

# C256-CO Beaches of D-Day landing



To better understand this long day, engraved in history forever, you are going to retrace the steps, on the very land where the battles were fought, of the men who risked and gave their lives for the world. The long sandy beaches and rocky cliffs hid numerous traps : the Atlantic Wall batteries, marshes to be flooded, and the Norman Bocage – meadows and farmlands crisscrossed by hedges and trees, a tangled maze of small paths that slowed down the advancement of the allied troops. This is a hike of remembrance, but also of pleasure, as you will pass through seaside resorts and charming fishing ports that lie along this coast. Caught between history and holidays, this will be a journey you will never forget!

## Itinerary

**Day 1** - Arrival in CAEN, the chief town of the Basse Normandie, a city of art. On both sides of the castle built by William the Conqueror (1060) you will find the famous Abbaye aux Hommes and Abbaye aux Femmes. The city was severely damaged during the Second World War, most specifically during the Battle of Caen, which lasted two months. We strongly recommend visiting the Caen Memorial, a museum that recalls the major events of the Second World War. *Lodging and breakfast in a 4-star hotel*

**Day 2** - MERVILLE - OUISTREHAM (17 km – 4 and a half hour walk). Transfer by taxi to the Battery Museum in Merville. On the east side of the Orne River's mouth stretches an area of low grounds and marshes that were flooded by the Germans in 1944. This is the exact place where the soldiers of General Gale's 6th Airborne Division were dropped during the night between the 5th and 6th of June. Their mission was to protect this area, as well as that of Sword Beach, from the German counter-attack, to destroy Merville's Battery and to take, no damage being done, the Orne Bridge. You will discover Merville's Battery and the marshland and the rough grounds on which the parachutists and gliders landed. You will walk along the Orne River, crossing over the new Pegasus Bridge. You will have a drink at the famous Café Gondrée, the first house in France to be set free and become a headquarters. You will then continue on to Ouistreham, where you will visit the German positions and their impressive blockhouses - *Lodging and breakfast in a 4-star hotel*

**Day 3** - OUISTREHAM – COURSEULLES SUR MER (16.5 km – 4 and a half hour walk). Sword Beach stretches out theoretically from Langrunes to Ouistreham. Understanding the risks of the defences in Ouistreham and the reefs located in front of Luc-sur-Mer and Lion-sur-Mer, the Landing took place in front of Hermanville and Colleville. You will walk along the coast of this vast, fine-sand beach and will soon reach Colleville Beach and the Breche d'Hermanville where the British troops landed. You will continue your stroll through the seaside resorts of Lion and Luc-sur-Mer and will arrive at Juno Beach, where the Canadian troops landed, having been helped by the British in Saint Aubin. The sailing conditions and the rising tide forced the troops to postpone the landing as they faced the loss of numerous soldiers.



But they finally accomplished their goal. Bernieres and Courseulles hold numerous vestiges and memorial monuments - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*



**Day 4 - COURSEULLES – ARROMANCHES** (15 km). Leaving Courseulles, you will walk along the Graye dunes where such statesmen as Churchill and De Gaulle arrived in support of the troops. Next you will step into the Gold Beach Sector, attributed to the 30th British Corp, settled between cliffs to the west and marshes at the east. Between Ver-sur-Mer and Asnelles, 25 000 soldiers landed. They faced strong resistance in Asnelles, but finally took position on the cliffs and liberated Bayeux. Arromanches and Vierville were chosen as the construction sites of two artificial harbors which were to be used to provision the troops. The Vierville harbor was destroyed by a storm only a couple of days after its completion - *Lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*

**Day 5 - ARROMANCHES – PORT EN BESSIN** (14 km – 3.45 hour walk). You will climb up to the top of the cliffs on the east side of Arromanches to discover the vestiges of the Winston harbor. This artificial harbor made it possible for the Allied Nations' soldiers to land 2.5 million soldiers, 500 000 vehicles and 4 million tons of equipment in about a hundred days. These cliffs stand about 60 meters high and offer a stunning view of the sea. This is where the Germans built a battery (Longues sur Mer battery) composed of four 150 mm cannons that have been very well preserved. You will continue along the cliffs to discover other defences that were part of the Atlantic Wall and will finally reach Port-en-Bessin, the looming Vauban Tower and a few remains of the German defences. Port-en-Bessin indicates the end of the British sector – *Lodging and breakfast in a 4-star hotel nearby a golf course*

**Day 6 - COLLEVILLE SUR MER – POINTE DU HOC** (17 km – 4.30 hour walk). You are now in the American sector. Omaha Beach was hell on earth. The soldiers had to land on a 6500 meter-long beach wedged between two cliffs and strongly defended by the German soldiers. The day was terrible and the Americans had to face the loss of 3000 dead soldiers, and just as many wounded or lost in the sea. All this to win nothing but a fragile bridge-head. Your day will start with an escort by taxi for a visit of the American cemetery of Colleville. Quiet, calm and grandeur fill this place of memory and self-communion. You will walk down to Omaha Beach and stroll its length, now a vast, sandy area with a few remnants of blockhouses and defences. In Vierville, you will leave the seaside to sink into the Norman Bocage, a network of hedges, narrow paths and little streams which trapped the landed troops and made it all the more difficult for them to access the land. You will reach La Pointe du Hoc. This 30-meter cliff was strongly fortified by the Germans and presented a terrible threat for the soldiers of the Allied Nations. The area was taken under siege by the Rangers who landed at the bottom of the cliff, but only after much personal sacrifice. A taxi will collect you and take you to Sainte Marie du Mont for the night - *Lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel – Dinner not included but restaurant in the hotel.*

