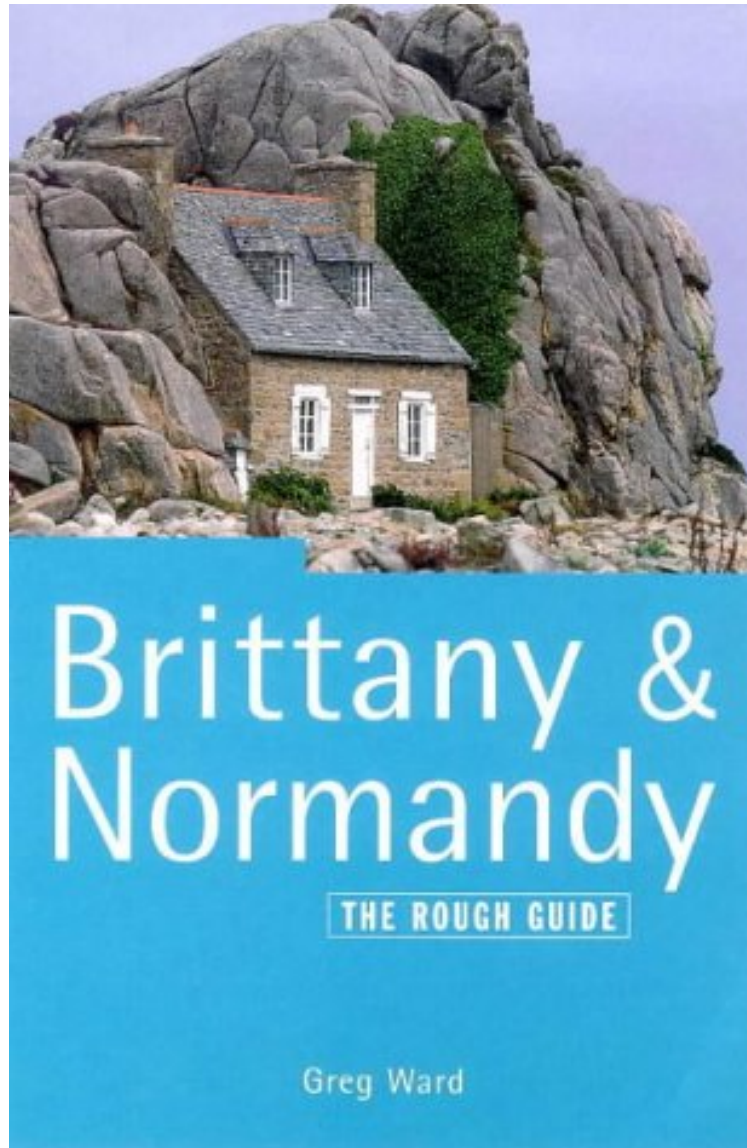


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Greg Ward

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Greg Ward : The Rough Guide to Brittany Normandy, 6th edition before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Rough Guide to Brittany Normandy, 6th edition:

Easily accessible from Paris, Brittany and Normandy remain among France's most enduringly fascinating regions. From early Celtic rites and King Arthur's tournaments to Monet's paintings at Giverny and the D-Day landings, these

shores resound with living history. Whether you're racing the tides of Mont-St-Michel or catching rays on the Norman Riviera, The Rough Guide gives you the inside track on an unforgettable trip.

About the Author Greg Ward has written and researched for Rough Guides for more than a decade. He is a co-author of The Rough Guide to the USA, and author of Rough Guides to Hawaii and the American Southwest. On the rare occasions when he's not bicycling through Brittany and Normandy or seeking the real story behind Roswell, New Mexico, Greg makes his home in London. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Normandy Normandy has a less harsh appearance and a more mainstream - and more prosperous - history than its neighbour. It too is a seaboard province, colonized by Norsemen from Scandinavia, and colonizing in turn; first of all, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, England, Sicily and parts of the Near East, and later on Canada. It has always had large-scale ports: Rouen, on the Seine, is as near as ships can get to Paris, while Dieppe, Cherbourg and Le Havre have important transatlantic trade. Inland, it is overwhelmingly agricultural - a wonderfully fertile belt of tranquil pastureland, where most visitors head straight for the restaurants of towns such as Vire and Conches. The pleasures of Normandy are perhaps less intense and unique than those of Brittany. Many of its better-known areas of seaside are a little overdeveloped. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the last of the Napoleons created a "Norman Riviera" around Trouville and Deauville, and a somewhat pretentious air still hangs about their elegant promenades. However, the ancient ports - Honfleur and Barfleur especially - are visual delights, and numerous seaside villages remain unspoilt by crowds or affectations. Even if you just plan to visit for a weekend break from England, delightful little towns are tucked away within 20km of each of the major Channel ports - the Cotentin peninsula around Cherbourg is one of the best, and least explored, areas - while the banks of the Seine, too, hold several idyllic resorts. Normandy also boasts extraordinary architectural treasures, although only the much-restored capital, Rouen, has preserved a complete medieval centre. 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, but there are also the monasteries at Jumiges and Caen; the cathedrals of Bayeux and Coutances; and Richard the Lionheart's castle above the Seine at Les Andelys. Bayeux can in addition offer its vivid and astonishing Tapestry. Many other great Norman buildings survived into this century, only to be destroyed during the Allied landings in 1944 and the subsequent Battle of Normandy, which has its own legacy in a series of war museums, memorials and cemeteries. These are hardly conventional sights, though as part of the fabric of the province they are moving and enlightening. Routes Individual highlights in each region are detailed in the chapter introductions throughout this book. Although hard-and-fast itineraries aren't given - much of the fun in both provinces is in rambling off on side roads - the text is structured as logically as possible in continuous routes or definable areas. Ways to get around are set out on p.24 onwards. If you read this before you decide how to travel, consider cycling; both provinces are ideal, with short distances between each town and the next. Otherwise, a car is probably the best alternative. Unless you plan to stay within a limited area, public transport can be frustrating. Climate and time of year Every French town or district eagerly promotes a "micro-climat", maintaining that some meteorological freak makes it milder or drier or balmier than its neighbours. On the whole, however, the bulk of Normandy and Brittany follows a fairly set pattern. A genuine summer, more reliable than in Britain, begins around mid-June and lasts, in a good year, through to mid-October. Spring and autumn are mild but sporadically wet. If you come for a week in April or November, it could be spoilt by rain; the rainy spells seldom last more than a couple of days, however, so a fortnight should yield better luck. Winter is not too severe, though in western Brittany especially it can be damp and very misty on the coast. Sea temperatures are not Mediterranean, and any greater warmth felt in the Channel waters off the Norman coast as opposed to the south of England is probably more psychological than real. The south coast of Brittany is a different matter - consistently warm through the summer months, with no need for you to brace yourself before going into the sea. The other factor that may affect planning is the tourist season. On the coast, this gets going properly around July, reaches a peak during the first two weeks of August and then fades quite swiftly - but try to avoid the great rentre at the end of the month, when the roads are jammed with cars returning to Paris. Inland, the season is less defined; highlights such as Monet's gardens at Giverny and parts of the Nantes-Brest canal can be crowded out in midsummer but, in August at any rate, some smaller hotels close to enable their owners to take their own holidays at the seaside. Conversely, those seaside resorts that have grown up without really being attached to a genuine town take on a distinctly ghostlike appearance during the winter months - and are often entirely without facilities.