



Calvados

Only a boat ride from our southern shores, Calvados, in the heart of Normandy, is a great place for relaxation, fine food and historic discovery – ideal for a short break

Above all, a trip to Calvados is about lingering lunches sitting by the sandy seaside, outside timbered houses or in lush fields. Lunches of fresh seafood or rich local cheese, best washed down with fiery apple brandy or heady cider.

For those with more on their minds than just their stomachs, Calvados has no shortage of absorbing sights. Every schoolchild knows Normandy for its military history. It was the launch pad for the last successful conquest of Britain, and the target of the largest seaborne invasion in history. Both have left their mark.

GETTING THERE

See our 'Ferry Crossings Report' (May 2007, p16) for information on boats to France. The Portsmouth-Ouistreham (Caen) ferry takes you right into Calvados, but the long crossing (3 hours 45 mins to 7 hours) means it may be quicker to catch a shorter ferry (eg Dover-Boulogne is 50 mins) and drive.

GETTING AROUND

If you're just interested in a seaside break or rural getaway, just plonk yourself down somewhere and enjoy the scenery. Even if you want to see more of the region, distances aren't huge and it's feasible to explore from a single base rather than touring.

Honfleur to Bayeux is only about an hour's drive (using the motorway) for example. But do be aware that driving on smaller roads can be time-consuming, so if you're planning on covering a lot of the sights in this factfile, you might be better off picking a few different bases.

GOOD PLACES TO STAY

Prices are for the cheapest double room in April 2008. Hotels have lifts or ground-floor rooms, unless otherwise noted. The dialling code for France from the UK is 0033.

Bayeux | Hotel d'Argouges

Tel 0231 928886

Decent central choice with an attractive garden. Our room at the top of the house was a bit cramped, but the public rooms have a degree of charm. There's good off-street parking. No lift, no ground-floor rooms. £70

Bretteville | Château des Riffets

Tel 0231 235321 www.chateau-des-riffets.com

Family mansion house in splendid isolation, with glasshouse swimming pool. We had a huge antique-crammed space all to ourselves. The only downside of the location is that there's nowhere to eat within walking distance. No lift, no ground-floor rooms. £75

Crèpon | Ferme de la Rançonnière

Tel 0231 222173 www.ranconniere.fr

Rambling, characterful farmhouse with elegant rooms – appealing features in ours included a beamed ceiling, hefty stone fireplace and luxurious historic-styled fabrics. There's an atmospheric restaurant too. £71

Deauville | Le Trophée

Tel 0231 884586 www.letrophee.com

Reasonably priced and very central, if not particularly inspiring. There's a nice garden terrace and outdoor pool. £83

Honfleur | Hotel des Loges

Tel 0231 893826 www.hoteldesloges.com

A fresh, modern design approach makes

for a restful stay right in the bustling centre of town. Clean lines and muted colours lend a relaxed air, while extras, such as free internet access, are an added bonus. Good value place to stay, though the breakfast isn't cheap. £86

Maisons de Léa

Tel 0231 144949 www.lesmaisonsdelea.com

Three 16th-century houses are joined to a salt warehouse to make up the Maisons de Léa, an appealing central Honfleur option. Take a look at its website to choose your favourite room from the four decorative schemes available, each bright and agreeable in its own way. No lift, no ground-floor rooms. £102

Maison de Lucie

Tel 0231 144040 www.lamaisondelucie.com

Stylish yet homely conversion of what was once a hospital. Your room might have a wood floor and beams, with stylish furnishings. There's a very pretty courtyard where you can sit and relax next to cypress trees while contemplating the modern sculptures. Not cheap, but fairly priced for what you get. Ground-floor rooms will be available in a forthcoming extension. £125

Orbec | Manoir de l'Engagiste

Tel 0231 325722

www.orbec-hotel-manoirengagiste.com

Orbec isn't necessarily the best location to base yourself, but if you're passing through, the Manoir de l'Engagiste is a great place to stop. It's a gorgeous half-timbered townhouse arranged around a central courtyard, superbly remodelled into a modern hotel. The living room is a soothing place to relax in front of the fireplace in inclement weather. £61

**For the full magazine report on Calvados,
see p46 of the March 2008 issue of Holiday Which?**

PLACES TO EAT AND DRINK

As ever in France, set menus can offer exceptional value, especially at lunchtime. Prices given are for evening menus. Phone numbers are for dialling within France.

Bayeux | Le Pommier

38-40 Rue des Cuisiniers, Tel 0231 215210
www.restaurantlepommier.com

Relaxed bistro just down from Bayeux's fine Gothic cathedral, with tables on the narrow pavement as well as in the modern interior. There are some bright flavours on the menu, such as a filo parcel of goat's cheese with vanilla and cider dressing with apple and bacon – perfect for a lunchtime pitstop. Set menus from €22.

