



GR22 (Paris to Mont Saint-Michel)

THE COMPLETE GUIDE



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Last updated 14 June 2026

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Overview

GR22 (Paris to Mont Saint-Michel): Paris to the Abbey on Foot

The GR22 is a 563 km waymarked Grande Randonnée in **France**, running from Notre-Dame Cathedral in central Paris to the abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy. Allow about 21 days for the full point-to-point walk. It is moderate rather than technical: the route stays low, uses forest tracks, footpaths, bocage lanes and quiet roads, and tops out at about 400 m. The main challenge is sustained daily distance, making it best for fit walkers who want a long cultural lowland thru-hike.

Route Overview

Walked westward, the GR22 starts on the parvis of Notre-Dame in Paris and finishes at Mont-Saint-Michel in the Manche department. It leaves the Paris region via Versailles and the Forest of Rambouillet, then passes Houdan, Anet, Verneuil-sur-Avre, the Perche hills, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Carrouges, Domfront-en-Poiraie, Mortain, Avranches and Pontaubault before the final approach across Mont-Saint-Michel bay. This is a point-to-point route, so plan end-to-end logistics rather than a loop. If you are comparing other French cultural walks, see the **D-Day Beaches Circuit**, **Châteaux of the Loire Circuit** or the easier-going **Canal du Midi Towpath**.

Pilgrim Roots of the GR22

Mont-Saint-Michel became a major pilgrimage destination after a monastery was founded on the rock in the 8th century. From the 9th–11th centuries onward, pilgrims known as “miquelots” travelled there from across France and beyond. The GR22 is the modern waymarked revival of these northern pilgrim approaches from Paris. As a Grande Randonnée, it dates to the late 1970s, with the FFRandonnée publishing the first topo-guide in 1978.

Notable highlights

- **Mont-Saint-Michel:** The finale is a medieval Benedictine abbey crowning a granite tidal island in a vast bay. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of France's most visited monuments.
- **Forest of Rambouillet:** A large former royal hunting forest in the Yvelines, crossed early as the route leaves the Paris region for quieter countryside.
- **The Perche and its bocage:** Rolling hills, manor farms and dense hedgerow country between the Avre and Orne. The Perche is a regional natural park and home of the Percheron draught horse.
- **Bagnoles-de-l'Orne:** A belle-époque thermal spa town set among the forests of the Orne, useful as a restful waypoint on the western half of the walk.
- **Pontaubault bridge:** A well-known fifteen-arch bridge over the Sélune near Avranches, linked to General Patton's Third Army breakout in August 1944.
- **Mont-Saint-Michel bay salt marshes:** The herbus, or prés-salés, line the approach to the Mont and are grazed by salt-meadow sheep.

Challenges to expect

There is no high-mountain or technical terrain, but 563 km and about 7,250 m of cumulative ascent make this a serious long walk. Expect mixed surfaces, including forest tracks, lanes, quiet roads and an urban start through Paris. Bocage and forest sections can be muddy after rain. In autumn and winter, hunting season requires caution. At the finish, do not cross the bay sands without a guide; most walkers use the causeway or footbridge.

Key Data

Country	France
Distance	563 km
Duration	21 days
Difficulty	Moderate
Trail type	Point to point
Elevation gain/loss	7250 m
Highest point	400 m
Terrain & landscape	Forest, River Valley, Hills, Farmland
Trail surface	Dirt, Gravel, Paved
Accommodation	Hotels, Guesthouses, Campsites
Average daytime temp.	18°C
Chance of rainfall	Medium
Estimated cost	\$\$
Optimal season	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Accessibility	Family Friendly, Pet Friendly
Facilities	Restrooms, Water Sources, Campsites, Picnic Areas
Permits & fees	No permits or fees

Introduction

The GR22 is a long, lowland crossing of northern France: 563 km from the parvis de Notre-Dame in central Paris to the abbey of Le Mont-Saint-Michel. It suits fit walkers who want culture, history and steady distance rather than alpine drama.

