

# *THE PLEASURES of NORMANDY & BRITTANY*

**May 9 – 16, 2012**



## *VentureOut*

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575 Pierce Street, Suite 604 • San Francisco, CA 94117 • (888) 431-6789 • (415) 626-5678  
[info@venture-out.com](mailto:info@venture-out.com) • [www.venture-out.com](http://www.venture-out.com)

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- **Giverny:** The house and stunning garden where the great Impressionist painter Claude Monet lived and painted for over 40 years.
- **Honfleur:** An insanely picturesque port town and the birthplace of Impressionist painting.
- **Pays d’Auge:** Lovely inland countryside famous for its quaint villages and production of Calvados, cider and cheeses.
- **Bayeux Tapestry:** The unique 900-year-old document and astonishing work of art that depicts the story of the Norman Conquest of England and the Battle of Hastings in 1066.
- **D-Day Landing:** The Allied Forces’ landings of June 1944 and the Battle of Normandy that followed are movingly commemorated.
- **Mont Saint Michel:** Now iconic in its fame, this solitary rock dominated by its monumental abbey became a place of pilgrimage when St Aubert built an oratory here over 1,000 years ago.
- **Emerald Coast:** Rocky, heavily indented and very picturesque, this coastal area in Brittany includes a series of points from which fine panoramas can be enjoyed as well as the wonderful towns of **Saint Malo, Cancale, and Dinard.**
- **Paris:** Not part of our sightseeing activities, but well worth arriving a few days early or extending your stay if you have the time.



- \* The ethereal abbey of Mont St Michel “floating” on water . . .
- \* The stunning Norman and Breton coastlines which have witnessed invasions from Iron Age Celts to D-Day’s Allied Forces . . .
- \* Apple and pear orchards producing the region’s popular spirits . . .
- \* Salt-meadow sheep flocks . . .
- \* Picture-book villages in the countryside and along the coast . . .

These are all part of the great allure of Normandy and Brittany. We sample the region’s famous drinks (Calvados, cider and pommeau) and of course its cheeses: Camembert, Livarot, Pont l’Evêque. We feast in restaurants where great platters of oysters and other fresh seafood are standard fare. We delve into the remarkable history of the region, from a thousand years ago when it contributed to changing the course of the English language to its great importance in World War II. So much beauty, in the shadow of so much history, warmed by a lively hospitality make this an unforgettable journey!



## **Day 1 - Meet in Paris** **Wednesday, May 9, 2012**

**Paris!** What an amazing world-class city and the gathering point for our tour to Normandy and Brittany. We will come together in the early evening at our very centrally located hotel for a welcome drink, a trip orientation, and a chance to meet and chat with our fellow travelers. This will be followed by our welcome dinner.

If you would like to arrive in Paris prior to Day 1 of our tour we can set up extra hotel nights at our group hotel. The city certainly merits extra time before and/or after the tour if you have it. Please let us know as soon as possible as Paris is heavily booked with events in May.

*Welcome Drink, Dinner*



## **Day 2 - Giverny / Honfleur**

After leaving Paris in the morning our first stop will be at **Giverny**, where the great Impressionist painter Claude Monet lived and painted for over 40 years. We'll have a tour of the house, where the artist entertained Cezanne, Renoir, Matisse and other famous artists of the period, as well as the Water Garden with its much-photographed Japanese Bridge, the Clos Normand (French-style garden), and the Water Lily studio. [The paintings in the

house are reproductions; the originals hang in museums in Paris and around the world.]

After lunch we continue to the wonderfully picturesque port town of **Honfleur** and check in for two nights at our charming town-center hotel. Later we can easily stroll through the town to this evening's restaurant.

*Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

## **Day 3 - Honfleur / Alabaster Coast**

We begin the day with a walking tour of Honfleur, which has to be one of France's most seductive towns. A major defensive port by the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Honfleur was once an important departure point for maritime expeditions, including the first voyages to Canada. The town's cobbled streets, half-timbered or slate-fronted houses, portside



cafes and restaurants, and interesting shops ooze quaintness. There are several art galleries here, resulting from a long line of artists visiting this picturesque place, beginning with the Impressionists.



