

## **Fam Trip to Normandy**

*In November I joined a group of 10 school tour operators on a trip to Normandie with AW from the Normandie Tourist Board.*

*We met up at Portsmouth for our journey to France as foot passengers on Brittany Ferries.*

### **Day 1**

*A chilly and misty dawn arrival in Cherbourg where we met our French driver and minicoach and onto **Citie de la Mer**, for a guided tour and breakfast. Then it was onto the **Airborne Museum** at **Ste Mère Eglise**, the first village to be liberated by the Allies. A fun interactive museum.*

*Onto **Bayeux** and lunch in a local restaurant in the shadow of the Cathedral where we met Marion from the Bayeux Tourist Board who is a fount of all knowledge. They have a room upstairs available for groups for dinner at 18h30. Delicious Normandy cuisine. A short walking tour amongst the pretty cobbled streets of Bayeux took us to the **Bayeux Tapestry** where groups can all have an audio guide headset, in English, which gives a basic and at the same time comprehensive explanation of the events leading up to the Norman Conquest of England. For schools studying this period in History a visit to the castle in nearby Falaise was highly recommended to us.*

*We then travelled along the coast road to Juno Beach and had a guided tour of the **Juno Memorial Beach Centre**, home to the Canadian War effort. An excellent interactive museum with specific age related workshops, my favourite visit today.*

*We finished with a tour of the **Biscuiterie de Jeanette**, where the famous Madeleines are made before travelling onto the **Kyriad Hotel** in **Carentan**.*

*The hotel is family run and includes en-suite bedrooms, a restaurant, plus a meeting room and bar area. There is lots of room for coach parking and the location is very quiet. A delicious 3 course dinner was served, we sampled the same food that the school groups enjoy. Probably better suited to Secondary School pupils.*

***Day 2** dawned dark and early, and after a delicious breakfast with lots of choice we began the day experiencing the "Yellow Jacket" protests. Our route was blocked but one of the protesters escorted us on a diversion and we were soon on our way to **Mont St Michel** where we met a guide for a tour of the island including the abbey at the top, which involves a climb of approximately 600 steps. It was helpful to see and understand the travel arrangements for groups arriving by coach and pick up tips for the best times to visit. (Avoid July and August if at all possible.)*

*The afternoon was spent cheese /pate and cider tasting and a visit to a **Poterie Museum** The final visit today was to **La Musée de Poirée** where the pupils can actually pick, wash and make the juice in a very hands on environment with an excellent owner. (Available September / October)*

Tonight we stayed in **chalets on a farm** south of Caen and enjoyed a delicious dinner and a very welcome reception but the centre is not yet set up for English school groups, it was more geared up for weddings with excellent entertaining spaces. Also the coach driver said access for a big coach could be problematic. This highlights the importance of fam trips for us.

### **Day 3**

We departed after another delicious French breakfast for Caen, where we met Florence from the Caen Tourist Office who gave us a guided walking tour, which was interesting but again as there is so much to see and do in the area, it was a good summary but probably not of interest to our groups, that said Florence was fantastic in her enthusiasm and knowledge.

Our next visit was to the **Pegasus Memorial and Museum** where we were met by Mark (ex RAF) our guide for the visit. Amazing. I would have loved to spend more time here, and I think it is a perfect option for our groups. Short film, walk over the bridge and see a Horsa glider replica. Picnic area

We then went on to the **Caen Memorial Museum** which is a large modern building situated on the outskirts of the town. Following another delicious French lunch we enjoyed a guided tour. This museum starts from the end of WW1 and then focuses on the causes of WW2, the occupation and D Day landings and there is also a section on the Cold War and workshops for schools can be arranged.

Our final visit today was to **The Calvados Experience**, a Disney-esque production of a series of rooms with films and music explaining the production of Calvados followed by a tasting. (Apple juice for the children. An enjoyable visit at the end of the day, perfect for Primary Schools.) We drove back to Caen to the **Hotel Balladins** on the outskirts of the city (modern, clean and very comfortable with the **Poivre Rouge** restaurant next door, which is excellent for groups. Ample coach parking.

### **Day 4**

Our last day's plan for a workshop had to be cancelled on the recommendation of the Gendarmerie due to the fuel protests so instead via the smaller coastal roads we focused on the excellent beaches and memorials in the area, including visits to the **American Cemetery at Colville Sur Mer**, the **German batteries at Longues Sur Mer** and **Mulberry Harbour** and viewpoint at **Arromanches** (where there is also an excellent circular cinema which is popular with our groups for an overview of the DDay landings. This morning gave us all the chance to reflect on what we had seen and learnt over the past couple of days.

Our final lunch of steak frites et café gourmand at Juno beach was the perfect end to a very busy but enjoyable trip.

To summarise I would highly recommend a trip to Normandie and do remember the School Journey Association can tailor-make a journey according to the interests and budgets of your school, whether it is for a Year 6 pre or post Sats trip or a tour to enhance GCSE studies. The guides and educational suppliers are passionate about their subjects and their country. And don't forget the French cuisine!