The route leaves Paris through Issy-les-Moulineaux, Meudon and Sèvres, then works west through the Forêt de Rambouillet and into quieter country. Beyond the Avre, it becomes a walk of Perche hills, hedged lanes, forests and Normandy bocage.

This is a waymarked Grande Randonnée with red-and-white GR balisage, but it is not a casual stroll. The high point is only about 400 m, yet the full route still adds up to roughly 7,250 m of ascent over many consecutive days.

The reward is a gradual approach to one of France's great walking finishes: Avranches, the salt marshes of Mont-Saint-Michel bay, Beauvoir, the causeway and the tidal island itself. Use the causeway or footbridge for the final approach; the bay sands should not be crossed without a licensed guide.

A brisk 21-day schedule means long stages and careful booking, especially through the quieter Perche and bocage sections where accommodation and resupply are thinner. Many walkers will be better served by 24–30 days or more.

This guide covers stages, daily planning, accommodation, food, transport, terrain and the common mistakes to avoid.

Stage-by-Stage Guide

The stages below use the fast 13-stage schedule listed for this route. It is a demanding way to walk the GR22: several days are over 40 km, and two are over 50 km. Most walkers will want to split some of these stages using the standard shorter GR sections, especially across the Perche and the Normandy bocage where accommodation can be thin.

Stage 1: Paris (Notre-Dame) to Montfort-l'Amaury — 44 km

The GR22 starts on the parvis de Notre-Dame and leaves Paris westwards through Issy-les-Moulineaux, Meudon and Sèvres before reaching the Versailles area and Saint-Cyr-l'École. This is the most urban stage of the route, with pavements, suburban paths, parkland edges and road crossings before the walk begins to feel more rural.

The main planning challenge is not difficult terrain but navigation through the city and suburbs. Red-and-white GR waymarks can be less obvious in built-up areas, so a map or GPX is useful for checking turns around junctions, parks and railway corridors.

Food and water are easy to find through Paris and the western suburbs, but the day is long and should not be treated as a casual city walk. Stock up before the route becomes quieter beyond the Versailles/Saint-Cyr-l'École area.

Montfort-l'Amaury is the logical end point for this long first day. Accommodation at or near the town should be booked ahead, especially if arriving late after a 44 km stage. Public transport access is strongest at the start in central Paris and around Versailles; current SNCF/TER and local transport times should be checked before relying on them.

Stage 2: Montfort-l'Amaury to Boncourt — 30 km

This stage takes the route away from the Paris fringe and into quieter Yvelines countryside, including the Forêt de Rambouillet section of the GR22 corridor. Expect forest tracks, field paths, lanes and occasional road walking rather than technical ground.

The walking is gentler than the first stage but can be slower after rain, particularly on woodland tracks. The forest sections require attention at path junctions, where it is easy to continue straight on when the GR turns.

Houdan is the principal service town in this part of the route corridor, but opening hours and the exact usefulness of services for your chosen timing should be checked before travelling. Carry enough food and water to cover the quieter stretches between settlements.

Boncourt is a small rural finish rather than a major service centre. Accommodation is likely to be limited, so book ahead or plan a transfer if needed. Road access exists, but onward public transport from small villages should be checked before travelling.

Stage 3: Boncourt to Verneuil-sur-Avre — 45 km

This is another very long day, moving through the Avre country towards Verneuil-sur-Avre. The route corridor includes Montreuil, Saint-Lubin-des-Joncherets and the Anet area before reaching the historic

frontier town of Verneuil-sur-Avre.

Underfoot, expect a mix of field paths, bocage lanes, quiet roads and village approaches. The walking is still lowland and non-technical, but 45 km on mixed surfaces is tiring, especially if lanes are muddy or waterlogged after rain.

Food and water should be planned carefully. Saint-Lubin-des-Joncherets and other named settlements may be useful, but do not assume shops or cafés will be open when you pass; carry a full day's supplies unless arrangements are certain.