We then head out to the **Alabaster Coast**, a line of high limestone cliffs, seemingly split off from their counterpart, the White Cliffs of Dover, on the other side of the English Channel. The sea beating at the foot of the cliffs has eroded the cliff faces, forming picturesque hanging valleys. The grandeur of the high cliffs and crashing waves has inspired many writers, artists, and even film directors. We'll have lunch and enjoy the beautiful scenery along this stretch of coastline, eventually returning to Honfleur where you can explore the town's shops and galleries at your leisure and select from a wide array of restaurants

for your dinner.

*Breakfast, Lunch*



#### **Day 4 - Pays d'Auge / Bayeux**

The **Pays d'Auge** is classic Norman countryside lushly woven with gently rolling landscape, wooded valleys, cider and Calvados orchards, dairy farms producing world-famous cheeses, castles, manor houses, and quaint villages. We call in at the enchanting 15<sup>th</sup>-century **Chateau Saint Germain-de-Livet**.

Outside are turrets, towers, timbers and cleverly patterned brick and stone; inside, oak furniture, Renaissance frescos, and

thick creaking floorboards. **Beuvron-en-Auge** is a lovely village hidden deep in the Pays d'Auge with intricate patterned half-timbered houses dripping with geraniums – a fine stop for our lunch. Afterwards we visit a family-owned **distillery** in the area for a tour and tasting of Calvados (an apple-based digestive), cider, and Pommeau, all famous spirits of the region.

Then it's on to our base for the next two nights, the small-scale, beautifully kept cathedral town of **Bayeux**. The town escaped damage during the war, leaving a cathedral and old houses — many tastefully restored — as well as a pedestrian quarter, for explorers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We check in to our very nice (and newly built) hotel right in the town center. An excellent dinner is in store for the evening.

*Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



### **Day 5 - Bayeux / D-Day Landing**

Bayeux was the first town liberated during the Battle of Normandy in 1944 (the day after D-Day) but is more famous as the home of what is commonly called the “**Bayeux Tapestry**” in English. Dating to the 11<sup>th</sup> century the tapestry depicts the decisive Battle of Hastings when William the Conqueror of Normandy invaded England in 1066. The impressive size — 230 feet long by 20 inches wide — along with its considerable artistic and historical

merit, make it a unique and world-renowned masterpiece.



After lunch we set out for the **D-Day coast**, where on June 6, 1944, Normandy made its mark in history and became the battleground for one of the greatest military operations of our time. The beaches here are peaceful now, but a visit to the **American Military Cemetery** sitting on a bluff above **Omaha Beach** (filmed in the opening scene of Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*) evokes very strong emotions of that horrific period. The seemingly endless rows of

simple white crosses bear testament to the price that was paid for the invasion of Normandy in June 1944 and subsequent victory of the Allies. Formal, yet serene, the 9,385 Carrara marble crosses and Stars of David stand aligned as a very moving sight. There are several other D-Day sights in the area, and we will attempt to visit as many as time will allow.

After returning to Bayeux, you'll have a chance to explore the shops, and dinner this evening is open. There are several nice options in the town center.

*Breakfast, Lunch*



### **Day 6 – Mont Saint Michel / Dinard**

Today we head for Brittany, but before we get there we stop at one of France's most glorious landmarks. **Mont Saint Michel** is an island-abbey a few hundred yards from the mainland, stunning at first glimpse, and “floating” on the sea — at least until the tide ebbs to reveal the sandy causeway that leads to its gates. It is a pilgrimage site that has enchanted travelers for centuries – indeed one of the most important pilgrimage sites in the

West. Dedicated in 708 after a series of visions of the Archangel Michael, the abbey was constructed over the course of centuries, and its various buildings represent every stage of medieval architecture, from pre-Romanesque chapels and Norman arches to 12<sup>th</sup>-century vaulted chambers that led to the Gothic style. Mont Saint Michel was also a fortress and resisted capture by the English throughout the Hundred Years War. Those who wish can walk along the ramparts. In fact, since there is only one road, pedestrian-only, leading to the abbey 260 feet up to the top, the ramparts walk is usually less clogged with visitors than the road.

