



Gardens of Normandy

Historic, contemporary and undiscovered gardens

2–9 September 2026 (MM 149)

8 days

Speaker: Amanda Patton

A selection of the finest gardens in Normandy, from the Renaissance to the present day.

A backdrop of attractive villages and varied landscapes, including the Seine valley and the dramatic Atlantic coast.

Includes gardens that are lesser-known and visited by special arrangement.

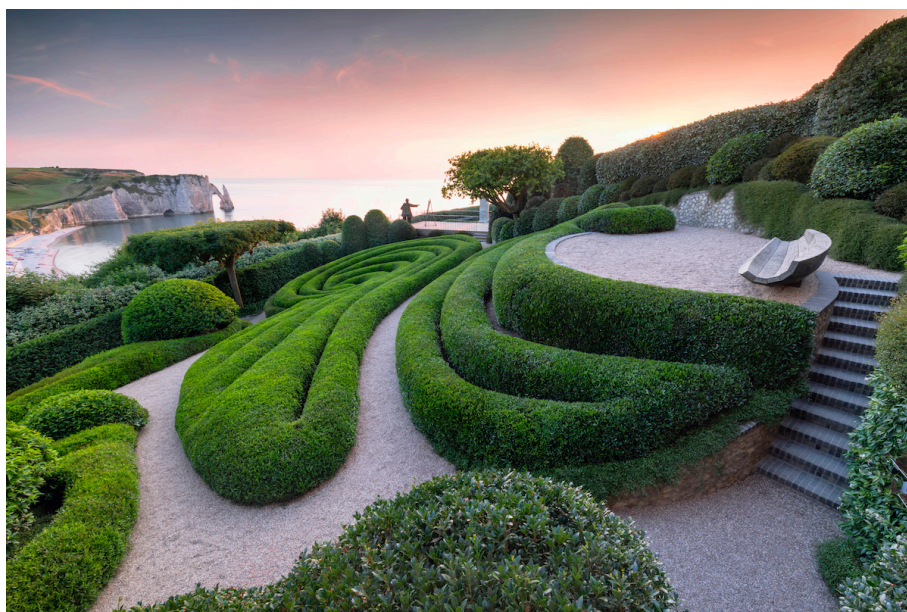
Stay in the centre of Rouen and in a five-star château in the countryside.

The gentle rolling countryside of Normandy has played host to dramatic world events and has inspired – and continues to inspire – artists and creatives, drawn to the picturesque villages, dramatic coastline and the ever-changing light.

With the coming of a more stable political landscape in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, an evolution away from defensive architecture led to a series of impressive châteaux emerging at the centre of independent agricultural enterprises that flourished in the mild climate. The production of camembert, ciders and calvados brought huge prosperity to the region that was reflected in these comfortable and elegant residences that were often a statement of the owners' status and prosperity. Gardens were for the first time regarded as an integral part of the estate, inspired by the grand gardens created by André Le Nôtre and a desire to be seen as equal to the sophistication of Paris.

While most of these gardens are long gone, the garden at the Château de Brécy is one of the few remaining examples of a garden created in the early half of the 17th century, beautifully restored by the current owners. More recently, from the early twentieth century, the landscape architect Achille Duchêne has created new gardens for these châteaux, including at the Château de Boutemont. Influenced by the seventeenth-century formal French style, the garden contains huge topiaries, graceful avenues and elegant water.

While the historic gardens allow us a window into this lost time, the Normandy gardens also offer some of the most exciting contemporary and creative spaces ever envisioned, where experimentation has been fundamental to their development. Alexander



Les Jardins d'Étretat, © wikimedia commons

Thomas's watery paths and sandy planting beds, and the formal parterres created with feathery grasses at the Jardin Plume are just two examples, but the most extraordinary of these is the Jardins d'Étretat. With a panoramic view over the graceful sea-arch and needle at Étretat, much painted by Monet and the Impressionists, an extraordinary neo-futuristic garden has been created where conceptually-shaped plant forms are integrated with modern sculpture. Elsewhere, the Château de Vascoeuil hosts a collection of sculptures by some of the greatest artists of the second half of the twentieth century, including works by Georges Braque, whose wonderful stained glass adorns the church on the cliff at Varengeville where he is buried.

Many of the gardens included in this tour come under the prestigious label of *Jardins Remarquables*, a recognition of public and private gardens with cultural, aesthetic, botanical or historical significance.

