



FRANCE

## A Channel-hop to Le Touquet

Travelling by ferry is seen as being safer than planes and trains — and if you have children it's also easier, too.

Liz Edwards takes a weekend break in Le Touquet



Le Touquet's waterfront  
ALAMY

[Liz Edwards](#)

Sunday July 26 2020, 12.01am, The Sunday Times

**W**e all turn into our parents eventually, don't we? A spot of gardening here, a pair of sensible shoes there. My latest evolutionary stage is ferry-shaped. When I was young my folks insisted that any overseas family holidays were via boat. Planes

consequently seemed so exciting to me that, as an adult, I had sailed cross-Channel only to avoid an ash cloud and to buy a

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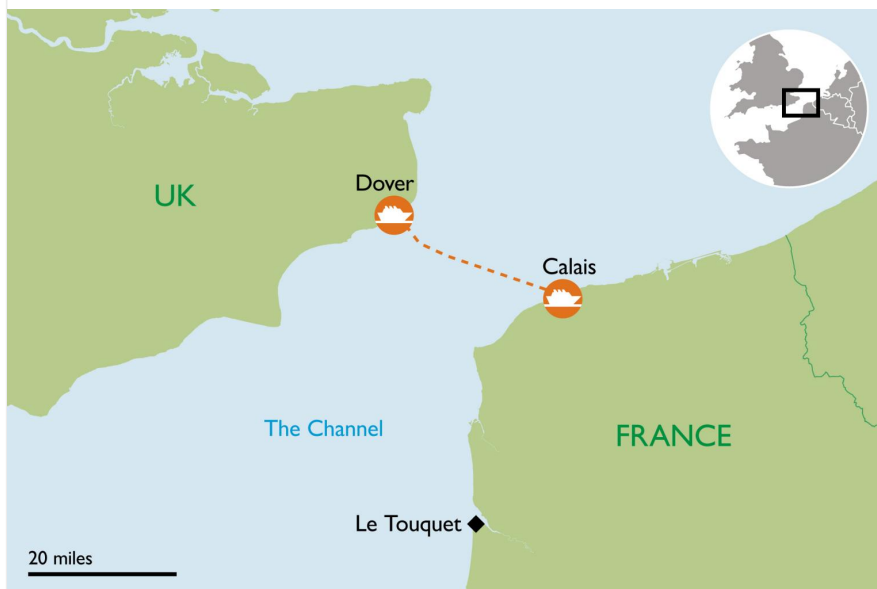


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itching to get away but picturing airborne stress rather than glamour, I am reverting to parental type. So last weekend my six-year-old son and I car-ferried to the seaside in northern France.

And we're not the only ones choosing the ferry for an easier life. A raft of recent stats suggests that ferry travel is perceived as safer than flying or even going overseas by train. Companies such as P&O are preparing for a surge in bookings from passengers lured by the prospect of crossing borders en plein air.

You also get to cut out a lot of airport-based faff. On arrival at Dover I am waved over for a spot security search, but waved on again when I can't find the catch to open the car bonnet. No scanner, no removal of shoes, no 100ml liquid limits, and no need to pack light — joining the queue for our departure I see many people with dogs or bicycles, or both; we've brought my son's scooter. Even delays are more manageable, as I discover during a four-hour wait on the return leg. You don't get fresh air in an airport departure lounge, and games of Frisbee tend to be frowned upon.



Things are slightly less carefree on board — we have to wear masks and are encouraged to take advantage of the many hand-sanitiser dispensers (most are full); an out-of-order loo means a trek round the floor-stickered one-way system. But the outdoor deck and bar are understandably popular, and many masks come off again — one group of lads with their pints of “manager’s special” Stella wear theirs as comedy hats.

“Masks have made everything harder,” says Jo Hay, onboard services manager, muffled by her own jaunty nautical number

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now holidays are starting, our boats are as full as can be with social distancing.” That’s about 1,000 passengers, rather than 2,000; none in coaches or on foot, with some seating off-limits and space to spread out.

