

# HONFLEUR

Domaine d'Ablon is a place that captures the fairytale magic of Normandy. A member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World, it's a unique property just outside of town, made up of several thatched roof guest cottages. Think Goldilocks, the luxury edition. Your own chocolate box French cottage comes with highly discrete 5 star hotel service. Your firewood awaits in place, your candlelit & white tablecloth dinner will be brought to you in your charming stone kitchen – or out in the greenhouse under the twinkle lights if you prefer. It's the perfect place to escape for a romantic weekend to celebrate something special.



*Domaine d'Ablon*

## HONFLEUR

If you prefer to stay in town on a lighter budget, there are two very good options tucked away in the time capsule backstreets of Honfleur. There's the very elegant 18th century [La Maison de Lucie](#) and the equally charming [La Cour Saint Catherine](#).



*L'union fait la force*

[Vieux Bassin](#) is the hub of Honfleur. The old port is lined with half-timbered buildings, mostly occupied by restaurants at ground level. They'll offer you a decent moules-frites if you're hoping for a waterside terrace table in the sun, but you can do better! Instead, on the water, look out for the old antique sailing ship turned oyster bar, [L'Union Fait La Force](#), permanently docked in the shadow of the 17th century Lieutenant's house. The oven-cooked oysters with melted Camembert cheese are not to be missed, perfect for a pre-dinner snack with wine at sunset. Back on land, head into the backstreets and warm up inside for an elegant seafood dinner at [Le Gambetta](#).

## HONFLEUR

At lunch time, try the **Laurence**, an antiques shop that doubles as a café and tea room serving salads and French comfort food. After lunch, continue on antiques hunt on the outskirts of town, finding some warehouse treasures for a bargain at **Brocante** (16 Route Jean Revel) and **Broc et Tendances**.

On your drive over to Deauville, stop at the cozy half-timbered French roadside pub, **Le Moulin Saint Georges** for some “down home cooking” and authentic Norman cuisine, before walking it off at the nearby beach.



© Laurence à Honfleur



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# Deauville & Trouville-sur-Mer

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If you're looking for the nostalgia of Art Deco glamour, forget Cannes, and go to Deauville. It was Tom and Daisy's honeymoon spot in *The Great Gatsby*, Coco Chanel opened her first clothing boutique there and it's also where Yves Saint Laurent would often escape the city. Explore [Deauville beach](#), the heart of the resort and walk along the [Promenade des Planches](#), the wooden boardwalk built for the aristocracy, which is lined with beach huts named after famous actors from the silver screen. The seaside town is often frequented by film stars, partly in thanks to its yearly [American film festival](#), which anyone can attend. And of course, take some time to enjoy the beach, testing the waters and collecting shells.

Gambling might not be your thing, but casinos have been a staple in the town since the end of the 19th century, so it's worth visiting the casino [Casino Barrière de Deauville](#). If you're up for the races, the [Hippodrome de Deauville - la Touques](#) is the most famous and iconic. Stop by the [Hotel Barrière Normandy Deauville](#) for afternoon tea, run by the same family, which was used as the filming location of one of the Poirot episodes.

## DEAUVILLE AND TROUVILLE-SUR-MER



Just a stone's throw away, bordering Deauville is **Trouville-sur-Mer**, the little fishing village which has been around a lot longer than its slightly more glamorous neighbour. It's one of the first coastal resorts to have ever been established in France.



Just behind the port is the **famous fish market**. You can even sit yourself down in front of the stalls and feast away on fresh purchases with a glass of cold white wine.

There's a casino here too, but in this town, the back cobbled streets and its little galleries seem a lot more tempting. **Musée Villa Montebello** is the summit of any art lover's trail in Trouville-sur-Mer. The historic villa is slightly hidden away, but once you get there you will be thanked with a fine collection of paintings, drawings, and prints.

