

The area of northern France known for battlefields and memorials also has pretty landscapes, unspoilt beaches and some of the country's best cuisine - all just a short hop from the UK, writes John Brunton

Somme

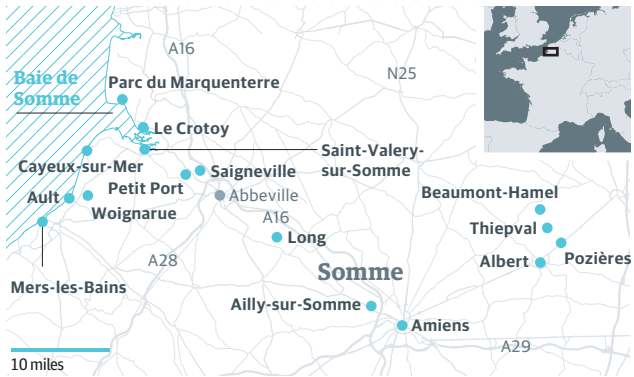
This bucolic region of north-east France is forever associated with memorials of the first world war, but it has a lot more to offer visitors, from unspoilt countryside to quaint coastal resorts that even few French people know about. The Somme is named for its river, with an immense estuary where it empties into the Channel. The Baie de Somme, as it is known, was where William the Conqueror gathered his army before setting off to fight the English at Hastings, and today these unique wetlands offer a host of ecological and wildlife holiday activities. Affordable accommodation ranges from camping and glamping to chic B&Bs and friendly family-run hotels. Eating out is also a revelation, with the freshest seafood, speciality charcuterie and cheeses straight from producers.

Baie de Somme and the coast

Bay of the Somme
The vast Somme estuary is an ever-changing landscape as the tides ebb and flow. A three-hour trek across the bay with a qualified guide (€15 adult, €7 child, promenade-en-baie.com) is a highlight of any trip. Locals head out alone foraging, shrimping and duck hunting, but the tides can be treacherous if you explore *tout seul*. Other options include high-tide canoe trips (adult €35, child €20, mabaiesomme.fr), horse rides across the sand (€45pp, henson.fr), or a more relaxing vintage steam train tour (€14.30/€10.70 return, cfb.eu) all the way around the bay from Saint-Valéry to Le Crotoy. The picturesque port of Saint-Valéry has grand seafront villas once rented out by luminaries including Victor Hugo, Edgar Degas and Alfred Sisley.

Parc du Marquenterre
To the north of the bay lie miles of sandy beaches and dunes, and the 200-hectare Marquenterre park, where some 300 species of migrating birds stop over or nest. Nature lovers can rent binoculars and set off on a 7km hike, taking in 12 hides with a guide at each to talk about the birds.
● [parcdumarquenterre.fr](#)

Coastal road trip
The wild coast road running south from the bay as far as Le Tréport passes some wonderfully kitsch seaside towns where little seems to have changed since the end of the 19th century.



Cayeux has a long pebble beach lined with brightly painted beach huts. The faded opulence of Ault's 19th-century villas is overshadowed by the natural beauty of its towering white cliffs, and seafront mansions at Mers-les-Bains have been wonderfully renovated.

Auberge de la Marine, Le Crotoy
The formal decor of the Marine belies the dazzling cuisine of Pascal Lefebvre. Splash out €44 for his six-course tasting menu made with products harvested around the bay: line-fished red mullet or John Dory; cockles and whelks; wild samphire and *oreilles de cochon* (purslane) from low-tide sand flats. Pork smoked over pine cones is served with beer-braised endives.
● +33 3 22 27 92 44, [aubergedelamarine.com](#)



Chés Troës Piots Coëchons, Woignarue
In a quiet village a few kilometres from the coast, the Three Little Pigs restaurant is a brilliant foodie discovery - though come with an appetite as portions can be huge. Presided over by genial chef Frank Galand, the menu ranges from succulent braised hock of ham to lamb roasted with thyme and limeflower honey or an incredible array of homemade charcuterie. The tavern doubles as the village shop and Woignarue's unofficial social centre. Unforgettable.
● Three-course lunch €17, mains €13-21, +33 3 22 60 54 84, [ches3piotscoechons.fr](#)

Le Saint Pierre, Ault
Emma and David, the young owners of this fabulously retro seaside restaurant, have left every detail of the 1960s and 70s decor intact, but surprise diners with a menu of fresh seasonal dishes at very affordable prices. Start with mackerel marinated in white wine and vinegar (€5.90), followed by a steaming bowl of mussels with crunchy *frites* (€8.90) or the fish of the day - plaice, sole, pollack - straight from the fishing boats of nearby Le Tréport (€12-14).
● +33 9 51 70 29 61, [brasserie-ault.com](#)

La Flibustière, Ault
The wonderfully eccentric, craft beer-loving Gerald Pailloux has converted the front room of his cosy seaside home into La Flibustière, a mariners' pub whose terrace overlooks Ault's dramatic white chalk cliffs. Don't miss a large glass of Page 24, an IPA brewed in the neighbouring Pas de Calais *département*. Telephone first (+33 3 60 26 91 22) to make sure Gerald has decided to open that day. He also has three B&B rooms with incredible sea views, from €70 a night.
● [flibustiere-nelson.blogspot.co.uk](#)

