

# Bon bed & breakfast

**C**ONSIDERING its proximity, less than 90 minutes away across the Channel, and the amazing low-cost fares available at this time of year, it's surprising that France's Nord-Pas de Calais region does not receive more

attention from British visitors.

The problem is that once they've crossed that narrow stretch of water – the busiest sea lane in the world – most Brits get straight on to the motorway and head south.

They really don't know what they are missing out on, so much closer to home.

Dulwich residents Richard and Vanessa Rhoades-Brown made the discovery, swapped their cramped London home for a spacious maison de maitre – a magnificent and highly elegant mansion bought from an elderly countess for just over £200,000 – and sank the rest of their savings into creating a new home for themselves and a B&B business.

## ROGER ST PIERRE discovers a hidden corner of France that's very close to home

Vanessa's background in design resounds from the moment you step through the massive front doors and into the magnificent living room, decorated in a contemporary art deco style.

Like something straight off the pages of *House & Garden*, *Maison de Plumes*, which gets its name from Vanessa's love for our feathered friends in general and peacocks in particular, is somehow grand and elegant at the same time. Doves flock in the garden while chickens fed on maize provide eggs of the most exquisite flavour.

There's nothing much wrong with the superb dinners offered either. Richard never trained as a chef but he is a confirmed foodie and a wine enthusiast too, and he makes the most of the region's superb larder to create a hybrid of British and French regional cuisine.

The prices will please too. It's just 89 euros per room per night, including breakfast, for one of the three large and truly delightful bedrooms – with two more nearing readiness – while the five-course dinner is priced at an equally reasonable 35 euros per person, including a half-bottle of wine.

The house is set on the outskirts of the sprawling village of Heuchin. It's just 50 minutes down the A26 autoroute from Calais and is within an easy drive of seven championship golf courses.

Other local attractions include the Great War battle sites and memorials of the First World War's epic Battle of the Somme, the field at Agincourt where King Henry V and his little

army defeated the flower of French knighthood on St Crispin's Day, Europe's largest fishing port at Boulogne, the upscale seaside resort of Le Touquet, the medieval walls of Montreuil sur Mer, which is, rather bizarrely, now seven miles from the sea, and the ornate cobbled squares of the charming little city of Arras.

Heuchin is set amid the beautiful Seven Valleys. There's a delightful web of lightly travelled byroads, picturesque little villages beside babbling trout streams and straggling ridges of gently rolling hills. Forests and lakes abound. And there's a surfeit of panoramic views.

You might, though, prefer to relax at *Maison de Plume*. There's a vast lawn and a welcoming deck complete with barbecue and hot tub.

Vanessa and Richard only opened for business in July but their guest book is already full of accolades, not just from the English but from German, Dutch, Australian and, yes, French guests as well.



- ROGER St. Pierre crossed the Channel with Seafrance aboard *Freedom*, returning three days later on the *Rodin*, both offering comfortable lounges, affordable refreshments and a high-speed crossing that had him back on the road within 90 minutes.
- Seek out some specialities: *Perle de Grossielles*, an alcoholic sparkler flavoured with redcurrants; *Potsjviesch*: rabbit, pork and chicken in an aspic jelly; and pungent *Boulet d'Avesnes* cheese.
- *Maison de Plumes* is located at 73 Rue d'Aire 62131, Heuchin, France. Tel: 0033 321 414 7855. E-mail: [enquire@maisondeplumes.com](mailto:enquire@maisondeplumes.com). Web: [www.maisondeplumes.com](http://www.maisondeplumes.com)

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