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# Must Love Cider

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*Beuvron-en-Auge*

If you love cider Consider the *Route du Cidre* as your tether whilst you explore a few other notable sights off its path, from a 22m high tree house to a 19th century prison. In France, children of all ages are traditionally allowed to drink cider, which is available with varying degrees of alcoholic content!

Head to the scenic Norman village called **Beuvron-en-Auge**, which hosts a yearly cider festival in October (*la Fête du cidre*). Sample the cider at the local cafe and creperie and enjoy the town's selection of small antique shops.



If the kids are in tow, they're likely to enjoy the experience of sleeping in a treehouse in the backyard of the 18th century [Chateau de Canon](#). There are five different treehouses to choose from, one of which is the tallest in Europe. Climb across the Indiana Jones-worthy bridge and into the 22 metre (72 ft) tall treehouse overlooking [Canon Park](#). Known as the [Nid d'Aigle cabana](#), it can comfortably house two and is in the backyard of the Chateau de Canon. You might not want to stay here if you have a fear of heights (there are other options closer to the ground). You'll be living among (and above) the friendly farm animals that freely wander the grounds – spot them from your treehouse while enjoying a cider apero amongst the branches. You can visit the estate and all its highlights, which includes a cider cave, where you can discover all their on-site production.



*Les jardins du Pays d'Auge*

If you're not one to sleep in the trees, [Prieuré Saint Michel](#) is a great option, and it's right next door to **Camembert**.

We love the romance of Loire Valley gems like Chenonceau, but we can't resist when a castle really owns its medieval history. The [Chateau de Creve-coeur](#) hosts medieval theatre company, La Muse (The Muse) that presents everything from medieval instruments, wartime hobbies, cooking, etc. to visitors daily.

Stop at the [Garden of Cambremer](#) (cahm-brem-er)! Charming follies pop up out of three hectares of vegetation that includes roses, water gardens and more. There's even a little antique garden museum. Don't miss the creperie on your way out, where you'll have your pick of flavours – over 80, in fact.

Foodies will recognize Pont-l'Évêque as the eponymous city where the creamy cheese was born, but it's also home to a [19th century prison](#) with particularly fascinating stories to tell, like holding the dashing French Public Enemy No. 1, [Rene](#). It got the nickname "The Joyful Prison" when a comedic film (La Joyeuse Prison) was made about his escape in the 1950s. These days, you can tour the preserved grounds and still see the graffiti and words of those held behind bars.

# Etretat

A WRITER'S RETREAT



Étretat was a source of endless inspiration for some of the greatest French creatives in history. Matisse, Monet and Courbet all painted it and writers such as Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas resided there for long periods of time. In fact, while growing up in Étretat, at the age of 18, Guy de Maupassant saved the famous poet, Algernon Charles Swinburne, from drowning. The event inspired his short story, "The Englishman of Étretat".

Wake up to the sound of seagulls at **Le Donjon - Domaine St Clair**, a hotel you can put your feet up with views of the tempestuous sea overlooking Etretat, while surrounded by Maupassant's old books. The rooms are inspired by his characters, his creative peers and figures of the Belle Epoque who sought inspiration at the seaside resort. Cosy up under a blanket by one of the crackling fireplaces or take a walk along the coast, admiring the haunting beauty of the old mansions and testing your vertigo on Étretat's iconic chalky cliffs. While the tide is low, visit the **Trou à l'Homme** sea cave – a few steps along the beach and the 17th Century oyster beds. A fisherman's shack will usually be open, offering hot wine and nibbles for a snack.







Come dinner, book a table at [La Marie Antoinette](#) (named after her because she allegedly ordered her oysters from Etretat). Magnificent, fresh seafood spreads come served in boats that take up your whole table. If you're not a fan of oysters, [Le Bel Ami](#) is a cosy little bistro spot, perfect for lunch, and Le Donjon's restaurant, painted by the famous artist Jean Charles de Castelbajac offers a full six course Michelin-star worthy dinner by candlelight.



