

# Take a stroll

Charming scenery and beautiful vistas



**Mary Novakovich** is charmed by this picturesque seaside resort in Pas-de-Calais which is home to historic villas and pretty beach huts

## IN THE AREA



**W**imereux makes a very good base from which to explore the Côte d'Opale, as many of the other villages and towns are connected by a €1 bus riôle. Electric bikes are easy to hire too and the whole region is part of a GR hiking network. Just south of the town is Boulogne's Nausicaï Centre National de la Mer ([nausicaa.fr](http://nausicaa.fr)), the largest aquarium in Europe and home to sharks, manta rays, tropical fish, penguins, sea lions and countless other creatures.

It recently had an enormous multimedia extension to add to its compelling displays of not just sea creatures but also the global work which is behind ocean conservation.

Follow the D940 up the coast to reach the neighbouring coastal villages of Ambleteuse and Audresselles. Along with a wide seafront promenade, Ambleteuse features the Viabean designed 17th century Fort Mahon. It's the only seafront fort on the Channel between Belgium and Cherbourg. Audresselles has a strong



**Above:** Nausicaï's underwater tunnel

fishing tradition, which it celebrates every June with a rustic Fête du Crabe.

Just north of Audresselles is Cap Gris Noz, which is a designated Grand Site de France – along with much of this coastal area known as Les Deux Caps. Beer lovers can veer inland

and look out for signs for Brasserie Artisanale des 2 Caps ([2caps.fr](http://2caps.fr)), a family brewery set on an 18th century farm near Tardingen where they grow their own grain for their ales and stouts and offer tastings in their on-site shop.

# Francophile

### WHERE TO STAY

**Hotel Atlantic**  
Tel: (Fr) 3 21 32 41 01  
[atlantic-delpierre.com](http://atlantic-delpierre.com)  
Dating from 1929, the four-star Hotel Atlantic (doubles from €147) has one of the best spots on the seafront and makes the most of its superb beach location.

### Hotel Restaurant Le Spéranza

Tel: (Fr) 3 21 32 46 09  
[hotel-speranza-wimereux.com](http://hotel-speranza-wimereux.com)  
This hotel is just a few metres from the beach and has cosy rooms, as well as a welcoming brick-lined restaurant. Doubles from €59.

### WHERE TO EAT

**L'Aloze**  
The ground-floor, Scandi-style brasserie at Hotel Atlantic spills out on to the waterfront terrace. It features beautifully grilled fish.

**Cap Nord**  
Tel: (Fr) 9 70 35 87 96  
[cap-nord.fr](http://cap-nord.fr)  
The seafront has several cheerful options for lunch, all with terraces and great sea views. If you want mussels and chips, or the local version of a Welsh rarebit, check out Cap Nord.

**La Vie Est Belle**  
Tel: (Fr) 3 21 83 19 31

### GETTING THERE:

**i** Wimereux is a 25-minute drive from the Eurotunnel terminal at Coquelles.

### TOURIST INFORMATION:

[wimereux-tourisme.fr](http://wimereux-tourisme.fr); [pas-de-calais-tourisme.com](http://pas-de-calais-tourisme.com)  
Département: Pas-de-Calais (62)

**restaurant-lawiestbelle.fr**  
Located in the centre of Wimereux, La Vie Est Belle offers innovative cooking in friendly surroundings.

### WHERE TO VISIT

**Colonne de la Grande Armée**  
[colonne-grande-armee.fr](http://colonne-grande-armee.fr)  
On the southern outskirts of Wimereux is a fascinating relic of Napoleonic history. The

Colonne de la Grande Armée commemorates the first distribution of the Légion d'Honneur in 1804.





We reach one of my favourites, Le Revoir on Avenue de la Mer, which dates from 1905 and is topped with a belvedere of timbered windows. It looks like it belongs in a fairy tale, or a place where fairy tales should be written.

#### Past and present

It's not all Belle Époque beauty, however. Interspersed are the 1960s mediocrities that replaced houses bombed

**Above:** Wimereux's peaceful seafront

**Below:** Wimereux's houses are a rainbow of colours



during World War II. Another sober reminder of war are the Commonwealth War Graves within the communal cemetery on the northern side of the Wimereux river. Because of the town's sandy foundations, the headstones lie flat.

One of them marks the grave of the Canadian physician, poet and soldier John McCrae, who died here in 1918 from pneumonia, and whose seminal poem *In Flanders Fields* inspired the wearing of the red poppy in remembrance every year.

A wander down the high street, Rue Camot, takes us past an encouraging number of independent shops, as well as boulangeries, delis and an especially good fishmonger.

We also pass the twice-weekly market that sets up near the river by the town hall. Though small, it sells high-quality produce from local farms, including an oyster stall and some exceptionally good cheese and butter. Back on the seafront, the low tide exposes a huge

expanse of wet sand, dotted with people ambling about or playing football, and small children magnetically being pulled towards puddles.

We stroll along the blissfully wide promenade, whose blue and white beach huts and ice cream stalls create a holiday atmosphere. Here, too, the architecture is lavish, easily holding its own against the dramatic backdrop of the sea. Those 19th-century industrialists must have known they were on to a good thing. ❤️



**Above:** Poet John McCrae's grave at Wimereux





**Above:** Blue and white beach huts line the seafront

**T**here's a playfulness about Wimereux that is instantly appealing – a game of architectural one-upmanship that got slightly out of hand, but in a good way. Here on the Côte d'Opale, about a half-hour south of Calais, is an example of what happens when you introduce a railway line from Paris to the coast.

From 1867 onwards, moneyed industrialists from Lille and other northern French cities developed a hankering to build a villa by the sea.

Then the British arrived and grand hotels sprang up to meet the demand – not to mention a casino (long gone) and, inevitably, a golf course.

A huge sweep of beach along the Baie de Saint-Jean turned Wimereux from a fishing hamlet into a fashionable seaside resort, one that's managed to retain its heart. Those moneyed industrialists wanted to show that they weren't just mercantile: they had an artistic side too. Between them and their architects, they built a collection of villas that's pure enchantment – with a dose of colourful flamboyance and whimsy thrown in.

### Meef and greet

I've been to Wimereux numerous times, but now I'm being shown round by Alain Lemain of Greeters 62 ([greeters62.com](http://greeters62.com)). This free initiative set up by the Pas-de-Calais tourist board gives local residents the chance to share their knowledge and special interests with visitors and Alain reveals Wimereux's wonderful quirks on our walk around the town. There's hardly a window that hasn't been gabled and given a decorative trim, a canopy and a finial, usually brightly painted. Colourful balconies abound, often paired with timbered windows. There's a turret here and there, with some Anglo-Norman houses adding their half-timbered stripes to the fun.

We stop at Wimereux's only listed building, the imposing Les Mauriciens on Rue du Général de Gaulle, looking regal behind wrought-iron gates.

Bought in 1895 by a London banker (via Mauritius) named Maurice Ulcoq, it was a military hospital in 1914 and later a hotel. It's just been restored to its 19th-century glory, complete with rooftop lantern.



**Above:** An original Napoleon statue