Itinerary

Day 1: Rouen. Leave London St Pancras at c. 10.30am by Eurostar. Continue by coach to Rouen, where four nights are spent.

Day 2: Jardin Plume, Vascoeuil, Jardins d'Angélique. At its best in September, Le Jardin Plume combines French formal design with grasses to create an exciting modern

garden. The formal French garden of 15th and 16th-century Château de Vascoeuil houses an important collection of sculpture from major 20th-century artists, while at Les Jardins d'Angélique the owners have created an intimate private garden in memory of their daughter.

Day 3: Miromesnil, Varengeville, Bois des Moutiers. The Jardin Potager of the Château de Miromesnil, the birthplace of Guy de Maupassant, lies adjacent to the château and is enclosed by 17th-century walls. Lunch is served at the château with produce from the garden. The recently (and magnificently) restored Bois des Moutiers is a rare Lutyens and Jekyll partnership in France in the village of Varengeville, where a 12th-century church contains stained glass windows by Georges Braques and Raoul Ubac.

Day 4: Jardin Agapanthe, Rouen. The contemporary Jardin Agapanthe is the private garden of landscape architect Alexandre Thomas. Experimental, surprising and creative, Thomas describes his garden as a laboratory for trials in both design and planting. Water is a constant presence in the garden, often playfully interweaving with paths bordered with the thousands of the designer's favourite plants and interspersed with his extensive collection of garden ornaments and antiques. Free afternoon in Rouen.

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continued

Day 5: Étretat Honfleur, Château de Boutemont. Les Jardins d'Étretat seek to identify new forms of trimmed compositions and plant material within contemporary art installations. This avant-garde garden also references the diversity, natural beauty and exposed location of the site. Some free time in the attractive, historic port of Honfleur gives an opportunity to visit one of the largest wooden churches in France, as well as the Musée Eugene Boudin, 'father' of the Impressionist movement. The garden at the Château de Boutemont was designed in the early 20th century by Achille Duchène around a 16th-century château. Continue to the Château d'Audrieu, where three nights are spent.

Day 6: Castillon, Bayeux, Omaha Beach. Created from the middle of the 1980s onwards, the two distinct gardens at Castillon are the creation of pioneering nursery woman Colette Sainte Beuve. The first garden is a series of eight interconnecting spaces varying in scale and atmosphere, while the second is a succession of largely formal terraces with yew topiaries culminating in a small maze. Both set off Colette's beautiful planting. After a free lunch in Bayeux, we visit the very moving memorial garden at Omaha Beach which honours the 10,000 American soldiers who died during the D-Day landings.

Day 7: Canon, Brécy. Two well-preserved gardens; the Château de Brécy is a 17th-century home with a meticulously restored, richly ornamented garden that dates from the mid-17th century. Still in private ownership, the garden is laid out over four terraces connected by a beautiful staircase, each terrace increasing in size to heighten the impact as it rises away from the château. The Château de Canon is a family estate that has remained intact since the 18th-century with a garden that is both formal and floral.

Day 8: Château du Champ de Bataille. Built in the middle of the 17th century, the château had mixed fortunes before falling into disrepair after the French Revolution. The current owner, Jacques Garcia, has restored the château and, from the early 1990s, created the impressive gardens based on an original design by André Le Nôtre. Return to Paris by coach and take the Eurostar to London St Pancras, arriving c. 6.30pm.

Lecturer

Amanda Patton. Multi-award-winning garden designer, writer, broadcaster and artist. A registered member and former vice-chair of the Society of Garden Designers, and member of the Garden Media Guild, she has created show gardens at Chelsea and Hampton Court, and has designed over 300 mainly private gardens which have featured in numerous books and national magazines. She lectures widely including at the London College of Garden Design, the RAC and the Lurie Garden in Chicago. Her particular interest is in 20th-century and contemporary garden design.

Practicalities

Included: travel by private coach throughout; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 3 lunches and 5 dinners with wine, water and coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

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

How strenuous? Some of the gardens are large so the tour is not suitable for people unable to walk a couple of miles at a time. Paths are often uneven or steep and there are many steps and inclines, so sure-footedness and sturdy footwear are essential. You need to lift your luggage on and off the train and wheel it within stations. Some days involve a lot of driving. Average distance by coach per day: 88 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.