Meet the curious faces that peak out of perfectly manicured shell-shaped bushes at the weird and wonderful Jardins d'Étretat, overlooking the rocky cliffs.

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# Things to do nearby

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*Calvados Drouin*

Take a drive along the coast and village hop your way to the [Veules-les-Roses](#) commune which is filled with fairytale cottages, flowers and streams. A trip to Normandy would be incomplete without a few glugs of calvados, so why not go all out and visit a [calvados distillery](#) in a handsome 17th century cottage.

At the museum dedicated to Gustave Flaubert in Rouen, you will see mummies, 3, 500 year old "naughty bits", and old surgical equipment that will make your face turn pale. The Musée Flaubert et d'histoire de la médecine is the birthplace of Flaubert and holds treasures such as Loulou the parrot, however it is really the cabinet of medicinal curiosities that stand out, which is there because Flaubert's father was the leading surgeon in Rouen. This stop is not for the faint hearted, but definitely worth it if you can stomach the gory stuff. Be aware that there's not much written around the museum in English, but there is a basic audioguide. PS. Did you know, Flaubert was the protégé of Guy de Maupassant?



Visit the charming chapels of Normandy. In the cemetery of La Haye-de-Routot you will find a yew tree, which is up to 1,300 years old, housing the tiny [Saint Anne chapel](#) with its own perfectly fitted door and fairy lights. Even more impressive is the [enormous tower-like oak tree](#) in Allouville-Bellefosse with its slithering staircase and conical roof, which survived a lightning strike and potential attack during the French revolution. It houses two chapels which were both built in 1696 and today it's still the destination of yearly pilgrimages.

# Mont St Michel

A HISTORY BUFF'S  
WEEKEND



Behold the mythical and the mysterious island of **Mont St Michel**, France's unconquerable ancient fort. Yes it's true, it's a tourist hotspot, but if you're stopping by, there are a few hidden gems to look out for that have probably missed most peoples' radars.

During your weekend visiting Mont Saint-Michel, we suggest visiting the island's charming neighbours **Granville** and **Cancalle** too.

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# How to do Mont Saint-Michel

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There is are no cars allowed on the island itself. The island of Mont Saint Michel has deadly tides. If you chose to walk across the sands, you'd be up against quick sands and a tide that is said to travel at the speed of a galloping horse. Visitors access Mont Saint Michel via a long bridge over the sandy beach all year round. Ample parking is provided in the marshlands on the mainland.

Once you're inside the walls of Mont Saint Michel, here's a tip for making your way through the town: take the tiny alley stairways up to the top instead of the main pathways.





Don't write off the souvenir shops entirely. The island has had souvenir shops since the Medieval times. When people would arrive at Mont Saint-Michel at the end of their pilgrimages, they would find a little memento to take back with them as was tradition.

The choice of restaurants is limited and many of them are overpriced, so keep it simple and go for the best creperie on the mount: [La Sirène Lochet](#).

Look out for the **medieval elevator** on the island. For nearly a century, Mont Saint-Michel was used as a prison, and even Victor Hugo was incarcerated there. The curious contraption was used to haul up supplies at the time. It was powered by a wheel, in which prisoners would sometimes stand and walk to keep it rotating (like a hamster wheel).

Find the fire station! It's possibly one of the most unique fire stations you'll ever come across, perched on this fairytale little "island".

Look for the [cloister of Mont Saint Michel](#). Interestingly, it wasn't built in the middle of the Abbey as a functional space that links the different rooms. It lies above the abbey, making it a spiritual, hidden space, with a herb and flower garden in the middle, and views looking towards the sky and the sea.

Mont Saint-Michel is said to have inspired Joan of Arc's endeavours, and this is why you can find a statue of the patron saint at the entrance of the [Église Saint Pierre](#) (Church of St Peter). In fact, nestled at the foot of the abbey in the main street, the parish church is a little gem often overlooked by visitors.



