

# CIDRE, CRÊPES AND CROISSANTS AND A CALIFORNIA 680

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We take a brand-new Grand California 680, VW's latest factory-built campervan on a Cidre, Crêpe and Croissant filled trip around Northwest France

**A**fter 18 months we finally had some time to get out on the road again. Deciding to leave our beloved T3 at home we opted to try out the brand new VW Grand California 680, a near four ton mega-beast of a campervan (or is it a motorhome?) with a built in shower and toilet, perfect for free camping and making use of the French Aires. These fantastic overnight parking spots, which are so much part of the French travelling culture, are sadly not very common in the UK.

We started our trip late on a Sunday in October last year, heading out from Newhaven on DFDS's late night service to Dieppe with all our forms filled out, tests booked and certificates in hand for a smooth crossing. Our ferry was very quiet, so we were lucky enough to grab a cabin (as they are often reserved for truckers) which was just what we needed for an overnight ferry. We even had a 2am wake up call to make sure we could get back to the van in time to drive off! Definitely our new favourite ferry route! Taking advantage of the quiet truck-free roads (no trucks on Sundays in France) we blasted down the autoroute as far as we could go, before getting tired and pulling into an Aire on the side of the road for a few hours sleep.

We woke early on Monday, feeling like we've

teleported to France, as only twenty-four hours earlier we were nursing hangovers from a big night out in Brixton, we were excited to explore a new part of the world.

First stop, Mont-Saint-Michel. We found a local Cidre shop nearby, who kindly offered us free parking for the night after we bought a few bottles from them, but we declined as we had a few more miles to travel that day. Mont-Saint-Michel is a truly impressive monument and a testament to medieval vision and engineering. You can see it from miles around and as you climb up through the winding streets to get to the abbey, you feel you have been transported back several hundred years. After touring the abbey, we had a lovely lunch in one of the many eateries lining the narrow streets, although beware- they are quite pricey!

Refreshed from our traditional omelette and pomme frites, we jumped back into the van and headed west. The great thing about the Grand California is it gives us so much freedom! Usually, in the T3 we'd look for a campsite straight away, or head for some street parking, but this time, every town we came across seemed to have an Aire, or special parking for bigger campervans and motorhomes. So, we just decided to head west to the Brittany coast, with a quick stop in Dinan, a lovely medieval town.



Mont Saint Michel



Footprints in the sand on Pen Hat Beach



Buildings in Dinan



Kingsize bed in the Grand California 680



One of many delicious Crepes

Dinan's Aire was just next to the town's tennis courts and if we had wanted we could have stayed for seventy-two hours for free. Checking our park4night app before we left, we decided on another hour's drive to find the next place to park for the night.

Rolling into the small village of Châtelaudren-Plouagat, we found the first of our paid Aires, taking a while to work out the machine we were amazed that it was only £6.50 including the opportunity to empty and fill our many onboard tanks! Next morning after an early morning walk around the village to grab supplies, we were able to eat breakfast outside with the onboard table and chairs in the sunshine, despite

it being October. After taking a while to work out how the service points work (mental note, pack hose connectors next time) and go through our first successful toilet emptying (not as bad as you think), we started off again. We wanted to get to one of the most westerly tips of Brittany, so we pinned a point on Google maps, and started along our route heading through the National Park of Armorique. Although it wasn't a particularly sunny day, the beach at Pen Hat is absolutely lovely and we even dipped our toes in the sea. Exploring the local sand dunes, we came across the manor house of surrealist poet Saint-Pol-Roux, left abandoned since the 1940s but the ruins still overlook the blue waters below.



D-Day memorial above Sword Beach



Inside the abbey at Mont Saint Michel



Lakeside Aire in Châtelaudren-Plouagat



Exotic walled gardens of Quimper



Cocktails in Rennes



Outside the Battle of Normandy Museum, Bayeux



British Military Cemetery in Bayeux



Amazing smelling Cidrerie just outside Quimper

**THE WHEELS**  
 The Grand California 680 was provided by CamperVanTastic, London's leading luxury campervan hire company specialising in VW California and Grand California hire and accessories. Get in touch with them at: [www.campervantastic.com](http://www.campervantastic.com) if you'd like to hire one of their amazing vehicles for a road trip to remember.