Later we arrive at the lovely town of **Dinard** in **Brittany** and our wonderful hotel by the sea. If you're so inclined enjoy a delightful walk on a coastal path around Dinard, passing lavish Belle Epoque villas along the way and soaking in terrific views.

Dinner is at your leisure this evening. We can recommend some good places. There's also a casino in town across from the beach.

*Breakfast, Lunch*



### **Day 7 - Saint Malo / Cancale**

Perched on the edge of the Atlantic the beautiful walled seaport of **Saint Malo** dates as far back as the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and it was once a haven for merchants, sailors, explorers, and pirates. Swept by the winds and tides, Saint Malo's sailors and corsairs (government-sanctioned pirates, basically) brought wealth to their city in

centuries past, crossing the oceans in search of unexplored continents and precious goods. The majestic ramparts surrounding the town are mighty impressive, and we'll have a chance to walk on part of them as well as along the cobbled streets, which are

charming The views out to sea from the ramparts are spectacular.

The magnificently scenic area between the towns of Saint Malo and Cancale is part of the **Emerald Coast**. We drive along here enjoying gorgeous coastal views and passing lovely homes. At the **Pointe du Grouin**, a wild rocky headland, we feast our eyes on a panorama stretching from Cap Fréhel in Brittany to Granville in Normandy and the Bay of Mont Saint Michel.



The fishing town of **Cancale**, sitting on the Bay of Mont Saint Michel, is famous for its oysters and is a sweetly picturesque village as well. If it's clear enough we'll enjoy a view of Mont Saint Michel itself in the distance. An informative visit to an oyster farm will illuminate us about the production of this famous seafood delicacy.

We'll then return to Dinard. You may wish to pick up some last-minute gifts among the shops of Dinard or go for a swim in the hotel's covered, heated pool before we meet for our farewell dinner and recap a wonderful journey through Normandy and Brittany!

*Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*



**Day 8 – Departure**  
**Wednesday, May 16, 2012**  
*Au Revoir et Bon Voyage!*

*Breakfast*

The Saint Malo train station is roughly a 15-minute taxi ride from Dinard. From this station there are high-speed trains back to Paris that depart every couple of hours (travel time 3-3.5 hours) or to other regions within France, depending on your

onward travel plans.

{**Please note:** If you would like another night in the laid-back resort town of Dinard to unwind further, we can set that up for you at the group hotel. Likewise, if you would like extra nights back in Paris, please let us know.}

## ACCOMMODATIONS

The following are the hotels that we intend to use for the tour at the time of publishing this itinerary. *We reserve the right to make changes to the accommodations.*



### **Paris – 1 night**

Our selected hotel is housed in a building that dates back to 1877 and used to be a private residence for British royalty. It's located on one of Paris's most prestigious streets on the Right Bank in the middle of the action. The stylishly renovated 4-star hotel is a family-run gem that bubbles with history and oozes Parisian charm married with a contemporary flair. The 70 rooms, all non-smoking, feature an attractive decor with luxurious French fabrics, elegant antique-style furniture, and smart contemporary design features. They're Parisian-sized, i.e., smallish. Double-paned windows are good for keeping out the bustle of Paris when you

don't want it. Other amenities include wifi, flat-screen TVs, minibars, and concierge service. The gastronomic restaurant offers seasonally changing, inventive menus as well as lighter bites, and the bartender can prepare all kinds of smart cocktails. The hotel's excellent location lends itself well to sightseeing. A multitude of tourist attractions are located in the vicinity. One can walk to: Opera Garnier, 3 minutes; the famous Galleries Lafayette department store, 7 minutes; the Louvre Museum, 10 minutes; the Tuileries Gardens, 10 minutes; the uber-fashionable shopping street Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré, 10 minutes; the Musée d'Orsay, 20 minutes. Three Metro stations are within easy walking distance.



