

Calais has been seen as the sort of place to go *through*, rather than *to*, for most Brits who typically only stopped in town to ask for directions to the hypermarché.

After 70% of the town had been destroyed in the Second World War, the town planners decided to rebuild in the *Style Modernisme* which seems to be still en-vogue. As a result, there's a confident 20th Century feel to much of the town where maintenance has been chosen over bulldozing. Bits that haven't stood the test of time so well have been brightened up with street art. Regular buses for the ferry terminal leave opposite the station, but the bus runs through the town so if you are on your way to the ferry, you could [catch the bus en-route](#).



Strolls

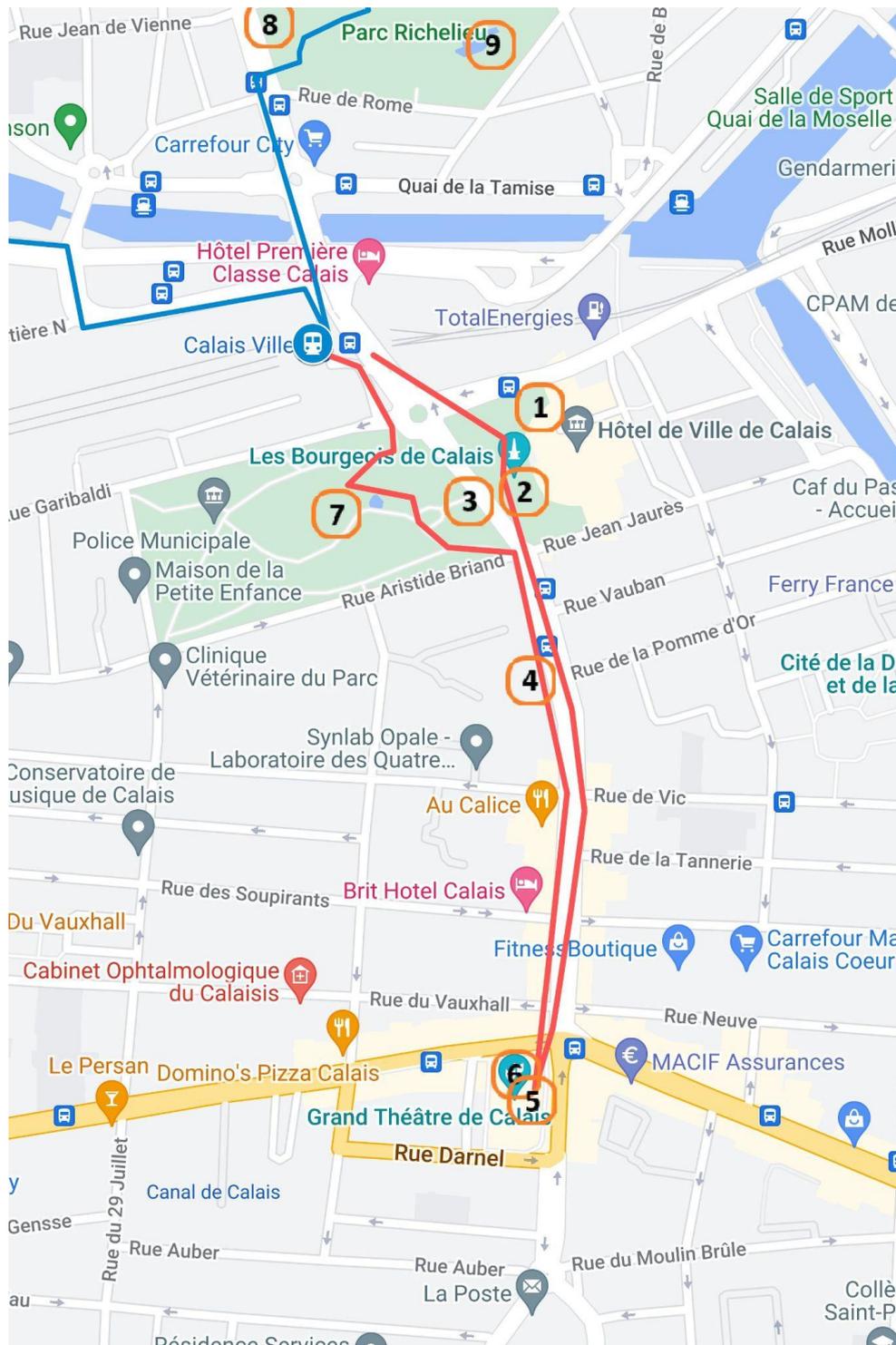
- [Rodin and the finer side of Calais \(2km red\)](#)
- [A wander around town \(3km blue\)](#)
- [There be dragons, and sea... \(2km green\)](#)