**Day 7 - UTAH BEACH – SAINTE MERE L'EGLISE** (18.5 km – 6 hour walk). *Transfer by taxi to the Utah beach in the morning.* You will next discover the second American sector, Utah Beach. This long beach, lined with dunes, stretches out over many kilometers and hides marshy areas once flooded by the Germans. The zone was defended by five batteries and small forts all along the coast. The landing took place, but at two kilometres south of the spot that had been previously chosen. The troops were saved from much difficulty. The taxi will bring you to the Utah Beach Museum and you will walk along the beach up to Les Cruttiers. Taking a little elevated path, you will cross a marshy area to reach the villages of Foucarville, Saint Germain de Vareville, and Beuzeville au Plain, set free in the first hours of June 6, 1944. You will end the walk at Sainte Mère Church, an area where 13 000 soldiers were dropped to try to stop the German counter-attack – *Return to the the hotel at Sainte Marie du Mont in late afternoon. Lodging and breakfast in a the same hotel*



**Day 8 – SAINTE MARIE DU MONT-** End of tour. Transfer by taxi from Sainte Marie to the Carentan train station.

## Season

From April to middle of October but be careful this area is very crowded in June and we recommend (if you can) to come outside this period. Nevertheless this area attracts a lot of tourists and you have to reserve earlier to get the best rooms.

## What's included?

- 7 nights' accommodations in 3 and 4-star hotels with breakfasts
- 1 gourmet dinner
- Luggage transfer between accommodations along the trail.
- Taxi transfers as written in the description of the itinerary
- A set of maps (1/25 000 scale) or topoguide (with translation) with the route marked on and detailed route notes describing the trail.
- A daily itinerary together with information about facilities and places of interest along the trail.
- Emergency assistance.

*Visa fees - transportation fees to and from the walk area - Insurance (strongly recommended on all trips) - Transfers except those mentioned above – Drinks – Entrance fees – Additional meals - Spending of personal nature e.g. laundry, souvenirs, phone calls, are not included*

## Getting there and away

*By rail:* Many express or direct trains between Paris and Caen. On return, trains from Carentan to Caen, connection to Paris

*By road:* Caen is easily accessible by the French motorways from Paris, Rennes or North of France

*Where to park:* Several pay guarded car parks in Caen

## Walk difficulty

Grade 2 - walks of 4 to 6 hours a day. Some stages could be more 20 km (13/15 miles) and rolling uplands, ascents mainly gradual than steep of up to 500 m. Reasonable level of fitness required



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through seaside resorts and charming fishing ports that lie along this coast. Caught between history and holidays, this will be a journey you will never forget!

June 6, 1944.

Terrible day.

Hell for more than 100 000 soldiers,  
but an offering of hope for freedom  
for the rest of the world.

To better understand this long day, engraved in history forever, you are going to retrace the steps, on the very land where the battles were fought, of the men who risked and gave their lives for the world. The long sandy beaches and rocky cliffs hid numerous traps : the Atlantic Wall batteries, marshes to be flooded, and the Norman Bocage – meadows and farmlands crisscrossed by hedges and trees, a tangled maze of small paths that slowed down the advancement of the allied troops. This is a hike of remembrance, but also of pleasure, as you will pass



## Itinerary

**Day 1** - Arrival in CAEN, the chief town of the Basse Normandie, a city of art. On both sides of the castle built by William the Conqueror (1060) you will find the famous Abbaye aux Hommes and Abbaye aux Femmes. The city was severely damaged during the Second World War, most specifically during the Battle of Caen, which lasted two months. We strongly recommend visiting the Caen Memorial, a museum that recalls the major events of the Second World War. *Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

**Day 2** - MERVILLE - OUISTREHAM (17 km – 4 and a half hour walk). Escort by taxi to the Battery Museum in Merville. On the east side of the Orne River's mouth stretches an area of low grounds and marshes that were flooded by the Germans in 1944. This is the exact place where the soldiers of General Gale's 6th Airborne Division were dropped during the night between the 5th and 6th of June. Their mission was to protect this area, as well as that of Sword Beach, from the German counter-attack, to destroy Merville's Battery and to take, no damage being done, the Orne Bridge. You will discover Merville's Battery and the marshland and the rough grounds on which the parachutists and gliders landed. You will walk along the Orne River, crossing over the new Pegasus Bridge. You will have a drink at the famous Café Gondrée, the first house in France to be set free and become a headquarters. You will then continue on to Ouistreham, where you will visit the German positions and their impressive blockhouses - *Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

