France: Normandy & Brittany

Tour-Only Itinerary

As you step onto the causeway, the Benedictine monastery of Mont St. Michel rises like a pyramid from the sand flats ahead, its steeple piercing the midday sky. So continues the lineup of iconic sights this Normandy and Brittany walking tour along France's spectacular north coast. One day, you're wandering Étretat's seaside bluffs, taking in the spectacular rock arches straight out of a Monet painting. The next, your guide is bringing World War II history alive on the sands of Omaha Beach. Along the way, decadent picnics featuring local cheeses, pastries, and cider, as well as meals in out-of-the-way restaurants, showcase the breadth of Norman and Breton cuisine. A walk across tidal flats leads to hidden nesting grounds for egrets, ducks, and marine seagulls. Best of all: you're exploring with warm and welcoming locals who call this exceptional region home.



Highlights

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

Stay in the historical 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.



Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided 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.

Note: For September 19-26, 2021 tour, your Country Walkers representative meets you at Hotel Rochester at 8:00 a.m. in the lobby.

Depart Paris and begin an approximately two-hour drive to Normandy. Your first stop in this region of northern France is the Manoir d'Apreval, a family-owned estate surrounded by an abundant apple orchard with 17 varieties of apples. The estate specializes in making cider and Calvados liqueur. At harvest time, a restored press is used to make cider, which eventually becomes Calvados after aging 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 of the Seine Estuary 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, taking in broad views that extend over the Seine River as it flows out to sea and the modern Normandy Bridge, linking Honfleur with the port of Le Havre. Famous 19th-century painters, such as Claude Monet and Gustave Courbet, depicted many of these same views.

Passing Honfleur's slate-shingled houses, you reach your enchanting hotel in the heart of town. Reconvene for dinner in the restaurant of your charming hotel, where the food reflects the fertile countryside and nearby coast. Monks in Normandy began developing the area's 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 cheese, Camembert.

Accommodation: Les Maisons de Léa, Honfleur
Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner

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 with jam. You drive through the beautiful countryside of Pays de Caux, to the start of the day's walk. Your trail 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 returning to your hotel, you have time to relax, and 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
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 3

Arromanches to Omaha Beach. Transfer to the Cotentin Peninsula

2.5 miles, easy

Today's itinerary calls for minimal walking as the day's main focus is visiting the D-Day beaches and the American Military Cemetery. 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 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. The Star of David or a white cross marks each of the graves—this is 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, 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. Nearby, the British island of Jersey is just off the coast.

Accommodation: Hôtel-Restaurant les Ormes, Barneville-Carteret
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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 water 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, a rocky promontory. This evening, you dine on your own in the charming port town of Barneville-Carteret.

Accommodation: Hôtel-Restaurant les Ormes, Barneville-Carteret
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5

Coastal walk and guided visit of Mont St. Michel

3 miles, easy to moderate

Today's itinerary takes you from Normandy into Brittany, starting with a drive towards the Baie du Mont St. Michel, known for its extreme tides. The trip 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 the monastery—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, and the church's main facade dates from the 12th century. You learn about the lives of medieval monks and village life, with an emphasis on the island's extraordinarily well-preserved architecture.

Afterward, you transfer to your home for the next two nights in Saint Malo, Brittany, a 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 sandy 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
Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

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. You enjoy lunch at a restaurant in Port Mer.

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

Accommodation: Hotel Le Nouveau Monde, Saint Malo
Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7

Your *France: Normandy & Brittany* tour concludes (with a visit of the Bayeux Tapestry and transfer to Paris by 6:30 p.m.)

Departing Brittany for Paris, you stop en route in the charming town of Bayeux, a settlement since the 1st century BCE, which 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 depicts 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. Despite its name, 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

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	✓
Travel assistance available 24/7 provided by Allianz	✓