Interactive Map

Here is a [link to a map](#) that can help you find your bearings.

Rodin and the finer side of Calais (2km red)

This walk takes in Rodin's local masterpiece and several other gems.



- 1 Belfroi de l'Hôtel de Ville
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On leaving the station, it's hard not to notice the 'functional' hotel in front, setting the tone for a practical town. But glance to the right and you'll see a not-so-practical bell tower or belfry that UNESCO thinks is worth a look, so let's go there first.

Go to your right and over the roundabout. On the far side, we can see that the belfry is attached to a big town hall with a bigger roof. The belfry (beffroi) (1) is one of 55 that comprise

UNESCO's [list](#) of cultural gems, symbolising the independence and pride of medieval towns across this part of Northern France and Belgium. But despite appearances, it was built in the 20th Century and is made of reinforced concrete.



Hotel de Ville



Burgers of Calais

In front of it is Rodin's masterpiece, the [Burgers of Calais](#) (2), depicting the scene when six local bigwigs put the interests of the townsfolk before their own and offered themselves up to Edward III and his besieging English army in 1346. It was a controversial sculpture at the time. Rodin didn't want to create some glorified image on a high plinth, but a more ordinary portrayal and wanted the figures at ground level, so you could look them in the eye and see their humanity and as a result, their heroism. It works, doesn't it?

Facing the sculpture on the other side of the road is a more orthodox monument, the Monument aux enfants de Calais (3).



Monument aux enfants de Calais - Google

The guy on the top having a laurel wreath placed on his head is [Captain Dutertre](#), who met his untimely end in the Algerian colonial wars of the 1840s. The monument also bears testimony to the people of Calais who lost their lives in subsequent conflicts with one of the last inscriptions

being a promise to stand by those Algerians who wished to remain French after independence. Oh, and there's a random naked lady with a sword...

Continue on down the Boulevard Jacquard, which isn't particularly lovely, so it's been cheered up with street art (4) and we get to the uber-ornate [Grand Théâtre de Calais](#) (5) which like the Hotel de Ville is also a deceptively young 20th Century piece.

In front is a statue of *Joseph Marie Charles dit Jacquard* (6) with two women - one adoringly looking up at him, the other at her wonderful new clothes which could now be woven thanks to the invention of the [Jacquard Loom](#), or more precisely the punched-card-based mechanism that controlled looms for intricate silk weaving. His fancy-pants invention was put to new use by IBM in the 1950s to program [its computers](#).



