

East Woodhay Twinning Association

How do we get to Normandy?

Usually we drive to Portsmouth and park our cars at the ferry port then cross on Friday afternoon of a Bank Holiday weekend, as foot passengers, to the port of Ouistreham near to Caen. The host families then meet us by car and drive to their homes, a journey of 25 minutes. The return trip would be either a 7 am ferry or the afternoon ferry on the Monday, depending on choices of families, and the crossing takes 6 hours which passes quite quickly because of good facilities on board. The cost for members is subsidised by the East Woodhay Twinning Association so is very affordable.

Where are the villages?

There are four villages – Anisy, Anguerny, Colomby-sur-Thaon, Villons-les-Buissons - which are only 15 minutes' drive Northwards from the city of Caen where most people in the locality work. Geographically, to the West of Caen are Ouistreham and the Cherbourg peninsula whilst Eastwards are Deauville and Le Havre.

The villages are in a farming area, mostly agricultural, and not far from the coast. A short drive takes you to Courseulles-sur-mer with beaches and fish market.

The City of Caen and its Castle

Caen was almost razed to the ground during bombing by the Americans in 1944. There is now a modern pedestrianised shopping centre but also some older buildings and part of the “old town” is intact. Two “Abbeyes” remain fairly unscathed whereas the Cathedral has been vastly but tastefully renovated. The Peace Museum has individual landscaped gardens as memorials to American, Canadian and British forces who were killed during the liberation of Caen.

The commercial centre of the city is attractively landscaped with wide-open areas and features the impressive town hall. Very many buildings are illuminated at night, which is extremely attractive during the evening.

Caen's castle, although partly ruined, has fairly intact ramparts to walk around giving great views of the city and into the far distance. There is a small museum and a grand hall.

The Calvados region

The “twinned villages” and Caen are situated in the Calvados region, well known for cider making. Tours and tastings can be arranged to cider farms in the area. Traditional architecture in the cider area is timber framed farms and barns for storing the barrels.

Along the coast are many fishing villages. Courseulles-sur-mer is not far away where a fish market is held daily on the quayside and fishing boats are anchored in the harbour. There is also a huge sandy beach, which is popular for kite flying.

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Places we have visited and a typical itinerary.

Once we arrive at the homes of our hosts the evening is free to get to know each other over a glass of wine.

The first day might be a free morning with a suggested local attraction during the afternoon.

A second day would be an all day coach outing to two locations.

A communal dinner for all hosts and visitors is held one evening which is a great opportunity to see everyone else who is taking part and of course drink more wine!

The final morning would be free to perhaps visit the hypermarket or just laze around indoors.

Here are some of the many interesting places we have visited:-

Bayeaux and its tapestry.

Arromanches – mulberry harbour & landing beach.

Fallaise castle – birthplace of William the Conqueror.

Chateau de Vendevre

Chateau de Pontecoulant

Deauville – coastal town and beach.

Basilica at Lisieux.

Boutemont Chateau and Castle.

Honfleur – harbour and old house

Rouen – city, ancient and modern.

Chateau de Balleroy with ballooning museum.

Moulin de Marcy – renovated working water mill.

Places the French have visited in Britain

The itinerary when the French families visit us is similar to that of when we go to France except that they usually cross the channel overnight (Friday) as foot passengers and then we arrange for a coach to meet them to bring them to Woolton Hill and East Woodhay. During the weekend a coach excursion is arranged and hosts have the choice of joining this or not. They are free to make whatever plans they wish, independently of the official schedule. Again, a communal evening meal is arranged in a local hall for which host families pay for themselves but East Woodhay Twinning Association pays for the visitors. Finally a coach drives them to Portsmouth for an afternoon ferry (Monday).

Here are some places the French have visited:-

London: Oxford: Hampton Court: Blenheim Palace: Stratford-on-Avon: Salisbury: Winchester: Portsmouth: Waddesdon Manor: Littlecote House: Whitchurch Silk Mill.