### **Honfleur – 2 nights**

Step out the door and you're in the very heart of this lovely old town. The town center has only 3-star hotels (or lower), but we think this is better than being in a fancier place out of town. Our selected hotel was purchased and lovingly renovated a few years ago with great attention to detail, and they did an extremely tasteful job. It's quite a jumble of various ancient buildings (an old salt warehouse and three 16th-century houses) stitched together in a somewhat confusing labyrinth, but that's part of its charm. Rooms are small, but again, very tasteful. Staff is friendly. The lounge is warm and cozy and the breakfast room

inviting. The hotel features a spa so you can indulge in a massage. Other nice touches include free wifi throughout the property and complimentary mineral water in the guest rooms. As this is quite a historic structure, no two guest rooms are identical.



### **Bayeux – 2 nights**

Under construction as we write this itinerary, this will be the first 4-star hotel right in the center of Bayeux. It's a small family-run operation along with their existing 3-star hotel next door. Twenty-eight spacious air-conditioned rooms will feature marble bathrooms, flat-screen televisions, and internet access. An Empire-style bar with fireplace and a fitness room will be among the common facilities. The owners have

selected beautiful fabrics, finishes, and furniture. We have visited the site and think it's going to make a lovely hotel — a great and welcome addition to the center of Bayeux. (Photo shown is from their 3-star hotel.)



### **Dinard – 2 nights**

Dinard is a fashionable town, and this is the town's fashionable 5-star address. The property overlooks the water, and it's an easy stroll both to the main shopping streets as well as to the beautiful waterfront coastal path that extends for a mile in each direction -- a delightful promenade before breakfast or dinner, perhaps? A gorgeous buffet breakfast includes Breton specialties. There's a covered, heated swimming pool, spa, and pretty central garden. The pleasant bar overlooks the water, and you can also have a casual evening meal here, or indulge yourself in the fine dining room. It's a historic hotel, dating back to the 19th century, so the guest rooms aren't identical.

## **TOUR COST and IMPORTANT TRIP DETAILS**

\$3995 (with 14 or 15 participants)

\$4195 (with 12 or 13 participants)

\$4395 (with 10 or 11 participants)

\$765 single supplement

A note about tier pricing: There are certain fixed costs involved with operating a trip of this nature regardless of the number of participants who have signed up. As you can imagine, with a smaller number of group members, the fixed costs per person are

higher. In order to cover those fixed costs for a smaller-sized group, we prefer to charge a bit extra in order to ensure that the trip can run rather than cancel a trip due to a low number of sign-ups.

Costs are based on double occupancy of a room. If you are traveling alone and wish to share a room, we will match you with a roommate if one is available. Should there be no one to pair you with, the single supplement fee will apply.



**Tour Cost Includes:**

- o Accommodations for 7 nights in carefully selected town-center properties (see descriptions above)
- o Breakfast each morning in the hotels
- o Lunch every day (except the arrival and departure days)
- o Dinner on Days 1, 2, 4, and 7
- o Welcome drink
- o Entrance fees for all sights mentioned in the itinerary
- o Licensed private tour guide for all towns and sights mentioned in itinerary
- o Tasting of Calvados, cider and Pommeau
- o Tour escort accompanying the group throughout (minimum of 10 participants)
- o Ground transportation in a private bus and driver's services, room, and board

**Tour Cost Does Not Include:**

Airfare; meals not specified above; additional accommodations pre- or post-tour that may be necessitated by flight schedules or other factors; transportation from the airport to the hotel in Paris; transportation from Dinard to Paris (or elsewhere) at the end of the tour; tipping (\*); travel insurance; passports; and other expenses of a personal nature such as minibar charges, laundry, telephone calls, etc.

**Currency Exchange Rates:** Our costs to operate this tour *are* tied directly to the exchange rate between the Euro and the Dollar. Over the past few years the value of the U.S. dollar has fluctuated in quite a volatile manner against the Euro — and generally in an unfavorable direction for the dollar. We reserve the right to alter the trip pricing indicated here should there be a significant fluctuation of the dollar. Please refer to the Terms & Conditions that accompany the Trip Enrollment Form.