Brittany's version of Stonehenge is also nearby, a collection of Monolithic stones aligned with the sun on certain days of the year. Our evening was spent in the elegant seaside resort of Morgat, with its 19th century beachside homes, stunning beach and useful free parking in the harbour with six or seven other motorhomes. That night a storm rolled in, and the Grand California was really tested as we were battered by heavy rain and winds, but with the onboard heating everything was nice and cosy inside. We left Morgat promising that we'll be back in the summer season, as the beach was wonderful. The drive to Quimper passed through some lovely quaint villages, although most places were closed due to the extended French lunch breaks, which although they can be a bit inconvenient if you're not used to them, we can fully get behind.

We arrived in Quimper just in time for lunch, with a huge selection of Creperies, Boulangeries and Biscuiteries to choose from. We settled for a traditional savoury crêpe (galette) and bowl of Cidre and were very glad we could sit outside in the sun. We spent the afternoon walking the rustic streets of Quimper admiring its twin towered Cathedral, half-timbered houses and the peaceful exotic walled gardens. We heard of a Cidrerie not far from Quimper via their tourist information centre, so we decided to make a stop there. Le Manoir du Kinkiz was hard to find, but worth it to take in the incredibly sweet-smelling aromas of their cellars, and to stock up on some authentic Bretagne Cidre. We spent the night near the hamlet of Gastavit, where we parked up next to a family member's holiday home that we happened to be passing.

After a couple of hours' drive through the damp, post-storm countryside we're treated to some of the best weather of the trip so far, with beautiful sunshine. The city of Rennes, the capital of Brittany, was the next stop. After a few laps getting lost on the ring road, we parked up at the wonderful city Campsite des Gayeulles, located in a large park in the outskirts of the city, with walking and cycling routes around the park and a useful bus into the city centre. Best not to arrive during their lunch time break though! A few hours were spent wandering the cobbled streets of Rennes taking in its grand churches, parliamentary buildings and watching as the student bars slowly filled up as the afternoon turned to evening, a good time to try out more local cidre, wine and a local steak restaurant.



Views over Sword Beach



Aire camping in Châtaudren-Plouagat



Inside the Cathedral in Rennes



Setting up camp at Camping Des Gayeulles, Rennes

The following day we headed to Bayeux, famous for its tapestry commemorating the Norman conquest of England, and the Battle of Normandy Museum, which were both excellent and worth a visit. Most excitingly we got to eat fresh mussels outside in the sunshine at lunchtime and watched a group of locals playing Petanque in the local park next to an old water mill. In the afternoon we headed up to the Normandy coast for the most poignant part of the trip, the visit to the D-Day Beaches. Our first stop was the clifftop above Arromanches-les-Bains where you can still see structures from the temporary harbours that were built in the war, only to be destroyed by a storm shortly after. Omaha Beach was the next stop, where many allied soldiers lost their lives fighting their way up the beaches, whilst under heavy Nazi fire. It was very peaceful in the evening as the sun went down, so we took a few moments to remember those who lost their lives before heading to the next place along the

coast for dinner. The last evening of our trip was spent in the small town of Port-en-Bessin-Huppain, used during the war as a key point to transport fuel from the UK. We had a wonderful dinner at a small local restaurant, which we finished off with some of Normandy's local Calvados. The next day we still had time—so we thought—to take in a few more of the memorials that line the beaches and cliffs all along this coast, before heading back to Dieppe for the DFDS ferry home again. Unfortunately, having forgotten the lessons we had learned earlier in the week, we realised too late that Sundays are still sacred in this part of Europe and finding an open hypermarket to stock up with all the French goodies that afternoon was impossible. We couldn't be too annoyed with this, as we later made use of the ferry's onboard Duty Free shop to stock up on some discounted rum and wine and take part in their wine tasting session.. A perfect end to a wonderful trip. ■

**THE BOATS**  
The Ferry crossing from Newhaven to Dieppe and back was provided by DFDS, the four hour overnight service had great food in the canteen, a bar and the cabin upgrade was perfect to get a bit of rest before the first long drive. We made up for missing the Hypermarket on the way back by taking advantage of the great deals in their onboard Duty-Free shop. Discover more at [www.dfds.com](http://www.dfds.com)



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