*Mont Saint Michel*

### Did you know?

Did you know that there's actually a miniature version of the island in Paris? Most people don't know that in a dark room in the attic of the 17th century palace that is Les Invalides, hides one of Paris' littlest-known and most fascinating museums. **The Musée des Plans Reliefs** is home to one of France's most curious historical treasures, a unique collection of miniature fortified cities created in secrecy for French monarchs throughout history to plan their next attacks. Here you will find a Mont St. Michel 3D model, which was created for Louis XIV by the island's own monks back in the 17th century.



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# Where to Stay

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*Château de Vouilly*

Follow in the footsteps of Ernest Hemingway and Robert Capa who served as war correspondents in the summer of 1944 and stay at the nearby **Château de Vouilly**, which was built in the 9th century. The room used by the press corps has been preserved by the owners, who will be happy to tell you more about the history of the chateau. If you want to learn more about the events of WW2 in the area, you can visit the D-Day landing sights too.

Today, during your stay at the Chateau de Vouilly, you will find yourself among a luscious garden, a peaceful pond, and a working dairy farm. It's a bit rough around the edges, but the experience will be unforgettable.

**Top tip:** ask for a room overlooking the garden!

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# Nearby

# Mont Saint Michel

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## Granville

Start off at the vibrant port where you will be treated with really fresh seafood. There are a few options to choose from, such as [Comptoir de l'Atelier Gourmet](#), [Au P'tit Mareyeur](#), and [Mer et Saveurs](#).

Get lost in the little streets, admiring the historical architecture, the dreamlike reflections on the water, seabreeze, and pop into galleries dotted around the town. If there's one thing you're going to see, it's got to be the [Musée Christian Dior](#). The Belle Époque childhood home of the famous couturier is set on top of a cliff, looking onto the sparkling sea, surrounded by an enchanting rose garden. «I have most tender and amazed memories... of my childhood home. I would even say that my life and my style owe almost everything to its site and architecture.»

Stay at [Hôtel du Fort et des îles](#).



## Cancale

Technically, just over the border in Brittany, if you think of yourself as a bit of an oyster addict, this is the place for you. When the tide is low, you can see the abundant oyster beds, and at the harbour, you'll find the legendary [oyster market](#). It's said that the extravagant Louis XIV used to have his oysters specially brought to him from here.

You will be able to see the famous Mont-Saint Michel from many points of Cancale. One of the best ways to experience the view, is to walk along the coastal footpath which will take you to [Pointe du Grouin](#). On a clear day you'll be able to see the Îles Chausey, Mont Saint-Michel and Saint-Malo. If you're lucky, you might even see some dolphins!

Some more good food spots in Cancale include [Chez Victor](#), [Le Tapecul](#) and [Sanchez](#) for an ice cream. [Le Coquillage](#) in the [Châteaux Richeux](#) is good for a romantic meal looking over the water.

Additional hotels we recommend in Granville: [Hôtel Auberge de la Motte Jean](#), [Les Rimains](#) (part of the maisons-de-bricourt)

# Guernsey

VISITING  
WITH VICTOR HUGO



Guernsey is an intriguing, picturesque island which is British, yet not part of the UK, and it's quite different to anything you'll find on the mainland. For starters, it's warm and sunny, its postboxes are red rather than blue, and its inhabitants use 1 pound notes, rather than coins. Overall, it's a bit of a mish mash of France and England, and it actually used to be attached to France before sea levels rose. Here you'll be able to visit Victor Hugo's former home, which today, is a literary lover's time capsule, open to visitors.



