

Nice nights in Normandy

History, art and cuisine make this one of France's most appealing regions. From island retreat to grand château, *Greg Ward* selects the best places to stay

Few parts of France are quite as attractive for a touring holiday as Normandy. There is fascinating history (this year is the 950th anniversary of the Norman conquest of Britain which began here), art (this summer marks the third Impressionist Festival with major exhibitions in five locations – see telegraph.co.uk/normandy), and wonderful food.

Rural Normandy is also excellent country for b&b – often run in charming manor houses, and in idyllic country and coastal locations. I've picked out 10 of my favourites below – a couple do dinner as well. My selection includes two from each of the region's five départements.

La Ferme des Isles

ISet on a river island that swirls with early-morning mists, barely an hour's drive north west of Paris, this idyllic retreat spreads through two huge barns. Five sumptuous guest rooms are kitted out with repurposed timbers and have ultra-modern bathrooms.

The hosts greet guests with aperitifs and snacks – brace yourself for snail vol-au-vents – before serving a three-course meal, with free-flowing wine, in a room large enough for kids to eat first before disappearing to play at the far end.

Breakfast, served outdoors in summer, comes with copious advice on local attractions such as Monet's home in Giverny. Animals are everywhere, from sheep and donkeys to geese and ducks.

La Mouchère, below, offers a peaceful haven

● Rooms €95-€160 (€75-€125), including breakfast, dinner €45 per person. 7 Chemin des Îles, 27490 Autheuil-Authouillet, Eure (0033 6 63 46 00 45; lafermedesisles.com)

Les Hautes Sources

2 Commanding a hillside expanse of meadows, orchards and vineyards, this 18th-century compound originally housed the farm of the neighbouring château.

One of the three thick-walled cottages grouped around the sunny, south-facing lawn holds three bright, airy b&b rooms, with high ceilings and fireplaces. Another is a self-contained suite large enough for a family of six, and there's a delightful wooden cabin perched on the slopes nearby, guests in which have their own bathroom in the main house.

Twenty minutes' drive from Giverny, and equipped with swimming pool and tennis court,



it's run by an exceptionally friendly young couple who serve breakfast but not dinner.

● Rooms €120-€160, cabin €150, including breakfast. 32 rue Roederer, Ménilles 27120 Eure (0033 6 72 84 91 89; les-hautes-sources.fr)

La Grande Maison

3 Five hundred years ago, already known as the "Big House", this elegant grey-stone town house dominated the harbourfront of Fécamp; customs officers would spot approaching ships from its turreted towers and hurry down to collect their dues. Now the last relic from that era, it stands a couple of streets inland, close to the mock-Gothic "palace" where Fécamp's famous Benedictine liqueur was first distilled.

Friendly owner Patricia Cordiez offers three spacious and very tasteful suites, sleeping from two to five guests, and serves lavish organic breakfasts downstairs, where a surreal touch is added by wood panelling salvaged from Lillie Langtry's yacht the White Lady.

● Rooms €160, including breakfast. 112 rue de Mer, 76400 Fécamp, Seine-Maritime (0033 2 35 28 52 44; lagrandemaison-fecamp.fr)

Les Buis de Boscherville

4 Created by a husband-and-wife team of architect and interior designer, the Buis de Boscherville is a purpose-built b&b nestled in the sleepy Seine valley, a handy 20-minute drive from historic Rouen – home to a new Joan of Arc museum and the cathedral immortalised by Monet.

Two of its five substantial rooms have private terraces, while the lovely Chinese-themed suite upstairs has a large outdoor deck. Guests are free to sit in the gardens, or cross the fields to reach the river itself, where lush footpaths follow the banks. With stables on site, you can even bring your own horse.

● Rooms €120-€150, including breakfast. 1169 Route de Duclair 76840 Hénouville, Seine-Maritime (0033 2 35 12 06 43; lesbuisdeboscherville.fr)

A l'école buissonnière

5 Drawing its name from the French phrase for playing truant, this 17th-century town house was indeed a girls' school at one point in its history.

Now, with much of its original brickwork and timber exposed to view, it's a delightfully ramshackle hideaway just a few steps from the quayside in the enchanting medieval



port of Honfleur. Accessed via ancient stairways, and in some cases offering private outdoor decks, the rooms mix quirky antiques with stylish contemporary sinks and baths.

Breakfasts are served in a downstairs café that's transformed each evening into an irresistible "bar à fromages", specialising in local wine and cheese.

● Rooms €100-€110, including breakfast. 4, rue de la Foulerie 14600 Honfleur, Calvados (0033 6 16 18 43 62; a-lecole-buissonniere.com)

La Vieille Abbaye

6 Children will love this fully functioning dairy farm, where the Anglo-French owners milk

