

## TIMELINE

# MONET ON THE NORMANDY COAST. THE DISCOVERY OF ÉTRETAT

19 MARCH–5 JULY 2026

Exhibition Annex

### Ca. 1786

The first known depictions of Étretat are the work of Alexandre Jean Noël (1752–1834). An oyster farmer had probably commissioned the artist to produce images that would serve to advertise his undertaking.

### Ca. 1820–1822

Eugène Isabey (1803–1886), an exponent of Romanticist landscape painting, is the first artist to sojourn in the village for a lengthy period. He lodges with a retired sea captain.

### 1822

France's first seaside resort opens in Dieppe. It will be followed by Veules-les-Roses in 1830, Étretat in 1840 and Le Tréport in 1851. At the time, sea bathing is thought to bring relief for various afflictions. In Étretat, patients visit the Duchemin bathhouse, where fishermen assist the bathers as so-called "guide-baigneurs".

### 1823–1825

The richly illustrated travel report *Excursion sur les côtes et dans les ports de Normandie* is published with a text by Noël Jacques Lefebvre-Durufilé (1792–1877). Its numerous views of Norman sites also include ones of Étretat. Images of the village thus begin to circulate early on.

### Ca. 1831

The painter Eugène Le Poittevin (1806–1870) visits Étretat for the first time. In the years that follow, he will have a villa and a studio built for himself on the shore. The sea, the fishermen and their families, but also bathing guests, become key themes of his paintings, which are regularly on display in the Paris Salon.

Typical local motifs such as the huts (*caloges*) fashioned from discarded ship hulls and the capstans (*cabestans*) used to haul the fishing boats on land become subjects of art.

### 1835

The writer Victor Hugo (1802–1885) travels to Normandy in the summer months and visits Étretat, among other places. The drawings in his travel diary testify to his fascination with the cliff landscape.

### 1836

Alphonse Karr's (1808–1890) novel *Le Chemin le plus court* (The Shortest Path) is published. Containing descriptions of Étretat's unique landscape and local customs, it contributes to the village's growing renown.

### 1838

One of the first travel reports about Étretat is published: *Reise- und Rasttage in der Normandie* (Days of Travel and Rest in Normandy) by the German journalist and politician Jakob Venedey (1805–1871).

The construction of the first proper road between Étretat and Le Havre begins; it will be completed in 1852. It still takes at least two days to travel from Paris to Étretat by stagecoach.

### 1842

Le Poittevin paints a sign for the façade of the Hôtel Blanquet. This façade will later also be decorated with a faience medallion by Théodore Deck (1823–1891) portraying the writer Alphonse Karr. In 1837, the owner had added the epithet "Au rendez-vous des artistes" to the hotel's name. For a long time, the Blanquet is the only hotel in the village. Over the course of the decades, many artists, among them Claude Monet and Henri Matisse, lodge there.

### 1850s

The first photographic views of Étretat are taken.

### 1852

The casino is opened. It will appeal to a cosmopolitan public and become a gathering place for society.

### 1858

The comic opera *Orpheus in the Underworld* by Jacques Offenbach (1819–1880) meets with huge success. Its popularity enables the composer to build the villa “Orphée” for himself in Étretat. In the years that follow, he will give splendid parties there.

### Ca. 1860

After his parents separate, the writer Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893) spends his childhood and adolescence with his mother in Étretat. Normandy and the way of life there will be a major source of inspiration for his work. The beach is divided up between bathers and fishermen, strongly reducing the latter’s area of operation.

### 1864

Claude Monet (1840–1926) carries out his first paintings of the Étretat landscape.

### 1868

Monet again sojourns in Étretat, now with his wife Camille and their little son Jean. He paints *The Luncheon and The Magpi*.

### 1869

Gustave Courbet (1819–1877) takes up quarters in Le Poittevin’s studio on the beach in order to paint *The Cliffs of Étretat after the Storm* and his *Wave* series.

Maupassant will later report on Courbet’s stay in “La vie d’un paysagiste” (1886; *The Life of a Landscapist*).

### 1872

The painter Camille Corot (1796–1875) sojourns in Étretat, lodging with the family of entrepreneur François Stump, who collects his works.

### 1874

The first Impressionist exhibition takes place in the former studio of the photographer Nadar in the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris. There Monet shows the painting *The Luncheon*, which he has carried out in Étretat.

### 1877

At the request of the writer Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880), who is working on his novel *Bouvard und Pécuchet*, Maupassant describes the Normandy coast in a letter of 3 November. The six pages also contain sketches of the coast at Étretat.

**1882**

Maupassant has the house “La Guillette” built for himself. There he will host friends and give parties.

