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Where is your favorite place to escape in the Hill Country?

"I love exploring the wineries. For a small price, you can taste and then linger on the property. Lately, I'm a fan of Pedernales Cellars and Lewis Wines."

EDITORIAL

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"I discovered Krause Springs in Spicewood while researching for this issue and loved it. The property is absolutely breathtaking."

"Enchanted Rock! It's only an hour away, but it seems like Middle-earth."

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"I live in Boerne in the Hill Country, so being home is truly my retreat."

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H-E-B

ART Octoberfest

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Sacrifice and Scenery

Commemorating the 70th anniversary of D-Day is reason enough to visit Normandy, France. Stay a little longer to eat, drink and take in the idyllic views

BY BECCA HENSLEY



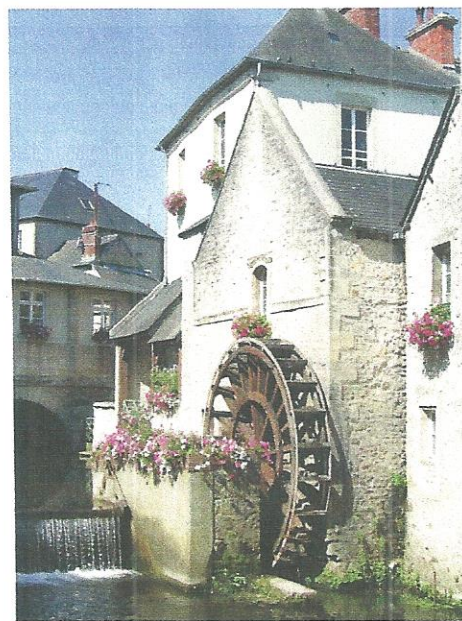
None other than Claude Monet raved about the light in Normandy. Take in the landscape's unique gold-spun illumination, and it's not hard to see why. The rolling pastures of this provincial region of northern France, an easy jaunt from Paris, glow. There's no point in attempting to capture the luminosity with a camera—a photo couldn't compare to the real deal.

Monet holed up for two years in the city of Rouen, the historic capital of Normandy. He lived across from the cathedral and painted some 20 renditions of the church at various times of day and in multiple seasons. Drive along undulating rural roads and it becomes clear that Monet had much from which to draw inspiration, beyond the region's light and architecture. There are subjects aplenty, many of them unchanged from the artist's time. Cows graze in emerald meadows that link villages composed of thatched-roofed, half-timbered houses. Nostalgic farms churn butter, collect fresh cream and produce sumptuous cheese products—such as gooey Camembert, named for the village where it is made via

centuries-old artisan traditions. Apple orchards abound, growing in rows thick and abundant.

Closer to the coastline, jagged cliffs rise above La Manche, the French name for the English Channel, which forms the region's marine boundary. The shoreline aptly recalls Normandy's bellicose history. Here, in ancient times, Vikings plundered, Joan of Arc led armies and William the Conqueror set off for the Battle of Hastings. This year, though, Normandy is top of mind around the world because it was the site of the greatest amphibious landing in military history—D-Day on June 6, 1944, and the decisive 77-day battle it sparked.

Commemorating the 70th anniversary of this world-altering event throughout 2014, the region pays its respects with a series of organized activities—from exhibitions to festivals to symposiums—in various locations along the 50 miles of coastline. While thronged in the summer, the D-Day beaches, their museums and monuments are less crowded during autumn's cooler months. Plan to spend at least a half-day visiting the D-Day shore, which includes Utah,



Sword, Gold, Juno and Omaha beaches. The ponderous Pointe du Hoc bomb craters, the contemporary Les Braves Omaha Beach memorial, and the poignant Normandy American

CYCLIST: CYCLOWINDO; WATERWHEEL: CLIFFS: SHUTTERSTOCK; MONET: CLAUDE MONET FOUNDATION

Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer speak to bravery and sacrifice—and are a must see for anyone visiting the region.

While military history and homage bring most American travelers to Normandy, the region offers a wealth of other experiences. One of the few areas in France not known for its vineyards, Normandy makes up for its paucity of grapes with its affection for apples. Ranging in taste from bitter to sweet, the apples grown in Normandy boast fairytale names, like gentle bishop and yellow knight, which fittingly herald just how magical they taste once baked into mouth-

watering Norman-style pastries and tarts. Monet's one-time home of Rouen is also known for a coveted apple sugar—a sweet tooth's treat like no other. Savory dishes, too, with apples, get high marks. Sup on moules à la normande, a classic dish of mussels cooked with apples and cream, for example.

