



ROUEN



ROUEN CATHEDRAL

**Rouen**, the medieval capital of Normandy, is synonymous with museums, Gothic cathedrals, half-timbered houses, church spires and Joan of Arc. Just 40 miles from Dieppe, either by train or car it's a very easy trip. Rouen is France's fourth largest port and the **River Seine** runs through it on its way to Paris. This fabulous city makes it the closest French city to the south east of England. It was almost destroyed during WW2 but today has been painstakingly restored in its original medieval style. Due to its proximity to Dieppe we have visited Rouen many times over the years and always come away looking forward to the next visit. The centre of the city is quite small but, they say, it has 3,000 hotel beds, we stayed at the **Mercure Cathedral**, a very pleasant comfortable modern hotel right next to the cathedral. Mercure is a worldwide group of hotels which are usually reliable; this one was perfect for us, nice room, good breakfast but only one English TV channel – CNN which can get very boring after about 15 minutes.

# FRENCH LEAVE

## Roger Wheeler takes a weekend away in Normandy.

Just about the best weekend away that you can have, if you live in Sussex, is a few days in **Normandy**, just four hours away on the **Newhaven/Dieppe** ferry. Transmanche Ferries took over this, the oldest ferry route in the country, a few years ago and have put on a new boat – **The Seven Sisters**. Nothing particularly special as ferries go, but it's fine, quite comfortable with a reasonable cafeteria, but no restaurant. They designed the new ship to have a 'proper' restaurant but forgot to include a kitchen – unbelievable but true. The on board shop does a very decent range of goodies, wine can be a very reasonable £2.99 a bottle which you are at liberty to open during the trip, which makes the £9.90 charged at the bar seem a bit expensive.

**Dieppe** is one of the prettiest French fishing ports on the coast of Normandy, in fact in my opinion it's one of the nicest on the whole Channel coast. Totally French with loads of



DIEPPE

great restaurants, hotels, shops and bars, Dieppe has everything you could wish for. Being opposite Sussex the beach is the same as ours, but quite pleasant with none of the tourist tat that we seem to love in the UK.

You have to have a beer in the **Tribuneaux** the biggest and trendiest bar in town and eat at one of the dozens of restaurants that

through the harbour side. There are hotels to suit everyone, we stayed at the **Mercure**, on the sea front and very nice indeed, in fact Mike, my better half, said that it was his all time favourite hotel room, praise indeed. Just a few miles down the coast there is the fabulous **Parc du Bois des Moutiers**, this is,



PARC DU BOIS DES MOUTIERS

for me the most beautiful garden in the region. There are lots of chateau gardens and plant collections in the area; none of them comes close to the sublime, mature beauty of this classic landscape park.

The huge garden was designed by **Gertrude Jekyll** and the result is a wonderful garden and park with the added benefit that the 12 hectares are in a peaceful valley running down to the sea. Another benefit is the acid soil which allowed the planting of numerous rare species including Himalayan rhododendrons, Chinese Azaleas and more. The Normandy climate means that these have grown magnificently too and there are rhododendrons which are 10 meters high.

The house was designed by **Sir Edwin Lutyens** is built in the Arts & Crafts style for which he is famous. It is still a private house but the grounds are open to the public and worth a visit.

Rouen is a perfect place to wander round its cobbled streets, look in the many lovely shops, visit the site of **Jean d'Arc's** execution in 1431 which is commemorated in the **Place du Vieux Marche** by a very modern church. The cathedral is huge, the fine art museum is worth a look (it's free), and be sure to eat some very fattening but gorgeous cream cakes form some of the many lovely patisseries. The Place du Vieux Marche is where you will find all the smart restaurants but it is also the tourist mecca, so we like to find restaurants away from this area. We found **Pascaline**, one of the most enjoyable, friendly restaurants we have ever been to. Right in the heart of the old city, this place is a real find.

There are a few gay bars and clubs, one of the newest is **Le Coq**, original name (!) great little bar and a lovely proprietor. The **XXL bar** caters for a wide range of customers, its very friendly and has a good vibe. We recommend a weekend in Normandy at any time of the year.

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PLACE DU VIEUX MARCHÉ, ROUEN