

Far Northern France



France's northernmost bits have more to engage the visitor than many realise. True, a tan is easier to come by along the Mediterranean, but when it comes to culture, cuisine, shopping and dramatic views of land and sea – not to mention good old-fashioned friendliness – the Ch'tis (residents of the far north) and their region compete with the best France has to offer. In 2008 the film *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* (see the boxed text, p51), which debunks grim stereotypes about the far north with high jinks and hilarity, swept France, becoming the biggest box office hit in the history of French cinema and creating a miniboom in domestic tourism.

Lille is an ideal place to sample Flemish architecture, cuisine and beer. More regional flavour is on offer in Arras, whose Flemish-style squares are unique in France. Amiens, not far from the battlefields of the Somme and a number of moving WWI memorials, boasts a magnificent Gothic cathedral. If you snag a promotional fare on the Eurostar, the region is a superb, reasonably priced weekend getaway from London – with a much smaller carbon footprint than flying.

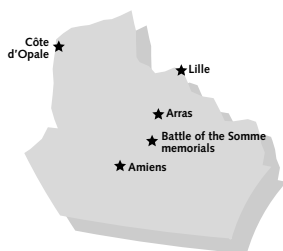
The most picturesque of the trans-Channel ports is Boulogne-sur-Mer. Dunkirk (Dunkerque), on the other hand, is so uncomely – much of the city was rebuilt after WWII – that you actually feel sorry for the locals, though there are still a few attractions. Although Calais has worthwhile museums and restaurants, not to mention *The Burghers* (see the boxed text, p236), most see it only through the window of an accelerating train, boat or car.

The sublime and spectacular Côte d'Opale stretches southward from Calais along the English Channel (La Manche). Inland, you'll find WWII sites and St-Omer, known for its basilica. Further south, the Somme estuary affords watery pleasures to humans and birds alike.

Just outside Greater Paris, Compiègne serves up the glories of Napoléon III's Second Empire; Beauvais is known for its huge, unfinished cathedral; and romantic Laon offers panoramic views from its hilltop old town.

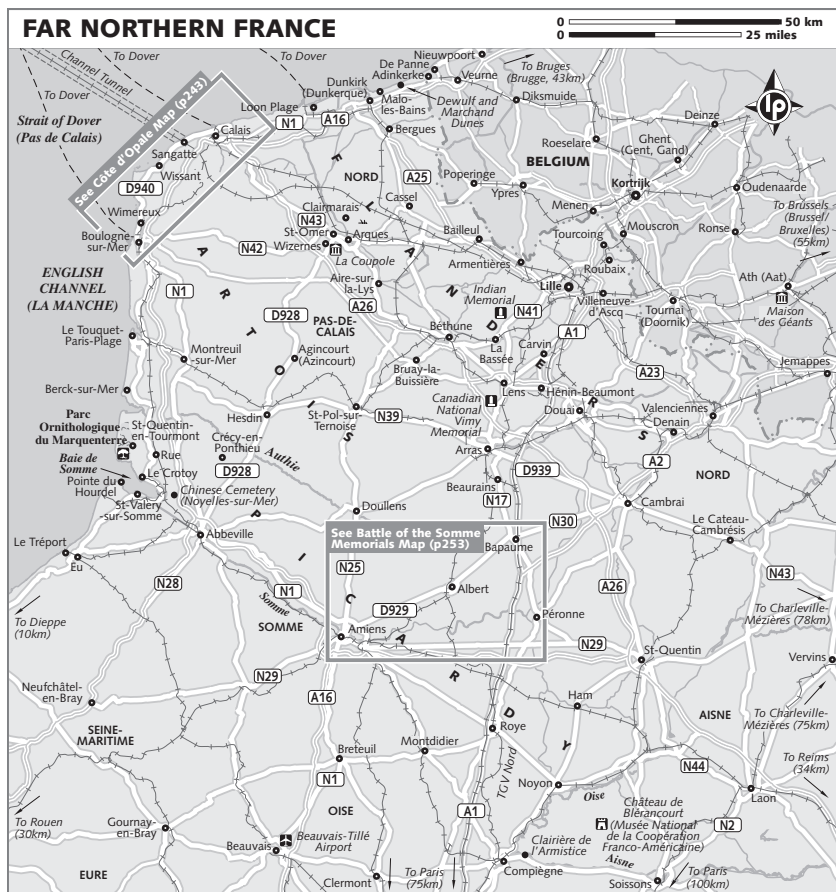
HIGHLIGHTS

- Ramble along the spectacular, windswept **Côte d'Opale** (p243), facing the white cliffs of Dover
- Visit Lille's superb **museums** (p229) and sample its **restaurants** (p232) and **nightlife** (p233 and p233)
- Contemplate Amiens' breathtaking **Gothic cathedral** (p256) both inside and out
- Stroll around – and under – the Flemish-style centre of **Arras** (p249)
- Ponder the sacrifices and horror of WWI at the evocative **Battle of the Somme memorials** (p252)



■ POPULATION: 5.9 MILLION

■ AREA: 31,813 SQ KM



History & Geography

In the Middle Ages, the *département* of Nord (the sliver of France along the Belgian border; www.cdt-nord.fr), together with much of Belgium and part of the Netherlands, belonged to a feudal principality known as Flanders (Flandre or Flandres in French, Vlaanderen in Flemish), which has absolutely nothing to do with Homer Simpson's annoying next-door neighbour Ned and everything to do with John McCrae's famous WWI poem *In Flanders Fields*. Today, many people in the area still speak Flemish – essentially Dutch with some variances in pronunciation and vocabulary – and are very proud of their *flamand* culture and cuisine. Along with the *département* of Pas-de-

Calais (www.pas-de-calais.com), the Nord forms the *région* of Nord-Pas de Calais (www.tourisme-nordpasdecalais.fr).

The area south of the Somme estuary and Albert, towards Paris, forms the *région* of Picardy (Picardie; www.cr-picardie.fr), historically centred on the Somme *département* (www.somme-tourisme.com). The area north-east of Amiens saw some of the bloodiest fighting of WWI. The popular British WWI love song 'Roses of Picardy' (www.firstworldwar.com/audio/rosesofpicardy.htm) was penned here in 1916 by Frederick E Weatherley.

Getting There & Away

Far northern France is a hop, skip and a jump from England. On the **Eurostar** (www.eurostar)

THE GIANTS

In far northern France and nearby Belgium, *géants* (giants) – wickerwork body masks up to 8.5m tall animated by someone (or several someones) inside – emerge for local carnivals and on feast days to dance and add to the general merriment. Each has a name and a personality, usually based on the Bible, legends or local history. Giants are born, baptised, grow up, marry and have children (though never really die), creating, over the years, complicated family relationships. They serve as important symbols of town, neighbourhood and village identity. For snapshots check out http://utan.lille.free.fr/geants_1.htm.

Medieval in origin and found in places as far afield as Catalonia, the Austrian Tyrol, Mexico, Brazil, India and the UK (www.giants.org.uk), giants have been a tradition in northern France since the 16th century. More than 300 of the creatures, also known as *reuze* (in Flemish) and *gayants* (in Picard), now 'live' in French towns, including Arras, Boulogne, Calais, Cassel, Douai, Dunkirk and Lille. Local associations cater to their every need, while transnational groups such as the International Circle of Friends of the Giant Puppets (www.ciag.org) promote the creatures worldwide. In 2005 France and Belgium's giants were recognised by Unesco as 'masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity'.

Giants make appearances year-round but your best chance to see them is at pre-Lenten carnivals, during Easter and at festivals held from May to September, often on weekends. Dates and places – as well as the latest marriage and birth announcements – appear in the free, annual, French-language brochure *Le Calendrier des Géants*, available at tourist offices; and online at www.geants-carnaval.org, in French (click on 'Agenda, actualités').

.com) – pricey unless you snag a promotional fare (London–Lille from UK£55 return) – Lille is now just 80 minutes from London. Eurotunnel (www.eurotunnel.com) can get you and your car from Folkestone to Calais, via the Channel Tunnel, in a mere 35 minutes. For those with sturdy sea legs, car ferries – some quite reasonably priced – link Dover with Calais, Boulogne-sur-Mer and Dunkirk (see p968). From Beauvais–Tillé airport (p260), Ryanair has flights to Dublin, Shannon and Glasgow; and Blue Islands (www.blueislands.com) can get you to the Channel Islands.

On the Continent, superfast Eurostars and TGVs link Lille with Brussels (35 minutes) and TGVs make travel from Lille to Paris' Gare du Nord (one hour) a breeze. Compiègne and Beauvais are close enough to Paris to be visited as day trips.

LILLE

pop 224,900 (1 million in metro area)

Lille (Rijsel in Flemish) may be France's most underrated major city. In recent decades this once-grimy industrial metropolis, its economy based on declining technologies, has transformed itself – with generous government help – into a glittering and self-confident cultural and commercial hub. Highlights for the visitor include an

attractive old town with a strong Flemish accent, three renowned art museums, stylish shopping, some fine-dining options and a cutting-edge, student-driven nightlife scene. The Lillois have a well-deserved reputation for friendliness – and are so proud of being friendly they often mention it!

History

Lille owes its name – once spelled L'Isle – to the fact that it was founded, back in the 11th century, on an island in the River Deûle. In 1667 the city was captured by French forces led personally by Louis XIV, who promptly set about fortifying his prize (see p230). Long the centre of France's textile industry, the miserable conditions in which its 'labouring classes' lived were exposed by Victor Hugo in the 1850s.

Lille's textile industry has declined but the city has shown renewed vigour and self-confidence since the TGV came to town in 1993, followed a year later by the Eurostar from London.

Orientation

Place du Général de Gaulle (also called the Grand' Place) separates Lille's main shopping precinct (around pedestrianised rue Neuve), to the south, from the narrow streets of Vieux

Lille (Old Lille), to the north. The Wazemmes neighbourhood is about 1.7km southwest of Place du Général de Gaulle.

Lille's two main train stations, old-fashioned Gare Lille-Flandres and ultramodern Gare Lille-Europe, are 400m apart on the eastern edge of the city centre.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Le Furet du Nord (☎ 03 20 78 43 43; 15 place du Général de Gaulle; **M** Rihour; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) One of the largest bookshops in Europe. The 4th floor has plenty of English-language books.

INTERNET ACCESS

4 Players (☎ 03 20 07 43 18; 9 rue Maertens; **M** République Beaux Arts; per 10min/hr prepaid €0.50/3; ☎ 11am-10.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-11.30pm Sat, 2-10pm Sun) Yes, it's pronounced 'foreplayers'.

Atlanteam (☎ 03 20 10 05 15; 93 rue Solférino; per hr €3.60; ☎ 10.30am-midnight Mon-Sat, to 7am on Fri & Sat nights with a reservation, 2-11pm Sun)

Net Arena (☎ 03 28 38 09 20; 10 rue des Bouchers; per hr €3; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, 2-8pm Sun) Has 30 computers.

LAUNDRY

Zombified by too much art and culture? Many experts recommend staring at washing machines going round and round.

Laundrette (4 rue Ovigneur; **M** République Beaux Arts; ☎ 7am-8pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hôpital Roger Salengro (☎ 03 20 44 61 40/41; rue du Professeur Émile Laine; **M** CHR B Calmette; ☎ 24hr) The *accueil urgences* (emergency room/casualty ward) of Lille's vast, 15-hospital Cité Hospitalière is 4km southwest of the city centre.

SOS Médecins (☎ 03 20 29 91 91; 3 av Louise Michel; **M** Porte de Douai; consultation at clinic day/weekend €22/48.50, night €64.50-73.50, house calls day/weekend €32/52, night €68-77; ☎ 24hr) Round-the-clock medical clinic and house calls by doctors.

MONEY

There are commercial banks with ATMs along rue Nationale. The tourist office will usually agree to exchange small sums but the rate is poor.

International Currency Exchange (☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-8pm Sun) In Gare Lille-Europe next to accès (track access) H.

Travel exchange bureau (☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun & holidays) In Gare Lille-Flandres next to counter N.

POST

Branch Post Office (1 bd Carnot; **M** Rihour) In the Chambre de Commerce building.

Main Post Office (8 place de la République; **M** République Beaux Arts) Changes money.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist Office (☎ from abroad 03 59 57 94 00, in France 08 91 56 20 04; www.lilletourism.com; place Rihour; **M** Rihour; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Sun & holidays) Occupies what's left of the Flamboyant Gothic-style Palais Rihour, built in the mid-1400s for Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy; a war memorial forms the structure's eastern side. A brochure (€2) outlines five walking tours. City maps cost €0.50.

Sights & Activities

CITY-CENTRE ARCHITECTURE

Vieux Lille (Old Lille), which begins just north of place du Général de Gaulle, is justly proud of its restored 17th- and 18th-century houses. The old brick residences along **rue de la Monnaie** (named after a mint built here in 1685) now house chic boutiques and the Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse (p230). Hard to believe, but in the late 1970s this area was a half-abandoned slum with lots of empty, dilapidated buildings, their windows breeze-blocked-up to keep out vandals and squatters.

The Flemish Renaissance **Vieille Bourse** (Old Stock Exchange; place du Général de Gaulle; **M** Rihour) of 1652, ornately decorated with caryatids and cornucopia, actually consists of 24 separate houses. The courtyard in the middle hosts a **used-book market** (☎ 1pm or 1.30pm-7pm or 7.30pm Tue-Sun) – old postcards and comic books are also available – and in the warm months locals often gather to play *échecs* (chess).

LILLE CITY PASS

Available in one-/two-/three-day versions (€18/30/45), this pass gets you into almost all the museums in greater Lille (www.destination-lille-metropole.eu) and affords unlimited use of public transport. The three-day version includes eight sites in the Nord-Pas de Calais *région* and the use of regional TER trains. Available at the Lille tourist office.

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69 23 60; www.roubaix-lapiscine.com; 23 rue de l'Espérance, Roubaix; 📞 Gare Jean Lebas; adult/under 18yr €3.50/free; 🕒 11am-6pm Tue-Thu, 11am-8pm Fri, 1-6pm Sat & Sun), 12km northeast of Gare Lille-Europe, showcases fine arts, applied arts and sculpture in a delightfully watery environment. The restaurant and *salon de thé* (tearoom) is run by Meert (p233).

MUSÉE DE L'HOSPICE COMTESSE

Housed in an attractive 15th- and 17th-century poorhouse, the **Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse** (Hospice Comtesse Museum; 📞 03 28 36 84 00; 32 rue de la Monnaie; adult/student/under 12yr €3/2/free; 🕒 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm, closed Mon morning & Tue) features ceramics, earthenware wall tiles, religious art and 17th- and 18th-century paintings and furniture. A rood screen separates the Salle des Malades (Hospital Hall) from a mid-17th-century chapel with a mid-19th-century painted ceiling.

MAISON NATALE DE CHARLES DE GAULLE

The upper-middle-class house in which Charles André Marie Joseph de Gaulle – WWII Resistance leader, architect of the Fifth Republic and ferocious defender of French interests – was born in 1890 has been turned into a **museum** (📞 03 28 38 12 05; www.maison-natale-de-gaulle.com; 9 rue Princesse; adult/10-26yr €5/3, English audioguide €1.50; 🕒 10am-noon & 2-5pm Wed-Sun) that presents the French leader in the context

of his times, with an emphasis on his connection to France's far north. Displays include de Gaulle's dainty baptismal robe and some evocative newsreels. By bus, take line 9 to the Bateliers stop or line 6 to the Magasin stop.

CITADELLE

The greatest military architect of the 17th century, Sébastien le Prestre de Vauban (see p65), designed this massive **fortress**, shaped like a five-pointed star, after the capture of Lille by France in 1667. Built using some 60 million bricks, it still functions as a military base (for tour details see below) – but outside the 2.2km-long outer ramparts you'll find central Lille's largest park. On the southeastern side there's a **children's amusement park** and a small **zoo** (admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm, to 6pm or 7pm in summer, closed mid-Dec–mid-Feb). The Citadelle is served by the Citadine bus line.

Tours

Tours (adult/student/under 6yr €7.50/6/free) run by the tourist office, which also handles reservations, include:

Inside the Citadelle (🕒 3pm Sun May-Aug) These two-hour tours, in French, begin at Porte Royale, the citadel's main gate.

Lille à Vélo bike tours (1/2 people €12.50/20; 🕒 5pm Fri Jul-Aug) Two-hour bike tours that begin at the Station Oxygène kiosk at the Champ de Mars.

Vieux Lille (🕒 in English 10.30am Sat Apr-Sep)

Festivals & Events

The **Braderie** (below), a flea market extraordinaire, is held on the first weekend in September. Christmas decorations and edible goodies are sold at the **Marché de Noël** (Christmas market; place Rihour; ☎ late Nov–30 Dec). Every two or three years until the year 3000 (so they say), an international cultural event called **Lille 3000** (www.lille3000.com) will link Lille with a different part of the globe – from mid-March to mid-July 2009, 'Les Frontières Invisibles' will focus on Central and Eastern Europe, including Istanbul.

Sleeping

Because of the business market, many of Lille's hotels are at their fullest from Monday to Thursday. Lots of one-, two- and three-star hotels face Gare Lille-Flandres.

BUDGET

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 03 20 57 08 94; www.hihostels.com; lille@fuaj.org; 12 rue Malpart; **M** Mairie de Lille; dm incl breakfast €16.85, d €33.70; ☎ closed 23 Dec–mid-Jan; ♿) This Spartan former maternity hospital, locked from 11am to 3pm (till 4pm from Friday to Sunday), has 165 beds (two to eight per room). Toilets and showers are down the hall for most rooms; a few doubles have ensuite showers. Kitchen facilities are available.

Hôtel Faidherbe (☎ 03 20 06 27 93; hotelfaidherbe@wanadoo.fr; 42 place de la Gare; **M** Gare Lille-Flandres; d from €47, with washbasin €33) The 40 one-star rooms are compact, cheerful, pastel and very simply furnished. The perfect choice for linoleum fans. Has a lift.

MIDRANGE

Hôtel Kanai (☎ 03 20 57 14 78; www.hotelkanai.com; 10 rue de Béthune; **M** Rihour; d Mon-Thu €75-95, Fri-Sun €60-65, festival period €105; ☎ ☎) You can't get much more central than this two-star place.

Completely renovated in 2007, its 31 rooms have clean, minimalist lines; some of the top-floor rooms have great views but there's no lift. By car, take bd de la Liberté, rue Jean Sans Peur and then rue des Fossés.

Hôtel Flandre-Angleterre (☎ 03 20 06 04 12; www.hotel-flandre-angleterre.fr; 13 place de la Gare; **M** Gare Lille-Flandres; s/d Mon-Thu from €60/76, Fri-Sun from €60/69, q €90) This hotel's 44 two-star rooms, though comfortable, clean and quiet, are, shall we say, somewhat lacking in character – but hey, there's plenty of that outside. The best rooms have views of the Lille-Flandres train station.

Hôtel Brueghel (☎ 03 20 06 06 69; www.hotel-brueghel.com; 5 parvis St-Maurice; **M** Gare Lille-Flandres; s/d from €78/84) The 65 two-star rooms here are a mix of modern styling (eg the bathrooms) and antique furnishing, though they don't have nearly as much Flemish charm as the lobby. The tiny wood-and-wrought-iron lift dates from the 1920s.