Deauville | Le Spinnaker

52 Rue Mirabeau, Tel 0231 882440
tinyurl.com/32pkos

Never judge a restaurant by its interior decor. Le Spinnaker looks initially unpromising, but the accomplished cuisine far outstrips its modest surrounds. After a foie gras paté, we tucked into the fish of the day, which practically floated off its skeleton to join crisp bacon and a well-judged herb mashed potato. A fine experience is finished off as the pastry chef troops out of the kitchen to offer a selection of desserts. Set menus from €32.

Honfleur | La Tortue

36 Rue de l'Homme de Bois, Tel 0231 988791,
La Tortue (The Tortoise) is an unpretentious,

homely bistro along a cobbled street just up from the harbour. The set menus are brilliant value, with the likes of apple soup and Camembert served between courses, making for a meal of artery-terrifying proportions. Set menus from €18.

L'Absinthe

10 Quai de la Quarantaine, Tel 0231 893900
www.absinthe.fr

Smart dining overlooking the new rather than the old harbour. Service is black-suited and gracious, while once again the set menu although a bit pricier, is still great value. We feasted on a fish starter so tender you could spread it on your bread, followed by guinea fowl with seaweed and tomato sauce. Set menus from €33.

THINGS TO SEE AND DO

Waterside drinks and chic shopping

At Calvados' eastern end, the Côte Fleurie is home to its best seaside towns: picturesque Honfleur and chic Deauville.

There can be few finer spots in Normandy for an early evening aperitif than at Honfleur's Vieux Bassin. Honfleur would be the perfect seaside town, if it only had a beach. But you're compensated with quaint, wobbly back

streets and shops which are jammed with a good selection of local produce.

Where Honfleur is pretty, Deauville is handsome. Enjoy Deauville's upmarket ambience, strolling along the vast flat beach or peering into boutiques and galleries.

Gentle walks and historic châteaux

The Suisse Normande is home to spectacular scenery. Head for the Roche d'Oètre, a 118m sheer drop and the starting point for treks into neighbouring Orne.

Château de Vendeuvre is a country pile where there's plenty to fill up a half-day visit. Medieval Crèvecœur-en-Auge makes a neat contrast to Vendeuvre, a splendid reconstructed example of Normandy's signature half-timbered architecture.

Medieval riches in Bayeux and Caen

Those with an interest in 1066 and all that will find plenty to amuse them in Calvados, where William the Conqueror was born.

Bayeux is a pleasant town, having escaped the sad World War Two fate of so many in Normandy. It makes a good base for visiting the D-Day beaches, but of course its claim to fame is as the resting place for the Bayeux Tapestry (actually it's an embroidery), one of the world's great medieval treasures.

Caen, ravaged during World War Two, features two showpiece medieval abbeys. William's tomb is in the Abbaye aux Hommes while his queen, Mathilda, is buried in the Abbaye aux Dames.

A moving tour of World War Two sites

The first fateful chunk of Western Europe was wrested back from the Nazis in the Battle of Normandy, opening up the way to Paris and Germany. All over Calvados you'll find reminders of the price paid in human lives.

Standing on the Normandy beaches today, it is hard to conjure up the hellish scenes of June 1944. Only at Arromanches is there a physical reminder of the D-Day operation. Hulking chunks of the floating harbours which were towed over the Channel to help supply the battle, now lie rusting in the sand.

The museum at the Pegasus Memorial, where the first British soldier died in action, makes a good starting point for a tour of World War Two sites. Other recommended stops include the Batterie de Longues, Point du Hoc, the American Cemetery near Omaha Beach, the Commonwealth Cemetery near Bayeux, and the Caen Memorial museum.

Tasty treats from fertile farmland

The epicurean visitor will live well on the fruits of the lush landscape in restaurants all over Calvados. But there's nothing quite like assembling a picnic with ingredients bought straight from the producers, so head out into

the countryside and meet the farmers.

All over Calvados you'll see signs for tastings and cellar-door sales for the region's eponymous apple brandy, but you might like to follow the circular Route du Cidre (most Calvados producers also make excellent cider), which takes in the pretty village of Bevron-en-Auge. We can recommend a stop at Dupont outside Victot Pontfol.

The Route du Cidre is just one of a number of well-signed tourist driving routes (see www.calvados-tourisme.info for details and to order maps). For some interesting picnic components, follow the Route des Traditions. Finally, at Le Village Fromagier in Livarot, there's a free museum and tour of a cheesemaking factory.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Language English is generally spoken around the coast, but even a little French will come in handy if you venture inland into rural areas.

Time difference UK +1 hour

Dialling code 0033

Money matters £1 = €1.34

When to go Calvados isn't far from the UK, so expect a broadly similar climate to the south of England.

MAP, GUIDEBOOK AND WEBSITE



- **Michelin Normandy, £14.99 (ISBN 9782067119277)**
- **Six Armies in Normandy** by John Keegan, **£8.99 (ISBN 9781844137398)**
A superb account of the Battle of Normandy, from both strategic and personal viewpoints.
- **www.calvados-tourisme.com**



MAP Ann Thomson