

## *Haute Normandie - Rouen, Monet's Gardens, the Route of the Abbeys and the Alabaster Coast*



*On a walk through Monet's Gardens in late October*

### **A JOURNEY THROUGH HISTORIC UPPER NORMANDY**

While most visitors dedicate just a few days to explore historic Normandy, on our October journey to this large and diverse region we chose to dedicate two weeks to an in-depth exploration of its architectural treasures, ancient fishing ports, fashionable coastal resorts, beautiful rolling farmland and of course, to the many important battleground sites of World War II's Allied Invasion.

The Seine River, flowing northwest from Paris into the English Channel, divides Normandy into two areas, **Haute** (Upper) and **Basse** (Lower) **Normandie**. We also divided our recent travels into two parts, commencing in the north, then moving south to *Basse Normandie*, the picture postcard world of half-timbered cottages, apple orchards, grazing cows, the classic Normandy of the four Cs - *Cider, Camembert, Calvados* and *Crème*.

We began our explorations in the Norman capital of **Rouen**, the lively, cultured gateway city on the banks of the River Seine. Rich in history, it was where William the Conqueror died in 1087 and where 19th century novelist Gustave Flaubert, author of *Madam Bovary*, was born. Known for its magnificent Gothic spires and superb medieval architecture, 45% of the city was destroyed by bombing raids during World War II. But its beautiful medieval core has been so magnificently restored, it is difficult to imagine the scale of the damage it suffered during the Battle of Normandy.



## THE HIGHLIGHTS OF ROUEN, CAPITAL OF HAUTE-NORMANDIE

Its atmospheric old quarter, **Vieux Rouen**, is filled with highly picturesque half-timbered homes, and a fine **Musée de Beaux Arts**, richly endowed with the Impressionist masterpieces of Monet, Sisley, Pissarro and Renoir.

Its **Ceramic Museum** is devoted to 17th and 18th century Rouen *faïence*, decorated earthenware.

You'll also find the great abbey church of **St-Ouen** in *Vieux Rouen* and of course the sights associated with **Jeanne d'Arc** (Joan of Arc), patron saint of France, who was tried for witchcraft and burned at the stake in the city's historic market square in 1431.



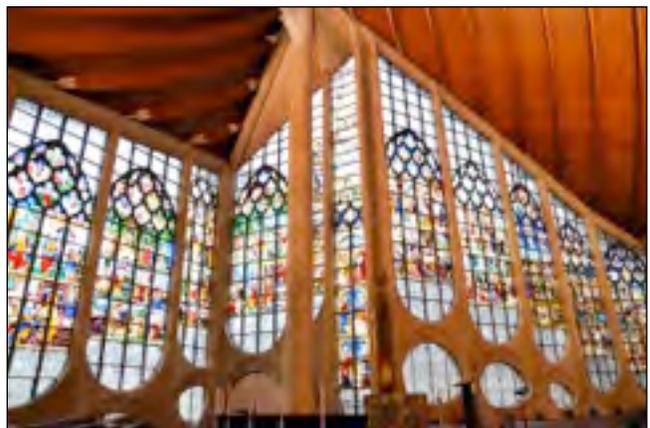
Typical half-timbered buildings in Rouen's historic quarter

Some of the finest church architecture in France can be found in Rouen, in particular its cathedral, one of Europe's finest Gothic masterpieces, whose west façade Monet painted 28 times in his studies of changing light.



Abbey church of St Ouen (currently under renovation)

The 16th century stain glass windows of *Eglise Sainte Jeanne d'Arc Rouen*, salvaged from the original church of Saint Vincent, severely damaged in 1944, are magnificent.



Stain glass windows of Eglise Sainte Jeanne d'Arc Rouen



*Hand decorated ceramics, Faïences Saint Romain*



*A few of the impressionist works at the Musée de Beaux Arts*



*16th century Gros Horloge astronomical clock*

From Rouen we journeyed eastward to the picture perfect postcard village of **Lyons-la-Forêt**, chock-filled with flower bedecked 17th century timber framed houses (one, the former residence of composer *Maurice Ravel*) and the hamlet used as the set for the *Madame Bovary* films. The village sits within one of Europe's finest beech grove forest.



*Main market square, Lyons-la-Fôret*



*The house of Maurice Ravel*

**MONET'S GARDENS, ROMANESQUE ABBEY ROUTE AND THE ALABASTER COAST**

We then traveled to Claude Monet's studio-gardens at **Giverny** and to the ruins of Richard the Lionheart's *Château-Gaillard* in **Le Petit-Andely**.