Grand Hôtel Bellevue (☎ 03 20 57 45 64; www.grandhotelbellevue.com; 5 rue Jean Roisin; **M** Rihour; d €135-165; ☎ ☎) This three-star Best Western-affiliated establishment was grandly built in the early 20th century. A charmingly creaky belle-époque lift trundles guests to the 60 spacious rooms, which have high ceilings, antique-style French furnishings and flat-screen TVs. Breakfast is usually free if you stay on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday night.

TOP END

our pick **L'Hermitage Gantois** (☎ 03 20 85 30 30; www.hotelhermitagegantois.com; 224 rue de Paris; d €205-275, ste €415; ♿ ☎) Occupying a one-time nun-run hospital complex, parts of which were built as far back as the 1460s, this supremely tasteful four-star hotel creates enchanting, harmonious spaces by complementing its rich architectural heritage – including a

BRADERIE DE LILLE

On the first weekend in September, Lille's entire city centre – 200km of footpaths – is transformed into the Braderie de Lille, billed as the world's largest flea market. The extravaganza – with stands selling antiques, local delicacies, handicrafts and more – dates from the Middle Ages, when Lillois servants were permitted to hawk their employers' old garments for some extra cash.

The city's biggest annual event, the Braderie runs from 3pm on Saturday to midnight on Sunday, when street sweepers emerge to tackle the mounds of mussel shells and old *frites* (French fries) left behind by the merrymakers. Before the festivities, you can make room for all those extra calories by joining in the half marathon held at 9am on Saturday. A free map of the market, *Braderie de Lille – Le Plan*, is available from Lille's tourist office.

Flemish-Gothic facade – with refined ultra-modern elements. The 72 rooms are huge and luxurious, with Starck furnishings next to Louis XV–style chairs and bathrooms sparkling with Carrara marble. One of the four courtyards is home to a 220-year-old wisteria recognised as a historic monument. The chapel, still consecrated, was built in 1637.

Eating

Lille, especially Vieux Lille, has an excellent and varied selection of restaurants and *estaminets* (traditional Flemish eateries, with antique knick-knacks on the walls and plain wooden tables), many of them serving Flemish specialities such as *carbonnade* (braised beef stewed with beer and brown sugar). In Vieux Lille, dining areas include the southern part of rue Royale (an ethnic cuisine hot spot); the eastern end of rue de la Barre; rue de la Monnaie and its side streets; and, a bit to the northeast, rue de Gand. West of the main post office, there are cheap eats on lively, studenty rue d'Inkermann, rue Solférino and rue Masséna. Good-value, *restaurants populaires* can be found around the Wazemmes food market.

Estaminet T Rijsel (☎ 03 20 15 01 59; 25 rue de Gand; mains €9.90-19.90; ☎ noon-1.30pm & 7.30-9.30pm, to 10pm or 10.30pm Fri & Sat, closed Mon lunch & Sun) Decorated with hops vines and items you'd have found in a Flemish kitchen a century ago, this homey, unpretentious eatery serves up local specialities such as *carbonnade* (€9.90), *pot'je vleesch* (a cold meat terrine; €11.90) and *poulet au Maroilles* (chicken with Maroilles cheese).

Tous Les Jours Dimanche (☎ 03 28 36 05 92; 13 rue Masurel; menus €15.50-16.50; ☎ restaurant noon-2.30pm, salon de thé noon-6.30pm, closed Mon, also closed Sun May-Sep) Having tea or a light lunch here, surrounded by a motley mixture of antique furniture and well-chosen objets d'art, is like

hanging out in an arty friend's living room. Specialities include salads, sandwiches (€11) and quiche-like tartes (€11). As it is especially popular with women, locals say it has an *ambiance feminine*. On Sundays from October to mid-April, you can have a *brunch anglais* (€19.50) starting at 11.30am.

Le Barbut d'Anvers (☎ 03 20 55 11 68; 1bis rue St-Étienne; ☎ Rihour; menu €38; ☎ Mon-Sat, closed Mon Jul & Aug) Named after a race of Belgian chickens, this well-regarded regional restaurant occupies an 18th-century building at the end of a cobblestone courtyard, its three levels decorated with antique Dutch and Flemish furnishings

our pick À l'Huitrière (☎ 03 20 55 43 41; www.huitriere.fr, in French; 3 rue des Chats Bossus; lunch menu €45, other menus €100-140; ☎ noon-2pm & 7-9.30pm, closed dinner Sun & late Jul-late Aug) In 1928 the great-grandfather of the present owners turned to the nascent art-deco movement – first exhibited (and named) in Paris just three years earlier – to find suitably elegant decoration for his fish shop, situated on 'Street of the Hunchback Cats'. The sea-themed mosaics and stained glass are worth a look-in even if you're not in the mood to dine on seafood fresh out of the water – accompanied, perhaps, by a wine or two from the over-40,000-bottle cellar. Booking ahead is recommended for Friday dinner and Saturday.

SELF-CATERING

About 1.5km southwest of the tourist office, in Wazemmes, an ethnically mixed, *populaire* (working-class) neighbourhood that's slowly gentrifying, you'll find Lille's beloved **Wazemmes food market** (place de la Nouvelle Aventure; ☎ Gambetta; ☎ 8am-2pm Tue-Thu, 8am-8pm Fri & Sat, 8am-3pm Sun & holidays). Right outside, the city's largest **outdoor market** (☎ 7am-1.30pm or 2pm Tue, Thu & Sun) is the place to be in Lille on Sunday morning – a real carnival scene! There's another outdoor market, **Marché Sébastopol** (place Sébastopol; ☎ République Beaux Arts; ☎ 7am-2pm Wed & Sat), a bit nearer the centre.

Other food-shopping options:

Carrefour hypermarket (Euralille shopping mall; ☎ Gare Lille-Europe; ☎ 9am-9.30pm Mon-Sat) Vast, with no fewer than 62 checkout counters! Has small, adjacent halal and kosher sections.

Fromagerie Philippe Olivier (☎ 03 20 74 96 99; 3 rue du Curé St-Étienne; ☎ Rihour; ☎ 9am or 10am-12.30pm & 3-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 9am-12.30pm & 1-7.30pm Sat) Fine cheeses.

Match supermarket (97 rue Solférino; ☎ 8.30am-9pm Mon-Sat) Inside a 19th-century cast-iron covered market.

LA SOURCE

Founded way back in 1979 and – thanks to its light and airy restaurant – now a Lille institution, **La Source** (☎ 03 20 57 53 07; 13 rue du Plat; ☎ République Beaux Arts; 2-course menus €8.50-14; ☎ meals 11.30am-2.30pm Mon-Sat, 7-9pm Fri, shop 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 9pm Fri) serves vegetarian, fowl and fish *plats du jour* that are not just for the granola set. Both the decor and the diners exude health, well-being and cheer.

CAFÉ CITOYEN

Progressive-minded volunteers turned a failing bar into the informal and very friendly **Café Citoyen** (Citizen Café; ☎ 03 20 13 15 73; <http://cafecitoyen.org>, in French; 7 place du Vieux Marché aux Chevaux; **M** République Beaux Arts; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Fri, 2-9pm or later Sat, 2pm or 4pm-7pm or later Sun; ☎) in which social and environmental questions are aired in public debates and discussions. Internet access is free if you order an organic microbrewed beer, a glass of wine (€3.30) or a cup of fair-trade coffee (€1.50) from the friendly fellow wearing round, Trotsky-style glasses. Also serves light meals (salads, soup, hot and cold sandwiches), including vegetarian options; all products are organic and most are sourced locally. A sign in the window welcomes English- and Spanish-speakers.

Drinking

Lille has two main nightlife zones: Vieux Lille (eg rue Royale, rue de la Barre and rue de Gand), where bars tend to be small and oriented towards a fairly chic clientele; and, 750m southwest of the tourist office, rue Masséna and rue Solférino, where inexpensive high-decibel bars draw mainly students. There are a number of edgy cafés around the periphery of the Wazemmes food market.

Meert (☎ 03 20 57 07 44; www.meert.fr; 27 rue Esquemoise; **M** Rihour; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 9am-7.30pm Sat, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Sun) *Gaufres* (waffles; €2.30 each), made with Madagascar vanilla and baked in a hinged iron griddle, are the speciality of Meert, a luxury tearoom-cum-pastry-and-sweets-shop that has served kings, viceroys and generals since 1761. Next door, Meert's chocolate shop has a coffered ceiling, painted wood panels, wrought-iron balcony and mosaic floor almost unchanged since 1839.

L'illustration Café (☎ 03 20 12 00 90; www.bar-lillustration.com, in French; 18 rue Royale; ☎ 12.30pm-3am Mon-Sat, 2pm-3am Sun) This mellow bar, adorned with art-nouveau woodwork and rotating exhibits of works by local painters, attracts artists and intellectuals in the mood to read, exchange weighty ideas – or just shoot the breeze. Very French in the best sense of the word.

Le Balatum (☎ 03 20 57 41 81; www.myspace.com/balatum; 13 rue de la Barre; ☎ 4pm-3am Sun-Fri, 2pm-3am Sat) This funky, dimly lit place, decorated with artwork that changes monthly, is ideal for a tête-à-tête. Attracts a *branché* (cool, in-the-know) crowd, many in their 20s. There's live music (jazz, blues, rock, folk etc) at 8pm on Sunday (and sometimes Saturday) and a DJ from 10.30pm on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. Gay friendly.

Café Le Relax (48 place de la Nouvelle Aventure; **M** Gambetta; ☎ 9am-midnight Tue, Thu & Sun, 10.30am-midnight Mon & Wed, 10.30am-1am Fri, to 2am Sat) A genuine, ungentrified *café de quartier* (neighbourhood

café) where locals drop in for an espresso or a strong Belgian beer and to run into friends. A great place to get a feel for this ethnically mixed, working-class part of town. On Sunday morning you can buy edibles at the nearby Wazemmes food market and eat them here with a beer. Local groups perform live music from 9pm to midnight on Friday, Saturday and Sunday; a DJ spins disks – often reggae or ska – on Wednesday night.

Café Oz (☎ 03 20 55 15 15; 33 place Louise de Bettignies; ☎ 4pm-3am Mon-Fri, 2pm-3am Sat & Sun, opens at noon or 2pm in nice weather, happy hour 6-9pm Mon-Sat) Footy and rugby on a wide screen, Australiana on the walls and cold bottles of Toohey's Extra Dry – what more could you ask for? Popular with English-speakers, including students, this place is packed when DJs do their thing from 9pm to 3am on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. The nearest bus stop is Palais de Justice, served by lines 3, 6 and 9.

Entertainment

Lille's free French-language entertainment guide, *Sortir* (www.lille.sortir.eu, in French), comes out each Wednesday and is available at the tourist office, cinemas, event venues and bookshops.

Tickets for Lille's rich cultural offerings can be bought just off rue St-Nicolas at the **Fnac billetterie** (Fnac ticket desk; ☎ 08 92 68 36 22; www.fnac.spectacles.com, in French; **M** Rihour; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat), inside the Fnac store. Events are posted by category on the walls.

CINEMAS

Nondubbed films, some in English, are the speciality of two **cinemas** (☎ 08 36 68 00 73; www.lemetropole.com, in French), the **Cinéma Majestic** (56 rue de Béthune; **M** Rihour), which has six projection spaces, and the **Cinéma Métropole** (26 rue des Ponts des Comines; **M** Gare Lille-Flandres), an art-house cinema.

GAY & LESBIAN

Vive Versa (☎ 03 20 54 93 46; 3 rue de la Barre; ☎ 1pm-2.30am Tue-Thu, 3pm-2.30am Mon, Fri & Sat, 4pm-2.30am Sun) The rainbow flies proudly at this well-heeled, sophisticated bar, which is as gay as it is popular (and it's very popular). Has retro-themed nights from 10pm every Tuesday and a house-and-electro-oriented DJ from 10.30pm on Friday and Saturday.

Miss Marple (☎ 03 20 39 85 92; www.lemismarple.com, in French; 18 rue de Gand; ☎ 4pm-midnight Mon-Thu, 4pm-1am Fri, 4pm-2am Sat) A friendly and unpretentious lesbian and gay bar that welcomes *hétéros* under its crystal chandeliers. The upstairs lounge features 1970s retro styling; the art on the walls changes monthly. There's a DJ from 10pm on some Friday and Saturday nights.

LIVE MUSIC

The **Orchestre National de Lille** (☎ 03 20 12 82 40; www.onlille.com, in French; adult €18-30, under 28yr €10) plays in the circular **Nouveau Siècle concert hall** (place Pierre Mendès-France; Ⓜ Rihour).

NIGHTCLUBS

Although you no longer have to cross the Belgian frontier (eg to Gand) to dance past 4am, some locals still do because, they say, the techno is edgier, the prices lower, substances more available and the closing time even later (1pm!).

Network Café (☎ 03 20 40 04 91; www.network-cafe.net, in French; 15 rue du Faisan; Ⓜ République Beaux Arts; admission free, coat check €1; ☎ 10.30pm-5.30am Tue & Wed, 9.30pm-5.30am Thu, 10.30pm-7am Fri & Sat, 7.30pm-5.30am Sun) At Lille's hottest late-late discotheque, you can choose between the main room, presided over by two 5m-high statues from faraway lands, and the baroque Venetian room, all crystal chandeliers and velvet settees. A magnet for guest DJs, it's hugely popular with students (especially on Wednesday and Thursday) and the 20-to-40 crowd. Rock sets the tone on Thursday, when there are dance classes (€5) from 9.30pm to 11.30pm, and salsa/R & B dominate on Sunday before/after midnight, but house predominates the rest of the time. The door policy is pretty strict – locals dress up to come here – but tends to be a bit more relaxed for tourists.

La Scala (☎ 03 20 42 10 60; 32 place Louise de Bettignies; admission free; ☎ 11pm-dawn Mon-Sat) A classic cellar discotheque, with pulsating music and gyrating bodies under ancient brick arches. There

are frequent student nights (Wednesday and Thursday) and theme nights (Thursday, Friday and Saturday). Things get going at about 1.30am.

Tchouka Club (☎ 03 20 14 37 50; www.tchoukaclub.com, in French; 80 rue Barthélemy Delespaul; ☎ 11pm-8am Fri, Sat & holiday eves) This till-dawn, gay and lesbian dance venue has Lille's clubbing classes chattering.

Shopping

Lille's snazziest clothing and housewares boutiques are in the old city in the area bounded by rue de la Monnaie, rue Esquermoise, rue de la Grande Chaussée and rue d'Angleterre. The tiny pedestrian streets northwest of Cathédrale Notre Dame de la Treille, including rue Peterinck, reward the inquisitive *flâneur* (aimless stroller).

For more-practical purchases, locals often head either to the pedestrian zone south of place du Général de Gaulle (eg rue Neuve) or to the **Euralille shopping mall** (cnr av Le Corbusier & av Willy Brandt; Ⓜ Gare Lille-Flandres or Gare Lille-Europe).

Getting There & Away**BUS**

Eurolines (☎ 03 20 78 18 88; 23 parvis St-Maurice; Ⓜ Gare Lille-Flandres; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 1-6pm Sat) serves cities such as Brussels (€15, 1½ to two hours), Amsterdam (€30, five hours) and London (€34, 5½ hours). Buses depart from bd de Leeds, to the left as you arrive at Gare Lille-Europe from av Le Corbusier – look for the anonymous white 'Autocars' sign behind the taxi rank, across the street from Lille's 10-storey World Trade Center.

CAR


Driving into Lille is incredibly confusing, even with a good map. To get to the city centre, the best thing to do is to suspend your sense of direction and blindly follow the 'Centre Ville' signs.

Parking at the Champ de Mars (the huge car park just east of the Citadelle) costs €3 a day, including return travel (for up to five people) to central Lille on the Citadine bus line (just show the card issued at the entrance barrier to the driver). If you arrive between 8pm and 7am or on Sunday, parking is free – but you don't get a free bus ticket into the city.

Parking is free along some of the streets southwest of rue Solfériano and up around the Maison Natale de Charles de Gaulle.

Avis, Europcar, Hertz and National-Citer have car-hire offices in Gare Lille-Europe. Domestic rental companies include the following:

ADA (☎ 03 20 57 02 25; 2 rue Gustave Delory;  Mairie de Lille) Also rents 50cc scooters for €53 per day.

DLM (☎ 03 20 06 18 80; 32 place de la Gare;  Gare Lille-Flandres; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat)

Rent-A-Car Système (☎ 03 20 40 20 20; 113 rue du Molinel;  Rihour or République Beaux Arts)

TRAIN

Lille has been linked to Paris by rail since 1846. The two main train stations are one stop apart on metro line 2 (in the Gare Lille-Europe metro station there's a fabulous mural).

Gare Lille-Flandres is used by almost all regional services and most TGVs to Paris' Gare du Nord (€37.60 to €52.20, one hour, 14 to 18 daily).

Gare Lille-Europe – an ultramodern structure topped by what looks like a 20-storey ski boot – handles pretty much everything else, including Eurostar trains (p965) to London (from the station's far northern end); TGVs/Eurostars to Brussels-Nord (Monday to Friday/weekend €25.20/16.30, 35 minutes, a dozen daily); and TGVs to Nice (€110 to €132.70, 7½ hours, two direct daily) and Strasbourg (€52, 3½ hours, three daily).

For details on getting to/from Amiens, Arras, Boulogne, Calais, Dunkirk and St-Omer, see those sections.

Getting Around

BICYCLE & SEGWAY

Always wanted to try one of those nifty Segway gadgets? Now's your chance! **Station Oxygène**, run by Transpole (right), rents out Segways for €4/15/20 per 30 minutes/half-day/full day (€3.50/12/18 if you have a bus ticket stamped within the hour), not including a mandatory first-time riding lesson (€4) that will get you an official French Segway licence (we're not kidding). Riders must weigh over 40kg and be at least 18 (14 if accompanied by an adult). E-bikes (city bikes with an electric power boost) are available for €1.50/7/10 per 30 minutes/half-day/full day (with a bus ticket €1.30/5.50/8). Both require a credit card deposit of €500.

Station Oxygène has two offices: a shiny glass structure that resembles a hovering flying saucer at the **Champ de Mars** (☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Apr-Oct); and in the Transpole bus information

office on the track level of **Gare Lille-Flandres** (place des Buisseries; ☎ 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri). To reserve, call **Team Segway** (☎ 03 20 81 44 02).

Two car-rental places (opposite) rent bicycles, DLM (city bikes per half-/full day €7/9, for students €5/7) and ADA (mountain bike per day €12).

BUS, TRAM & METRO

Lille's two speedy metro lines (1 and 2), two tramways (R and T) and many urban and suburban bus lines – several of which cross into Belgium – are run by **Transpole** (☎ 08 20 42 40 40; www.transpole.fr, in French), which has **information offices** (☎ closed Sun) in Gare Lille-Flandres and its metro station. In the city centre, metros run every one to six minutes until about midnight. Useful metro stops include those at the train stations, Rihour (next to the tourist office), République Beaux Arts (near the Palais des Beaux-Arts), Gambetta (near the Wazemmes food market) and Gare Jean Lebas (near La Piscine). Clair de Lune night buses operate from 9.30pm to 12.30am. In this chapter, places with a metro stop within 500m have the name of the stop noted next to the street address.

