

French fancies

Experience Normandy's delights



Whilst only a tunnel or ferry ride away, this region of France can be overlooked as you bustle on to more far-flung regions. As the home of Calvados, the Bayeux Tapestry and exceptional seafood, there's much to be explored.

Stroll about Deauville for the chance of bumping into Hollywood A-listers, this former fishing village is now an "in" place, especially during the eponymous film festival. Pop on your gladrags and find your own red carpet!

Mont-St-Michel is the world-famous Benedictine abbey and UNESCO World Heritage Site dating back to mediaeval times. Its ancient, cobbled streets and historic shops are charming, although at very high tide it becomes an island, so plan your visit carefully.

The D-Day landing beaches of Normandy are also unmissable, with museums that are personal to so many of us whose fathers fought for our freedom.

Honfleur, famous for Monet's nearby Giverny, is a charming fishing port where the Old Harbour is overlooked by narrow houses up to seven storeys high. Cabin cruisers provide splashes of colour for the artists at work at their easels. ■

FAST FACTS

Stay at Eurocamp's parcs for at least a night or two to get the most from this region. Visit eurocamp.co.uk/destinations/france/north/Normandy/overview

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Europe

EASY DOES IT

The Adriatic and beyond - Italy and Croatia. Jennie Carr slows down



From above: The Adriatic coastline features pretty towns by the sea, perfect for strolling and lunching; slow down with yoga in Hvar, Croatia

this region is regaining popularity as a holiday destination.

EXPERT KNOWLEDGE

With Venetian and Roman architecture very apparent, the towns of Pula and Poreč are best explored with a local expert. And that's where a guided tour with Travel Department comes into its own, providing the opportunity to soak up the history, without lists or hurting, rather with understanding and appreciation. The pace of these holidays is relaxed: one day touring, the next to do as you please. Enchanting slow travel again.

Further down the coast, the glorious walled city of Dubrovnik, known as the "Pearl of the Adriatic" offers a laid-back sophistication that's begun attracting the rich and famous.

I can understand why: its people are friendly, the setting is unrivalled, history oozes from its buildings yet there's a modern chic style in many first-rate bars and restaurants.

Dubrovnik celebrates its past whilst embracing and creating the present and future. I'd like to take those two busy ladies from Florence for a slow, relaxed cocktail there. ■



TAKING IT SLOW

Years ago, I saw two mature lady travellers, with a list, hurtling around Florence, ticking off churches and buildings as they saw them, as if on a quest for the Holy Grail. I wish they'd meandered, gently, got lost a little, people watched over an espresso and soaked up the essence of the city. To my mind, Italy rewards the slow. It means lazy afternoons with an Aperol spritz in Verona and savouring home-produced olive oil with bread in Ravenna.

Slow travel is on trend just now and the concept has been combined with cycling in that you take your time rather than pedal really slowly.

Jacqueline Hartmann of Italy Bike Tours wants her guests to be able to experience where they are and what they're doing, to stumble across a perfect photo setting, to feel, to breathe and to let the breeze as they're pedalling through.

And, yes, there may be hills on the Treasure on Two Wheels tour of Emilia-Romagna, so she suggests an e-bike to enjoy the journey. You'll reach the end of each day, giddy with exhilaration at having reached hilltop villages you might otherwise have missed.

Across the Adriatic in Croatia, you'll discover equally memorable moments. I found this to be a land of colour: bright in the towns, on the buildings and awnings, subtly muted in the countryside, sparkling by the sea. Lunching or strolling in Rovinj, café culture is an art form here, close to the water with idyllic-looking islands appearing behind the yachts, it's easy to understand exactly why

FAST FACTS

For leisurely pedalling in Italy, visit italybike.com/slow-cycling-holidays For tours in Croatia, visit traveldepartment.com/croatia-holidays-and-tours

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