*Claude Monet's house & gardens, Giverny*

Driving west through the highly scenic Seine valley, we explored the evocative **Romanesque Abbey Route**, including the haunting ruins of **Jumièges**, the abbey church and gardens of **St-Georges de Boscherville** and the ruins of **St-Wandrille** before reaching the dramatic **Alabaster Coast**, with its eighty miles of lofty white chalk cliffs, some 120 meters high, reminiscent of the white cliffs of Dover and much loved by the Impressionists.



*Ruins of the Abbey Jumièges, dating from the 7th century*

In the pretty port village of **Étretat** with its shingle beaches and colorful timbered houses, on each side of the beach, we admired these striking alabaster cliffs at their most spectacular, where the wind and waves have carved fascinating rock formations or *falaises*: arches, tunnels and a solitary "needle" out to the sea, the **Falaise d'Aval**, immortalized on so many Impressionists' canvases.



*Falais d'Aval, Étretat*

In the ancient cod-fishing port of **Fécamp** we sampled the "*medicinal elixir*", first concocted from local wild plants by the Bénédictine monk *Dom Bernardo Vincelli* in the 16th century and now one of the world's most famous *digestifs*, B&B, Bénédictine & Brandy, at the wildly ornate, Neo-Gothic distillery, **Le Palais Bénédictine**.



*Le Palais Bénédictine, Fécamp*

## DINING IN HAUTE-NORMANDIE

Our gastronomic discoveries in Rouen included the sleek contemporary bistro **Le 37**, 37 rue St-Étienne-des-Tonneliers, opened by Michelin starred chef *Gilles Tournadre*, and the charmingly traditional **le Bistrot de Panurge** on Rue Ecuycère, where we feasted on its delectable *gigot*, roast leg of lamb.

We stopped for lunch at the country-cute **Le Grand Cerf** with open kitchen in picturesque **Lyons-la-Forêt**, and, on the Côte d'Albâtre, at the family-owned seafood restaurant-fish market of **La Marée**, on the Quai Bérigny, while visiting Fécamp.



*Fresh seared scallops at Le 37, Rouen*



*Country-chic dining room, Le Grand Cerf, Lyons-la-Fôret*



*The perfectly cooked roast lamb at Le Bistrot de Panurge*



*Restaurant-Fish Market La Marée, Fécamp*



*Sausage & Onions on market day in Rouen*

## STAYING IN ROUEN

For our 4-day base for exploring Upper Normandy we chose a very charming and slightly hidden treasure of a B&B, **Le Clos Jouvenet**. This little 4-room gem is a quite sophisticated yet reasonably priced 19th century mansion located in a calm, architecturally interesting and well-to-do residential neighborhood, Quartier Jouvenet, on a hill above the hustle and bustle of the city. Yet we were within a 15-minute walk of its compact medieval core.

This very pretty home with its refined décor is surrounded by a walled, tree-filled garden, making it a haven of tranquility. From our large, handsome, well-appointed room we enjoyed a view of the cathedral spires and slept soundly in the comfortable queen bed dressed with fine linens. The house boasts a cozy upstairs library with computer for guests' use, a designer-chic, antique-filled living room with open fireplace and a charming winter garden where guests can relax in the evening and dine on a light repast of local cheeses, bread and Norman cider purchased at the high quality neighborhood *epicerie*, *charcuterie* and *boulangerie*.

The delicious, gourmet continental-plus breakfasts, elegantly presented on antique silver, china and crystal, can be taken in the formal dining room or in the conservatory facing the garden and are included in the room rate. The owners also provide sun loungers and tables in the well-manicured garden, complimentary W-Fi and off-street parking.

The **Clos Jouvenet** simply delivered with style all the creature comforts we needed for a truly perfect stay. Thanks to the genuinely warm welcome, attention to detail and excellent touring and dining advice from its gracious hostess, Madame De Witte, we began our Norman adventures on a most cossetting and relaxing note. We highly recommend this lovely *chambre d'hôte*, one of the very finest European B&Bs we have experienced!



*Our B&B, Le Clos Jouvenet, 42 rue Hyacinthe Langlois*



*The comfortable upstairs library*

*We highly recommend a Normandy holiday for all lovers of French art, history and literature. Ask Iberian Traveler to prepare a special, very unique, package for you to this captivating northwestern corner of France.*