Tickets (€1.25 for a one-way full fare) are sold on buses but must be purchased (and validated in the orange posts) *before* boarding a metro or tram. A pack of 10 tickets costs €10.30. A Pass Journée (all-day pass) costs €3.50 and needs to be time-stamped just once. A Pass Soirée, good for unlimited travel after 7pm, costs €1.50.

TAXI

Cabs can be ordered 24 hours a day from **Taxi Gare Lille** (☎ 03 20 06 64 00) and **Taxi Rihour** (☎ 03 20 55 20 56).

CALAIS

pop 74,200

As Churchill might have put it, 'never in the field of human tourism have so many travellers passed through a place and so few stopped to visit'. Indeed, there are few compelling reasons for the 15 million people who travel by way of Calais each year to stop and explore – pity the local tourist office, whose job it is to snag a few of the Britons racing south to warmer climes.

That said, the town – a mere 34km from the English town of Dover (Douvres in French) – has enough to offer travellers to make a stop

THE BURGHERS OF CALAIS

Rodin sculpted *Les Bourgeois de Calais* (The Burgbers of Calais) in 1895 to honour six local citizens who, in 1347, after eight months of holding off the besieging English forces, surrendered themselves and the keys to the starving city to Edward III. Their hope: that by sacrificing themselves they might save the town and its people. Moved by the entreaties of his consort, Philippa, Edward eventually spared both the Calaisiens and their six brave leaders.

Is it worth a trip to Calais' Flemish Renaissance-style **Hôtel de Ville** (built 1911–25) just to see Rodin's masterpiece? Actually, you don't even have to come to France to see the work. Other casts of the six emaciated but proud figures, with varying degrees of copper-green patination (several were made posthumously), can be seen in London (next to the Houses of Parliament), the USA (New York, Washington, Philadelphia, Omaha, Pasadena, Stanford University) and even Japan (Shizuoka Prefecture).

worthwhile, including three speciality museums, some decent restaurants and, of course, Rodin's *The Burgbers of Calais* (above). In addition Calais makes a convenient base for exploring French Flanders and the majestic Channel coast by car or public transport.

Orientation

Gare Calais-Ville (the train station) is 650m south of the main square, place d'Armes, and 700m north of Calais' main commercial district, which stretches south along bd Jacquard from the *Burgbers of Calais* statue to place du Théâtre and bd Léon Gambetta. The town centre is ringed by canals and ship docks.

On foot, the car-ferry terminal is 1.5km northeast of place d'Armes (by car the distance is double that). The Channel Tunnel's vehicle-loading area is about 6km southwest of the town centre.

Information

Currency exchange is possible aboard car ferries (at a terrible rate) but *not* at the ferry terminal, which lacks even an ATM.

Change Bureau (☎ 03 21 97 72 66; 5 rue Royale; ☎ 9-11am & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat)

Laundrette (place d'Armes; ☎ 7am-9pm) Be prepared for British border formalities – cross the Channel with clean undies.

Media ServiCenter (☎ 03 21 34 72 85; 1 rue Paul Bert; per hr €3; ☎ 9.45am-4pm & 5.30-8pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 9.45am-4pm Wed, 2.30-8pm Sat, 3.30-7pm Sun) Internet access.

Médiathèque (☎ 03 21 46 20 40; 16 rue du Pont Lottin; per hr €1; ☎ 10am-noon & 1.30-7pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am-7pm Wed, 10am-6pm Sat) Internet access at the public library. Opening an account takes just two minutes.

Post Office (place de Rheims)

Tourist Office (☎ 03 21 96 62 40; www.calais-cote-dopale.com; 12 bd Georges Clemenceau; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat year-round, 10am-1pm Sun Jul & Aug)

Sights & Activities

The 13th-century **tour de guet** (watchtower; place d'Armes), square at the base and octagonal on top, is a rare remnant of pre-20th-century Calais – the rest of the town was virtually demolished during WWII.

The **Musée des Beaux-Arts et de la Dentelle** (Museum of Fine Arts & Lace; ☎ 03 21 46 48 40; 25 rue Richelieu; admission free; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 10am-noon & 2-6.30pm Sat, 2-6.30pm Sun) focuses on just two things: modern sculptures, including pieces by Rodin; and the history of lacemaking both before and after the first lace machines were smuggled over from England – with French government encouragement – in 1816.

In spring 2009, a brand new museum dedicated to Calais' glorious mechanical lacemaking legacy, the **Musée de la Dentelle et de la Mode** (Museum of Lace & Fashion; rue Sambor), is set to open in a 19th-century lace factory whose facade resembles a giant Jacquard punched card.

Willing to exert your thigh muscles for a superb panorama? Try climbing the 271 stairs to the top of the **lighthouse** (☎ 03 21 34 33 34; bd des Alliés; adult/5-15yr €4/2; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm 21 Jun–21 Sep, 2-5.30pm Wed & Sat, 10am-noon & 2-5.30pm Sun rest of year, also open 2-5.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri during school holidays), built in 1848.

Colonne Louis XVIII (Louis XVIII Column; bd des Alliés) commemorates the French king's return from exile in England after the fall of Napoléon (1814). A close inspection will reveal a Hollywood-style imprint of the royal foot.

WWII artefacts (weapons, uniforms, proclamations) fill the display cases of the **Musée**

SHOP TILL YOU DROP IN CALAIS

Calais' shops and supermarkets supply day-tripping *rosbifs* (Britons) with everything except, perhaps, roast beef. Items eagerly sought 'on the Continent' include delicious edibles (terrines, cheeses, gourmet prepared dishes) and drinkables (fine wine, cheap plonk, beer and champagne) that are hard to find – or much more expensive – in the land of the pound sterling.

In Coquelles next to the vehicle-loading area for the Channel Tunnel, you'll find the enormous, steel-and-glass shopping centre **Cité Europe** (☎ 03 21 46 47 48; www.cite-europe.com; 1001 bd du Kent; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Thu, 10am-9pm Fri, 9am-8pm Sat). Its 130 shops include a vast **Carrefour hypermarket** (☎ 8.30am-10pm Mon-Sat) and wine suppliers such as **Tesco Vins Plus** (☎ 8.30am-10pm Mon-Sat), where buying alcohol in bulk to carry home in the boot is made easy.

Right nearby is the **Marques Avenue outlet centre** (☎ 03 21 17 07 70; www.marquesavenue.com; bd du Parc, Coquelles; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat), whose 53 shops boast discount clothing and accessories by 80 'top brands'.

To get to Cité Europe by car, take the A16 to exits 41 or 43; for Marques Avenue, use exit 41. Calais bus 5 goes to Cité Europe.

Shopping options in central Calais include **Les Quatre Boulevards** (bd Jacquard; www.les4boulevards.com; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat), a mall with about 50 shops. Genuine *dentelle de Calais* (Calais lace) – we're talking placemats and tablecloths – is available at **Royal Dentelle** (☎ 03 21 96 68 40; www.royal-dentelle.com; 106 bd Jacquard; ☎ closed Mon morning & Sun, also closed Mon afternoon Jan-Apr).

de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale (WWII Museum; ☎ 03 21 34 21 57; adult/student/family of 5 incl audioguide €6/5/14; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Sep, 11am-5pm Wed-Mon Feb-Apr & Oct-Nov), housed in a concrete bunker that was once a German naval headquarters. It sits incongruously in **Parc St-Pierre**, next to a boules ground and a **children's playground**.

You can watch huge car ferries sailing majestically towards Dover from Calais' sandy, cabin-lined **beach**, which begins 1km north-west of place d'Armes and is linked to town by a bike path, which also goes along the beachfront. The sand continues westward along 8km-long, dune-lined **Blériot Plage**, named after pioneer aviator Louis Blériot, who began the first ever trans-Channel flight from here in 1909. Both beaches are served by buses 3 and 9.

Sleeping

Lots of two-star hotels can be found along, and just east of, rue Royale.

In Coquelles, near the Channel Tunnel vehicle-loading area and next to the Cité Europe shopping mall, you'll find half a dozen hotels, including the 99-room **Etap Hôtel** (☎ 08 92 68 30 59; www.etaphotel.com; place de Cantorbéry; s/tr €39/45, in summer €49/55) and the 86-room **Hôtel Ibis** (☎ 03 21 46 37 00; place de Cantorbéry; d €65-79).

Camping Municipal (☎ 03 21 97 89 79, 06 79 68 93 22; av Raymond Poincaré; site €2.60 plus per adult €3.65; ☎ Easter-Oct) Occupies a grassy but soulless site overlooking the Channel and the ferry

port, inside a section of Fort Risban. Served by buses 3 and 9.

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 03 21 34 70 20; www.auberge-jeunesse-calais.com; av Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny; s incl breakfast €24, dm in double r €18; ☎ 24hr; ☎) Modern, well equipped and just 200m from the beach, this 162-bed hostel is a good source of information on local events. Served by buses 3 and 9.

Hôtel Victoria (☎ 03 21 34 38 32; hotelvictoriacalais@wanadoo.fr; 8 rue du Commandant Bonningue; d €42, with washbasin €30) A hotel so ordinary that it could be described as 'extraordinarily ordinary'. The 14 two-star rooms are clean, comfortable and in good repair. Don't expect an effusive welcome, but overall it's good value and parking is a breeze.

Balladins Hôtel (☎ 03 21 96 10 10; www.balladins.eu; 2 quai du Danube; d/tr from €40/43) A 104-room prefab hotel with precious little charm – but a very convenient location facing the train station.

Hôtel La Sole Meunière (☎ 03 21 96 83 66; www.solemeuniere.com; 53 rue de la Mer; s/d/q €49/59/89; ☎) A family-run two-star place named after the ground-floor restaurant, which – you guessed it – specialises in butter-sautéed sole. Some of the 18 attractive, pastel rooms have electric toilets that grind when you flush. The best rooms have views of the port.

Hôtel Richelieu (☎ 03 21 34 61 60; www.hotelrichelieu-calais.com; 17 rue Richelieu; d/2-room q €57/116; ☎) At this welcoming two-star place, the 15 cheery rooms, each one unique, are lov-

ingly maintained and outfitted with antique furniture redeemed by the owner from local flea markets.

Eating

Calais is a good place for a first or last meal on the Continent. Eateries are plentiful on rue Royale and rue de la Mer and around place d'Armes.

Tonnerre de Brest (☎ 03 21 96 95 35; 16 place d'Armes; weekday lunch menus €10.50-18.50; ☒ closed Mon except Jul & Aug) At this informal, rustic eatery, run by two sisters, you can wash down with *cidre* (cider) 28 kinds of savoury galettes or 31 sorts of sweet crêpes – or a large salad (€10). Ice cream desserts are a speciality.

Histoire Ancienne (☎ 03 21 34 11 20; www.histoire-ancienne.com; 20 rue Royale; menu du jour from noon-1pm & 6-8pm €11.50, 2-/3-/5-course menus €18/25.50/35.50; ☒ closed Sun & dinner Mon) Specialising in French and regional meat, fish and vegetarian mains, some grilled over an open wood fire, this 1930s Paris-style bistro also has treats such as *escargots à l'ail* (garlic snails). The toilets take full advantage of the latest self-cleaning technology.

Aux Mouettes (☎ 03 21 34 67 59; 10 rue Jean Pierre Avron; menus €16-34; ☒ closed dinner Wed, dinner Sun & Mon) Fisherfolk sell their daily catch across the street at the quay – easy to see how this unassuming place manages to serve only the very freshest fish and seafood, including *sole de notre quai* (sole landed at our quay; €22).

Au Cadre Vert (☎ 03 21 34 69 44; 3 rue André Gerschell; menu incl wine €18.50; ☒ closed Sun, lunch Sat & lunch Wed) A family-run restaurant known for its generous portions and reasonable prices. Specialities include French-style *magret de canard* (duck breast fillet; €14) in raspberry sauce, *pièce de bœuf sauce pleurotote* (beefsteak in mushroom sauce) and large salads (€10 to €12).

La Pléiade (☎ 03 21 34 03 70; 32 rue Jean Quéhen; menus €28-58; ☒ closed Sun & Mon) At this elegant, family-run restaurant, superfresh North Sea *bar* (sea bass), turbot and sole are prepared differently for each season, using locally grown ingredients. The menu, *gastronomique* but with modern touches, changes every six weeks.

SELF-CATERING

Food market (place d'Armes; ☒ morning Wed & Sat)

La Maison du Fromage et des Vins (☎ 03 21 34 44 72; 1 rue André Gerschell; ☒ 3-7.30pm Mon, 8.30am-12.30pm & 3-7.30pm Wed-Fri, 8.15am-12.45pm & 2.30-7.30pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) Sells cheese and fine wine.

Match supermarket (place d'Armes; ☒ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat year-round, 9am-noon Sun Jun-Aug)

Entertainment

Cinéma Alhambra (☎ 03 21 17 73 33; www.cinema-alhambra.org, in French; 2 rue Jean Jaurès) Screens nondubbed films, some in English, in its four halls.

Getting There & Around

For details on options for crossing the Channel by ferry and tunnel, see p968 and p964.

BICYCLE

Opale Vélo Services (☎ 03 21 00 07 41; 39 bd Jacquard; ☒ 9am-noon & 4.30-7pm Mon-Sat, 11am-12.30pm & 5-7pm Sun) rents out city bikes (per half-day/full day/week €4/6/23) and electric-powered bicycles (€5/8/30). A deposit of €200 is required.

BOAT

Every day, 35 to 52 car ferries from Dover dock at Calais' bustling car-ferry terminal, which on foot is about 1.5km northeast of place d'Armes (further by car). Company offices:

P&O Ferries Calais town centre (41 place d'Armes); car-ferry terminal (☎ 03 21 46 10 18; ☒ 6am-10pm); car-ferry parking lot (☒ 24hr)

SeaFrance Calais town centre (2 place d'Armes); car-ferry terminal (☎ 03 21 46 80 05; ☒ 7.30am-7.30pm); car-ferry parking lot (☒ 24hr)

Shuttle buses (€1.50 or UK£1, roughly hourly from about 10am to 7pm or 7.40pm), marked 'Terminal Car Ferry/Centre Ville', link Gare Calais-Ville and place d'Armes (the stop is in front of Café de la Tour) with the car-ferry terminal. Departure times are posted at the bus stop.

Hoverspeed, the company that pioneered the use of hovercraft – the pride of British maritime engineering in the 1960s – ceased operations in 2005.

BUS

Bus 44, run by **Inglard** (☎ 03 21 96 49 54; www.colvert-littoral.com, www.voyages-inglard.com, in French; office in car-ferry terminal), follows the breathtaking Côte d'Opale coastal road (D940), linking Calais' train station with Sangatte, Wissant (€3.10), Audinghen, Ambletouse and Boulogne-sur-Mer (€5.40, 1¼ hours, three daily except Sunday and holidays). Stops in Boulogne are at Nausicaä and 75 bd Daunou.

Ligne BCD (☎ 08 00 62 00 59) is an express service linking Calais' train station with Dunkirk (€7.70, 45 minutes, 11 daily Monday to Friday,

three on Saturday) and Boulogne (€7.20, 40 minutes, five daily Monday to Friday, two on Saturday), where bus stops are at the train station and place Dalton.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

To reach the Channel Tunnel's vehicle-loading area at Coquelles, follow the road signs on the A16 to 'Tunnel Sous La Manche' (Tunnel under the Channel) and get off at exit 42.

ADA (☎ 03 21 96 49 54), Avis, Budget, Europcar, Hertz and National-Citer have offices at the car-ferry terminal but they're not always staffed. In town, reasonable rates are on offer at **France Cars** (☎ 03 21 96 08 00; 47 bd des Alliés).

TAXI

To order a cab, call **Taxis Radio Calais** (TRC; ☎ 03 21 97 13 14).

TRAIN

Calais has two train stations: Gare Calais-Ville in the city centre; and Gare Calais-Fréthun, a TGV station 10km southwest of town near the Channel Tunnel entrance. They are linked by trains and a *navette* (shuttle bus).

Gare Calais-Ville has services to Amiens (€22.10, 2½ to 3½ hours, six to eight daily), Arras (€18.70, 1¼ hours, 12 daily Monday to Friday, five daily Saturday and Sunday), Boulogne (€7.20, 30 minutes, 15 to 18 daily Monday to Saturday, eight on Sunday), Dunkirk (€7.70, 50 minutes, two to five Monday to Saturday) and Lille-Flandres (€15.30, 1¼ hours, seven to 11 daily).

Gare Calais-Fréthun is served by TGVs to Paris' Gare du Nord (€39.60 to €54.60, 1½ hours, six daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday) as well as Eurostars to London (one hour, three daily).

ST-OMER

pop 14,900

St-Omer is said to be the first truly French town you come to after landing at Calais – its river, the Aa, is certainly the first one you'll come across in any alphabetised list of the world's waterways. The town is justly renowned for its richly furnished 13th- to 15th-century **basilica** (entrance via the south transept arm; ☎ 8am–5pm, to 6pm Apr–Oct), downgraded from cathedral status in 1801. The only major Gothic church in the region, it's a real gem; much of the woodwork, including the main altar and breathtaking baroque organ, dates

from the 1700s. In the ambulatory, the rough-hewn tomb of the 8th-century Irish monk St Erkembode has on top a neat row of toddlers' shoes, placed there by the parents of children with walking difficulties in the hope of saintly intercession.

The **tourist office** (☎ 03 21 98 08 51; www.tourisme-saintomer.com; 4 rue du Lion d'Or; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun & holidays Easter–Sep, 9am–12.30pm & 2–6pm Mon–Sat except holidays Oct–Easter) is one block north of place Foch, the typically northern-French square in front of the neoclassical **hôtel de ville** (town hall; 1830). The lovely 19th-century **jardin public**, a landscape park, is a block west of place Foch.

Musée de l'Hôtel Sandelin (☎ 03 21 38 00 94; 14 rue Carnot; adult/15–25yr & student €4.50/3; ☎ 10am–noon & 2–6pm, sometimes to 8pm Thu, closed Mon & Tue), with displays that include ceramics, objets d'art and paintings, is housed in a harmonious town house built in 1776. A number of rooms are furnished in the refined style preferred by the Enlightenment elite. To get there from place Foch, walk a block south and then a long block east.

North and northeast of town, the 36-sq-km **Marais Audomarois** (Audomarois Marsh), its market gardens criss-crossed by *watgangs* (canals), is home to all sorts of wildlife, including 250 kinds of bird, 19 species of dragonfly and 11 types of bat. The area can be explored on foot or by boat, including flat-bottomed *bacôves*. In Clairmarais, 5km northeast of St-Omer, **Isnor** (☎ 03 21 39 15 15; www.isnor.fr; 3 rue du Marais; canoe 4hr €25; ☎ Sat, Sun & holidays Apr, May, Jun & Sep, daily Jul & Aug) rents canoes, row boats, electric boats and bicycles and runs pontoon boat excursions. The tourist office can supply a brochure with walking, cycling and horse-riding options around St-Omer.