Hermann, Saint-Valéry
This cheese store to die for also has a gourmet choice of smoked hams, saucissons and patés, plus a lengthy wine list, with prices the same in the bar as to take away. This is the magic formula of Hermann Etard's *cave à manger*, where an abundant selection of cheese and charcuterie for two costs €15, with fine wines starting at €9 a bottle.
● [hermann-store.fr](#)

La Buvette de la plage, Saint-Valéry
An idyllic spot for a sunset aperitif, this casual bar sits right at the end of Saint-Valéry's promenade, with tables and deck chairs right on the sand, overlooking the bay.
● [On Facebook](#)

▲ Front row ... beach huts and colourful houses at Mers-les-Bains

Chambres d'Hôtes Deloison, Saint-Valéry
Sophie and Patrick Deloison run an Aladdin's cave of an antique shop and two lovingly decorated B&B rooms at the best rates in town. A more chic alternative, at correspondingly higher rates, is Au Vélocipède ([doubles €105 B&B](#), [auvelocipede.fr](#)) which also has a creative restaurant with local products.
● [Doubles from €52 B&B](#), [chambresdhotels.org](#)

Les Pilotes, Saint-Valéry
This old-fashioned guesthouse has been transformed into a designer hotel by Parisian Laurence Gauthier and offers breathtaking views over the Bay of the Somme. Friday night happy hour attracts a lively crowd of locals.
● [Doubles €98 room only](#), [lespilotes.fr](#)

Les Tournelles, Le Crotoy
Across the bay, the distinctive red towers of cliff-top Les Tournelles dominate the skyline of sleepy Le Crotoy, and this hip hotel offers a fine-dining restaurant, lounge bar and minimalist rooms.
● [Doubles from €80 room only](#), [lestournelles.com](#)

throughout the forest, around 5km from Blangy-sur-Bresle, just off the A28 motorway. The route follows a pretty track before descending to the village of Mierval then joining a tiny road back to the start.
Dave Leggett

Custom officers' path
You can join the Normandy coastal path (Sentier des Douaniers) at many points, but my favourite is the final part for its breathtaking views of Mont St-Michel, stretching out into the

Pourville-sur-Mer. Within another mile you'll find the cliff-top fisherman's hut he painted and, inland, the Manoir d'Ango at Varengeville and the graveyard where Braque is buried.
John Pelling

Forêt d'Eu
The Forêt d'Eu, near the Normandy-Picardy border, is the perfect place to get away from the crowds. A 5km walk, populated by deer and birds, begins at the Poteau Maître Jean, one of the many landmarks at crossroads

Etangs du Romelaère, near Saint-Omer
This peaceful wetland in Pas de Calais, used by migrating birds, offers great walking all year round. Footpaths and signage were updated last year, and now there's a 4.5km route that's easy for children, or a 10km walk. Watery reflections make great photographs.
● [reserves-naturelles.org](#)
tiriel

With Claude Monet to Pourville
Follow Monet by walking west from Dieppe on the clifftops two miles to

Winning tip
Alabaster coast, Normandy
The GR21 from Le Havre to Le Tréport takes in Normandy's classic coast, countryside, architecture and second world war sites. From Le Havre head to the beautiful port town of Fécamp, passing stunning white cliffs, vistas painted by Monet at Etretat and a wealth of history. The walk is clearly waymarked in red and white, but there are maps at the Le Havre tourist office.
● [seine-maritime-tourisme.com](#)
Savas Arici

Readers' tips
Walks in northern France
See the full list of tips on walks in northern France at [theguardian.com/travel](#)

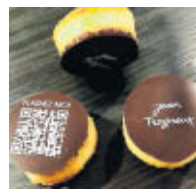
▼ Bargain hunt

Réderie is the local term for a village car boot sale or flea market - and there are always pre-loved bargains waiting to be discovered each weekend. Find listings on [somme.fr/rederies](#)



▼ Macron macarons

Jean Trogneux is a fifth-generation chocolatier with three outlets in Amiens. Famous for its marzipan macarons, it is owned by the family of Brigitte Macron, wife of France's president. [trogneux.fr](#)



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Amiens and the upper Somme valley

Amiens cathedral
The largest medieval cathedral in the world, Amiens's immense Unesco-listed Notre Dame is about twice the size of what locals call "the other one", in Paris. Gothic sculptures on the facade are magnificent and there's a free nightly sound and light show in summer.
● [Adult €6, free Sat and Sun afternoon](#), [cathedrale-amiens.fr](#)

The Hortillonages
Dating from Roman times, the floating gardens of Amiens stretch over 230 hectares of reclaimed marshland and a maze of waterways and lakes. They are the venue for an annual international exhibition - Art, Ville et Paysages, until 15 October - that blends avant-garde art and landscape gardens with extraordinary installations. Some parts are accessible on foot in the centre of town, around the Ile aux Fagots; the rest can be explored on electric boats.
● [Boat trip €5.90pp](#), [hortillonages-amiens.fr](#)

