

TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

...to get headlamp-adjustment stickers to drive in... as well as a reflective jacket and a triangle to drive in... and don't forget your GB sticker.

...s list of what you need, see tinyurl.com/cjzu6



DON'T LEAVE MONTREUIL WITHOUT

Doing your Susan Boyle impression – Montreuil was the setting for the first half of *Les Misérables*



NOT SO GRIM | The rolling hills of the Pas-de-Calais are stuffed with individual producers happy to show you their wares



>> Beer: Christophe Noyon microbrewery

BEST BUY: beer (750ml) £4
Thanks to its proximity to Belgium, the Pas-de-Calais used to have a proud beer heritage. In the early 20th century, there were 200 breweries; today, there are just 20. One of the figureheads of the campaign to keep French beer alive is Christophe Noyon (below), who brews four styles on his beautiful farm on the coast near Calais itself (go there on the way back to the ferry). Tastings are available all year round on Fridays and Saturdays, and Tuesday-Sunday (closed Sunday mornings) in July and August. A brewery tour is also available for £3.10. bieredes2caps.com



LUSH | The Pas-de-Calais coast

>> Veg: Aux Légumes d'Antan

BEST BUY: Pot of pineapple-flavoured sage £1.75

Bored of the standard red tomatoes and orange carrots? François Delépierre is the man for you. At Aux Légumes d'Antan, he grows 3,000 varieties of organic fruit, vegetables and herbs, including black carrots, lemon cucumbers (round yellow cucumbers) and zebra tomatoes (green and yellow striped tomatoes with a sweet spicy taste).



PICK 'N' MIX | Delépierre's huge range of veg

THERE
...nce operates up to 15... alais crossings a day, 3 return per car (plus up... ople) for a day trip, or

Skinted: Le Coq Hotel
Quiet three-star hotel in the heart of Montreuil overlooking a cobbled

...or you can go Dutch and have a damn gouda time

Not hungry for France? Head to Holland and take a bite out of Alkmaar, the country's cheese capital, says **Julia Buckley**

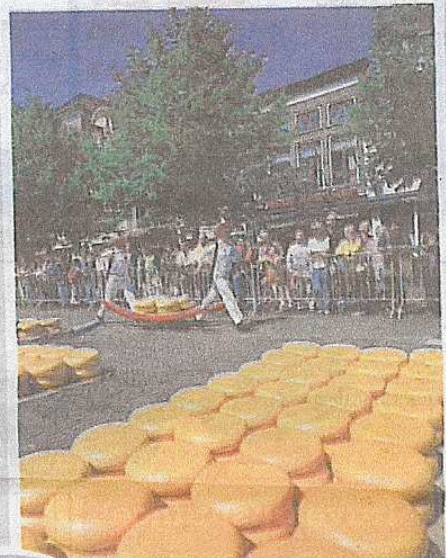
FRANCE may be the obvious candidate for a weekend away, but for something a little more original, Holland is just as accessible.

Granted, the ferry ride may be longer (seven-and-a-half-hours longer, to be precise), but choose an overnight trip and you won't lose any time at all. The midnight crossing from Harwich will have you in the Hook of Holland for breakfast the next day.

And yes, in general, Dutch food isn't really up there with the French scene (unless you're a fan of chips with mayonnaise and herring sarnies). But one thing they do well in is cheese – and Alkmaar, 40 minutes north of Amsterdam, is dairy central.

Not only does it hold its own against the capital in the looks department – a ring of dinky canals, with 17th-century buildings clustered higgledy piggledy along them – but its status as cheese capital of the Netherlands means that every Friday morning from April to September, the main square is commandeered by men in straw boaters with huge wheels of gouda hoisted on sleighs round their necks, to be stacked up, inspected and weighed on the cobbles.

The market's been going since 1593, though these days it's more of a touristy reconstruction than the real deal (the gouda's stuffed back in the lorries to be brought back the following week). But the edge of the square is ringed by stalls shifting their own stuff, and half the shops in town (Alkmaar is second only to Amsterdam in the



EASY CHEESY | Alkmaar's square (above and circled) hosts a famous cheese market



The best thing about Holland is how teeny it is, so you can cover a lot of ground in a weekend. East of Alkmaar lies the Beemster Polder system – classic Dutch landscapes of pancake-flat fields livened up by cows, windmills, and cutesy villages like De Rijp, where the 17th-century houses (and their glossy mag-worthy interiors) have earned it the title of "finest village in Holland".

Go west from Alkmaar, meanwhile, and in about 15 minutes you'll hit the coast at the dune Egmond aan Zee. Summer is mussels season, and the restaurant menus have countless takes on them – with lemon, with chilli, with a special house



SORT IT

GET THERE
Stena Line has two daily crossings from Harwich to Hook of Holland. Taking a car costs from £81 per person, including cabin, stenaline.co.uk

WHERE TO STAY