



Medieval Normandy

Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance

10–17 May 2025 (ML 705)

£3,620 • 8 days

Speaker: Dr Richard Plant

Architecture, together with medieval sculpture and stained glass.

Superb examples of Romanesque and Gothic.

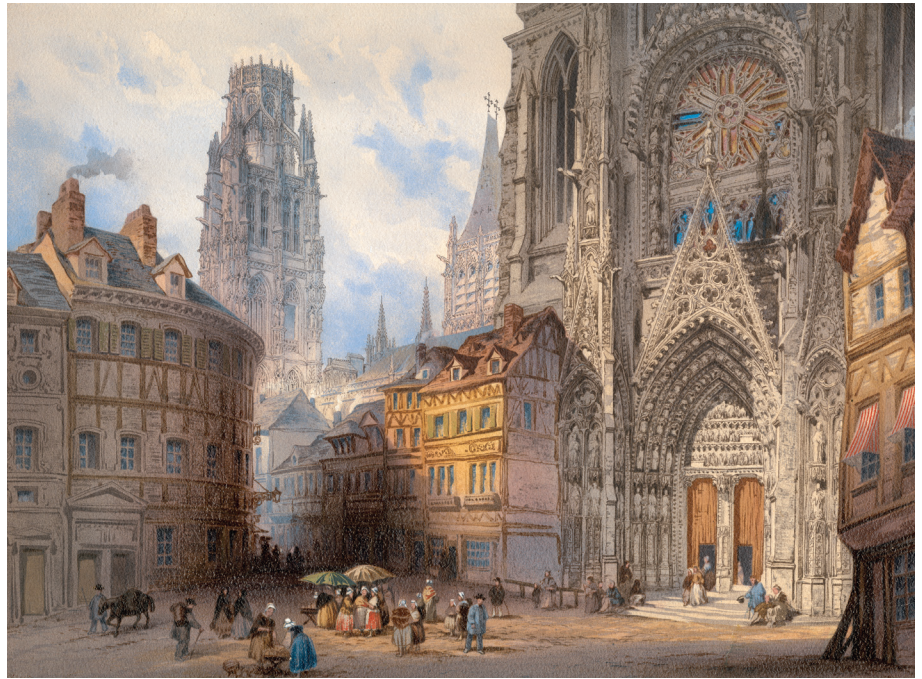
Leisurely drives through the beautiful landscapes of the Seine Valley.

Beginning in the middle of the ninth century, raiding parties from Scandinavia first pillaged, and then occupied, the coastal reaches of northern France. The effect on Carolingian France was catastrophic, and as its governmental systems collapsed, France disintegrated into a patchwork of small feudal domains.

Normandy was one of the most significant of these, and after the old Norse chieftain Rollo was granted the lordship of the lands north of the rivers Epte and Andelle, he took the title 'Duke' and set his embryonic duchy on a course of expansion. With feudalism came Christianity, the adoption of the French language and the emergence of one of the most far-reaching and influential schools of architecture to grace medieval Europe.

It is no exaggeration to see in the events of 1066 something central to a Norman, and English, sense of identity, events which are relayed in the Bayeux tapestry. But the most visible reminders of William's success at Hastings are the great Norman castles and churches which are such familiar landmarks of English towns. Their origins lie in the pioneering eleventh-century buildings of Jumièges, Rouen and Caen. This development of a mature Romanesque architecture places Normandy at the forefront of an initiative which was to have profound consequences for later medieval Europe – the development of the integrated and articulate church on a colossal scale – the effects of which are readily seen.

Normandy's Romanesque buildings have often been the subject of lavish praise, however. That distinctive late twelfth- and thirteenth-century architecture, of polished surfaces, detached shaftwork, giddy spires and sumptuous colour remains less widely appreciated. It is also the case that the buildings undertaken in the aftermath of the Hundred Years War have been overlooked by historians of the period. Yet these are characterised by an extraordinarily well-developed interest in



Rouen, oiligraph c. 1870.

the picturesque and the fantastical, by myriad angles, flickering tracery, and twisted slate-hung roofs. Taken individually they number among the most ravishing buildings of late medieval Europe.