Biking and boating
The Somme river meanders in its verdant valley for 70km between Amiens and the coast. The recently resurfaced towpath crosses tiny lakes, locks and canals and makes a great cycling or walking route. The lock keeper's cottage at Ailly-sur-Somme was reopened as a tourist office this year, with bikes (some electric) and boats for hire.
● [amiens-ouest-tourisme.fr](#)

Battlefield memorials
Visiting the memorials, cemeteries and museums of the Somme is an intensely emotional experience, and can become overwhelming. To get a physical idea of trench warfare, begin with the view over the Newfoundland Memorial at Beaumont-Hamel, then head 10km south down the valley to the Somme Museum in Albert for a harrowing underground reconstruction of a soldier's daily life. The Thiepval Memorial to the Missing, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, is sombre and reflective, and its newly opened museum looks at the great battle unconventionally, with a giant black-and-white cartoon-style tableau that evokes the Bayeux Tapestry.
● [somme-battlefields.com](#)

Le Retroviseur, Amiens
This local institution is classic bistro, all red banquettes and sepia photos, but serves delicious modern *bistronomie*, such as seven-hour lamb shank or tarte tatin with thick cream. The lunchtime plat du jour is €10, a three-course meal €25. It also has cocktails, craft beer, DJ sets and live concerts.
● +33 3 22 91 92 70, [leretroviseur.fr](#)

La Coupole, Amiens
The original refreshment room of the splendid Cirque Jules Verne building,



designed by the writer himself in 1889, La Coupole is always buzzing at lunchtime, serving honest brasserie staples such as steak tartare and a *plat du jour* for €9.
● +33 3 22 45 50 10, [on Facebook](#)

Restaurant de la Basilique, Albert
It's difficult to find a better lunchtime deal close to the Somme memorials, with two courses for €16 - perhaps rillettes of fresh and smoked salmon or a huge plate of fresh crudités, then steak in maroilles cheese sauce.
● +33 03 22 75 04 71, [hoteldelabasilique.fr](#)

Baobar, Amiens
While the centre of Amiens is pretty quiet, there is an altogether different scene in the more alternative, canal-side Saint-Leu quarter, where dozens of bars are packed out most nights. The tropical punch at Baobar is lethal, and is accompanied by a booming reggae and African beat.
● [On Facebook](#)

Au Repos des Pêcheurs, Saigneville
Off the beaten track in the Somme valley's maze of lakes and waterways, this redbrick cottage has been a traditional *estaminet* tavern for over a century. It has a lovely garden overlooking the river, and inside feels like the owners' living room.
● [2 Petit Port, Saigneville](#)

La Chapelle, Saigneville
La Chapelle has been a local favourite since the day Corinne and Frank opened its doors. It looks like a fashionable Parisian wine bar, with not just organic and natural wines, but regional craft beer and cider, accompanied by seafood platters (€25), artisan charcuterie and an irresistible honey-roasted camembert (€8).
● [lachapelledesaigneville.com](#)

Le Prieuré, Amiens
An ancient mansion next to Amiens cathedral, this smart but affordable hotel is decorated with eye-catching designer furniture and funky artworks.
● [Doubles from €76 room-only](#), [hotel-prieure-amiens.com](#)

Butterworth Farm, Pozières
Amid the battlefield memorials, this comfy, purpose-built wooden farmhouse is named after a missing British soldier. There's a lovely garden and use of the kitchen.
● [Doubles €80 B&B](#), [butterworthfarm.com](#)

Ocean Villa, Auchonvillers
Avril Williams has transformed a farm into guesthouse, tearoom and eclectic museum. Rooms are basic, but guests can visit a genuine communications trench that runs under the house, restored by archaeologists. Artefacts found there are on display in the tearoom.
● [Doubles €90 B&B](#), [avrilwilliams.eu](#)

Le Presbytère, Saigneville
In a quiet village on the Somme river, Sophie and Antoine Leleux have transformed the parish priest's grand mansion into a cosy B&B. The brightly painted *roulottes* (Gypsy caravans) at the end of the garden are excellent for families with kids.
● [Doubles €70 B&B](#), [caravan €80](#), [aupresbytere.fr](#)

Car hire and accommodation provided by Somme Tourisme (somme-tourisme.com)

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See GuardianWitness for terms and conditions. The closing date for tips for next week's competition, on Colroado, is 10am on Wednesday 13 September



White walking ... the Alabaster coast

Atlantic as the sun sets and shadows stretch across the waves. This 20km section is easy, if windswept at times.
funinfinland

Seine walk from Les Andelys
For a four-hour walk that clears your head, opens up superb countryside and hurts your calf muscles, try the route from Les Andelys to Le Thuit. You feel as if you are heading for the mountains, on a narrow track flanked by rocks, with great views of the Seine valley. You come back along the river

bank, with grazing cows for company.
● [visorando.com](#)
kglover

Morsalines, Cotentin peninsula
From Morsalines, we walked south, with satisfyingly bleak views of the wide horizon, then scrunched over low ridges of shells to take a right-hand lane up to the hamlet of Beauvais, then down again to a little brook. Turning right again to bear north along the stream we headed back to Morsalines.
ProfMcTeach