

Shopping

The posh booze cruise

With a little help from wine guru Oz Clarke, Nell Card steers clear of Calais' hypermarkets, and stocks up at organic farms, breweries and specialist shops

Heading south out of Calais, I glance out of the window as Carrefour recedes into the distance. No bumper packs of madeleines, jars of Bonne Mamam or cheap cases of wine for me. I'm spurning the faceless hypermarkets on the periphery of the port in search of something more, well, French: a strictly regional food and booze cruise that doubles up as a festive mini-break.

Accompanying me is wine expert Oz Clarke, here to show us that Calais isn't just full of warehouses selling cheap booze. "A significant amount of people are doing a lot better," he says. "You just have to know where to look."

The Pas-de-Calais produces an abundance of fresh cheeses, superb lamb and beef and a surfeit of fruit and salad staples such as chicory and endive. What it lacks in vineyards, it



Super market sweep... (main picture) Montreuil-sur-Mer is a short drive from Calais; bottles of fizz, jams and smoked garlic make great presents



what to look for in a good fizz: brioche flavours, the "delicious decay" of loft apples and tiny bubbles. Anything bigger than Yeux de Crapaud (toad's eyes) indicates a bad bubbly (the bigger the bubbles, the sooner your glass will go flat). And, if you're thinking of stocking up on cheap Champagne this Christmas, don't. You're much better off buying Cremant de Bourgogne or, indeed, Perlé.

On Sunday morning, we load up the car and take the scenic road back to Calais, passing the seaside villages of the Côte d'Opale. Our last stop is the Deux Caps brewery (bieresdes2caps.com). Even at 10am, Christophe Noyon's passion for his craft is

Oz Clarke's guide to the best wine shops

Calais and around

Le Bar à Vins

Luc Gille, the owner of this friendly little shop in the centre of town, says he buys "only the wines I like" from small producers all over France. Tastings available.

● 52 Place Armes in the centre of Calais, 00 33 3 21 96 9631

Calais Vins

A huge shop, but a good choice and good advice.

● Close to Junction 15 off the A16 motorway, calais-vins.com.

Boursot's Wine Collection

Housed in an attractive 250-year-old listed building in the pretty and historic town of Ardres, just 15 minutes south of Calais. Here you can be assured of receiving good advice and you can taste the wines before you decide. All wines are personally selected by wine expert Guy Boursot to offer great quality for the price, starting from around £2.

● +3 21 36 81 46, boursot.co.uk,

Montreuil-sur-Mer

The Wine Society

Located in the Hotel Hermitage in Montreuil-sur-Mer, in partnership with La Compagnie des Vins. You need to become a member to purchase, but the membership charge of £40 covers your lifetime. One of the early objectives of The Wine Society was to sell wines to members at the lowest possible price, and today the society offers a large range from prices varying from £4.25 to over £250 per bottle.

● thewinesociety.com, or contact Véronique Chaumetout (+3 21 06 38 54, lacompagniedesvins@orange.fr).