Verneuil-sur-Avre is one of the better overnight points on the eastern half of the route, with accommodation options more realistic than in the small rural villages. It is also a useful railhead, making it a practical place to start, finish or break a section. Check current SNCF/TER times before booking a journey around this stage.

Stage 4: Verneuil-sur-Avre to Malétable — 44 km

From Verneuil-sur-Avre the GR22 heads deeper into the Perche approach, passing through rural country around Saint-Maurice-lès-Charencey before reaching Malétable. This is a quieter, more agricultural stage, with rolling hedgerow landscapes and fewer obvious escape points.

Terrain is typical lowland GR walking: tracks, lanes, woodland edges and field paths. Mud is a realistic issue after wet weather, and the cumulative effect of repeated small climbs is more noticeable here than the modest elevations suggest.

Food and water availability is limited compared with the Paris-side stages. Leave Verneuil-sur-Avre with enough supplies for the day and check any planned village stops in advance.

Malétable is a small rural end point, so accommodation must be arranged before walking this stage. Public transport options should not be assumed; use Verneuil-sur-Avre as the more dependable transport anchor and check any regional bus or taxi arrangements before travelling.

Stage 5: Malétable to Aillières-Beauvoir — 51 km

At 51 km, this is one of the hardest stages in the fast schedule. It crosses the Perche country around La Chapelle-Montligeon, the Bellême area and Saint-Ouen-de-la-Cour before reaching Aillières-Beauvoir.

The landscape is classic Perche bocage: rolling farmland, wooded sections, hedgerows and quiet rural lanes. The high point of the GR22 is reached in the wooded hills of the Perche / southern Orne area at about 400 m, but this remains lowland walking rather than mountain terrain.

The length is the main warning. Even on good waymarked paths, 51 km leaves little margin for café closures, slow mud or navigation errors. Many walkers will sensibly split this stage, using the standard shorter GR sections through La Chapelle-Montligeon and Saint-Ouen-de-la-Cour.

Food, water and accommodation need firm planning. La Chapelle-Montligeon and the Bellême area are the main named service opportunities in the wider stage, but do not rely on spontaneous availability; check opening times and book rural accommodation ahead. Aillières-Beauvoir is not a major service hub, so have the night's lodging and evening meal arrangements fixed before setting out.

Stage 6: Aillières-Beauvoir to Alençon — 26 km

This is a shorter recovery stage after the demanding Perche crossing. The route leaves the quieter bocage and works towards Alençon, the Orne préfecture on the edge of the Normandie-Maine regional park.

The terrain remains lowland and mixed, with lanes, field paths and gradual undulations rather than steep climbs. After rain, expect soft ground in rural sections and take care where the GR uses minor roads.

Food and water may still be limited early in the day, so start with supplies rather than waiting for the outskirts of Alençon. Once in Alençon, services and accommodation are much more reliable than in the preceding rural stages.

Alençon is one of the route's key transport and resupply points. It is a useful railhead and a good place to pause, shorten the itinerary or restart a section. Check current SNCF/TER times before making onward plans.

Stage 7: Alençon to Carrouges — 37 km

From Alençon the GR22 heads into the Normandie-Maine country, passing Saint-Nicolas-des-Bois before reaching Carrouges. This is a substantial day but more manageable than the 40–50 km stages either side of the Perche.

Expect woodland, quiet roads, rural tracks and bocage lanes. The walking is not technical, but frequent changes between lanes and paths require steady attention to the red-and-white waymarks.

Services thin out quickly after Alençon. Carry enough food and water for the day unless specific stops have been checked in advance. Saint-Nicolas-des-Bois is a useful named waypoint, but small-place services should never be assumed.

Carrouges is the overnight target, but accommodation should be booked ahead. Public transport is much less straightforward than in Alençon; road access exists, but any bus or taxi plan should be checked before travelling.

Stage 8: Carrouges to Bagnoles-de-l'Orne — 30 km

This stage leads through the forested Normandie-Maine landscape towards Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, the Belle Époque thermal spa town set in the Forêt des Andaines. It is one of the more attractive woodland stages on the western half of the GR22.