Grand Théâtre de Calais - Google



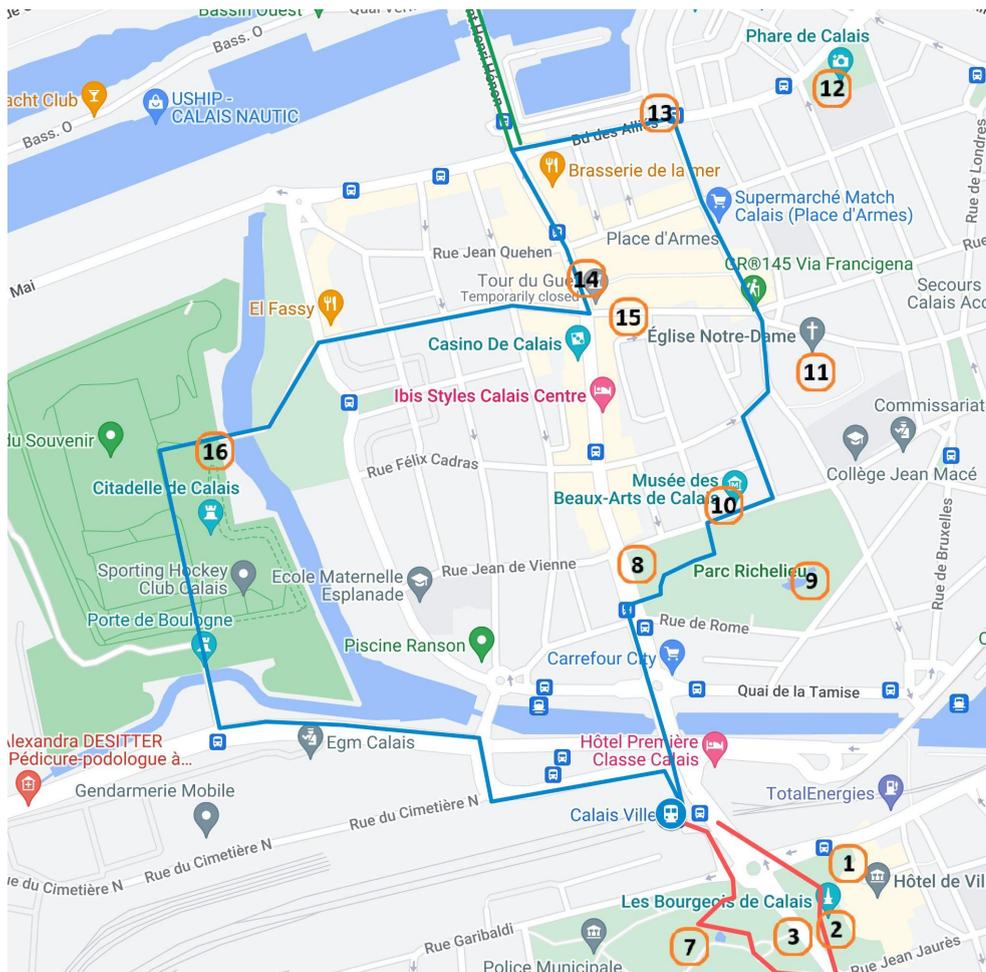
Jacquard - Google

If you would like to see more of the fruits of the new loom, you could take a detour to the lace museum (marked on the map).

Otherwise, continue back towards the Hotel de Ville but this time take a wander through the park (Parc Saint-Pierre) (7) on the other side of the road which has a [Second World War museum](#) where you can get an idea of why so much of Calais had to be rebuilt after the war.

A wander around town (3km blue)

On this walk, we'll take in some more of the town's sights and learn a bit of history on the way.



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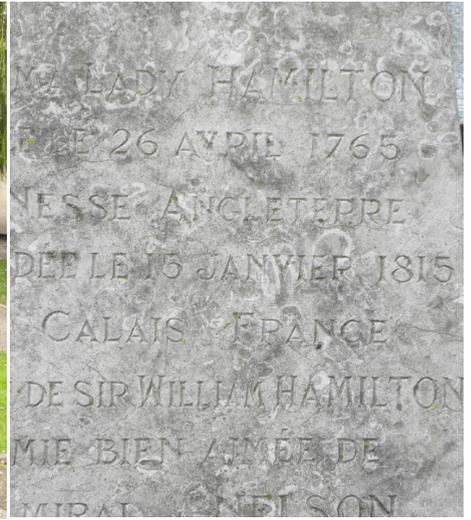
Leaving the station (or continuing from the previous stroll), turn to your left, crossing Pont George V. Beyond the roundabout is a park (Parc Richelieu) on our right which is worth a wander.