Itinerary

Day 1: Mantes, Rouen. Travel by Eurostar at c. 10.30am from London St Pancras to Paris, and by coach to Mantes, home to the French royal collegiate church of Notre-Dame. Transfer by coach to Rouen where five nights are spent.

Day 2: Rouen. Unquestionably the greatest city of Normandy, and one which retains enough of its historic fabric to rank among the most architecturally enthralling cities of northern Europe. Visits include the wonderfully inventive cathedral, the Palais de Justice and the important late Gothic churches of St-Ouen and St-Maclou.

Day 3: Caudebec-en-Caux, Fécamp, Jumièges, Boscherville. Drive along the Seine to Caudebec-en-Caux to see the virtuosic parish church of Notre-Dame and on to the great ducal monastery of La Trinité at Fécamp. The afternoon is spent at the peerless ruined abbey of Jumièges, one of a handful of buildings

which might be said to mark the arrival of mature Romanesque architecture in Europe and finally, the altogether more intimate spaces of St-Martin-de-Boscherville.

Day 4: Conches-en-Ouche, Bernay. A morning excursion will take in Conches-en-Ouche, famed for its late medieval and early Renaissance stained glass and Bernay - the essential starting point for an understanding of Norman Romanesque. Some free time in Rouen later in the afternoon.

Day 5: Les Andelys, Écouis. From the ruins of the Château Gaillard, Richard I's mighty castle defending the approaches into Normandy, there are spectacular views of the Seine valley. Below is Grand Andely, centred around the church of Notre-Dame (13th and 15th century), while in Petit Andely is the 13th-century church of St-Sauveur. Return to Rouen via Écouis to see the stunning 14th-century sculpture that still embellishes the church.

Day 6: Caen, Audrieu. Caen, capital of Basse-Normandie, offers a feast of celebrated Romanesque buildings, the great abbey churches of St-Etienne and La Trinité both buildings of the first rank built c. 1065 to c. 1140. First of two nights at Château d'Audrieu.

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continued

Day 7: Bayeux, Coutances, Cerisy-la-Forêt. The Bayeux tapestry, subject of much scholarly attention and an object whose splendour and importance can scarcely be overstated, is one of those rare 'marvels' which exceeds expectations. Bayeux cathedral is an exceptional building whose piecemeal 13th-century rebuilding programme had the effect of producing an essentially Gothicised Romanesque interior. Afternoon visits to the cathedral at Coutances – a superb example of Norman 13th-century Gothic – and the stunning Romanesque abbey church at Cerisy-la-Forêt.

Day 8: Evreux. Evreux's diocesan museum has been beautifully refurbished and now houses both the exquisite 13th-century shrine of St-Taurin and the English alabaster retable of St George from La Celle. We will follow this with visits to Evreux's variously Romanesque and Gothic cathedral along with the gloriously ramshackle monastic church of St Taurin. Continue to Paris and return by Eurostar to London St Pancras arriving at c. 8.30pm.

Practicalities

Price. Two sharing: £3,620 or £3,440 without Eurostar. **Single occupancy:** £4,370 or £4,190 without Eurostar.

Included: return rail travel by Eurostar (Standard Premier) from London St Pancras to Paris; coach travel in France; accommodation as described below; breakfasts and 5 dinners with wine or beer, soft drinks, water and coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Mercure Rouen Centre Cathédrale (accorhotels.com): modern, functional 4-star hotel in the historic centre. **Château d'Audrieu** (chateaudaudrieu.com): 18th-century château in the Normandy countryside, converted into a 5-star hotel. *Single occupancy rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? The tour involves a lot of walking, some on roughly paved streets, and a fair amount of standing around. You need to be able to carry your luggage on and off the train and within the stations. On some days there is a lot of coach travel.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.