About 5km east of St-Omer in Arques, the glassware conglomerate **Arc International** (☎ 03 21 12 74 74; www.arc-international.com; Zone Industrielle, N43; adult/student €6.50/4.20), famous for brands such as Arcoroc, Luminarc and Mikasa, runs 1½-hour guided tours (often in English) of its state-of-the-art production facilities – glowing globules of glass! – at 9.30am, 11am, 2pm and 3.30pm from Monday to Saturday.

The two-star **Hôtel St-Louis** (☎ 03 21 38 35 21; www.hotel-saintlouis.com; 25 rue d'Arras; s/d €59/72), a few blocks southeast of the basilica, has 30 quiet, spacious rooms, rich in yellow and orange tones, and a garden.

There are quite a few good-value restaurants (lunch *menus* from €10) around the perimeter of place Foch (including pedestrianised rue Louis Martel) and adjacent place P Bonhomme. **Le Cygne** (☎ 03 21 98 20 52; www.restaurantlecygne.fr; 8 rue Caventou; menus €15-48; ☎ closed dinner Sun & Mon), two blocks east of the basilica, is an elegant French restaurant that uses only the freshest seasonal ingredients. For self-catering there's a lively **food market** (place Foch; ☎ Sat morning).

St-Omer's train station, 1.5km northeast of the *hôtel de ville*, has frequent services to Calais (€7, 30 minutes, nine to 18 daily) and Lille-Flandres (€10.40, 50 minutes, seven to 11 daily).

LA COUPOLE

A top-secret subterranean V2 launch site just five minutes' flying time from London – almost (but not quite) put into operation in 1944 – now houses **La Coupole** (☎ 03 21 12 27 27; www.lacoupole.com; adult/student/5-16yr/family incl audioguide €9/7.50/6/19.50; ☎ 9am-6pm, to 7pm Jul & Aug, closed 2 weeks from Christmas), an innovative museum that uses lots of moving images to present Nazi Germany's secret programs to build V1 and V2 rockets (which could fly at 650km/h and an astounding 5780km/h respectively); life in northern France during the Nazi occupation; and the postwar conquest of space with the help of V2 rocket technology – and seconded V2 engineers.

La Coupole is 5km south of St-Omer (the circuitous route is signposted, but confusing), just outside the town of Wizernes, near the intersection of the D928 and the D210. From the A26, take exit 3 or 4.

CASSEL

pop 2300

The fortified, very Flemish village of Cassel, 57km southeast of Calais atop French Flanders' highest hill (176m), affords panoramic views of the verdant Flanders plain. A **bagpipe festival** is held here each year on the 3rd weekend in June. Cassel is enormously proud of Reuze Papa and Reuze Maman, its resident giants (see the boxed text, p226).

The main square, fringed by austere brick buildings with steep slate roofs, is where you'll find the **tourist office** (☎ 03 28 40 52 55; www.cassel-horizons.com; 20 Grand' Place; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri year-round, 9am-noon Sat Oct-Mar, 8.30am-noon & 1.30-5.45pm Sat, 2-6.30pm Sun Apr-Sep) and

CASSEL AT WAR

Thanks to its elevated position, Cassel served as Maréchal Ferdinand Foch's headquarters at the beginning of WWI. In 1940, it was the site of intensive rearguard resistance by British troops defending Dunkirk during the evacuation.

Cassel Horizons (adult/6-14yr €3/2.50; ☎ same as tourist office), an interactive museum which presents Cassel's history in an easily digestible form.

Eight or 10 generations ago, wheat flour was milled and linseed oil pressed just as it is today at the wooden **moulin** (windmill; adult/6-14yr €3/2.50; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 1.30-7pm Sun Jul & Aug, 2-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Sat & Sun Apr-Jun & Sep, 2-6pm Sat & school holidays, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Sun Oct-Mar, closed Dec-early Jan, last tour begins 1hr before closing), perched on the highest point in town to catch the wind. The 45-minute, hands-on tour is noisy but interesting. During the 19th century, the skyline of French Flanders was dotted with 2000 such windmills.

Le Foch (☎ 03 28 42 47 73; www.hotel-foch.net, in French; 41 Grand' Place; d €67; ☎) has six spacious rooms with antique-style beds, some with views of the square. The elegant **restaurant** (menus €15-25; ☎ closed dinner Sun & Fri) serves traditional French cuisine, made with fresh local ingredients, amid carved woodwork and sparkling crystal.

Taverne Flamande (☎ 03 28 42 42 59; 34 Grand' Place; menus €12-17, Sunday menu €24.50; ☎ closed Wed & dinner Tue) occupies a classic 1933 dining room that's as Flemish as the cuisine.

Cassel's train station, 3km up the hill (the tram no longer runs), is on the secondary line linking Dunkirk (€5.50, 25 minutes, 10 daily Monday to Friday, two or three daily weekends) with Arras (€12.30, 1¼ hours, seven daily Monday to Friday, one or two daily weekends).

DUNKIRK

pop 69,400

Dunkirk (Dunkerque), made famous and flattened almost simultaneously in 1940 (see p38), was rebuilt during one of the most uninspired periods in Western architecture. Charming it may not be, but the port city has two worthwhile museums, a mellow beach and several colourful pre-Lent carnivals.

Under Louis XIV, Dunkirk – whose name means ‘church of the dunes’ in Flemish – served as a base for French privateers, including the daring Jean Bart (1650–1702), whose hugely successful attacks on English and Dutch merchant ships have ensured his infamy in British history and, locally, his status as a national hero: the city centre’s main square, suitably adorned with a dashing statue (1845), bears his name, as does a high school.

In the base of a 58m-high **belfry** (adult €2.80) with spectacular views, erected around 1440, is Dunkirk’s **tourist office** (☎ 03 28 66 79 21; www.lesdunesdeflandre.fr; rue de l’Amiral Ronarch; ☎ 9.30am–12.30pm & 1.30–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 10am–noon & 2–4pm Sun & holidays, no midday closure Jul & Aug). Staff can supply you with an **MP3 tour** (€3.50) of the city’s WWI and WWII sites and have details on **boat tours** (adult/5–12yr €8.50/6.50; ☎ 3pm daily except Wed Jul & Aug, also often possible 3pm Sat, Sun & holidays Apr–May, Sep & Oct) of the port. The **Pass Tourisme** (€12) offers discounts on museums, activities, public transport and shopping.

M+A Informatique (☎ 03 28 64 49 91; 8 rue Thiers; per hr €2.70; ☎ 2–10pm or 11pm) offers internet access four blocks southwest of the tourist office.

Sights & Activities

The **Musée Portuaire** (Harbour Museum; ☎ 03 28 63 33 39; www.museeportuaire.com; 9 quai de la Citadelle; adult/student/family €4/3/10; ☎ 10am–12.45pm & 1.30–6pm Wed–Mon, also open Tue & no midday closure Jul & Aug), housed in a one-time tobacco warehouse, will delight ship model-lovers of all ages. Guided **tours** (adult/student/family €7.50/6/18, incl museum €9/7.50/22) take visitors aboard a lighthouse ship, a *peniche* (barge) and the *Duchesse Anne*, a three-masted training ship built for the German merchant marine in 1901 and acquired by France as WWII reparations.

The somewhat faded, turn-of-the-20th-century seaside resort of **Malo-les-Bains** is 2km northeast of Dunkirk’s city centre (served by buses 3 and 9). Its wide, promenade-lined beach, **Plage des Alliés**, is named in honour of the Allied troops evacuated to England from here in 1940. Just off the coast, vessels sunk during the evacuation can be visited on scuba dives, and some can even be seen at low tide.

The **Musée d’Art Contemporain** (LAAC; ☎ 03 28 29 56 00; av des Bains; 1st/2nd adult €4.50/3, 18–25yr/under 18 €1.50/free; ☎ 9am–noon & 2–6.30pm Tue, Wed & Fri, 10am–

12.30pm & 2–6.30pm Sat & Sun, to 5.30pm Nov–Mar, 9am–noon & 2–8.30pm Thu year-round), a few hundred metres from the western end of Malo-les-Bains’ beach, features often-whimsical, ‘evolving’ expositions of contemporary art. Outside is a sculpture garden.

The **British Memorial** (rte de Furnes), honouring more than 4500 British and Commonwealth MIAs from 1940, is 1.5km southeast of the tourist office. A military museum dedicated to the evacuation, the **Mémorial du Souvenir** (☎ 03 28 26 27 81; www.dynamo-dunkerque.com; rue des Chantiers de France; adult/under 12yr €3.50/free; ☎ 10am–noon & 2–5pm Apr–Sep), is next to the Musée d’Art Contemporain.

Stretching east from Malo-les-Bains to the Belgian border, the *dunes flamandes* (Flemish dunes) represent a unique ecosystem harbouring hundreds of plant species, including rare orchids. The area – including the **Dewulf and Marchand dunes** – is linked to Dunkirk by **DK’BUS** (www.dkbus.com, in French) bus 2B (3B on Sunday and holidays), which continues on to Adinkerke in Belgium (€1.30, an extra €0.90 to cross the border). Tides permitting, you can walk or cycle along the wet sand or the GR from Malo-les-Bains to Bray-Dunes and Westhoek.

Festivals & Events

Dunkirk’s **carivals**, held both before and (mischievously) after the beginning of Lent, originated as a final fling for the town’s cod fishermen before they set out for months in the frigid waters off Iceland. The biggest celebration is the *bande* (parade) held on the Sunday right before Mardi Gras, when men traditionally dress up as women, costumed citizens of all genders march around town behind fife-and-drum bands and general merriment reigns. At the climax of the festivities, the mayor and other dignitaries stand on the *hôtel de ville* balcony and pelt the assembled locals with dried salted herrings.

Eating

Dunkirk is not known for its gastronomy but restaurants are scattered around town, including near the tourist office.

Entre Ciel et Mer (☎ 03 28 59 39 00; 16 rue de Flandre, Malo-les-Bains; menus €14.50–23; ☎ closed dinner Sun & Mon) Between the beach and place Turenne, this is a good choice for classic French-style fish and meat dishes.

Getting There & Away

For details about getting from Dover to Dunkirk's car-ferry port, about 25km west of the town centre near Loon Plage, see p968.

For details on buses to Calais, see p239.

All but a few express trains from Dunkirk's train station, 1km southwest of the tourist office, to Lille stop at Gare Lille-Flandres (€12.70, 30 to 80 minutes, 30 daily Monday to Friday, 11 to 15 daily weekends).

CÔTE D'OPALE

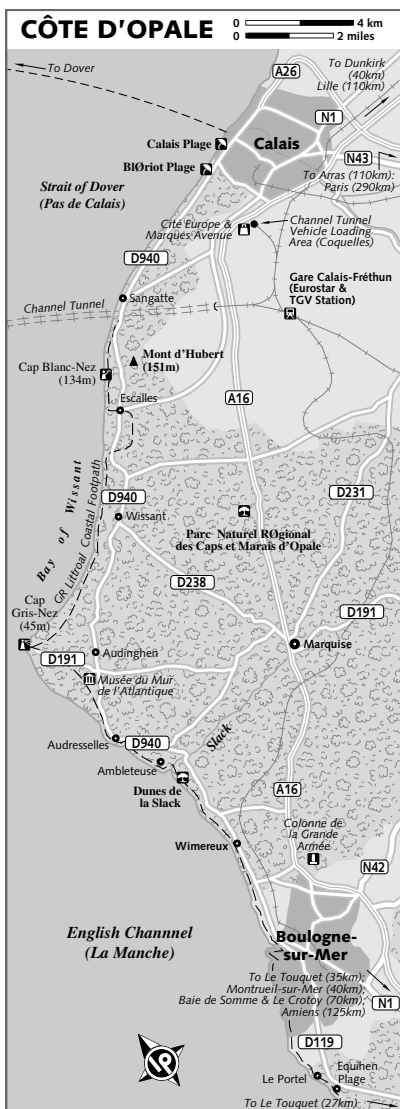
The 40km of cliffs, sand dunes and beaches between Calais and Boulogne, known as the Côte d'Opale (Opal Coast) because of the ever-changing interplay of greys and blues in the sea and sky, are a dramatic and beautiful introduction to France. The coastal peaks (frequently buffeted by gale-force winds), wide beaches and rolling farmland are dotted with the remains of Nazi Germany's Atlantic Wall, a chain of fortifications and gun emplacements built to prevent the Allied invasion that in the end took place in Normandy. The seashore has been attracting British beach-lovers since the Victorian era.

Part of the **Parc Naturel Régional des Caps et Marais d'Opale** (Opal Coast Headlands & Marshes Regional Park; www.parc-opale.fr), which stretches as far inland as St-Omer, the Côte d'Opale area is criss-crossed by hiking paths, including the GR Littoral (GR120) trail that hugs the coast (except where the cliffs are in danger of collapse). Some routes are also suitable for mountain biking and horse riding. Each village along the Côte d'Opale has at least one campground.

By car, the D940 offers some truly spectacular vistas. For details on Ingland's bus 44, which links all the villages mentioned below with Calais and Boulogne, see p239.

Sights

The Channel Tunnel slips under the Strait of Dover 8km west of Calais at the village of **Sangatte**, known for its wide beach. Southwest of there, the coastal dunes give way to cliffs that culminate in windswept, 134m-high **Cap Blanc-Nez**, which affords breathtaking views of the Bay of Wissant, the port of Calais, the Flemish countryside (pock-marked by Allied bomb craters) and the cliffs of Kent. The grey obelisk, a short walk up the hill from the new parking area, honours the WWI Dover Patrol.



The tidy and very French seaside resort of **Wissant**, home of the Côte d'Opale area's **tourist office** (☎ 08 20 20 76 00; www.tourisme.terredes2caps.fr, in French; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Sun, no midday closure & sometimes to 7pm Jul & Aug), is a good base for walks in the rolling countryside and along the beach from Cap Blanc-Nez to Cap Gris-Nez (check the tides at the tourist

office before setting out or you may get trapped between a rock and a wet place). It boasts a vast fine-sand beach where you can admire England from afar – in 55 BC Julius Caesar launched his invasion of Britain from here.

Hôtel Le Vivier (☎ 03 21 35 93 61; www.levivier.com; place de l'Église, Wissant; d incl breakfast €60-82, with wash-basin €44), across the street from the church and next to the millpond, has 39 nicely appointed rooms and a homey, nautically themed **restaurant** (menus €18.50-38.50; ☹ closed Tue & Wed) specialising in fresh local fish and seafood. There are several other hotels right nearby.

Topped by a lighthouse and a radar station serving the 600 ships that pass by each day, the 45m-high cliffs of **Cap Gris-Nez** are only 28km from the white cliffs of the English coast. The name – in French, 'Grey Nose' – is a corruption of the archaic English 'craig ness', meaning 'rocky promontory'. The area is a stopping-off point for millions of migrating birds.

Oodles of WWII hardware, including a gargantuan rail-borne German artillery piece with an 86km range, are on display at the **Musée du Mur de l'Atlantique** (☎ 03 21 32 97 33; www.batterietodt.com; adult/8-14yr €5.50/2.50; ☹ 9am-7pm Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Sep-Nov & Feb-Jun, closed Dec & Jan), which occupies a Brodingtonian German pillbox with the word 'musée' inscribed on the side. It is 500m off the D940, just southwest of Audinghen.

The village of **Ambleteuse**, on the northern side of the mouth of the River Slack, is blessed with a lovely beach, which was once defended from attack by 17th-century **Fort d'Ambleteuse**, designed by Vauban. Just south of town is a protected area of grass-covered dunes known as **Dunes de la Slack**.

The neatly organised **Musée 39-45** (☎ 03 21 87 33 01; www.musee3945.com; adult/7-14yr €6.50/4.50; ☹ 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep-mid-Oct, 10am-6pm Sat, Sun & school holidays mid-Oct-Nov & Mar, closed Dec-Feb), at the northern edge of Ambleteuse, features realistic tableaux of military and civilian life, and a 25-minute film. The dashing but wildly impractical French officers' dress uniforms of 1931 hint at why France fared so badly on the battlefield in 1940. Popular wartime songs accompany your visit.

BOULOGNE-SUR-MER

pop 44,600

Boulogne, the most interesting of France's Channel ports, makes a pretty good first stop in France, especially if combined with a swing north through the Côte d'Opale (p243).

Much of the city is an uninspiring mass of postwar reconstruction, but the attractive Ville Haute (Upper City), perched high above the rest of town, is girded by a 13th-century wall. The biggest attraction is Nausicaä, one of Europe's premier aquariums.

Auguste Mariette (1821-81), the archeologist who founded Cairo's Egyptian Museum, was born here, which is why Boulogne has a number of sculptures and artefacts related to the Pharaohs.

Orientation

Central Boulogne consists of the hilltop Ville Haute and, on the flats below, the Basse Ville (Lower City). The main train station, Gare Boulogne-Ville, is 1.2km southeast of the centre.

Information

Several commercial banks can be found on or near rue Victor Hugo. Money can be changed aboard Speed Ferries' trans-Channel catamaran.

Forum Espace Culture (57 rue Adolphe Thiers; per 15 min €1; ☹ 2-7pm Mon, 10am-7pm Tue-Sat) Internet access in a bookshop.

Laundrettes 62 rue de Lille (☹ 7am to 8pm); 235 rue Nationale (☹ 7am to 8pm) Duds meet suds in a gripping contest of wills.

Main Post Office (place Frédéric Sauvage) Exchanges money.

Syrius Connect (☎ 03 21 30 03 47; 23 rue des Religieuses Anglaises; per hr €3; ☹ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat) Internet access.

Tourist Office (☎ 03 21 10 88 10; www.tourisme-boulognesurmer.com; parvis de Nausicaä; ☹ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-1pm & 2.30-6pm Sun & holidays Jul & Aug, 10am-12.45pm & 1.45-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 3pm-5pm or 6pm Sun & holidays Apr-Jun & Sep-mid-Nov, 10.30am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat & sometimes Sun mid-Nov-Mar)

Tourist Office Annexe (forum Jean Noël; ☹ 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.45pm or 2pm-6pm or 6.30pm Mon-Sat year-round, 10am-1pm Sun & holidays Apr-mid-Nov, also open 3-6pm Sun Jul & Aug)

Sights

You can walk all the way around the **Ville Haute** – an island of centuries-old buildings and cobblestone streets – atop the rectangular, tree-shaded ramparts, a distance of just under 1.5km. Among the impressive buildings around place Godefroy de Bouillon are the neoclassical **Hôtel Desandrouin**, built in the 1780s

BOULOGNE-SUR-MER

0 0 400 m
0 0.2 miles

1 **INFORMATION**

Forum Espace Culture.....1 C2
Laundrette.....2 E3
Laundrette.....3 E2
Main Post Office.....4 C2
Synus Connect.....5 D1
Tourist Office.....(see 13)
Tourist Office Annexe.....6 C2

2 **SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

Basilique Notre Dame.....7 E1
Château-Musée.....8 E2
Fishing Port.....9 C2
Hôtel de Ville.....10 E2
Hôtel Desandrouin.....11 E2
Musée Libertador San Martin.....12 D2
Nauticaal.....13 B1

3 **SLEEPING**

Auberge de Jeunesse.....14 D4
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4 **EATING**

Champion supermarket.....17 C3
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Fromagerie.....19 D2
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Shoo Bee Doo.....21 E2
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Euroto.....25 D3
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6 **TOURIST INFORMATION**

To Calais (20km)
To Dunkirk (16km)
To Arras (116km)
To Lille (116km)
To Omer (17km)
To St-Omer (17km)
To Valenciennes (43km)
To Arras (43km)
To Paris (258km)

7 **TOURIST INFORMATION**

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14 **TOURIST INFORMATION**

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15 **TOURIST INFORMATION**

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16 **TOURIST INFORMATION**

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17 **TOURIST INFORMATION**

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19 **TOURIST INFORMATION**

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20 **TOURIST INFORMATION**

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28 **TOURIST INFORMATION**

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and later used by Napoléon, and the brick **hôtel de ville** (1735), with its square medieval belfry.