Thirsty adults may yearn for their apples crunched in a more spirited way. Normandy's celebrated hard cider, a lightly fizzed, fermented, amber concoction served in a corked bottle, tastes of earth and festiveness. Locals pour the beverage into the glass from high above their heads, a dramatic way to unleash the nose and meld the complex flavors. Want something stronger? Tipple the region's revered calvados, a tart, twice-distilled apple brandy. Within minutes you'll be converted by the Norman claim that

cider and calvados easily replace wine on any table, complementing the region's cream sauces, rich cheeses, and fresh seafood (especially oysters, scallops, and mussels) with the citrus zing of a sauvignon blanc. Find out for yourself with an excursion down the Cider Route, a sign-posted tourist circuit that begins to the east of Caen. Winding through the countryside and encompassing hamlets like Beaufour-Druval, the tour takes imbibers to some 20 cider producers and distillers.

A fascinating way to see the region is to pedal



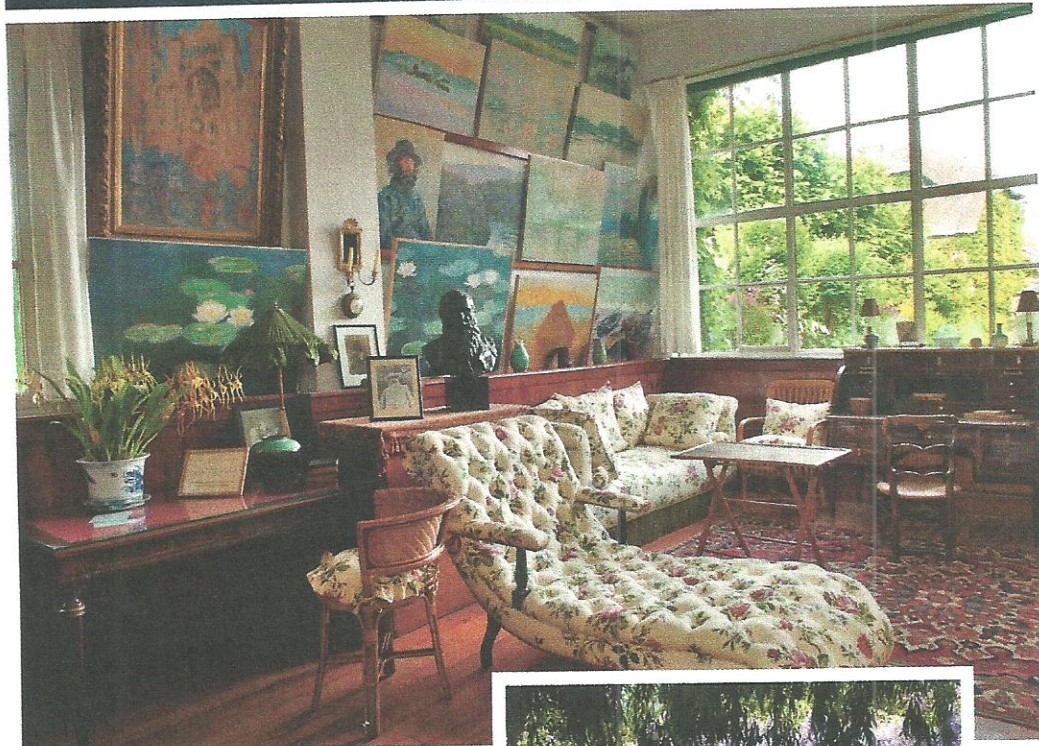
Normandy was the site of historic battles, but its landscape offers idyllic views for sightseeing. Take a multi-day bike tour or wander the towns by foot. Either way, leave time for a visit to the house and gardens of artist Claude Monet in Giverny (below).

WHEN YOU GO

STAY While a day trip to Normandy from Paris is possible, consider staying and exploring. **Le Lion d'Or** offers a dose of Norman chic in the village of Bayeux, just six miles from the D-Day beaches. en.liondor-bayeux.fr

EAT In Honfleur, where the Seine River greets the English Channel, lunch al fresco at **Bistro des Artistes**, a chef-owned outdoor cafe on the harbor. logis-saint-leonard.com

DO Book a self-guided but supported bike tour with **Cyclomundo**. cyclomundo.com/p_normandy_dday.html. Visit the **Foundation Claude Monet** in Giverny, where you can see the artist's preserved home and gardens. fondation-monet.com



it. A number of marked bicycle trails link the villages, cities and sites, and the slower pace allows for more meditative sightseeing. Flat landscape, uncrowded paths, countless farmers' markets and idyllic picnic spots ensure a ramble at your own pace, while your suitcases are delivered ahead to each night's lodging by local outfitters/tour guides, such as Cyclomundo. Their five- or six-day tours take you to D-Day sites, but also include stops in noteworthy Norman cities like Bayeux, miraculously unscathed by the war, and home to the 230-foot, medieval Bayeux Tapestry, which depicts the Norman invasion.

Any visit to Normandy should include a stop at Mont Saint-Michel, an island abbey that lords over the coast. Centuries old, it exudes a gravitas awash in dark and light. It's an ideal spot to ponder the sometimes-violent history and the many life-affirming virtues of this unique region of France. ★