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# En route from Paris

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*Maison du Biscuit*

France doesn't have as many roadside oddities as America does, but this one on the road from Paris to Guernsey is most certainly worth a stop off. A recreated 19th century street of picture-perfect little boutiques awaits at the charming **Maison du Biscuit**, an old cookie factory that has been passed down over five generations. It looks like a film set where you can duck in and out of boutiques that look like they are 200 years old. At this whimsical playground for adults and children alike, you'll be greeted with oodles of tasters, and find anything from books, biscuits, toys, whiskey, crockery and more, with quaint packaging to match the decor. Perfect for bringing home some gifts. For a little rest, indulge in a hot chocolate and a platter of sweet treats in the charming café, but take note that it's not open during lunch hours.

*Drive down to Carteret where you will board the ferry to St Peter Port in Guernsey.*

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# Visiting Victor in Guernsey

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*Hauteville House*

A short drive from the ferry terminal, Victor Hugo's home, **Hauteville House**, awaits. The romantic author decided to go into exile for nineteen years after the coup-d'état by Louis Napoleon Bonaparte in 1851. After passing through Brussels and Jersey, he settled in Guernsey and bought this elaborate home using the money he received from a collection of poems. Before he acquired it, there were rumours that it was haunted by a former occupant who had committed suicide, and it stayed empty for years. Hugo spent six years designing and decorating the house, and he included references to his writings and philosophies throughout. There's five floors of Renaissance-inspired decor, paintings, chinese curiosities and tapestries – the man was as much an interiors master as he was a poet. Our favourite room is his Persian-carpet covered room under the glass roof. In the garden there is a towering oak tree that was planted by Hugo back in 1870.



*Hauteville House*



You can find a statue of the man himself, right next door to his home, at [Candie Gardens](#). The tranquil 19th century garden looks onto the harbour and onto the islands nearby. Stay for a picnic.

**Not to miss:** [Guernsey Tapestry Gallery](#), [Castle Cornet](#), [La Vallette Underground Military Museum](#), [Moulin Huet Bay](#) (a subject Renoir often depicted)

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# Where to Stay

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*Airbnb*

We suggest finding a boutique hotel like **Fermain Valley Hotel**, or a charming Airbnb near St.Peter Port, like this annexe of a historic 15th Century cottage

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# Where to Eat

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*Octopus*

Cobo Tearoom

Octopus

Slaughterhouse

Tinto

Terrace Garden Cafe



The Parisian Riviera, on the Côte Fleurie (Flowery Coast), gets its name from its proximity to the capital. This area was frequented by the upper class during the Belle Époque and a sense of faded Art Deco glamour remains. Today, chic Parisians escape to Deauville and its neighbours when the sun comes out and it's even a hot spot for movie stars. Spend some time in **Trouville-sur-Mer** and **Honfleur** too.

# Giverny

A MOMENT WITH MONET





*Monet's Garden*

Giverny is of course most famous for being home to the wonderful impressionist, Claude Monet. Here you can [visit his house](#), his wild and colourful garden, and see the water lily scenes in real life.





If you rightly consider less tourists a bonus, avoid the high summer months (so early Spring and outside of school holidays). There will always be tourists at Giverny however, so you'll never entirely avoid them. If you're up for it, you might consider staying overnight next door at [La Maison de Madame Baudy](#) or [Le Petit Giverny](#) and be the first to arrive at Monet's garden at 9.30am or enjoy the quiet hour before closing at 6pm.

[Vernon](#) is a very lovely village too, particularly at twilight once the tourists have returned to Paris for the evening. Either way, I wouldn't miss lunch at the old [Hotel Baudy](#).



Train tickets from Paris are around 10 euros and very easy to book using the [Trainline platform](#) (which is in english). You'll leave from Gare Saint Lazare, and travel 45 miles northwest of Paris, which takes about 45 minutes. You'll disembark the train at Vernon, where there's always a shuttle waiting for you at the station to take you to Monet's house.

If you're feeling inspired, you can buy tickets that combine a visit to Monet's house and garden with a visit to the [Musée des Impressionnismes](#) or the [Musée Marmottan Monet](#) and the [Musée de l'Orangerie](#) in Paris. You can also buy "skip the line" tickets beforehand on the [website](#).