Basilique Notre Dame (rue de Lille; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5pm, to 6pm Apr-Aug), its towering, Italianate dome visible from all over town (and best admired from the old city's ramparts), was built from 1827 to 1866 with little input from trained architects. The partly Romanesque **crypt and treasury** (admission €2; ☎ 2-5pm Tue-Sun) are eminently skippable.

The cultures of the world mix and mingle inside the **Château-Musée** (☎ 03 21 10 02 20; adult/student €2/free; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm Sun), one of the few places on earth where you can admire Egyptian antiquities (including a mummy) next to 19th-century Inuit masks and compare Andean ceramics with Grecian urns, with an in-situ, 4th-century Roman wall thrown in for good measure – all inside a 13th-century fortified castle.

And now for something even more unexpected: the house where José de San Martín, the exiled hero of Argentine, Chilean and Peruvian independence, died in 1850 has been turned into the **Musée Libertador San Martín** (☎ 03 21 31 54 65; 113 Grande Rue; admission free; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Sat), owned by the Argentine government and staffed by Argentine military personnel who may be surprised to have anyone stop by. Ring the bell to visit this expatriated piece of South America, complete with memorabilia related to San Martín's life and lots of gaudy military uniforms.

The most interesting thing to do in the mostly postwar **Basse Ville** is to stroll along the **fishing port** (quai Gambetta), where you'll find fish vendors' stalls – and hungry seagulls diving and squawking overhead. The **shopping precinct** is centred on rue Victor Hugo and rue Adolphe Thiers.

NAUSICAÄ

The outstanding, completely bilingual **Nausicaä** (French Sea Experience Centre; ☎ 03 21 30 99 99; www.nausicaa.fr; bd Ste-Beuve; adult/student/3-12yr €16.50/11.50/10.80, audioguide €4-5; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-6.30pm Sep-Jun, closed 3 weeks in Jan), the focus of which is the sustainable use of marine resources, comes with lots of kid-friendly activities (fish petting, a California sea-lion tank, feeding sessions) and is educational in the best sense of the word. You can see everything up close from see-through jellyfish and 250kg sharks to speckled caimans (in the **Submerged Forest**) and arawanas, fish that can hop out of the water

to pluck birds from overhanging branches (ladies with fancy hats, beware!). The interactive **Environment-Friendly House** – with a bicycle parked out front, of course – looks at things we can do in our daily lives to safeguard the planet. An interactive section focusing on the sea and sustainable development, **Planet Nausicaä**, opened in 2008.

If the prices look like they'll do to your pocket what drag nets do to the oceans, remember that going to the cinema to see *Finding Nemo* and *A Fish Called Wanda* would cost about the same. The centre is wheelchair-accessible except for one aquarium.

At the cafés you can dine on *specialités boulonnaises* (herring, mackerel and haddock; €5.50) – kind of like a zoo that sells lionburgers, some might say, but don't forget that Boulogne is France's number-one fishing port, and sustainability is just as important to the survival of fish species as it is to the fishers.

BEACHES

Boulogne's beach begins just north of Nausicaä, across the mouth of the Liane from a whirring wind farm and the one-time site of a steelworks. There are other fine beaches 4km north of town at **Wimereux** (served two to four times per hour by buses 1 and 2 from place de France), a partly belle-époque-style resort founded by Napoléon in 1806; 2.5km southwest at **Le Portel** (bus 23 from place de France); and 5km south at **Equihen Plage** (bus Ea and Eb from the train station).

Sleeping

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 03 21 99 15 30; www.fuaj.org; place Rouget de Lisle; dm incl breakfast & sheets €17.95; ☎ closed Jan, reception closed noon-5pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar; ☎) This modern, 137-bed outfit has a bar, lounge area and spacious rooms with shower, toilet and two to five beds. Kitchen facilities are available.

Hôtel Faidherbe (☎ 03 21 31 60 93; www.hotelfaidherbe.fr; 12 rue Faidherbe; d/q €63/96, d Oct-Mar €58, with washbasin €38; ☎) A friendly two-star hotel where every guest elicits some sort of response from the house mascot, a mynah bird named Victor – his repertoire includes laughing, coughing and squawking 'bonjour', 'au revoir' and 'bye-bye'. The 33 rooms are smallish but modern and practical.

Hôtel La Matelote (☎ 03 21 30 33 33; www.la-matelote.com; 70 bd Ste-Beuve; d Sun-Thu €95-150, Fri, Sat & holidays €110-170; ☎ ☎) Boulogne's plushiest hotel

has a luxurious Jacuzzi, *hammam* (Turkish baths) and sauna. The 35 spacious four-star rooms, many decorated in rich shades of red and gold, have ultramodern bathrooms and classic wood furnishings, and some come with balconies. Wheelchair access available.

Eating & Drinking

Thanks to its ready supply, Boulogne is an excellent place for fresh fish. In the Ville Haute, rue de Lille is lined with small eateries. In the Ville Basse, the area around place Dalton and rue du Doyen has a good choice of eateries.

Shoo Bee Doo (☎ 03 91 90 55 58; www.shoobeedoo.eu; 2 rue du Château; lunch menus €13.50, dinner menus €17.50-23.50) Yet another of Boulogne's many surprises! Decked out like a Victorian bordello, with dark-red walls, maroon velvet chairs and lots of gilded picture frames, this bar-restaurant puts on *spectacles transformistes* (drag shows; €45) preceded by a meal from 8.30pm to 2am on Friday and Saturday and from 1.30pm to 6pm on many Sundays; reserve ahead. It's also a restaurant (open Tuesday to Thursday and lunch Friday) serving family-style French cuisine; and a gay bar (open 6pm to 1am Tuesday to Sunday) that welcomes *hétéros*.

La Cave (☎ 03 21 32 71 60; 24 rue du Pot d'Étain; menu €25; ☎ open Tue-Sat & holiday Sun) This restaurant and piano bar, on a desolate side street, serves excellent French cuisine, including *dos de cabillaud* (cod steak). There's often live music in the cellar bar from 8pm to 10pm on Saturday night.

La Matelote (☎ 03 21 30 17 97; 80 bd Ste-Beuve; menus €33-75; ☎ closed dinner Sun & lunch Thu) A classy establishment with white tablecloths, paper-thin wine glasses, fine porcelain and one Michelin star. Serves French-style *cuisine de saveurs* (cuisine that mixes savours and flavours) with an emphasis on fish, crustaceans and meat.

SELF-CATERING

Food shops are sprinkled around rue de la Lampe and rue Adolphe Thiers.

Champion supermarket (53 bd Daunou; ☎ 8.30am-8pm Mon-Sat)

Food market (place Dalton; ☎ morning Wed & Sat) Held the day before if Wednesday or Saturday is a holiday.

Fromagerie (☎ 03 21 87 58 53; 23 Grande Rue; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-7.30pm, no midday closure Sat, closed morning Mon & Sun) Fine cheeses.

Traiteur (☎ 03 21 31 53 57; 1 Grande Rue; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 3-7.15pm Tue-Fri & morning Sun, 7.30am-7.30pm Sat) Ready-to-eat delicacies.

Trésor du Vin (☎ 03 21 30 39 13; 12 rue Adolphe Thiers; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-7pm Tue-Sat, sometimes also 10am-12.30pm Sun) A wine shop by and for people who are passionate about wine.

Getting There & Around

For information on car catamarans to Dover, see p968.

For details on buses that service the Côte d'Opale and Calais, see p239.

Euroto (☎ 03 21 30 32 23; 96 rue Nationale) rents cars. There's free parking north of Nauticaa along the beach. To order a cab, call ☎ 03 21 91 25 00.

Gare Boulogne-Ville has rail services to Amiens (€17.60, 1½ hours, six to eight daily), Calais-Ville (€7.20, 30 minutes, 15 to 18 daily Monday to Saturday, eight on Sunday), Étaples-Le Touquet (€5, 20 minutes, 21 Monday to Friday, 13 on weekends), Gare Lille-Flandres or Gare Lille-Europe (€17.60, one to 2¼ hours, 12 daily) and Paris' Gare du Nord (€30.70, 2½ hours, five or six direct daily).

LE TOUQUET

pop 5680

The beach resort of **Le Touquet Paris-Plage**, 30km south of Boulogne, was hugely fashionable during the interwar period, when the English upper crust found it positively smashing (in 1940 a politically oblivious PG Wodehouse was arrested here by the Germans). These days it remains no less posh and no less British. Good spots for a high-profile stroll include the 6km-long **beach**, which features sand sculpture exhibitions, and the leafy area around **place de l'Hermitage**, where you'll find the fabled **Hôtel Westminster**, the casino and the **tourist office** (☎ 03 21 06 72 00; www.letouquet.com; Palais de l'Europe, place de l'Hermitage; ☎ 9am-6pm Oct-Mar, to 7pm Apr-Sep, opens 10am Sun & holidays).

Accommodation pricing is highly seasonal. If you're hunting for somewhere central to stay, it's hard to beat the **Hôtel Red Fox** (☎ 03 21 05 27 58; www.hotelredfox.com; 60 rue de Metz; d in winter from €54, in summer €95; ☎ ☎), a two-star hotel just off rue St-Jean, Le Touquet's sparkling, boutique- and eatery-lined main thoroughfare. The 53 functional rooms feature primary colours and brand-new bathrooms.

Just half a block from the beachfront, **Riva Bella** (☎ 03 21 05 08 22; www.rivabella-touquet.com; 12 rue Léon Garat; d €18-20, d €45; ☎ mid-Feb-mid-Nov; ☎ ☎), Le Touquet's hostel (though it feels more like

an old-time hotel), has 50 beds in rooms for two to four people.

There are food shops along rue de Metz, between rue St-Jean and the semicircular **covered market** (☎ morning Thu & Sat, also open Mon mid-Jun–mid-Sep).

Lyddair (www.lyddair.com) links Aéroport Le Touquet Côte d'Opale (www.aeroport-letouquet.com) with Lydd (London Ashford), while Sky South (www.skysouth.co.uk) has flights to Shoreham.

The Étaples-Le Touquet train station, 5km from Le Touquet's centre, is linked with Boulogne (€5, 20 minutes, 21 Monday to Friday, 13 on weekends). Bus 42 links Le Touquet with Boulogne's bd Daunou (€4.60, one hour, four or five Monday to Saturday).

MONTREUIL-SUR-MER

pop 2400

The first thing you should know about Montreuil – so you don't have your hopes cruelly dashed upon arrival – is that this fortified hilltop town is 15km from the sea, the 'sur-mer' a mere vestige of the time before the River Canche silted up. The second thing you should know – if you like literary trivia – is that Victor Hugo once had lunch here, the result being the great man's decision to set the first scenes of *Les Misérables* in Montreuil.

Montreuil's most interesting bits are inside the walled **Ville Haute** (Upper Town), where you'll find the star-shaped, 16th-century **Citadelle** (adult/student €2.50/1.25, audioguide €1; ☎ 10am–noon & 2pm–4pm or 5pm, closed Tue & Dec-Feb); **St-Saulve abbey church** (☎ 9am–noon & 2–6pm), whose 12th-century facade is topped by an 18th-century tower; quite a few attractive 18th-century town houses (eg around place Darnétal and along rue de la Chaîne); and some picturesque streets (eg rue du Clape-en-Bas, rue du Clape-en-Haut and cavée St-Firmin). The 3km ramparts walk affords panoramic views of the countryside 40m below but a lack of railings makes it dicey for rambunctious children.

Brochures in English on things to do in and around Montreuil are available from the **tourist office** (☎ 03 21 06 04 27; www.tourisme-montreuillois.com; 21 rue Carnot; ☎ 10am–12.30pm & 2pm–5pm or 6pm Mon–Sat year-round, 10am–12.30pm Sun Apr–Oct, also open 3–5pm Sun Jul & Aug), just outside the citadel.

Totally renovated in 2006, the **auberge de jeunesse** (☎/fax 03 21 06 10 83; www.fuaj.org; dm €10.70; ☎ check-in 2–6pm except Tue, closed Dec-Feb), with 40

industrial-strength steel single beds, is inside the Citadelle. Kitchen facilities are available. You can usually drop off your bags in the morning.

The three-star **Coq Hôtel** (☎ 03 21 81 05 61; www.coqhotel.fr; 2 place de la Poissonnerie; d €115–135; ☎ ☎), with 19 traditionally styled rooms, occupies a 19th-century building in the heart of the Ville Haute.

The train station, in the Ville Basse, is linked to Boulogne (€6.80, 30 minutes, five to eight daily).

BAIE DE SOMME

The **Somme Estuary** (www.baiedesomme.org, in French, www.baiedesomme.fr), at 5km wide the largest in northern France, affords delightfully watery views as the cycle of the tides alternately hides and reveals vast expanses of sand. **Le Crotoy** is a modest beach resort on the northern bank that makes a good base for exploring the area. From there, across the estuary you can see **Pointe du Hourdel**, famed for its colony of sand-bank-lounging seals and linked to Le Crotoy by a **bike path** (www.baiecydette.com); lots of duck-hunting huts; and **St-Valéry-sur-Somme**, which can be reached on foot (with a bit of knee-deep sloggling) at low tide, though only with a guide (the area is notorious for its strong currents and galloping tides) – for details year-round, contact **Promenade en Baie** (☎ 03 22 27 47 36; www.promenade-en-baie.com, in French; 5 chemin des Digues).

Le Crotoy's **Tourist Office** (☎ 03 22 27 05 25; www.tourisme-crotoy.com; 1 rue Carnot; ☎ 9.30am–12.30pm & 2–6pm Mon & Wed–Sat, 10am–12.30pm & 2–5.30pm Sun & holidays, to 7pm Jul & Aug) can supply you with a *horaire des marées* (tide schedule).

Family-run **Les Tourelles** (☎ 03 22 27 16 33; www.lestourelles.com; 2–4 rue Pierre Guerlain; s/d €51/74, with washbasin €46/64; ☎ ☎), a sprawling old two-star hotel overlooking the beach, has an austere, Victorian feel – this is the sort of place where guests take bracing seaside walks before breakfast. One room has 14 bunk beds for kids aged four to 14 (€23, including breakfast), creating a summer-camp atmosphere. The attached **restaurant** (menus €22–32; ☎ lunch & dinner) serves French cuisine with Channel Coast touches, including veggie options. From 2.30pm to 6.30pm light meals and oysters are on offer.

The 2-sq-km **Parc Ornithologique du Marquenterre** (Marquenterre Ornithological Park; ☎ 03 22 25 68 99; www.parcduarquenterre.com; adult/6–16yr €9.90/7.90,

MCDONALD'S HAS BRANCHES SO WHY SHOULDN'T THE LOUVRE?

A local branch of the Louvre is coming to a depressed former coal-mining town near you – at least if you live in France's far north. That's right, come 2010, when the Louvre-Lens (www.louvre-lens.fr) is set to open in **Lens** (☎ tourist office 03 21 67 66 66; www.tourisme-lenslievin.fr), you'll no longer have to go to Paris to visit the world's most-visited museum.

We may as well be blunt: Lens, 18km northeast of Arras and 37km south of Lille, is known for absolutely nothing, at least as far as tourism is concerned. But thanks to a high-minded effort to 'democratise' the Louvre by bringing its riches to the people – '*la culture est un acteur de la justice sociale*' ('culture is an agent for social justice'), the French prime minister intoned – the town's 37,000 residents are hoping that the Louvre-Lens will do for them what the Guggenheim Museum did for Bilbao. Incidentally, the decision to situate this ultraprestigious project in Lens was apparently helped along by a municipal advert that juxtaposed IM Pei's Louvre pyramid with one of Lens' very own pyramid-like slag heaps!

The new museum, which will occupy the site of long-closed Mineshaft No 9, is being designed by the Japanese architectural firm Sanaa, led by Kazuyo Sejima (said to be the first woman to design a major public monument in France) and Ryue Nishizawa. About two-thirds of the 6000 sq metres of exhibition space will be given over to 600 to 800 major works rotated to Lens from the Louvre (original recipe) for two or three years at a time.

binoculars €4; ☎ 10am–7.30pm Apr–Sep, 10am–6pm mid-Feb–Mar & Oct–mid-Nov, 10am–5pm mid-Nov–mid-Feb, last entry 2hr before closing) in St-Quentin-en-Tourmont, a circuitous 10km northwest of Le Crotoy, is a migratory stopover for more than 200 species of birds on their way from the UK, Iceland, Scandinavia and Siberia to warmer climes in West Africa. While here, our feathered friends – including 12 stork couples (out of 30 in the Somme *département*) – find most of their food in the sandy estuary at low tide. Three marked walking circuits of 2km to 6km take you to marshes, dunes, meadows, freshwater ponds, a brackish lagoon and 14 observation posts.

ARRAS

pop 41,400

Arras (the final *s* is pronounced), former capital of Artois and *préfecture* (capital) of the *département* of Pas-de-Calais, is worth seeing mainly for its harmonious ensemble of Flemish-style arcaded buildings. The city makes a good base for visits to the Battle of the Somme Memorials (p252).

Orientation

The Grand' Place and the almost-adjointing place des Héros (also called the Petite Place), where you'll find the *hôtel de ville*, are Arras' focal point. The train station is 600m to the southeast. Commerce is centred on rue Gambetta, rue Ernestale and the pedestrianised area south of place des Héros, including rue Ronville.

Information

Banks can be found along rue Gambetta and its continuation, rue Ernestale.

The **tourist office** (☎ 03 21 51 26 95; www.ot-arras.fr, in French; place des Héros; ☎ 9am or 10am–noon & 2pm–6pm or 6.30pm Mon–Sat, no midday closure Apr–Sep, 10am–12.30pm or 1pm & 2.30–6.30pm Sun & holidays) is inside the *hôtel de ville*, has an internet terminal, and offers an audioguide tour (adult/student €6/3.20) of the city centre. Le City Pass (adult/student €19/10) gets you into the belfry, the tunnels, Wellington Quarry, the Musée des Beaux-Arts and Cité Nature (a science museum focusing on food, health and nature).

Other handy places:

Copie-Com (☎ 03 21 73 98 02; 121 rue St-Aubert; per hr €1; ☎ noon–7pm Mon, 10.30am–7pm Tue–Fri, 2–7pm Sat) Internet access.

