

PEACE OF THE ACTION



Remember wars in Amiens

Sarah Whitfield King hops over the Channel and finds historic battlefields, fascinating museums, beautiful beaches and a fabulous French city

THE French city of Amiens is a 90-minute drive from Calais. With its historic buildings, cafes and canals, it's easy to forget that two World Wars were fought in this now peaceful area. It's the perfect way to combine a trip to the French coast with teaching your children about the legacy of World War I, which was fought in the surrounding Somme area.

FOR FREE: Amiens Cathedral - this magnificent Gothic building dominates the city and is listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is the largest Gothic building ever built and Notre Dame in Paris could fit inside it twice over! During the summer months, as night falls, there's a beautiful light show which brings to life saints, apostles and other figures that decorate the cathedral.

Take a trip down to the Baie de Somme (30 minutes drive from Amiens), with its beautiful long, sandy beaches. Look out for the colony of harbour seals which have taken up residence here. At high tide these mischievous animals nose their way into the marinas, while at low water they rest on the sandbanks - their favourite spot is the beach at Le Hourdel.

WORTH PAYING FOR: The Museum of the Great War in Peronne is an inspiring place which opened in 1992 within the city's 13th Century castle. It's not a memorial or military museum but a peaceful place

with five large rooms illustrating life at the front and behind the lines of WW1. The attention to detail is fascinating, including the wickerwork backpacks the soldiers carried and their contents - clothing, uniforms, guns and hip flasks. There's also a front page of the Daily Mirror dated August 5, 1914 announcing the start of the war and the edition of November 11, 1918 declaring its end. Admission: €7.50 adult, €3.80 child (www.historial.org)

The Somme 1916 Museum in Albert retraces the soldiers' lives in the trenches during July 1916. The museum is underground and runs 230 metres with 15 alcoves with glass cases filled with scenes from the war. Sound effects, pictures and lighting add to the atmosphere. Admission: €5 adult, €3 child (www.somme-trench-museum.co.uk)

The Hortillonages - or "floating gardens" - in the centre of Amiens are best seen by boat. The trip takes a couple of hours and passes allotments and ornamental gardens on a network of canals. It is a magnet for wildlife and there's a good chance of seeing Little Bittern, the Blue Throat (a cousin of the robin), crested grebes, mallards, coots, swans and moorhens. Boat rides run from April to October: €5.70 adult, €3.80 child. Advance bookings: www.amiens-tourisme.com, 0033 3 22 921218.



The best way to see Amiens' floating gardens teeming with wildlife is on a boat trip



The Thiepval Memorial to the missing soldiers of the Somme, near Amiens



The pretty Saint-Leu district with its bars and restaurants

FEELING HUNGRY? In the shadow of Amiens Cathedral are a collection of houses in the medieval waterside district of Saint-Leu. This is the historic heart of the city and also of Amiens nightlife. Formerly millers, weavers and industrial outlets, these are now smart bars, restaurants, antique shops and craft stalls. The Quai Restaurant (www.lequai.c.la, 0033 3 22 721080) is an attractive spot with tables outside or alternatively there's an upstairs floor overlooking the river. Food is very much based on local produce and there is lots of choice of fish. Expect to pay £20 per head with wine for an evening meal.

WHERE TO STAY: Mercure Amiens Cathedral (www.mercure.com/hotel-mercure-amiens; 0033 3 22 806060) is a modern, centrally-located hotel with a good restaurant opposite the cathedral with parking. Doubles from £95. Ask for a room with a cathedral view. For weekend breaks check out www.weekend-picardy.co.uk

GETTING AROUND: The Circuit of

Remembrance is a self-drive car tour of the WW1 battlefields and other points of interest. The route, which takes you between the two towns of Peronne and Albert and the main battlefields of the Somme, is marked with signs throughout and easy to follow.

Personal tours with an English speaking guide to the battlefields and museums can be organised through Battlefield Guided Tours (www.terresdememoire.com, 0033 3 22 842305). Further info: www.visiting-somme.com

GETTING THERE: P&O Ferries (www.poferry.com; 08716 646464) Dover to Calais, 1 hour 30 minutes, fares from £30 each way for car and up to nine passengers.

LD Lines (www.ldlines.com; 0844 576 8836) Dover to Boulogne, 1 hour 45 minutes, fares from £29 single for car and two passengers. Short breaks from £28 return for car and four passengers.

BETWEEN THE SHEETS

Inside our hotel of the week



Luxury...the Rafayel

➔ **Hotel Rafayel, London SW11**

➔ **Where and why** This new five-star boutique hotel on the left bank of the Thames at Battersea in South-West London claims to be one of the capital's first green luxury places to stay. The lights are low energy along with the air conditioning. Even the doors are made from sustainable veneered mahogany. Plastic water bottles are banned and rain water is reused.

Bathrooms are huge with walk-in showers and body massage jets. Floor-to-ceiling windows in the bedrooms give great views. And the beds are Hypnos, billed as the most comfortable beds in the world as used in royal and presidential residences.

➔ **On the menu** On a summer's evening go for drinks al fresco on the terrace overlooking the river or at the hookah bar and enjoy the views as the sun goes down and the lights in surrounding buildings go on. At the Banyan restaurant you can have a three-course meal from the Asian and modern European menu including a tasty curry or pan-fried fish for £20-£30 with a bottle of wine starting around the £20 mark.

➔ **While you're there** There is a gym, sauna, steam room, exercise pool and spa (Sunday Mirror readers can get a special discount on treatments - enquire when booking). You are close to the West End and all its attractions.

Try a boat trip to the Tower, London Eye and South Bank attractions.

➔ **The deal** Doubles start at £120 a night. For more details or to book go to www.hotelrafayel.com, 020 7801 3610



Stunning view from a room

Pictures: CDT SOMME/JUSTINE LABESSE/AFERO PHOTO STUDIO