Forest tracks and woodland paths dominate more of the day, mixed with lanes and rural approaches. These tracks can be muddy or waterlogged after rain, and forest junctions deserve careful navigation.

Food and water are limited once away from Carrouges, so leave with supplies. Bagnoles-de-l'Orne has a stronger accommodation base than the surrounding countryside, with hotels and other visitor services associated with the spa town.

Bagnoles-de-l'Orne is a practical overnight stop and a sensible place to recover before the next section. Public transport and regional bus options should be checked before relying on them, especially outside peak visitor periods.

Stage 9: Bagnoles-de-l'Orne to Domfront-en-Poiraise — 14 km

This is the shortest stage in the fast schedule and functions well as a rest or half-day walking stage. The route continues through the southern Orne landscape towards Domfront-en-Poiraise, a medieval hilltop town above the Varenne gorge.

The terrain remains non-technical, with a mix of wooded paths, lanes and town approaches. Although the distance is short, Domfront's hilltop position means the final approach may feel more varied than the kilometre count suggests.

Food and water are available at the stage ends, with Bagnoles-de-l'Orne and Domfront-en-Poiraise both more useful than the smaller rural settlements. Carry snacks and water anyway, as intermediate services should not be relied on.

Domfront-en-Poiraise is a good overnight point, with accommodation options in and around the town. It is also a logical place to slow the itinerary before the much longer Domfront–Mortain stage. Public transport should be checked before travelling, as no major railhead is listed here for the GR22.

Stage 10: Domfront-en-Poiraise to Mortain — 46 km

This long stage pushes west from Domfront-en-Poiraise through poiré country and Normandy bocage, passing Lonlay-l'Abbaye before reaching Mortain. It is a sustained rural day with more distance than difficulty.

Expect hedged lanes, field paths, woodland sections and quiet roads across granite country. In wet periods, bocage paths can be muddy and slow, and road sections require normal care with local traffic.

Lonlay-l'Abbaye is the key named point between the stage ends, but food and water availability should be checked before relying on it. Start from Domfront with a full day's supplies unless specific arrangements are certain.

Mortain is a useful overnight town and one of the named accommodation centres on the western half of the route. Its waterfalls, including the Grande and Petite Cascade, are the local highlight, but tired walkers should prioritise lodging and food after a 46 km day. Public transport and any onward bus links should be checked before travelling.

Stage 11: Mortain to Le Petit-Celland — 52 km

This is the longest stage in the listed schedule and should be treated as a serious endurance day. The route heads across the Manche bocage via Saint-Pois towards Le Petit-Celland, with repeated rural lanes, hedgerows and small settlements.

The terrain is low, but the day is not easy. Mud, frequent junctions, minor road walking and fatigue can all slow progress. In autumn and winter, parts of the route pass through hunting areas, so pay attention to local signs and avoid entering signed active chasse zones.

Saint-Pois is the main named waypoint, but this stage should be planned as if services are sparse. Carry enough food and water for the full distance unless shop or meal stops have been checked in advance.

Le Petit-Celland is a rural finish with limited accommodation options. Book ahead, or arrange a transfer to a confirmed bed elsewhere. Public transport should not be relied on without checking current

regional services before travelling.

Stage 12: Le Petit-Celland to Avranches — 17 km

This short stage brings the GR22 into Avranches, the hill town above Mont-Saint-Michel bay. After the previous day's 52 km, it is a welcome shorter walk and a practical resupply point before the final approach.

The route continues through bocage and lanes before the more urban finish into Avranches. Navigation is generally straightforward if the GR waymarks are followed carefully at lane junctions and on the town approach.

Food and water may be limited before Avranches, so carry what is needed for the morning. Avranches has accommodation, food and resupply options, and it is one of the route's useful railheads.

Avranches is also a strong logistical break point before the final stage to Le Mont-Saint-Michel. Check current SNCF/TER times if starting or ending a section here.