**Day 3** - OUISTREHAM – COURSEULLES SUR MER (16.5 km – 4 and a half hour walk). Sword Beach stretches out theoretically from Langrunes to Ouistreham. Understanding the risks of the defences in Ouistreham and the reefs located in front of Luc-sur-Mer and Lion-sur-Mer, the Landing took place in front of Hermanville and Colleville. You will walk along the coast of this vast, fine-sand beach and will soon reach Colleville Beach and the Breche d'Hermanville where the British troops landed. You will continue your stroll through the seaside resorts of Lion and Luc-sur-Mer and will arrive at Juno Beach, where the Canadian troops landed, having been helped by the British in Saint Aubin. The sailing conditions and the rising tide forced the troops to postpone the landing as they faced the loss of numerous soldiers. But they finally accomplished their goal. Bernieres and Courseulles hold numerous vestiges and memorial monuments - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*





**Day 4 - COURSEULLES – ARROMANCHES (15 km).** Leaving Courseulles, you will walk along the Graye dunes where such statesmen as Churchill and De Gaulle arrived in support of the troops. Next you will step into the Gold Beach Sector, attributed to the 30th British Corp, settled between cliffs to the west and marshes at the east. Between Ver-sur-Mer and Asnelles, 25 000 soldiers landed. They faced strong resistance in Asnelles, but finally took position on the cliffs and liberated Bayeux. Arromanches and Vierville were chosen as the construction sites of two artificial harbors which were to be used to provision the troops. The Vierville harbor was destroyed by a storm only a couple of days after its completion - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel*

**Day 5 - ARROMANCHES – PORT EN BESSIN (14 km – 3.45 hour walk).** You will climb up to the top of the cliffs on the east side of Arromanches to discover the vestiges of the Winston harbor. This artificial harbor made it possible for the Allied Nations' soldiers to land 2.5 million soldiers, 500 000 vehicles and 4 million tons of equipment in about a hundred days. These cliffs stand about 60 meters high and offer a stunning view of the sea. This is where the Germans built a battery (Longues sur Mer battery) composed of four 150 mm cannons that have been very well preserved. You will continue along the cliffs to discover other defences that were part of the Atlantic Wall and will finally reach Port-en-Bessin, the looming Vauban Tower and a few remains of the German defences. Port-en-Bessin indicates the end of the British sector – *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel nearby the port*

**Day 6 - COLLEVILLE SUR MER – POINTE DU HOC (17 km – 4.30 hour walk).** You are now in the American sector. Omaha Beach was hell on earth. The soldiers had to land on a 6500 meter-long beach wedged between two cliffs and strongly defended by the German soldiers. The day was terrible and the Americans had to face the loss of 3000 dead soldiers, and just as many wounded or lost in the sea. All this to win nothing but a fragile bridgehead. Your day will start with an escort by taxi for a visit of the American cemetery of Colleville. Quiet, calm and grandeur fill this place of memory and self-communion. You will walk down to Omaha Beach and stroll its length, now a vast, sandy area with a few remnants of blockhouses and defences. In Vierville, you will leave the seaside to sink into the Norman Bocage, a network of hedges, narrow paths and little streams which trapped the landed troops and made it all the more difficult for them to access the land. You will reach La Pointe du Hoc. This 30-meter cliff was strongly fortified by the Germans and presented a terrible threat for the soldiers of the Allied Nations. The area was taken under siege by the Rangers who landed at the bottom of the cliff, but only after much personal sacrifice. A taxi will collect you and bring you to Sainte Mere l'Eglise for the night - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel in Sainte Mere l'Eglise*

**Day 7 - UTAH BEACH – SAINTE MERE L'EGLISE (18.5 km – 6 hour walk).** A taxi will collect you and bring you to the Utah Beach museum. You will next discover the second American sector, Utah Beach. This long beach, lined with dunes, stretches out over many kilometers and hides marshy areas once flooded by the Germans. The zone was defended by five batteries and small forts all along the coast. The landing took place, but at two kilometers south of the spot that had been previously chosen. The troops were saved from much difficulty. The taxi will bring you to the Utah Beach Museum and you will walk along the beach up to Les Cruttiers. Taking a little elevated path, you will cross a marshy area to reach the villages of Foucarville, Saint Germain de Vareville, and Beuzeville au Plain, set free in the first hours of June 6, 1944. You will end the walk at Sainte Mère Church, an area where 13 000 soldiers were dropped to try to stop the German counter-attack - *Lodging and breakfast in the same hotel*



**Day 8 - SAINTE MERE L'EGLISE.** End of tour. Escort by taxi from Sainte Mere l'Eglise to the Carentan train station.

## Season

From middle of April to middle of October but be careful this area is very crowded in summer time and we recommend you (if you can) to come outside this period. Nevertheless this area attracts a lot of tourists and you have to reserve earlier to get the best rooms.

## What's included?

- 7 nights' accommodation in selected 2-star hotels
- 7 breakfasts – 4 dinners
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