**1883**

Between 1883 and 1886, Monet sojourns in Étretat every year. It is there that he paints his first motif series.

Maupassant publishes his novel *A Life (Une vie)* in the newspaper *Gil Blas*. Like many of his short stories, the novel is set in the Pays de Caux region and Étretat. It is an immediate success.

**1885**

Monet leaves paintings on two doors behind in the “Hostellerie des Vieux Plats”. The latter is a guesthouse in Gonneville-la-Mallet— a commune located a few kilometres from Étretat—where artists, intellectuals, politicians and tourists gather. The innkeeper Edmond Aubourg offers artists who visit his establishment the option of painting the doors of his typical Pays de Caux cabinets for a meal. The owners will later sell Monet’s paintings.

**1886**

Monet’s last stay in Étretat.

**1895**

The railway line is extended from Les Ifs to Étretat, connecting the village with the Saint-Lazare station in Paris and reducing travel time there to a mere four hours.

**1899**

The painter Félix Vallotton (1865–1925) rents the Grandval Castle in Étretat and spends the entire summer there. It is his honeymoon with his wife Gabrielle (née Bernheim). He takes photos of beach life that will serve him as bases for paintings. The Swiss painter Sophie Schaeppi (1852– 1921) sojourns in Étretat and carries out oil sketches and drawings.

**Ca. 1900**

The “Alabaster Coast” receives its name. Other coastal regions in France, for example the “Côte d’Azur”, the “Côte d’Émeraude” and the “Côte d’Argent”, have also received epithets attributed to writers and artists. Like those, “La Côte d’Albâtre” is used for tourism marketing purposes.

## 1908

The Étretat golf course—still in existence today—is landscaped.

## 1908/09

Maurice Leblanc's (1864–1941) *The Hollow Needle* (*L'Aiguille creuse*) comes out, initially as a serial novel in the magazine *Je sais tout*, then—in 1909—in full length. In the story, the rock spire at Étretat serves as a hiding place for Lupin's loot. Leblanc will write most of his Arsène Lupin series in his home in Étretat, which he will dub the "Clos Lupin". Today it houses the "Maison d'écrivain" established in honour of the writer and his protagonist.

## 1920

In the summer, the painter Henri Matisse (1869–1954) sojourns twice in Étretat. He produces a large number of paintings and drawings, which he will sell successfully.

## 1924

Suzanne Lenglen (Olympic tennis champion in 1920), who has visited Étretat regularly since childhood, takes part in one of the international tennis tournaments held there.

## 1939—1945

During World War II, the German occupiers change the shoreside promenade and tear down the casino, the Hôtel Blanquet and several villas. The beach of Étretat is part of the Atlantic Wall. At the end of the war, the promenade lies in ruins. Bomb shelters built into the cliffs are still in existence today and testify to this period.

## 1950

The writer Georges Simenon (1903–1989) publishes *Maigret and the Old Lady*, which is set in Étretat.

On the advice of Henri Matisse, Polish-American artist Manfred Schwartz (1909–1970) travels to Étretat. During this trip and a later visit in 1960, he develops a new, abstract approach to the landscape, particularly the local pebble beach.

## From 1950s

Étretat serves as a backdrop for numerous films, including *Le Fauve est lâché* (*The Beast Is Loose*, 1959), *Les Galets d'Étretat* (*The Pebbles of Étretat*, 1972), *Guy de Maupassant* (1982), *Jours tranquilles à Clichy* (*Quiet Days in Clichy*, 1990), *Lucy* (2014) and *Albatros* (*Drift Away*, 2021).

**2000**

Elger Esser carries out a photo series retracing the footsteps of Maupassant and Flaubert.

**2021**

Netflix airs the series *Lupin* by George Kay and François Uzan with Omar Sy in the leading role. It is one of the streaming service's most watched series and contributes to increasing the number of visitors to Étretat.

**2026**

With nearly 1.5 million visitors every year, Étretat suffers from “overtourism”. Along with climate change, the crowds contribute to the erosion of the cliffs. The coast of the Departement Seine-Maritime, which is punctuated with valleys cutting through the chalk cliffs, faces particular threat. Some sixty landslides take place yearly. To avoid accidents, the community has kept access to the cliffs and a large proportion of the beaches closed since April 2025—many people had put themselves at risk to capture the perfect shot in the spectacular landscape.

Étretat is a popular motif on social media, where—much as in artworks of the nineteenth century—visitors stage themselves in such a way as to mask out the streams of tourists. The mechanisms of popularization also resemble those of the nineteenth century, when artists like Courbet and Monet memorialized the site with their work.