Colin and Juliet are on their way from Broughty Ferry, near Dundee, to visit their daughter in Lille. They’re taking a vanload of baby gear for their new grandchild, but — even without it — say they wouldn’t have gone by plane. “I fly for work all the time, but I won’t until there’s a vaccine,” Juliet says. “We like the fact we can be self-contained in our own vehicle, then sit in the open air.”

It’s only 90 minutes to Calais, then we’re off — no checks, forms or baggage carousels to contend with (on the return leg there’s an online form, which no one looks at). Calais Beach looks tempting, but we’re going an hour’s drive south, to Le Touquet — full name Le Touquet-Paris-Plage, for all the Parisians who make it their beachy bolt hole.





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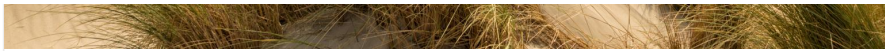
The town of Le Touquet  
ALAMY

The only tricky moment is at the motorway toll. Had I gone to finishing school I might have learnt how to get a ticket via the passenger window of a right-hand-drive car without a lot of unseemly clambering. Soon we're cruising through the lofty pines and chestnuts of Le Touquet's forest. Broad avenues are lined with large thatched bungalows and villas; we see children plodding along on Thelwell ponies — it could be Hampshire.

If the seaside town reminds me of anywhere, though, it might be Portmeirion, for the whimsical look of the place. Built in the early 20th century, the resort is an architectural pick and mix of art deco, Arts and Crafts, mock-Tudor and Trumpton. Sounds like a car crash; looks quite charming.

The former home of Serge Gainsbourg and PG Wodehouse, it couldn't be more Franglais. On the front is a giant sand sculpture of the Eiffel Tower, a carousel and a 1950s mini-golf course, where we get the dinky version of a town tour — each hole's obstacle is a Le Touquet landmark: the lighthouse; the casino; the gothic town hall. At the huge, room-for-everyone beach, crayon-coloured cabins and children's play areas line up under the prom next to Le Sand bar, where sunset comes with Aperol spritzes and a live sax player blasting out the solo from *Baker Street*.





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Streets and strands are lively while still being laid-back ; everyone I speak to says it's no quieter than any pre-Covid summer weekend. On our evening wander we see few masks — there's too much Friday-night eating, drinking and smoking to be done — and the only coverings on our fellow diners at the seafood specialist Perard are lobster bibs (mains from £22; [perard-letouquet.fr](https://perard-letouquet.fr)). But most of the Saturday-morning shoppers queuing at delis, butchers and bakers, and thronging the faux-medieval covered market, are masked. It's more reassuring, but I'm not ready for crowds yet so we escape back to the beach.

We're away from home for less than 48 hours, but it feels longer — perhaps because the holiday starts en route, on the sunny deck. I can certainly live a little longer without flying. While so much about travel is up in the air, I suspect my next holiday won't be.

*Liz Edwards was a guest of P&O Ferries (a return Dover-Calais sailing with car costs from £170; add £12pp for priority boarding and club lounge access; [poferries.com](https://poferries.com)), [letouquet.com](https://letouquet.com), [visit-pas-de-calais.com](https://visit-pas-de-calais.com) and Castel Victoria, which has doubles from £76, room only ([castelvictoria.com](https://castelvictoria.com))*

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Lovely place, enormous beach and French food.

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Christopher Needham 26 JULY

If you want to be even safer, try Eurotunnel. You can stay in your own car for the whole journey, which should take only about 60 to 90 minutes maximum, depending on check-in and passport control times. It's also more environmentally friendly - just look at the plumes of black smoke as the ferries leave port, and the haze of pollution that hangs around Calais when there's little wind.

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I passed through Le Touquet last summer and found it charming, it would be a lovely place to spend a lazy few days.

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