



BACKGROUND

♥ HISTORY

Six thousand years of history wrapped up in one whistle-stop package. (opposite)

♥ THE BATTLE FOR NORMANDY

The fate of the free world was decided by the momentous events of 6 June 1944, henceforth known as D-Day. (p265)

♥ THE AGE OF IMPRESSIONISM

Some of the greatest artists of the 19th century set up shop along the Norman coastline. Follow in the footsteps of Monet, Boudin, Pissarro and co. (p270)

♥ BRETON CULTURE

For centuries Brittany was an independent nation, and it's still fiercely proud of its history, culture and heritage. (p274)

♥ FOOD & DRINK

Everything you need to know to eat like a local, from superstar cheeses to stellar seafood. (p279)

♥ FOOD & DRINK GLOSSARY

To get the most out of your gastronomic getaway, you'll need to brush up on your foodie vocabulary. (p284)

HISTORY

ARRIVAL OF THE ANCIENTS

Humans have been living along the Breton and Norman coastline for at least 100,000 years, but the first hard evidence of settlement emerges from around the end of the last ice age in around 10,000 BC. The melting of the great ice sheets raised the sea level by around 100m, flooding large areas of land and creating the region's distinctive coastline, including the deep coastal inlets known as *rias* or *abers*. As northern Europe warmed, Neolithic tribes slowly migrated north, clearing areas of forest for settlement and establishing rudimentary arable farms and cattle enclosures.

By around 5000 BC, Neolithic communities were well established across Brittany and Normandy. Around this time prehistoric settlers began to construct a series of dramatic stone monuments such as cairns (stone burial mounds), dolmens (burial chambers consisting of a capstone supported by menhirs), *cromlechs* (stone circles), menhirs (single standing stones), and the strange arrow-straight arrangements known as *alignements*. The exact purpose of many of these monuments is still a mystery, although the consensus is that they probably served a spiritual or religious function. Normandy has relatively few Stone Age sites, but the Breton landscape is littered with them, including the monumental Alignements de Carnac (p122). By the dawn of the Bronze Age (2500 BC), Normans and Bretons had also established trading links with several areas of Europe and the British Isles, especially in precious metals such as tin and copper.

CELTS, ROMANS & CHRISTIANS

Around 500 BC, Celtic settlers spread across northern Europe from their heartland in present-day Germany. They settled between the Seine and Loire rivers, christening their new homeland Armor, meaning 'the land by the sea'. There were five principal tribes, whose ancient territories roughly mirror Brittany's present *départements*: the Namneti (Loire-Atlantique), Veneti (Golfe du Morbihan), Rhedoni (Ille-et-Vilaine), Osismi (western Finistère) and Coriosolites (Côtes d'Armor). Other Celtic tribes settled in Normandy around Lisieux, Évreux, Carentan and Bayeux, while the powerful Velioasses founded their capital in Rouen.

The Celts were a skilled and cultured people, with a complex society governed by warrior kings, religious mystics (known as Druids) and an elaborate pantheon of

» 5000–2500 BC

Neolithic people begin construction of Brittany's major stone monuments, including the great burial cairn of Barnenez and the Alignements de Carnac.

» 500–56 BC

Celts settle widely throughout Brittany and Normandy. Many hill forts and fortified villages are built before the Celts' subjugation by the Romans, completed by 56 BC.

» 5TH CENTURY AD

A new wave of Celtic settlers arrive from Cornwall, Wales and Ireland. Missionaries begin the process of Christianisation and found small churches, abbeys and chapels.