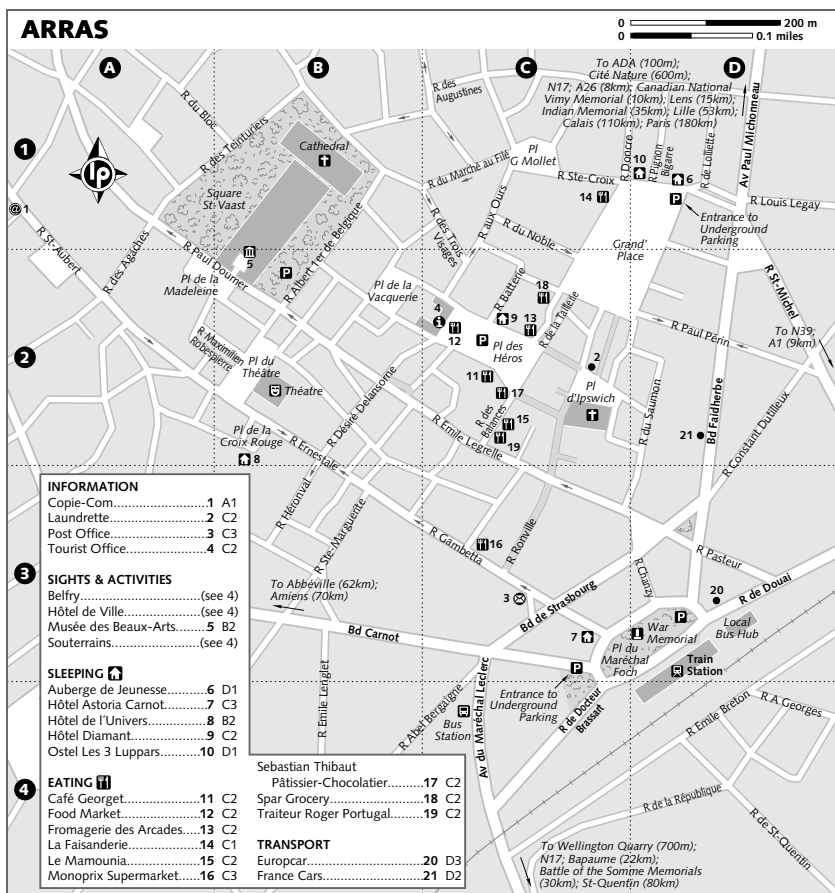
Laundrette (17 place d'Ipswich; ☎ 7am–8pm) Across the street from an old red British phone box.

Post Office (rue Gambetta) Changes money.

Sights & Activities

Arras' two market squares, **place des Héros** and the **Grand' Place**, are surrounded by 17th- and 18th-century Flemish-baroque houses, especially handsome at night. Although they vary in decorative detail, their 345 sandstone columns form a common arcade unique in France.

The Flemish-Gothic **hôtel de ville** (place des Héros) dates from the 16th century but was completely rebuilt after WWI. Three giants (see the boxed text p226) – Colas, Jacqueline and their son Dédé – make their home in the lobby.



The basement of the *hôtel de ville* is a veritable hub of activity. If you're in the mood for a panoramic view, this is the place to hop on the lift to the top of the 75m **belfry** (adult/student €2.30/1.60; ☎ same as tourist office). But for a truly unique perspective on Arras, head into the slimy **souterrains** (tunnels). Also known as *boves* (cellars), they run under place des Héros and were turned into British command posts, hospitals and barracks during WWI. Each spring, in a brilliant juxtaposition of underground gloom and horticultural exuberance, plants and flowers turn the tunnels into the lush, creative, life-affirming **Jardin des Boves** (Cellar Garden; ☎ mid- or late Mar–mid- or late Jun). **Tours** (adult/student €4.70/2.70) of the *souterrains* lasting 45 minutes (in English upon request),

focusing on the gardens (when they're there), generally begin at about 11 am and twice in the afternoon from Monday to Friday, and every 30 minutes or so on Saturday and Sunday.

The staging ground for the spring 1917 offensive in which the poet Siegfried Sassoon was wounded, **Wellington Quarry** (Carrière Wellington; ☎ Arras tourist office 03 21 48 58 52; www.carriere-wellington.com; rue Delétoile; adult/student €6.50/2.70; ☎ 10am–12.30pm & 1.30–6pm, last tour 1-1½ hr before closing) is a 20m-deep network of old chalk quarries expanded during WWI by tunnellers from New Zealand. Hour-long guided tours in French and English combine imaginative audiovisuals, evocative photos and period items. It's easy to tell who wrote which graffiti when: signs painted in black are British and

from WWI, those in red are French and from WWII, when the site was used as a bomb shelter. Opened to the public in 2008, the quarry is about 1km south of the train station; to get there, take av du Maréchal Leclerc or follow the signs around town to the 'Carrière'. It's served by buses 1A and 4.

Highlights at the **Musée des Beaux-Arts** (Fine Arts Museum; ☎ 03 21 71 26 43; 22 rue Paul Doumer; adult/student & over 65yr €4/2; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 2-5.30pm Wed-Mon), housed in a neoclassical former Benedictine abbey with an impressive courtyard, include the original copper lion from the *hôtel de ville* belfry (in the lobby), medieval sculpture (including a 15th-century skeletal figure whose stomach is being devoured by worms) and 17th-century religious paintings.

Sleeping

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎ 03 21 22 70 02; www.fuaj.org; 59 Grand' Place; dm €11.60; ☎ reception 9am-noon & 5-10pm, closed mid-Nov-Jan) Modern and superbly situated in the town centre, this hostel has cheerful rooms for two to 10; almost all of the 54 beds are bunks. Full kitchen facilities are available.

Hôtel Astoria Carnot (☎ 03 21 71 08 14; www.hotelcarnot.com; 10 place du Maréchal Foch; s/d/q €52/59/80) Above a sleek brasserie, this hotel has 29 spiffy, well-lit rooms with pastel colours, big windows and all-tile bathrooms.

Ostel Les 3 Luppars (☎ 03 21 60 02 03; www.ostel-les-3luppars.com, in French; 47 Grand' Place; s/d/q from €55/70/85) Homey and centred on a courtyard, this lift-equipped 'ho(s)tel' occupies the Grand' Place's only non-Flemish-style building (it's Gothic and dates from 1370). The 42 rooms, some with fine views of the square, are comfortable, if uninspired and a tad small. A half-hour in the sauna costs €5 per person.

Hôtel Diamant (☎ 03 21 71 23 23; www.arras-hotel-diamant.com; 5 place des Héros; s/d from €65/70; ☎ ☒) The 12 two-star rooms, though smallish, are neat and tasteful, and six have great views of the *place*. Free internet access, coffee and orange juice are available in the lobby.

Hôtel de l'Univers (☎ 03 21 71 34 01; www.hotel-univers-arras.com; 3-5 place de la Croix Rouge; d €95-143; ☎ ☒) Ensnconced in a 16th-century former Jesuit monastery, this three-star, Best Western-affiliated hostelry, arrayed in a U around a quiet classical courtyard, is an island of calm – though it's just 50m from No 29 on bustling rue Ernestale. Classic draperies, bedspreads and writing desks give each of the 38 rooms

a touch of French class. Civilised comfort at a reasonable price.

Eating

Lots of eateries are hidden away under the arches of the Grand' Place.

Café Georget (☎ 03 21 71 13 07; 42 place des Héros; plat du jour €8; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat) In her unpretentious café, Madame Delforge has been serving hearty, home-style French dishes to people who work in the neighbourhood since 1985.

Sebastian Thibaut Pâtissier-Chocolatier (☎ 03 21 71 53 20; 50 place des Héros; ☎ 8am-7.30pm Tue-Sun) Sparkling cases of mouth-watering pastries and chocolates greet you at this *salon de thé*, a good place for a light lunch – options include sandwiches (€3 to €4.80), omelettes, quiches and, in the warm months, salads.

Le Mamounia (☎ 03 21 07 99 99; 9 rue des Balances; mains €12-23; ☎ closed Mon, lunch Sat, dinner Sun) The elegant, multicoloured decor mixes the Maghreb with Provence but the couscous and *tajines* (stews) are 100% Moroccan.

La Faisanderie (☎ 03 21 48 20 76; 45 Grand' Place; menus €24-63; ☎ closed Mon, dinner Sun & lunch Thu) An especially elegant French restaurant under vaulted brick ceilings. The *menus* change with the seasons to take advantage of fresh seasonal ingredients. Specialities include sole and wild turbot.

SELF-CATERING

Food market (place des Héros, Grand' Place & place de la Vacquerie; ☎ morning Sat) There's an additional smaller market at place des Héros on Wednesday morning.

Fromagerie des Arcades (37 place des Héros; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-7.30pm Tue-Sat)

Monoprix supermarket (30 rue Gambetta; ☎ 8.30am-7.50pm Mon-Sat)

PARDON MY FRENCH

Some sensitive matters, it seems, are best mentioned with the discretion implied by foreign vocabulary. Thus, decades ago, a condom was known as a 'French letter' in the UK and a *capote anglaise* (English hood) in France. In Arras' Wellington Quarry (opposite), toilets were treated with similar trans-Channel euphemism: marked *latrines* (a French term) by the British during WWI, they were signposted WC (water closet) by the French during WWII.

Spar grocery (9 rue de la Taillerie; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 3.30-8pm Tue-Thu, to 9pm Fri & Sat, 9.30am-1pm & 5.30-8pm Sun)

Traiteur Roger Portugal (☎ 03 21 23 44 72; 13 rue des Balances; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sat, 9am-12.30pm Sun & holidays) Delicious ready-to-eat delicacies.

Getting There & Away

BUS

For details on getting to the Canadian National Vimy Memorial, see opposite.

CAR

Car-rental options:

ADA (☎ 03 21 55 05 05; 15 av Paul Michonneau)

Europcar (☎ 03 21 07 29 54; 5 rue de Douai)

France Cars (☎ 03 21 50 22 22; 31 bd Faidherbe)

TAXI

Alliance Arras Taxis-GT (☎ 03 21 23 69 69; ☎ 24hr) can take you to Somme battlefield sites (eg Vimy).

TRAIN

Arras is on the main line linking Lille-Flandres (€9.40, 24 to 45 minutes, 14 to 25 daily) with Paris' Gare du Nord (€28.70 or €38.90 by TGV, 50 minutes, eight to 12 daily). Other destinations include Amiens (€10.50, 50 minutes, six to 12 daily), Calais-Ville (€18.70, 1¼ hours, 12 daily Monday to Friday, five daily Saturday and Sunday) and Lens (€3.80, 15 minutes, 23 daily Monday to Friday, eight to 11 daily weekends).

BATTLE OF THE SOMME MEMORIALS

The First Battle of the Somme, a WWI Allied offensive waged in the villages and woodlands northeast of Amiens, was designed to relieve pressure on the beleaguered French troops at Verdun. On 1 July 1916, British, Commonwealth and French troops 'went over the top' in a massive assault along a 34km front. But German positions proved virtually unbreachable, and on the first day of the battle an astounding 21,392 British troops were killed and another 35,492 were wounded. Most casualties were infantrymen mown down by German machine guns.

By the time the offensive was called off in mid-November, a total of 1.2 million lives had been lost on both sides. The British had advanced 12km, the French 8km. (Today, 'Ligne de Front' signs mark where the front line stood on specific dates.) The Battle of the Somme has become a symbol of the meaningless slaughter of war and its killing fields have since become a site of pilgrimage (see www.somme-battlefields.co.uk).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Visiting the Somme memorials is easiest by car but quite a few sites can be reached by train or bus from Amiens and/or Arras; details on public transport options appear after each listing. Cycling is also an option.

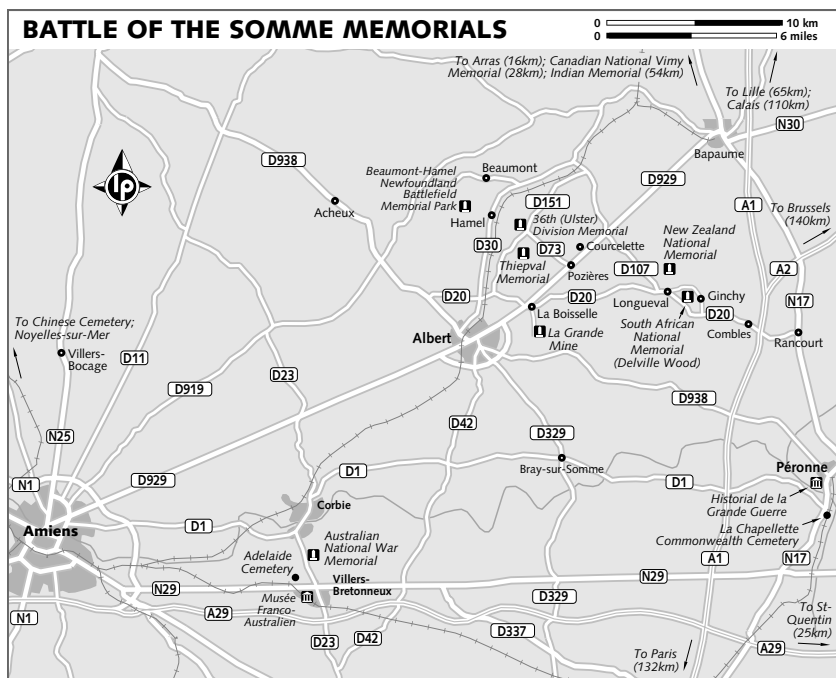
The tourist offices in Amiens and Arras can provide details on minibus tours.

COMMONWEALTH CEMETERIES & MEMORIALS

Almost 750,000 soldiers, airmen and sailors from Great Britain, Australia, Canada, the Indian subcontinent, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the West Indies and other parts of the British Empire died during WWI on the Western Front, two-thirds of them in France. According to the Commonwealth tradition, they were buried where they fell, in more than 1000 military cemeteries and 2000 civilian cemeteries now tended by the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission** (www.cwgc.org). French, American and German war dead were reburied in large cemeteries after the war.

Today, hundreds of neatly tended Commonwealth plots – marked by white-on-dark-green road signs – dot the landscape along a wide swathe of territory running roughly from Albert and Cambrai north via Arras and Béthune to Armentières and Ypres (leper) in Belgium. Many of the headstones bear inscriptions composed by family members. Twenty-six memorials (20 of them in France) bear the names of more than 300,000 Commonwealth soldiers whose bodies were never recovered or identified.

Except where noted, all the monuments listed in this chapter are always open. Many Commonwealth cemeteries have a bronze plaque with historical information. The bronze cemetery-register boxes contain a booklet with details on the site and brief biographies of each of the identified dead; you can record your impressions in the visitors book.



North of Arras

The area towards Lille from Arras has a couple of noteworthy memorials and numerous military cemeteries.

CANADIAN NATIONAL VIMY MEMORIAL & PARK

Whereas the French, right after the war, attempted to erase all signs of battle and return the Somme region to agriculture and normalcy, the Canadians decided that the most evocative way to remember their fallen was to preserve sections of the crater-pocked battlefields. As a result, the best place to get some sense of the unimaginable hell known as the Western Front is at the chilling, eerie moonscape of **Vimy Ridge**. Visitors can also visit **tunnels** (admission free; ☎ with a guide early May–Nov) and reconstructed **trenches** (☎ 10am–6pm early May–Oct, 9am–5pm Nov–early May).

Of the 66,655 Canadians who died in WWI, 3589 lost their lives in April 1917 taking this ridge, a German defensive line. Its highest point was later chosen as the site of Canada's **WWI memorial** (built 1925–36, renovated 2007). The allegorical figures, carved

from huge blocks of limestone, include a cloaked, downcast female figure representing a young Canada mourning her fallen. The base is inscribed with the names of 11,285 Canadians who 'died in France but have no known graves'. The 1-sq-km park also includes two **Canadian cemeteries** and, at the vehicle entrance to the main memorial, a **monument to the Moroccan Division** (in French and Arabic).

The **Historical Interpretive Centre** (☎ 03 21 50 68 68; www.vac-acc.gc.ca; admission free; ☎ 10am–6pm early May–Oct, 9am–5pm Nov–early May), in a modest, rust-coloured building at the entrance to the trenches, is staffed by Canadian students, who also serve as tour guides from May to November.

To get to the Canadian memorials from Arras, take bus 191 (€1, 20 minutes, six daily Monday to Saturday) – run by **Tadao** (☎ 08 10 00 11 78; www.tadao.fr, in French) – from Arras' bus station, towards Lens, and ask the bus driver to stop a bit before the Thelus–Vert Tilleul turn-off, 3.2km from the memorial.

Trains link Arras with the town of Vimy (€2.70, 12 minutes, six daily Monday to

Friday, two on Saturday), 6km east of the memorial.

A taxi from Arras costs €22 to €24 one-way (30% more on Sunday).

INDIAN MEMORIAL

The fascinating and seldom-visited **Mémorial Indien**, vaguely Moghul in architecture, records the names of Commonwealth soldiers from the Indian subcontinent who 'have no known grave'. The units (31st Punjabis, 11th Rajputs, 2nd King Edward's Own Gurkha Rifles) and the ranks of the fallen – sepoy, havildar, *naik* (chief), *sowar* (mounted soldier), labourer, follower – engraved on the walls evoke the pride, pomp and exploitation on which the British Empire was built.

To get there from La Bassée, take the northbound D947 to its intersection with the D171.

South of Arras

Some of the bloodiest fighting of WWI took place around the town of Albert. The farmland north and east of the town is dotted with scores of Commonwealth cemeteries.

PÉRONNE

Perhaps the best place to start a visit to the Somme battlefields is in the river port of Péronne (population 8400), at the well-designed and informative **Historial de la Grande Guerre** (Museum of the Great War; ☎ 03 22 83 14 18; www.historial.org; Château de Péronne; adult/over 60yr/children 6-18yr incl audioguide €7.50/6/3.80; 🕒 10am-6pm, closed mid-Dec-mid-Jan). This innovative museum tells the story of the war chronologically, with equal space given to the German, French and British perspectives on what happened, how and why. A great deal of visually engaging material, including period films and the bone-chilling engravings by Otto Dix, capture the aesthetic sensibilities, enthusiasm, naive patriotism and unimaginable violence of the time. The proud uniforms of various units and armies are shown laid out on the ground, as if on freshly – though bloodlessly – dead soldiers. Not much glory here.

On the N17 at the southern edge of town, **La Chapelle Commonwealth Cemetery** has separate British and Indian sections.

Buses 38 and 46 link Péronne with Albert (€4, 35 to 50 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday); bus 47 goes to both Villers-

Bretonneux (€4, 1¼ hours, one daily Monday to Saturday) and Amiens' bus station (€4, two hours, two daily Monday to Saturday).

THIEPVAL MEMORIAL

Dedicated to 'the Missing of the Somme', this **memorial** – the region's most visited place of pilgrimage – was built in the early 1930s on the site of a German stronghold that was stormed on 1 July 1916, with unimaginable casualties. The columns of the arches are inscribed with the names of 73,367 British and South African soldiers whose remains were never found. Most of the discreet, glass-walled **visitors centre** (☎ 03 22 74 60 47; admission free; 🕒 10am-6pm Mar-Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Feb, closed two weeks around New Year) is below ground level.

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL WAR MEMORIAL

During WWI, 313,000 Australians (out of a total population of 4.5 million) volunteered for military service; 46,000 met their deaths on the Western Front (14,000 others perished elsewhere). The **Australian National War Memorial**, a 32m tower engraved with the names of 10,982 soldiers who went missing in action, stands on a hill where Australian and British troops repulsed a German assault on 24 April 1918. It was dedicated in 1938; two years later its stone walls were scarred by the guns of Hitler's invading armies.