Stage 13: Avranches to Le Mont-Saint-Michel — 29 km

The final stage descends from Avranches towards Mont-Saint-Michel bay, passing Pontaubault and Pontorson before Beauvoir and the causeway/footbridge to Le Mont-Saint-Michel. The landscape changes from inland bocage to salt marshes, herbus and prés-salés around the bay.

Pontaubault's multi-arch stone bridge over the Sélune is a key landmark, known for its role in the 1944 breakout when Patton's US Third Army crossed through the area. Beyond Pontorson and Beauvoir, the finish becomes increasingly busy and open as the abbey comes into view across the bay.

Food and water planning is easier than on the rural bocage stages, with Avranches at the start and Pontorson/Beauvoir on the final approach, but opening hours still need checking. Accommodation is available in the Pontorson / Mont-Saint-Michel area, though it should be booked ahead because the Mont is one of France's most visited monuments.

Pontorson is the nearest station to Mont-Saint-Michel and is the main public transport access point for the finish, with onward shuttle or walking access to the Mont. Check current SNCF/TER, regional bus and shuttle times before relying on them.

Do not cross the bay sands independently. Fast tides and quicksand make unguided bay crossings dangerous; use the official causeway/footbridge unless walking with a licensed bay guide. The GR22 finishes at Le Mont-Saint-Michel, with the final approach at sea level after the long westward crossing from Paris.

Recommended Itinerary

The table below uses a demanding 13-day fit-walker schedule. It keeps to the route's known stage groupings, but several days are exceptionally long by normal Grande Randonnée standards, with multiple 44–52 km days. Most walkers should treat this as a fast framework to split, not as the default pace for a first long-distance hike.

Fast 13-day itinerary

Day	From	To	Approx. distance	Why this stage makes sense	Services/accommodation notes
1	Paris (Notre-Dame)	Montfort-l'Amaury	44 km	A long first day clears the urban and suburban start through Issy-les-Moulineaux, Meudon, Sèvres and the Versailles / Saint-Cyr-l'École area, getting the walk into quieter country early.	Start logistics are easy in central Paris, but this is a hard opening day. Montfort-l'Amaury is a more practical stopping point than trying to finish still within the Paris suburbs. Book ahead if arriving late after a long day.
2	Montfort-l'Amaury	Boncourt	30 km	This stage continues west from the Yvelines towards the Eure-et-Loir border area, with a more manageable distance after the heavy first day.	Boncourt is a small rural stop rather than a major service centre. Accommodation and evening food should be arranged before setting out.
3	Boncourt	Verneuil-sur-Avre	45 km	A major mileage day that carries the route through the Avre country to one of the most useful towns on the eastern half of the GR22.	Verneuil-sur-Avre is a key overnight and resupply point, with better accommodation options than the surrounding countryside. It is also a useful railhead for starting, leaving or section-hiking.
4	Verneuil-sur-Avre	Malétable	44 km	This stage pushes deep into the Perche, where the route becomes more rural and accommodation spacing needs more care.	Malétable is a rural halt. Book accommodation in advance and do not assume late-day food options. Carry enough food for the full day.
5	Malétable	Aillières-Beauvoir	51 km	One of the longest days on this schedule, crossing quiet Perche and bocage country before positioning the walk for a shorter approach to Alençon.	This is a serious endurance stage. Accommodation in and around Aillières-Beauvoir should be fixed before travel; rural services may be sparse between stops.
6	Aillières-Beauvoir	Alençon	26 km	A shorter recovery day after the previous 51 km, ending in one of the best service towns on the route.	Alençon is a major practical waypoint, with accommodation, food and transport options. It is a sensible place to rest, resupply, replace kit or join/leave the route by rail.

