



# MANCHE

## 3 PERFECT DAYS

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### ♥ DAY 1 // MOSEYING MONT ST-MICHEL

No French adventure would be complete without a visit to the celestial spires of Mont St-Michel (opposite). Avoid the crowds with a morning walk across the bay (p163), and aim for the abbey in late afternoon (opposite). If you're here in summer, stay for a night-time concert; otherwise, skip the local digs and base yourself in Pontorson (p298) or Granville (p298).

### ♥ DAY 2 // HIT THE CENTRE

Spend the morning in Granville (p163), enjoying the lower-town shops and the upper-town views. Head on to Villedieu-les-Poêles (p166), stopping for lunch at Manoir de l'Archerie (p166). Carry on to Coutances cathedral (p166) and continue north to Carteret (p168), where you can end the day with fine food and estuary views at La Marine (p168).

### ♥ DAY 3 // TACKLE THE TOP END

Head up to the Hague Peninsula (p175) and its blustery walking tracks, or admire wild and windy views at Nez de Jobourg and Goury. Bypass Cherbourg-Octeville and drive on to Barfleur (p171), Valognes (p168) and Ste-Mère-Église (p170), stopping wherever takes your fancy. If time allows, consider a boat trip to the Île Tatihou (p171) or a swampy trek in the Parc Naturel Régional des Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin (p161).

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# MONT ST-MICHEL

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The slender towers and sky-scraping turrets of the abbey of Mont St-Michel are one of the quintessential images of northern France. Rising from a sea of white sands, the abbey sits atop a small island ringed by ramparts and battlements, connected to the mainland by a causeway and surrounded by one of Europe's largest tidal bays. Over three million visitors make the Mont St-Michel pilgrimage every year, and despite the coach tours and hordes of bellowing schoolkids, it's still a must-see for any first-time visitor – you will usually miss the worst of the crush by coming in late afternoon or, better still, by avoiding the summer season altogether.

According to local legend, the abbey was founded in the 8th century when Aubert, the bishop of Avranches, was visited by the Archangel Michael in a dream (a gilded statue of Michael slaying a dragon sits on the top of the abbey, symbolising the triumph of good over evil). Following his revelation, the bishop built a chapel in 708, and in 966 the site was gifted to the Benedictines by Richard I, Duke of Normandy. The island later served as an ecclesiastical fortress during the 11th century; during the Hundred Years' War it was the only place in northern France not to fall to the English. In 1966 the abbey was symbolically returned to the Benedictines as part of its millennial celebrations, and it became a Unesco World Heritage Site in 1979.

## ORIENTATION

Mont St-Michel is linked to the mainland by a 2km causeway (soon to be a bridge – see the boxed text, p162). A gateway, the Porte de l'Avancée, leads to the Mont's main street, the Grande Rue, lined with restaurants, hotels and a string of tacky souvenir shops. There are car parks (€4 per day) at the foot of the Mont, two of which are covered by the rising tide – pay attention to the parking attendants unless you fancy your motor becoming a submarine. Nearby Beauvoir is a conglomeration of restaurants and hotels – the nearest proper town is Pontorson.

## ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

**TOURIST OFFICES** // **Mont St-Michel** (☎ 02 33 60 14 30; www.ot-montsaintmichel.com; 📞 9am-7pm Jul & Aug, 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm or 6.30pm Mar-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Nov-Feb) Just inside the Porte de l'Avancée. A tide-table (*horaire des marées*) is posted beside the door, and a detailed map costs €3.50. **Pontorson** (☎ 02 33 60 20 65; mont.st.michel.pontorson@wanadoo.fr; place de l'Église; 📞 9am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Sat, 10am-noon Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 3-6pm Sat Sep-Jun)

## EXPLORING MONT ST-MICHEL

### 👤 THE ABBEY // MAKE YOUR OWN HEAVENLY ASCENT

Just glimpsing the Mont from the shore is reason enough to visit, but once you're here you can't miss visiting the stunning **abbey** (☎ 02 33 89 80 00; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €8.50/5/free; 📞 9am-7pm May-Aug, 9.30am-6pm Sep-Apr) itself, reached by the twisting cobbles of the Grand Rue and a 350-step

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