The nearest town is **Villers-Bretonneux**, an ugly burg that feels like it hasn't completely recovered from the war. For Aussies, though, it's a heart-warming place that bills itself as *l'Australie en Picardie*, and Anzac Day is religiously commemorated here. In 1993, the unidentified remains of an Australian soldier were transferred from **Adelaide Cemetery**, on the N29 at the western edge of town, to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Canberra.

The town's **Musée Franco-Australien** (☎ 03 22 96 80 79; www.museeaustralien.com, www.villers-bretonneux.com/Australian.htm; École Victoria, 9 rue Victoria; adult/student €4/2.50; 🕒 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Wed-Sat, 2-6pm Tue, 1st & 3rd Sun of month, closed 2 weeks around New Year) has intimate, evocative displays of WWI Australiana, including letters, photographs of life on the Western Front, and a small Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) library.

The Villers-Bretonneux train station, 700m south of the museum (along rue de Melbourne) and a walkable 3km south of the Australian National War Memorial, is well

served from Amiens (€3.20, 12 minutes, 10 daily Monday to Friday, five or six weekends). Bus 47 links Villers-Bretonneux with Amiens (€1.50, 25 minutes, two or three daily Monday to Saturday) and Péronne (€4, 1¼ hours, one daily Monday to Saturday).

Taking a **taxi** (☎ 03 22 48 49 49) to the memorial from Villers-Bretonneux and getting picked up at a time of your choosing costs €18 to €20 return.

BEAUMONT-HAMEL NEWFOUNDLAND BATTLEFIELD MEMORIAL PARK

Like Vimy (p253), the evocative **Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Battlefield Memorial Park** (Mémorial Terre-Neuvien de Beaumont-Hamel) preserves part of the Western Front in the state it was in at fighting's end. The zigzag trench system, which still fills with mud in winter, is clearly visible, as are countless shell craters and the remains of barbed-wire barriers.

On 1 July 1916, the volunteer Royal Newfoundland Regiment stormed entrenched German positions and was nearly wiped out; a plaque notes blandly that 'strategic and tactical miscalculations led to a great slaughter'. You can survey the whole battlefield from the **caribou statue**, surrounded by plants native to Newfoundland. Canadian students based at the **visitors centre** (☎ 03 22 76 70 87; www.vac-acc.gc.ca; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar, closed 2 weeks around New Year), designed to look like a typical Newfoundland fisher's house, give free guided tours year-round (except perhaps in late December and January).

THIRTY-SIXTH (ULSTER) DIVISION MEMORIAL

Built on a German frontline position assaulted by the overwhelmingly Protestant 36th (Ulster) Division on 1 July 1916, the **Tour d'Ulster** (Ulster Tower; ☎ 03 22 74 87 14; teddy.ulstertower@orange.fr; ☎ museum 10am-5pm, to 6pm Apr-Sep, closed Dec-Feb), also known as the Mémorial Irlandais, is an exact replica of Helen's Tower at Clanboye, County Down, where the unit did its training. Dedicated in 1921, it has long been a Unionist pilgrimage site. A black obelisk known as the **Orange Memorial to Fallen Brethren** stands in an enclosure behind the tower. In a sign that historic wounds are finally healing, in 2006 the Irish Republic issued a €0.75 postage stamp, showing the 36th Division in action on this site, to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme.

Virtually untouched since the war, nearby **Thiepval Wood** can be visited on a guided tour; phone or email the Tour d'Ulster for times.

SOUTH AFRICAN & NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL MEMORIALS

The **South African National Memorial** (Mémorial Sud-Africain) stands in the middle of shell-pocked **Delville Wood**, which was almost captured by a South African brigade in the third week of July in 1916. The avenues through the trees are named after streets in London and Edinburgh. The star-shaped **museum** (☎ 03 22 85 02 17; www.delvillewood.com; admission free; ☎ 10am-5.30pm, to 4pm outside daylight savings, closed Mon, holidays & Dec-early Feb) was dedicated amid much apartheid-related controversy in 1986.

The **New Zealand National Memorial** is 1.5km due north of Longueval.

LA GRANDE MINE

Just outside the hamlet of La Boisselle, this enormous **crater** looks like the site of a meteor impact. Some 100m across and 30m deep and officially known as the **Lochnagar Crater Memorial**, it was created on the morning of the first day of the First Battle of the Somme by about 25 tonnes of ammonal laid by British sappers in order to create a breach in the German lines – and is a testament to the boundless ingenuity human beings can muster when determined to kill their fellow creatures.

ALBERT

The most noteworthy landmark in this rather unfetching town (population 10,000), virtually flattened during WWI, is neo-Byzantine-style **Basilique Notre Dame de Brebières**, topped by a dazzlingly gilded statue of the Virgin Mary, repaired since famously being left dangling by a German shell.

Right next to the basilica, the underground **Musée Somme 1916** (Somme Trench Museum; ☎ 03 22 75 16 17; www.musee-somme-1916.eu; rue Anicet Godin; adult/6-18yr €5/3; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Feb-mid-Dec, no midday closure Jun-Sep) does a good job of evoking the grim, grimy lives of Tommies, *poilus* ('hairy ones', ie French WWI soldiers) and civilians at the front line.

The **tourist office** (☎ 03 22 75 16 42; www.pays-ducoquelicot.com, in French; 9 rue Léon Gambetta; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 2pm-6.30pm

Sat, 10am-12.30pm Sun & holidays Apr-Sep, to 5pm & closed Sun & holidays Oct-Mar) is 50m towards the train station from the basilica. Year-round, it rents out bicycles (per half-/full day €8/12). A *coquelicot* (as included in the website address) is a poppy.

Trains (14 to 20 Monday to Saturday, seven Sunday) link Albert's train station – the monoplane hanging in the waiting hall is a Potez 36 from 1933 – with Amiens (€5.70, 25 minutes).

CHINESE CEMETERY

Towards the end of WWI, tens of thousands of Chinese labourers were recruited by the British government to perform non-combat jobs in Europe, including the gruesome task of recovering and burying Allied war dead. **Noyelles-sur-Mer**, 65km northwest of Amiens, served as the French base for the Chinese Labour Corps, and it is there (actually, in the neighbouring hamlet of Nolette) that the **Chinese Cemetery**, maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, bears silent testimony to 849 men from a far-off land who never made it home. To get there, follow the signs along the D111 and the C6 to the 'Cimetière Chinois'.

AMIENS

pop 136,600

One of France's most awe-inspiring Gothic cathedrals is reason enough to spend time in Amiens, the comfy, if reserved, former capital of Picardy, where Jules Verne lived for the last two decades of his life. The cleaned city centre, rebuilt after the war, has aged remarkably well, thanks in part to recent pedestrianisation and train station renovations. Some 25,000 students give the place a young, lively feel.

Amiens is an excellent base for visits to the Battle of the Somme memorials.

Orientation

The pedestrianised main drag, known as rue de Noyon and rue des Trois Cailloux, stretches from the train station west to place Gambetta, the city's commercial hub, which is three blocks southwest of the cathedral.

Information

Banks can be found around place René Goblet and rue des Trois Cailloux.

Bibliothèque (☎ 03 22 97 10 00; 50 rue de la République; ☎ 2-7pm Mon, 9.30am-7pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-6pm Sat) Free internet access in a grand public library, built in the 1820s.

Laudrette 10 rue André (☎ 8am-6pm); 15 rue des Majots (☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-8pm Sun)

Main Post Office (7 rue des Vergeaux) Has currency exchange.

Neurogame Cybercafé (16 rue des Chaudronniers; ☎ 03 22 72 68 79; per hr €3.50; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, 2-8pm Sun) Internet access.

Tourist Office (☎ 03 22 71 60 50; www.amiens.com/tourisme; 40 place Notre Dame; ☎ 9.30am-6pm or 6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Sun) Can supply details on the Somme memorials and visiting them on minibus tours. Sells the City Pass (€8), which offers all sorts of discounts.

Cathédrale Notre Dame

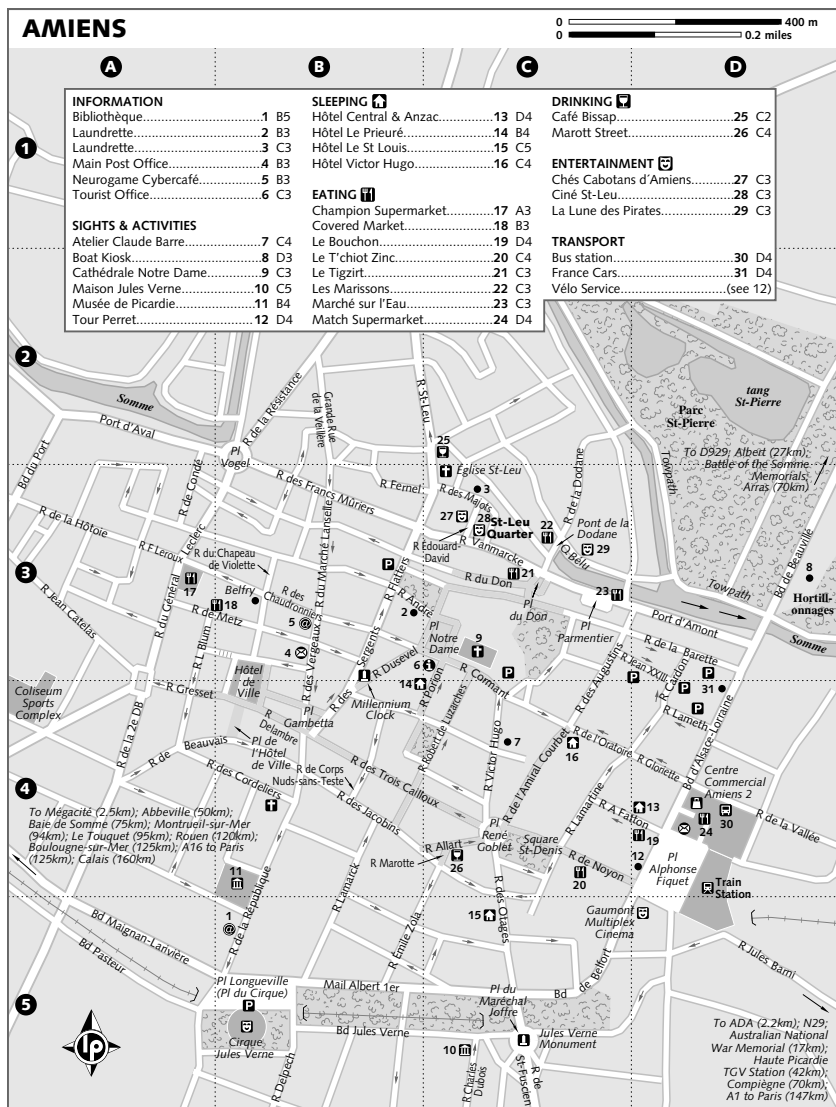
The largest Gothic cathedral in France (it's 145m long) and a Unesco World Heritage Site, the magnificent **Cathédrale Notre Dame** (place Notre Dame; ☎ 8.30am-6.15pm Apr-Sep, to 5.15pm Oct-Mar) was begun in 1220 to house the skull of St John the Baptist, now enclosed in gold in the northern outer wall of the ambulatory (on view from about Easter to October). Connoisseurs rave about the soaring Gothic arches (42.3m high over the transept), unity of style and immense interior, but for locals, the 17th-century statue known as the **Ange Pleureur** (Crying Angel), in the ambulatory directly behind the very baroque, 18th-century high altar, remains a favourite.

The black-and-white, octagonal, 234m-long **labyrinth** on the floor of the nave is easy to miss as the soaring vaults draw the eye upward. Plaques in the south transept arm honour Australian, British, Canadian, New Zealand and US troops who died in WWI.

Weather permitting, it's possible to climb the **north tower** (☎ 03 22 80 03 41; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €6.50/4.50/free; ☎ visits begin 11am & 2.30-5.15pm Wed-Mon Jul & Aug, 3pm & 4.30pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 2.30-5.15pm Sat & Sun Apr-Jun & Sep, 3.45pm Wed-Mon Oct-Mar except when windy or snowy) with a guide.

Worthwhile, one-hour **audioguides** (1st/2nd person €4/3) of the cathedral's highlights, in six languages, can be rented at the tourist office.

A free 45-minute **light show** bathes the cathedral's facade in vivid medieval colours nightly from mid-June to mid-September and December to 1 January; the photons start flying at 7pm in winter and sometime between 9.45pm (September) and 10.45pm (June) in summer.



Other Sights & Activities

Postwar renovations have left parts of the medieval **St-Leu Quarter** too cute by half, but the many neon-lit quayside restaurants and pubs make the area especially lively at night.

Another product of postwar exuberance is the concrete **Tour Perret** (built 1948–54), once the tallest building in Europe, across

the square from the train station. At night the structure, designed by the Belgian architect Auguste Perret (who also planned postwar Le Havre), is illuminated by ever-changing coloured lights.

The lawns, lakes, waterways and bridges of **Parc St-Pierre** stretch eastward from St-Leu all the way to the **Hortillonnages** – also known as the Jardins

Flottants (Floating Gardens) – a 3.3-sq-km area of market gardens that have supplied the city with vegetables and flowers since the Middle Ages. From April to October, one-hour **cruiques** (adult/11-16yr/4-10yr €5.50/4.55/3.70) of the peaceful canals – in 12-person gondola-like boats – depart from a riverside **boat kiosk** (☎ 03 22 92 12 18; 54 bd de Beauvillé) daily from 1.45pm until sometime between 4.30pm and 6.30pm; get there before 4pm (5pm in summer) to buy tickets.

Jules Verne (1828–1905) wrote many of his best-known works of brain-tingling – and eerily prescient – science fiction while living in his turreted Amiens home, now the **Maison Jules Verne** (☎ 03 22 45 45 75; www.amiens.com/jules-verne; 2 rue Charles Dubois; adult/student & over 65yr/8-17yr/family €5/3.50/2.50/12, audioguide €2; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 2-6.30pm Thu, 11am-6.30pm Sat & Sun mid-Apr–mid-Oct, to 6pm & closed Tue afternoon mid-Oct–mid-Apr). The models, prints, posters and other items inspired by Verne's fecund imagination afford a fascinating opportunity to check out the future as it looked over a century ago, when going around the world in 80 days sounded utterly fantastic – and before WWI dashed Europeans' belief in an ever-improving world. Signs are in French and English.

The **Musée de Picardie** (☎ 03 22 97 14 00; 48 rue de la République; adult/student €5/3; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sun), housed in a dashing Second Empire structure (1855–67), is surprisingly well-endowed with archeological exhibits, medieval art and Revolution-era ceramics. During the life of this guide, renovations are likely to send most of the 18th-century French paintings (including royal commissions) into storage.

Ever wonder how stained glass is actually designed and put together? You can see firsthand at **Atelier Claude Barre** (☎ 03 22 91 81 18; 40 rue Victor Hugo; adult/student €4/3; ☎ tours 3pm Mon-Sat), whose artisans fill commissions from churches and private collectors. This place also has a collection of 11th- to 20th-century stained glass.

Sleeping

Amiens' hotels offer excellent value for money. They often fill up with businesspeople from Monday to Thursday.

Hôtel Central & Anzac (☎ 03 22 91 34 08; www.hotelcentralanzac.com; 17 rue Alexandre Fattou; s/d from €46/54, with washbasin €33/39; ☎) Founded decades ago by an Australian ex-serviceman, this two-star place has 25 clean, well-maintained rooms, many with old-time touches, though some are a bit on the small side.

Hôtel Victor Hugo (☎ 03 22 91 57 91; hotelvic.torhugo@wanadoo.fr; 2 rue de l'Oratoire; d €42-47, q €58-66; ☎) Just a block from the cathedral, this charming family-run hostelry has two stars and 10 stylish modern rooms with a pleasing ambience of days gone by.

Hôtel Le St-Louis (☎ 03 22 91 76 03; www.le-saint-louis.com, in French; 24 rue des Otages; d/q from €54/81; ☎) All the mod cons combined with more than a dash of 19th-century French class. The 15 two-star rooms are spacious and tasteful. Has a fine formal French restaurant.

Hôtel Le Prieuré (☎ 03 22 71 16 71; www.hotelrestaurantleprieure.com, in French; 17 rue Porion; d €58-76; ☎) A cobblestone's throw from the cathedral, 'The Priory' is a two-star, family-run hotel whose 23 rooms are imaginatively decorated – some have old wooden beams and one even comes with mock-Gothic vaulting and baroque putti. Rue Porion is for pedestrians only but you can drive up to drop off your stuff.

Eating

The area around place du Don and the quays across the river in St-Leu (quai Bélu) are bursting with restaurants and cafés.

Le Tigzirt (☎ 03 22 91 42 55; 60 rue Vanmarcke, on weekends via 7 place du Don; dishes €10-21; ☎ closed Mon, dinner Sun & lunch Sat) The Algerian Berber-style couscous and *tajines* (stews) are steamed, boiled, grilled and baked to perfection.

Le T'chiot Zinc (☎ 03 22 91 43 79; 18 rue de Noyon; menus €12.40-25.90; ☎ closed Sun, also closed Mon Jul & Aug) Inviting, bistro-style decor reminiscent of the belle époque provides a fine backdrop for the tasty French and Picard cuisine, including fish dishes and *caqhuse* (pork in a cream, wine vinegar and onion sauce).

Le Bouchon (☎ 03 22 92 14 32; 10 rue Alexandre Fattou; lunch menus Mon-Fri €13, other menus €18-38; ☎ closed dinner Sun) A semiformal restaurant, decorated with changing exhibits of original artwork, that serves traditional French cuisine. The mouth-watering dessert list includes the French classics.

our pick Les Marissons (☎ 03 22 92 96 66; pont de la Dodane; menus €18.50-46; ☎ closed Sun, lunch Wed, lunch Sat) Refined *cuisine du marché* (market cuisine), made with fresh local ingredients, is the speciality of this elegant eatery, set under the exposed beams of a 15th-century boatwright's workshop. The chef's personal favourite – it's his own invention – is *lotte rôtie aux abricots* (monkfish roasted with apricots, €25), available whenever monkfish is.

SELF-CATERING**Champion supermarket** (22bis rue du Général Leclerc;

☎ 8.30am-8pm Mon-Sat)

Covered market (rue de Metz; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Thu, 9am-7pm Fri & Sat, 8.30am-12.30pm Sun)**Marché sur l'eau** (floating market; place Parmentier; ☎ to 12.30pm Sat, to 1pm in summer) Fruit and vegetables grown in the Hortillonnages are sold at this once-floating market, now held on dry land.**Match supermarket** (Centre Commercial Amiens 2;

☎ 8.30am-8pm Mon-Sat)

Drinking**Café Bissap** (☎ 03 22 92 36 41; 50 rue St-Leu; ☎ 6pm-3am Tue-Sat, 6pm-1am Sun & Mon) A very laid-back, ethnically mixed crowd, including students, sips rum cocktails and West African beers (eg Guinness Foreign Extra, brewed in Cameroon) amid decor from the Senegalese-born proprietor's native land.**Marott Street** (☎ 03 22 91 14 93; 1 rue Marotte; ☎ 11am-1am) Designed by Gustave Eiffel's architectural firm in 1892, this one-time insurance office is now a chic bar where the trendy sip Champagne, suspended – on clear-glass tiles – over the wine cellar.**Entertainment**

The tourist office (p256) has details on cultural events.