Day	From	To	Approx. distance	Why this stage makes sense	Services/accommodation notes
7	Alençon	Carrouges	37 km	This stage leaves Alençon for the wooded and rolling country of the Normandie-Maine area, keeping the itinerary moving without another 50 km day.	Carrouges is a useful overnight before the Forêt des Andaines and Bagnoles-de-l'Orne section. Book ahead in busier periods.
8	Carrouges	Bagnoles-de-l'Orne	30 km	A moderate day into Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, one of the most comfortable stopping points on the western half of the walk.	Bagnoles-de-l'Orne is a Belle Époque spa town in the Forêt des Andaines, with better accommodation options than the smaller bocage villages. It is a good place for a higher-comfort overnight.
9	Bagnoles-de-l'Orne	Domfront-en-Poiraise	14 km	A deliberately short day, useful for recovery after the first eight days and for leaving time in Domfront-en-Poiraise.	Domfront-en-Poiraise is another strong overnight choice, with more practical services than the rural stages either side. This short stage can also be used as a half-rest day.
10	Domfront-en-Poiraise	Mortain	46 km	A long westbound day through the southern Orne and into the Manche approach, linking two important historic towns.	Mortain is a useful town stop before the final approach towards Avranches. As with all long days, accommodation should be secured before setting off.
11	Mortain	Le Petit-Celland	52 km	The hardest day on the itinerary by distance, crossing bocage country towards the Avranches area. Only strong, well-conditioned walkers should plan it as written.	Le Petit-Celland is a rural overnight, so this day needs firm accommodation arrangements and enough food carried from the start. Many walkers should split this stage.
12	Le Petit-Celland	Avranches	17 km	A short recovery stage into Avranches, giving time to regroup before the final walk to the bay and Mont-Saint-Michel.	Avranches is one of the best final resupply and accommodation points before the finish. It is also a useful transport point for section hikers.
13	Avranches	Le Mont-Saint-Michel	29 km	The final stage links Avranches, Pontaubault, Pontorson and Beauvoir with the causeway/footbridge approach to Le Mont-Saint-Michel.	Pontorson is the nearest station to Mont-Saint-Michel and is useful for exit logistics. Use the causeway/footbridge for the final approach; do not cross the bay sands without a licensed guide. Accommodation around Pontorson, Beauvoir and Mont-Saint-Michel should be booked ahead in busy periods.

Slower variant: 24–30 days

This is the better choice for most walkers who want a sustainable thru-hike rather than a forced march. Split the long 13-day stages into the traditional shorter GR sections, using intermediate places such as Meudon, Saint-Cyr-l'École, Osmoy, Montreuil, Saint-Lubin-des-Joncherets, Saint-Maurice-lès-Charencey, La Chapelle-Montligeon, Saint-Ouen-de-la-Cour, Saint-Nicolas-des-Bois, Lonlay-l'Abbaye and Saint-Pois where they fit your bookings.

This slower plan suits walkers carrying heavier packs, anyone hiking in wet conditions, and anyone wanting time for Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraise, Mortain, Avranches and the Mont-Saint-Michel finish. Distances between exact overnight stops should be checked on the official mapping before booking, because accommodation availability in the Perche and bocage can dictate the stage plan.

Faster variant: 11–12 days

A faster schedule is only realistic for very fit, ultralight walkers who are comfortable with repeated 40 km-plus days on mixed tracks, lanes and roads. The obvious places to compress are the shorter Bagnoles-de-l'Orne to Domfront-en-Poiraise and Le Petit-Celland to Avranches days, but combining them with neighbouring stages creates very long days and reduces recovery time.

For most hikers, going faster than the 13-day table is not a sensible planning baseline. If attempting it, check official mapping before booking and make sure every rural overnight is fixed in advance; there may not be a convenient fallback if the planned stop has no available bed.

Planning the Route

How many days to allow

The GR22 is best planned as a long lowland endurance route rather than a mountain trek. The walking is non-technical, but the daily distance, repeated road-and-track mileage and rural accommodation pattern make the schedule important.

Most walkers should allow **24–30 days**. The FFRandonnée allows **30+ days**, and that is a sensible pace if you want shorter days, time in towns such as Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraise and Avranches, and less pressure around accommodation.

A **21-day itinerary** is brisk. It suits fit long-distance walkers who are comfortable with repeated long days and who book ahead rather than improvising each evening.

