

France: Normandy & Brittany

Tour-Only Itinerary

Journey into Northern France, along the scenic coastlines beloved by Impressionist painters and immortalized in the historic events of World War II. Follow seaside trails on a walking tour of Normandy's coast, marveling at the towering white cliffs of Étretat, and visit Omaha Beach where Allied forces changed the course of World War II. Cross a causeway to a small island and tour Mont St. Michel Abbey, an ancient Benedictine wonder. Throughout your tour, enjoy delicious French cuisine: Norman cheeses, fresh mussels, and savory crepes paired with a glass of wine. Relax at the end of each day in lodgings that include intimate family-run hotels and luxurious four-star accommodations. This Normandy to Brittany walking tour is sure to make memories that will last a lifetime.



Highlights

Marvel at the timeless artistry of the Bayeux Tapestry—a 230-foot medieval embroidery illustrating the story of the Norman conquest of England in 1066

Stay in the historic departure ports of French explorers Samuel de Champlain and Jacques Cartier

Explore the island monastery of Mont St. Michel, a UNESCO World Heritage site set in the postcard-perfect landscape of Northern France

Savor France's delectable cuisine in stunning coastal settings, trying fresh oysters, locally caught seafood, and creamy handmade cheeses paired with delightful local wines

Walk scenic coastal landscapes immortalized by French Impressionists and important D-Day beaches where World War II history was made

On all Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided – Full Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with an average of 3 to 5 miles per day. Walks are along grassy trails, atop cliffs overlooking the sea, and over sand dunes. The terrain is smooth with few rocks or roots to negotiate, although there could be mud in some places after rain. Please note that the mileage when visiting the D-Day beaches and American Cemetery is minimal as the main focus is hearing about the history of that event. The itinerary presents a mixture of lovely seaside and rural landscapes, as well as birdlife, and focuses on the landing beaches of World War II and their accompanying history, the Viking and Norse invasions of the 9th century, medieval architecture and history, and the traditional customs and food of both Normandy and Brittany.

DAY 1

Join your *France: Normandy & Brittany* tour

3-4 miles, easy to moderate

Your Country Walkers representative meets you at the Hotel Splendid Etoile at 8:00 a.m. in the lobby. The tour begins with a two-hour transfer to Normandy.

Depart Paris on an approximately two-hour drive to Normandy. Your time in this region of northern France begins at the Manoir d'Apreval, a family-owned estate surrounded by an abundant apple orchard with 17 varieties of apples, specializing in cider and Calvados liqueur. At harvest time, a restored press is used to make cider, which eventually also becomes Calvados after ageing in oak barrels.

After a tour of the estate and a buffet lunch, you leave the Manoir d'Apreval on foot, entering the Bois du Breuil, a nature reserve. A forest trail alternates with views down to the Seine Estuary on your left and country lanes bordered by Normandy's famous hedgerows. About one mile from Honfleur, you reach the Notre Dame de Grâce Chapel, a pilgrimage site for local fishermen adorned with message plaques from sailors and their families. You descend into Honfleur, broad views extending over the Seine River as it flows out to sea and the modern Normandy Bridge, linking Honfleur with the port of Le Havre. Many of these views were depicted by late 19th-century painters, such as Monet and Gustave Courbet.

Passing Honfleur's typical slate-shingled houses, you reach your enchanting hotel in the heart of town. Later, reconvene for dinner in your charming hotel's restaurant, where the food reflects the fertile countryside and nearby coast. Monks in Normandy began developing its famous cheeses as early as the 11th century, and dinners (as well as your picnic lunches this week) may conclude with a rich Pont l'Évêque, Livarot, or, the best known, Camembert.

Accommodation: Les Maisons de Léa, Honfleur

DAY 2

Cliffs of Étretat

4 miles, easy to moderate

Awaken in the comfort of your historic hotel, and enjoy a breakfast of fresh fruit and homemade baked goods and jams. You drive through the beautiful countryside of Pays de Caux, to the start of the day's walk along a trail that gently descends through an oak forest and into an open landscape of pasture and gorse along the dramatic coastline of "La Manche"—the English Channel. You soon have your first views of the towering cliffs and rock formations of Étretat, a favorite subject of the Impressionist painter Claude Monet.

You walk along the trail that takes you on the top of the cliffs and toward the famous Manneporte rock arch, the Porte d'Aval, and the Aiguille or "needle." The 19th-century French author Guy de Maupassant spent a good part of his childhood in the small fishing and resort town of Étretat.

Upon reaching your hotel, you have time to relax, perhaps even indulge in a spa treatment or *hammam* on site before dinner on your own in Honfleur. There are plenty of restaurants to choose from, ranging from gourmet meals to a local *crêperie*.

Accommodation : Les Maisons de Léa, Honfleur

DAY 3

Arromanches to Omaha Beach. Transfer to the Cotentin Peninsula

2.5 miles, easy

As the day's main focus is visiting the D-Day beaches and the American Military Cemetery, there is minimal walking. You first drive to a view over Arromanches, a resort town with a sandy beach but no natural harbor, which became one of the world's busiest ports in June 1944. It was here that Winston Churchill's idea of using prefabricated floating ports was implemented for the Battle of Normandy, until the existing ports could be liberated from the Germans. From the town of Arromanches, you walk along a short stretch of beach up to the cliffs on the west side of the town as your guide begins a discussion of the D-Day landings.

