



TO THE END OF THE EARTH – FINISTERE

OPPOSITE LAND'S END IN NORTHWEST FRANCE LIES FINISTERE (FROM FINIS TERRAE, LATIN FOR 'THE END OF THE EARTH'). IT'S AT THE VERY TIP OF BRITANNY AND ALL THE BROCHURES MAKE IT SOUND BEAUTIFUL. ROGER WHEELER VISITS...



We had heard mixed opinions about rural French *gîtes*, most of which seem designed for large family groups, so finding one for just the two of us was going to be difficult. The **Gîtes de France** website is huge but eventually we found **An Ti Bian**, a lovely little

cottage just for two about a kilometre from the nearest beach and the same from the little village of **Guissény**.

Booking for mid-July would seem to guarantee great weather. It didn't – but we weren't to know that in January. We got a great deal with **Speed Ferries**, Dover to Boulogne, **£55** return for us and the car. The drive down to Brittany through northwest France is long and in the main pretty boring, with fabulous roads that seem to go on forever. Don't forget the *péage* tolls that can add about **£50** to the cost.

We broke our journey in **Caen**, a really lovely medieval walled city in **southern Normandy**, staying in an **Ibis hotel**, which was cheap, clean, comfortable and excellent value at just **€70** per night.

We got to our *gîte* and it was exactly as we had hoped – located in the heart of the country, on a farm in fact. Madame welcomed us in French; she didn't speak English, *mais, pas de problem!* The Breton dialect is closer to the Cornish or Irish languages than French, so be careful of the road signs.

The cottage was virtually new, small but beautifully designed with everything you could want. Later research has told us that these country cottages, wherever they are, are not really that comfortable if the weather is lousy and in our situation it was.

The little villages of Brittany are pretty and the beaches are fine but you do need the sun. Finistère is directly opposite Cornwall and in many ways is the same. Facing directly onto the Atlantic, it can be grim. Still, we are British and



there is nothing you can do about the weather, so we decided to explore. The star was, without doubt, **Quimper**, a beautiful city and worth re-visiting for a real taste of Breton culture.

We found some fabulous restaurants and tried *cheval* – the meat that the French love but which is illegal in the UK. Really tasty, just like venison, we loved it.

Visiting **Brest**, the main French naval base, was disappointing. The Allies had bombed it to pieces during the war and the rebuilding in the 1950s and 1960s was not exactly award-winning. And they don't let the sailors off the base!

On one of the few reasonable days we set out to find the only gay beach in the region – **Plage des Blancs Sablons** – about a two-hour drive south from the cottage. The scenery along the coast was beautiful and we found the beach. It was deserted apart from a couple of guys tucked up in one of the bays. Showing our true grit, we climbed down and took our shirts off, then put them straight back on again. The beach itself is really nice, sandy and sheltered, but a long way from any shops so you have to take everything with you.

The further south you travel in Brittany the better the scenery and beaches, but being based in Finistère during a chilly July was not a lot of fun. We decided to come home a day early, stopping off in **Dinan**; just one word would describe this little town – charming.

Chatting with some French friends on our return, we learned the French aren't keen on Brittany themselves, preferring to head further south.

Given nicer weather the holiday would have been better. There was nothing wrong with the cottage, the local towns and beaches, but you could find exactly the same in Devon and Cornwall at the same price.

www.gite-de-france.com
www.brittanytourism.com