Near the entrance you'll pass two elderly gentlemen - Charles de Gaulle and Winston Churchill (8). There is also another sight which is as quintessential of this part of the world as its belfries, a fritierie where you can buy a warming cone of chips.

The park also has another recent monument - a memorial to [Lady Hamilton](#), the paramour of Lord Nelson who ended up living an impoverished life in Calais after Nelson's demise (9).



Winston and Charles - Google



Lady Hamilton - Google

Going through the far side of the park, we pass the [Musée des Beaux-Arts](#) which contains a collection of Rodin's works (10).

Then continue down Rue Ernest Lejeune and then right through the passage leading to Notre-Dame Church which was originally built when this place was under English control (11).

Continue through to the place d'Armes by going through another passage under the modernist housing project and all the way to the end where there is a pleasingly nautical and Flemish-gabled set of flats.



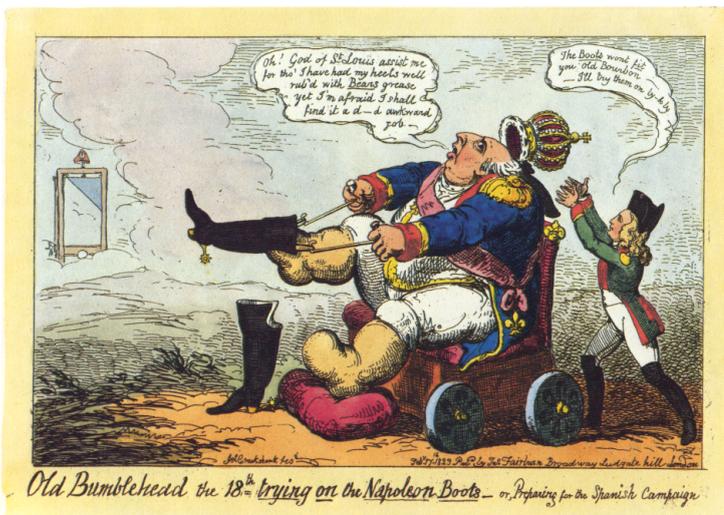
Place Léon Vincent - Google



King Louis XVIII - Google

To the right is the lighthouse which you can climb for some good views (12), but to the left is another lofty column (13). This one is to mark the return of King Louis XVIII in 1814. There's

even a cast of his first footprint back on French soil. It's unclear if its noteworthiness is because he (like his chum George IV) was a very heavy bloke.



Louis XVIII - wikicommons

Cartoons at the time had views on whether he was a suitable replacement for Napoleon - whether he could fill his boots...

Unfortunately, a year later when Napoleon staged his comeback, Louis was too overweight and plagued by gout to rally his troops in 1815 and it was left to the Iron Duke to sort out the mess - presumably wearing his wellies.

From here we can head around the promenade to meet a dragon (see green route below).

Otherwise, head back down the Rue de la Mer which brings us to the Place d'Armes (14) with restaurants, bars, a friterie and it also has a statue of Charles de Gaulle and his wife, Yvonne who got married in Calais.



Yvonne et Charles De Gaulle



Tour de Guet

They had their wedding celebrations at the Town Hall, which is where the Burghers of Calais sculpture is. This square, with the medieval Tour de Guet (15) is the more likely place where the

burghers actually left the city gates to meet their fate. So wouldn't it make more sense if the sculptures were swapped? Although perhaps, it's better to give the politicians in the town hall a reminder that they have big shoes to fill.

We could get back to the station by continuing along this road, but let's go through one of the greener bits of the town, the Citadelle. It's a remnant of the substantial defensive works (that were given the [Vauban](#) treatment) that have been essential to Calais' survival for almost all of its history - maybe a wander around here is a chance to reflect on how open and peaceful most of Europe is these days...