La Lune des Pirates (☎ 03 22 97 88 01; www.lalune.net, in French; 17 quai Bélu) A dynamic venue that hosts cutting-edge concerts one to three times a week.**Chés Cabotans d'Amiens** (☎ 03 22 22 30 90; www.chés-cabotans-damiens.com, in French; 31 rue Édouard-David) A theatre whose stars are all traditional Picard marionettes. Great fun even if you don't speak Picard or French.**Ciné St-Leu** (☎ 03 22 91 61 23; www.cine-st-leu.com, in French; 33 rue Vanmarcke) An art-house cinema with nondubbed films, some in English.**Getting There & Away**

For details on visiting the Battle of the Somme Memorials (p252) by public transport, see the listing for each memorial site.

The **bus station** (☎ 03 22 92 27 03; ☎ office 6am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-6.35pm Sat), in the basement of the Centre Commercial Amiens 2, is accessible from rue de la Vallée.Car-rental places include **ADA** (☎ 03 22 46 49 49; 387 chaussée Jules Ferry), situated 2.4km southeast of the train station and served by bus 1, and **France Cars** (☎ 03 22 72 52 52; 75 bd d'Alsace-Lorraine).

Amiens is an important rail hub. Accessed through a dramatic new entrance, the train station offers direct services to Arras (€10.50, 50 minutes, six to 12 daily), Boulogne (€17.60, 1½ hours, six to eight daily), Calais-Ville (€22.10, 2½ to 3½ hours, six to eight daily), Compiègne (€16.20, 1¼ hours, five to eight daily), Laon (€15.30, 1½ hours, five to seven daily), Lille-Flandres (€17.80, 1½ hours, six to 12 daily), Paris' Gare du Nord (€18.30, one to 1½ hours, 17 to 22 daily) and Rouen (€17.10, four or five daily, 1¼ hours). SNCF buses go to the Haute Picardie TGV station (40 minutes, 16 daily), 42km east of the city.

Getting Around

There's free parking one or two blocks north of the Victor Hugo and Central & Anzac hotels, along rue Lameth, rue Cardon, rue Jean XXIII and rue de la Barette.

Vélam (www.velam.amiens.fr; 1/7 days €1/5), the local version of Paris' Vélib' (p201), has 313 bicycles at 26 automatic rental stations around town. The first half-hour is free.**Vélo Service** (Buscyclette; ☎ 03 22 72 55 13; per hr/day/weekend €1/6/8, tandems per hr/day €2/8; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-7pm), a nonprofit organisation that rents bikes, is in the courtyard of Tour Perret, behind the main entrance. Helmets are free.**BEAUVAIS**

pop 55,100

Famed for the titanic hubris of its cathedral, doomed to remain forever unfinished, Beauvais became an important tapestry-making centre during the reign of Louis XIV and is often mentioned in the same breath as Gobelins and Aubusson. Today, the city – rebuilt less than enchantingly after WWII – hosts excellent tapestry exhibitions and is a budget airline hub.

Information**Tourist Office** (☎ 03 44 15 30 30; www.beauvais.fr, in French; 1 rue Beaugerard; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Sat year-round, 10am-5pm Sun mid-Apr–mid-Oct) About 150m southeast of the cathedral.**Sights**The history of hapless **Cathédrale St-Pierre** (☎ 9am-12.15pm & 2-6.30pm May-Oct, 9am-12.15pm & 2-5.30pm Nov-Apr, no midday closure Jul & Aug) has been one of insatiable ambition and colossal failure. When Beauvais' Carolingian cathedral (parts of which, known as the **Basse Œuvre**,

can still be seen) was partly destroyed by fire in 1225, the bishop and local nobles decided that its replacement should surpass anything ever built. Unfortunately, their richly adorned creation also surpassed the limits of technology, and in 1284 the 48m-high Gothic vaults – the highest ever built – collapsed. There was further damage in 1573 when the 153m spire, the tallest of its era, came a-tumblin' down. One of the **astronomical clocks** (adult/17-25yr/6-16yr €4/2.50/1) dates from the 14th century; the other, set to solar time and thus 52 minutes behind CET (Central European Time), does its thing at 10.40am, 11.40am, 2.40pm, 3.40pm and 4.40pm. English audioguides of the cathedral (adult/under 26 years €3/2, including astronomical clock €6/4) are available at the tourist office.

Just west of the cathedral, head through the two round bastions – a relic of the early 1300s – to the excellent **Musée Départemental de l'Oïse** (☎ 03 44 11 11 30; 1 rue du Musée; admission free; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon, no midday closure Jul-Sep). Highlights in this former bishops' palace include the *Dieu Guerrier Gaulois*, a slender and aristocratic Celtic warrior made of hammered sheet brass in the 1st century AD; the 17th-century funerary monument of a kneeling Charles de Fresnoy, looking more pious than he could possibly have been in real life; and a sinuous art-nouveau dining room.

Themed exhibitions of striking contemporary tapestries make the **Galerie Nationale de la Tapisserie** (☎ 03 44 15 39 10; rue St-Pierre; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar, closed btwn exhibitions), France's national tapestry gallery, a place of pilgrimage for fans of this ancient art. Situated next to the cathedral's choir.

Eating

Picnic supplies can be picked up at the **Marché Plus supermarket** (4 rue Pierre Jacoby; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), three short blocks east of the cathedral.

Getting There & Away

Beauvais-Tillé airport (Paris-Beauvais airport; ☎ 08 92 68 20 66; www.aeroportbeauvais.com), a few kilometres northeast of the centre and 80km from Paris, is thriving thanks to Ryanair, whose destinations include Dublin, Glasgow and Shannon. **Blue Islands** (www.blueislands.com) flies to the Channel Islands while **Wizz Air** (http://

wizzair.com) goes to Budapest, Warsaw and Cracow. There are buses to/from Paris' Porte Maillot (http://tickets.aeroportbeauvais.com; €13, 1¼ hours).

Local bus 12 (€0.90, six daily except Sunday and holidays) and a *navette* (shuttle bus; €4; eight daily) link the airport with Beauvais' train station and the town centre.

The **train station**, 1.2km southeast of the cathedral, has direct services to Paris' Gare du Nord (€11.70, 1¼ hours, a dozen daily).

COMPIÈGNE

pop 41,700

Compiègne, an easy day trip from Paris, reached its glittering zenith under Napoléon III (r 1852-70), whose legacy is alive and well in the château and adjacent park. The city was the site of the armistice that ended WWI, the French surrender in 1940 and a major Nazi transit camp, now a memorial.

On 23 May 1430, Joan of Arc (Jeanne d'Arc) – honoured by two statues in the city centre – was captured at Compiègne by the Burgundians, who later sold her to their English allies.

Information

Tourist Office (☎ 03 44 40 01 00; www.compiègne-tourisme.fr, in French; place de l'Hôtel de Ville;

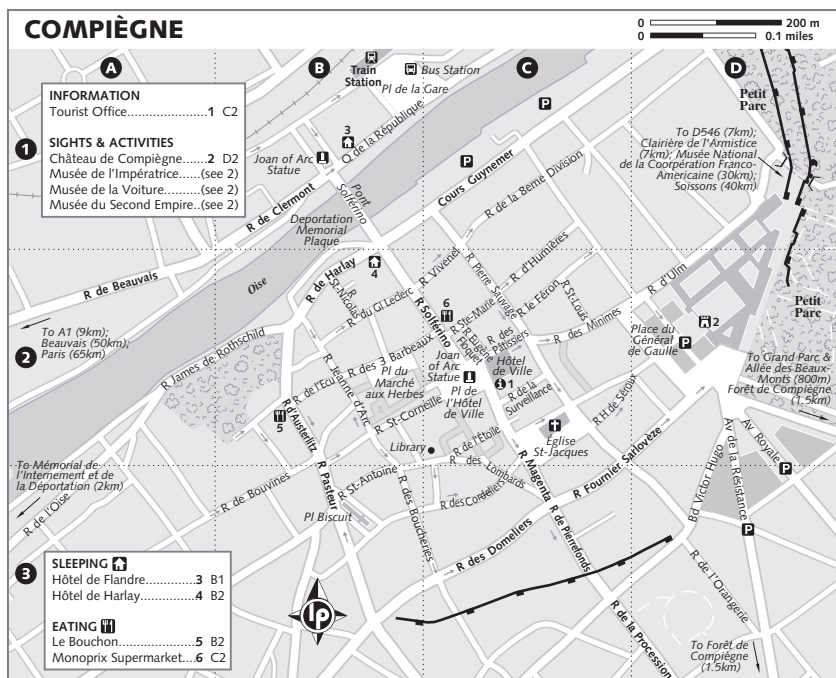
☎ 9.15am-12.15pm & 1.45-6.15pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, to 5.15pm & closed morning Mon Oct-Mar, 10am-12.15pm & 2.15-5pm Sun & holidays Easter-Oct) In a building attached to the ornate, 15th-century Gothic *hôtel de ville*, facing a statue of (who else?) Joan of Arc.

Sights

CHÂTEAU-DE-COMPIÈGNE

Napoléon III's dazzling hunting parties drew aristocrats and wannabes from all around Europe to his 1337-room **royal palace** (☎ 03 44 38 47 00; www.musee-chateau-compiègne.fr, in French; place du Général de Gaulle; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €6.50/4.50/free), built around eight courtyards. The sumptuous **Grands Appartements** (Imperial Apartments; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.45pm Wed-Mon, last admission 30min before closing), including the empress's bedroom and a ballroom lit by 15 chandeliers, can be visited with an audioguide in four languages.

Depending on staffing, you may also be able to visit the **Musée du Second Empire**, which illustrates the life of Napoléon III and his family, on a French-language tour; and/or the **Musée de l'Impératrice**, which stars Eugénie and includes



mementos of her dashing, exiled son, 'killed by the Zulus, in Zululand, Africa' in 1879 while serving – with Queen Victoria's express permission – in the British army. Vehicles that pre-date the internal combustion engine and early motorcars – including the *Jamais Contente*, a torpedo-shaped motorcar from 1899 – are featured at the **Musée de la Voiture** (Vehicle Museum). Tours (one hour) are in French.

To the east of the château, the 20-hectare, English-style **Petit Parc** (admission free) links up with the **Grand Parc** and the **Forêt de Compiègne**, which surrounds Compiègne on the east and south and is criss-crossed by rectilinear paths. The area is a favourite venue for hiking and cycling (maps available at the tourist office) as well as horse riding. Napoléon I had the 4.5km **allée des Beaux-Monts** laid out so that Empress Marie-Louise wouldn't miss Vienna's Schönbrunn palace quite so much.

MÉMORIAL DE L'INTERNEMENT ET DE LA DÉPORTATION

The new **Mémorial de l'Internement et de la Déportation** (Internment & Deportation Memorial); ☎ 03 44 96 37 00; <http://memorial.compiègne.fr>, in French; 2bis av des

Martyrs de la Liberté; adult/student/under 16yr & WWII veteran €5/2.50/free incl English audioguide; ☎ 10am–6pm Wed–Mon), 2.5km southwest of the city centre, occupies a small part of Camp de Royallieu, a French military base used as a Nazi transit camp from 1941 to 1944. Of the more than 53,000 men, women and children held here – Resistance fighters, political prisoners, POWs, Jews (kept in a special section) and even American civilians arrested after Pearl Harbour – 48,000 were marched through town to the train station for the trip east to concentration and extermination camps, including Auschwitz.

To get to the memorial from pont Solférimo, take rue de Harlay southwest along the river, turn left (south) onto bd Gambetta, then right onto rue de Paris; or hop aboard bus 5.

CLAIRIÈRE DE L'ARMISTICE

The armistice that came into force on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month – the year was 1918 – and finally put an end to WWI was signed 7km northeast of Compiègne (towards Soissons) inside the railway carriage of the Allied supreme commander, Maréchal Ferdinand Foch.

On 22 June 1940, in the same railway car, the French – with Hitler looking on smugly – were forced to sign the armistice that recognised Nazi Germany's domination of France. Taken for exhibition to Berlin, the carriage was destroyed in April 1945 on the Führer's personal orders lest it be used for a third surrender – his own.

In the middle of a thick forest, the **Clairière de l'Armistice** (Armistice Clearing; ☎ 03 44 85 14 18; adult/7-13yr €4/2; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon, closed mornings Jan & Feb), staffed by volunteers (mainly French army veterans), commemorates these events with monuments and a museum whose 700 stereoscopic (3-D) photos give you an eerie feeling of being right there in the mud, muck and misery of WWI. The wooden rail wagon now on display is of the same type as the original; the furnishings, hidden away during WWII, were the ones actually used in 1918.

Sleeping

Hôtel de Flandre (☎ 03 44 83 24 40; www.hoteldeflandre.com; 16 quai de la République; s/d €50/60, with washbasin €30/35; ☎ ☒ ☒) This straightforward place offers more convenience than charm. Some of the 42 rooms, many recently refurbished, have river views.

Hôtel de Harlay (☎ 03 44 23 01 50; www.hotel-compiègne.net; 3 rue de Harlay; d €72; ☎ ☒ ☒) A family-run, three-star hotel whose 20 attractive rooms have two-tone walls and rich carpeting.

Eating

Quite a few eateries can be found on the streets southwest of Église St-Jacques, including rue Magenta and narrow, ancient rue des Lombards.

Le Bouchon (☎ 03 44 20 02 03; 4 rue d'Austerlitz; lunch menu €11.50, other menus €19.50-33; ☎ closed dinner Sun) In a half-timbered house with out-of-kilter walls, this bistro and wine bar (per glass €2.50 to €4) serves traditional French dishes; specialties include *magret de canard aux figues* (duck's breast with figs; €12).

Monoprix supermarket (37 rue Solférino; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun)

Getting There & Around

Compiègne, 65km northeast of Paris, can be visited as a day trip from the capital.

Trains link Compiègne to Paris' Gare du Nord (€12.50, 40 to 80 minutes, 16 to 26 daily) and Amiens (€16.20, 1¼ hours, five to eight daily). As you walk from the station building out

to the tracks, turn right and you'll soon come to deportation memorial plaques and two train carriages of the type used during WWII to ship Royallieu prisoners to concentration camps.

Local TIC buses are free except on Sunday and holidays, when service is, in any case, very limited. Lines 1 and 2 link the train station with the château.

There's nonmetered parking in front of the château (place du Général de Gaulle), southeast of there along av Royale and av de la Résistance, and along the river (cours Guynemer).

LAON

pop 26,500

Laon (the name has one syllable and rhymes with *enfant*) served as the capital of the Carolingian empire until it was brought to an end in 987 by Hugh Capet, who for some reason preferred ruling from Paris. The walled, hilltop Ville Haute, an architectural gem, commands fantastic views of the surrounding plains and also boasts a magnificent Gothic cathedral. About 100 vertical metres below sits the Ville Basse, completely rebuilt after being flattened in WWII. Laon is great for a romantic getaway.

Information

Tourist Office (☎ 03 23 20 28 62; www.tourisme-paysdelaon.com, in French; place de la Cathédrale, Ville Haute; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-6.30pm early Apr–Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun & holidays Oct–early Apr) Next to the cathedral in a 12th-century hospital decorated with 14th-century frescos. Has a 1:600-scale model of Laon in 1854, excellent English brochures, guided tours (in French, although most guides can speak English) and audioguides (€3) for excellent one- to three-hour walking tours of the Ville Haute and the cathedral.

Sights & Activities

A model for a number of its more famous Gothic sisters – Chartres, Reims and Dijon among them – **Cathédrale Notre Dame** (☎ 9am–6.30pm or 7pm, to 8pm in summer) was built (1150–1230) in the transitional Gothic style on Romanesque foundations. The 110m-long interior has a gilded wrought-iron choir screen and is remarkably well lit; some of the stained glass dates from the 12th century. A memorial plaque for Commonwealth WWI dead hangs inside the west facade. The structure is best appreciated with an audioguide,

available next door at the tourist office. You can climb the **south tower** (adult €3; ♿ visits begin 11am, 3pm & 4pm Jul & Aug, 3pm & 4pm Fri, Sat, Sun & holidays Apr-Jun & Sep-mid-Nov).

Underneath the cathedral (and indeed most of the old town) are three levels of **souterrains** (subterranean passages); those underneath the citadel can be visited on a **tour** (€3; ♿ 3pm Wed-Sun & holidays except late Dec, 3pm & 4.30pm daily Jul & Aug), in French – although most guides also speak English. Tickets are available at the tourist office.

The Ville Haute's narrow streets, alleyways and courtyards are rich in historic buildings, making Laon a particularly rewarding place for keen-eyed wandering. The octagonal 12th-century **Chapelle des Templiers** is in the garden of the archeologically oriented **Musée de Laon** (☎ 03 23 22 87 00; 32 rue Georges Ermant; adult/student €3.50/2.60; ♿ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 2-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-May).

The Ville Haute's 7km-long **ramparts**, with their three fortified gates, are lovely for a stroll; paths known as *grimpettes* take you down the steep forested slopes. For especially panoramic views, head to the 13th-century **Porte d'Ardon**; circular **Batterie Morlot**, a one-time optical telegraph station; and **rue du Rempart St-Rémi**.

Laon-born Jesuit missionary **Jacques Marquette** (1637-75), a pioneer explorer of the Mississippi River and, in 1674, the first European to live in what is now Chicago, is commemorated by an haut-relief statue at square Marquette, at the bottom of rue Franklin Roosevelt (below the Ville Haute Poma station).

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Les Chevaliers (☎ 03 23 27 17 50; www.hotel-chevaliers.com, in French; 3-5 rue Sécurier; d incl breakfast €60, s with washbasin €35) Parts of this two-star, family-run, 14-room hostel, right around the corner from the Haute Ville's *hôtel de ville*, date from the Middle Ages. Rooms are rustic, with ancient stone and brick walls.

Hôtel du Commerce (☎ 03 23 79 57 16; www.hotel-commerce-laon.com, in French; 11 place de la Gare; s/d/t €51/57/63, s/d with toilet €40/46) Facing the train station, this welcoming two-star hotel has 24 modestly furnished but cheery rooms.

Rue Châtelaine, which links the cathedral with place du Général Leclerc, is home to several food shops selling nutritional basics such as chocolate (at No 27).

Getting There & Around

There are direct rail services to Amiens (€15.30, 1½ hours, five to seven daily), Paris' Gare du Nord (€19.70, 1½ to two hours, 14 daily Monday to Friday, eight on Saturday and Sunday) and Reims (€8.50, 45 minutes, eight daily Monday to Friday, four daily weekends).

The Ville Haute is a steep 20-minute walk from the train station – the stairs begin at the upper end of av Carnot – but it's more fun to take the automated, elevated **Poma funicular railway** (return €1; ♿ every 4min 7am-8pm Mon-Sat except holidays, closed 2 weeks late Jul-early Aug), which links the train station with the upper city in 3½ minutes flat.

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