**(\*) Tipping:** In an effort to make it as simple and seamless for our guests as possible, on some trips, such as this one, we think it's better to collect some tip funds from you at the beginning of the tour on Day 1 so that you don't have to fuss with that every day as you go along. These tip funds will be distributed by the tour escort as the trip unfolds to the wait staff in restaurants, drivers, and hotel porters. We prefer that you tip the local tour guide directly at the end of the tour.



**TRIP PACING & ACTIVITY LEVEL:** We have structured the days in this program in the most logically flowing way in order to keep driving times to a minimum and to avoid repetition of roads. However, some days will see more driving than others. None of the driving is done at long, uninterrupted intervals. We stop often throughout the day for our visits, thus breaking up the day's activities. Our transportation will be in a comfortable tour bus, and at no time will it feel like an endless road trip. Days 2, 4 and 6 are our transfer days and will involve the most driving: about two and a half hours in total each of those days, but broken up with sight visits.

After the initial night in Paris we stay two nights at each hotel.

Most of the towns we visit cannot be driven through on a bus. We have to explore the towns (and other sights) on foot. This might pose a challenge to those who have any walking issues. Please check with us if you have concerns in this area.

Mont Saint Michel is truly an awesome sight and site, but it is usually very crowded, and there's no avoiding that, unfortunately. Also, to reach the abbey itself at the top of the island requires walking up through the town -- an ascent of about 250 feet.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT --- Some Typical Culinary Items from this Part of France...

Norman cheeses include Camembert, Livarot, Pont l'Évêque, Brillat-Savarin, Neufchâtel, Petit Suisse and Boursin.

Normandy butter and cream are lavishly used in gastronomic specialties.

Fish and seafood are of superior quality in Normandy and Brittany.



Normandy is a major cider-producing region (very little wine is produced). Apple brandy, of which the most famous variety is Calvados, is also popular. The mealtime *trou normand*, or "Norman hole," is a pause between meal courses in which diners partake of a glassful of calvados in order to improve the appetite and make room for the next course, and this is still observed in many homes and restaurants. *Pommeau* is an apéritif produced by blending unfermented cider and apple brandy. Another aperitif is the *kir normand* or *kir breton*, a measure of crème de cassis topped up with cider.

Other regional specialties include tripes à la mode de Caen, andouilles and andouillettes, salt meadow lamb, seafood (oysters, mussels, scallops, lobsters, mackerel...), and teurgoule (spiced rice pudding).



Normandy is also noted for its pastries. It is the birthplace of brioches.

Large, thin pancakes made from buckwheat flour (*blé noir*) are eaten with ham, eggs and other savory fillings. They are made with plain buckwheat flour and water in Eastern Brittany and called *galettes*. Thin *crêpes* made from wheat flour are eaten for dessert or for breakfast. They may be served cold with local

butter. Traditional pastries include *kouign amann* ("butter cake" in the Breton language) made from bread dough, butter and sugar, and *far*, a sort of custardy pudding cake with prunes and a flan-like texture.

### **CAVEAT**

While as accurate as possible at the time of printing, this itinerary should be considered a close indication of the schedule and scope of activities, trip routing, and meals, rather than an inflexible schedule of events. It is subject to change. We also reserve the right to maintain flexibility in order to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities. This trip is subject to the Limitation of Liability and all the Terms and Conditions as detailed in the Trip Enrollment Form.

To realize the maximum enjoyment from your Venture Out trip, we encourage participants to have flexibility, a sense of humor, curiosity and enthusiasm about new people and places, and an openness to the unexpected. With a spirit of adventure and positive attitude, we're sure you will have a very special travel experience. If you are uncertain about the level of comfort, difficulty, or any of the activities described in this itinerary, please email us or call Venture Out at 1-888-431-6789 to discuss your concerns.

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