Now firmly incorporated into the French mainstream, the seaboard province of **Normandy** has a history of prosperous and powerful independence. Colonized by Vikings from the ninth century onwards, it went on to conquer not only England but as far afield as Sicily and areas of the Near East. Later, as part of France, it was instrumental in the settlement of Canada. Normandy’s wealth has always depended on its ports: [**Rouen**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/seine-maritime/rouen/), on the Seine, is the nearest navigable point to Paris, while [**Dieppe**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/seine-maritime/dieppe/), [**Le Havre**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/seine-maritime/le-havre/) and [**Cherbourg**](file:///C:\destinations\europe\france\normandy\basse-normandie\cherbourg-2\) have important transatlantic trade. Inland, it is overwhelmingly agricultural – a fertile belt of tranquil pastureland, where the chief interest for many will be the groaning restaurant tables of regions such as the [**Pays d’Auge**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/inland-normandy/pays-dauge/). While parts of the coast are overdeveloped, due either to industry, as with the huge sprawl of Le Havre, or tourism – as along the “Norman Riviera”, around [**Trouville**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/basse-normandie/trouville-deauville/) and [**Deauville**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/basse-normandie/trouville-deauville/) – ancient harbours such as **[Honfleur](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/basse-normandie/honfleur/" \o "Honfleur)** and **[Barfleur](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/basse-normandie/cotentin-peninsula/" \o "The Cotentin Peninsula)** remain irresistible, and numerous seaside villages lack both crowds and affectations. The banks of the Seine, too, hold several delightful little communities. Normandy also boasts extraordinary Romanesque and Gothic architectural treasures, although only its much-restored capital, Rouen, retains a complete medieval centre. Elsewhere, the attractions are more often single buildings than entire towns. Most famous of all is the spectacular merveille on the island of [**Mont St-Michel**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/mont-st-michel/), but there are also the monasteries at **[Jumièges](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/seine-maritime/abbaye-de-jumieges/" \o "Abbaye de Jumièges)** and [**Caen**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/basse-normandie/caen/), the cathedrals of Bayeux and Coutances, and Richard the Lionheart’s castle above the Seine at [**Les Andelys**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/seine-maritime/chateau-gaillard/). [**Bayeux**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/basse-normandie/bayeux/)has its vivid and astonishing tapestry, while more recent creations include Monet’s garden at [**Giverny**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/seine-maritime/giverny/). Furthermore, Normandy’s vernacular architecture makes it well worth exploring inland – rural back roads are lined with splendid centuries-old half-timbered manor houses. It’s remarkable how much has survived – or, less surprisingly, been restored – since the[**D-Day**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/normandy/basse-normandie/d-day-beaches/) landings in 1944 and the subsequent Battle of Normandy, which has its own legacy in war museums, memorials and cemeteries.