After lunch in a local restaurant, you walk along the sands of Omaha Beach to the American Military Cemetery, where 9,387 American soldiers are buried, each marked with a white cross or Star of David—the first American World War II cemetery on European soil. Your guide provides context about the

battle, explaining why the casualties along Omaha Beach were far worse than at other locations along the D-Day beaches, here where Allied soldiers ran inland toward the German positions on the nearby ridge.

After a moving visit to the American Military Cemetery, you transfer to the remote Cotentin Peninsula, which traces its name to the 4th-century Roman Emperor Constantius Chlorus. It is an enchanting area with unspoiled stretches of rocky coastline, sheltering tranquil bays, and quaint villages. You are warmly welcomed at your charming seaside hotel in the town of Barneville-Carteret, two coastal resort towns separated by a river estuary, with the British island of Jersey just off the coast.

Accommodation: Hôtel-Restaurant les Ormes, Barneville-Carteret

DAY 4

La Hague Coastal Trail

5 miles, easy to moderate

This morning, you wake to the sound of seabirds and the smell of the salty air. The hotel's harborside location permits a stroll on your own before breakfast. Today, a short drive brings you to La Hague (literally "high cape"), the Cotentin Peninsula's westernmost point. This area of Normandy is a picturesque place with granite cliffs, small coves, and green fields. Setting off on a bracing walk along a coastal trail lined with wildflowers, you are graced with views of the British isle of Alderney, the closest Channel Island to the French coast. The small harbor of Goury is near some of the strongest currents in Europe. Built in 1834, the Phare de Goury, Goury's lighthouse, signals the local current called the Raz Blanchard. After a picnic lunch of cured meats, cheeses, breads, and pastries, you continue walking to the Nez de Jobourg. This evening, you dine on your own in the charming port town of Barneville-Carteret.

Accommodation: Hôtel-Restaurant les Ormes, Barneville-Carteret

DAY 5

Coastal walk and guided visit of Mont St. Michel

3 miles, easy to moderate

Today the itinerary takes you from Normandy into Brittany, starting with a drive towards the Baie du Mont

St. Michel, known for its extreme tides. The drive provides a panoramic view of the bay and the pyramid-shaped island monastery of Mont St. Michel. Tombelaine Island, a protected sanctuary for nesting shell ducks, marine and brown seagulls, and white egrets, lies opposite the almost fantastical Mont St. Michel. After a short (one-hour) walk along the coast, you continue to one of the most impressive constructions of the Middle Ages—a quintessential image of northern France and a UNESCO World Heritage site. You cross the causeway to the small island just a half mile off the coast, where your guide leads you through the narrow back streets, winding your way to the top of the mount at the door of the Benedictine Abbey, dating from the 8th century. The majority of the buildings here were built, however, in the 11th century, with the church's main facade dating from the 12th century. You learn about the lives of medieval monks and village life, with a particular emphasis on the island's extraordinarily preserved architecture.

Afterward, you transfer to your home for the next two nights in Saint Malo, Brittany, the medieval fortified city that was once the home of French “corsair” privateers, as well as Jacques Cartier, considered the first European explorer of Canada. Today, it is a popular seaside resort, with a long sand beach and promenade leading to the granite city walls. Your oceanfront hotel is perfectly located to stroll along the promenade or to Saint Malo's old town. After checking in, you gather for dinner in your hotel's fine-dining restaurant.

Accommodation: Hotel Le Nouveau Monde, Saint Malo

DAY 6

Pointe du Grouin

5 miles, easy to moderate

Today's walk takes place on the westernmost tip of the Bay du Mont St. Michel along the Pointe du Grouin, a windswept headland with expansive views north to the Chausey Islands and west along the coast toward Saint Malo. Fifteen miles to the east, Mont St. Michel appears as a speck on the horizon. A German pillbox coastal fortification now serves as an ornithological observatory looking over a bird sanctuary island. The coastal path winds into a string of tiny coves, some with little ports tucked into them. Lunch is enjoyed in a restaurant in Port Mer.

Tonight, celebrate the week's adventures at a sumptuous farewell dinner.

Accommodation: Hotel Le Nouveau Monde, Saint Malo

DAY 7

Your *France: Normandy & Brittany* tour concludes (with a visit to the Bayeux Tapestry and transfer to Paris by 6:00 p.m.)

Departing Brittany for Paris, you stop en route in the charming town of Bayeux, a settlement since the 1st century BC, it has remained an important town in the Normandy region and was virtually untouched during the Battle of Normandy. Here, you visit the fabulous Bayeux Tapestry, which was probably commissioned in the 1070s and commemorated the 1066 Norman conquest of England. The tapestry shows, scene by scene, the story of William the Conqueror and Harold, Earl of Wessex, the men who led the Norman and Saxon armies in 1066. William's defeat of Harold at the Battle of Hastings ensured the success of the Norman invasion of England. Surprisingly, this priceless treasure is not a true tapestry, but rather a 230-foot-long embroidered cloth.

After lunch in town, you continue to the tour's conclusion in Paris.

What's Included

Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
All on-tour meals except 1 lunch and 2 dinners	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Emergency travel assistance hotline available 24/7	✓