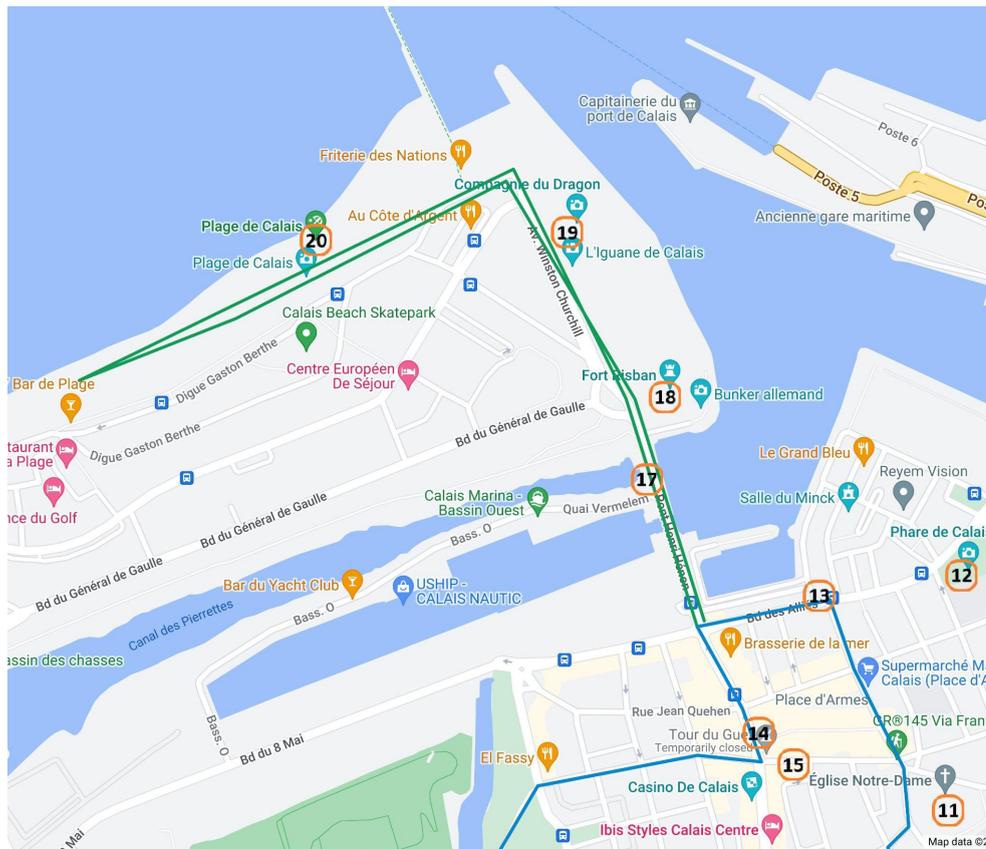


Citadelle

Turn right down Rue d'André Gerschel which leads to the Citadelle (16) and the Porte de Neptune. Wander through to the Porte de Boulogne and then turn left onto Avenue Pierre de Coubertin, which leads us back to the station.

There be dragons, and sea... (2km green)

If it seems odd to come to the seaside without seeing the sea then this stroll should do the trick.



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Follow the Quai de la Colonne Louis XVIII around the shallow dock and to the Pont Henri Hénou but before we cross the water, take a peek at the original Capt'n Tom. (17) Tom Souville was a corsair - a state sponsored pirate who plagued merchant shipping of France's (or more specifically Calais') enemies. He also founded Calais' first lifeboat.



Tom Souville - google



Calais Dragon - compagnie du dragon

Over the bridge there are the ramparts of Fort Risban (18) which also contain German Bunkers.

Further on is a massive fire-breathing [dragon](#) (19) - which you can book tickets to ride along the seafront.

If you want to keep your feet on the ground, you could instead go for a bracing walk along the front (20) or huddle in one of the beach huts and watch the ferries file past.

When you are ready for a bag of chips, retrace your steps.