The route can be compressed further only with very long stages. Some stage plans group the trail into around 13 demanding days, but that means several days of 40–50 km and should be treated as a fast-walker schedule, not a standard thru-hike plan.

Pace	Typical use	Planning implications
30+ days	Conservative thru-hike pace	More manageable daily distances; easier to absorb bad weather, tired legs and limited rural accommodation
24–30 days	Sensible independent-walker pace	Good balance of progress and flexibility; still needs booking in quieter areas
Around 21 days	Brisk thru-hike	Long daily stages; accommodation and resupply should be planned before departure
Faster grouped schedule	Very fit walkers only	Several very long days; little margin if accommodation, weather or transport disrupts the plan

Let accommodation shape the stages

On this route, overnight stops matter more than terrain. The GR22 passes through useful towns and spa resorts, but between them it crosses quieter Perche and Normandy bocage country where accommodation can be thin.

Plan first around reliable sleeping points, then adjust daily distances around them. The main practical hubs include **Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraise, Mortain, Avranches** and **Pontorson / Mont-Saint-Michel**. Rural nights in the Perche and bocage should be booked ahead, especially if walking in a shorter timeframe.

Do not assume every village has a room, shop or evening meal available. Where a stage ends away from a larger town, check accommodation, food options and arrival arrangements before committing to the day.

Shortening, extending and rest days

The route is easy to make slower, because many walkers simply split longer days into shorter Grande Randonnée stages. This is usually the better approach for a first GR22 thru-hike, particularly across the western half where repeated lanes, forest tracks and muddy paths can be tiring over many consecutive days.

It is harder to shorten the route elegantly without skipping sections by transport. If time is limited, the most practical choice is section-hiking from rail-served towns rather than trying to force the full Paris–Mont-Saint-Michel line into too few days.

Rest or half-days are most useful in larger service towns. **Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poirais** and **Avranches** are logical places to slow down, resupply, dry kit and reset before the next block.

Section hiking

Section hiking is practical. The start is in central **Paris**, and useful access points along or near the route include **Versailles, Dreux, Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Avranches** and **Pontorson**.

Pontorson is the nearest station for the finish at Mont-Saint-Michel, with onward access to the Mont by shuttle or on foot via Beauvoir and the causeway/footbridge. Current SNCF/TER and regional bus times should be checked before travelling, especially if a same-day connection is needed at the end of a stage.

Good section-hike blocks are likely to follow the route's natural changes in character: Paris and the western suburbs into the Yvelines, the Forêt de Rambouillet and Perche, the Orne and Normandie-Maine country, then the Manche approach to Avranches and Mont-Saint-Michel.

Food, water and resupply

Food planning is straightforward in the larger towns but needs attention in rural stretches. Carry enough lunch, snacks and water for the full day whenever the route crosses forest, bocage farmland or small villages without guaranteed services.

The most reliable resupply opportunities are in the larger towns and resort stops, including **Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poirais, Mortain, Avranches** and **Pontorson**. In smaller places, opening hours can be limited; this should be checked before travelling.

Even where accommodation is booked, do not assume an evening meal is available on site. Ask in advance whether dinner is provided, whether there is a nearby restaurant, or whether supplies need to be bought earlier in the day.

Navigation and route information

The GR22 is a waymarked Grande Randonnée with red-and-white balisage. Waymarking reduces navigation difficulty, but it should not be the only navigation method on a multi-week walk.

Carry the current FFRandonnée topo-guide or equivalent mapping, and keep an offline digital map available. Trail diversions, forestry work, urban changes and local path closures should be checked before travelling.

Distance figures for the GR22 vary between reputable route descriptions, roughly from **549 km to 567 km**. For planning, treat the route as about **563 km**, then build in a small buffer rather than calculating every day to the exact kilometre.

Weather, mud and season choice

Spring, summer and autumn are the normal walking seasons. The route stays low, with no mountain terrain, but weather still affects progress: forest tracks, field paths and bocage lanes can become muddy or waterlogged after rain.

Wet conditions can make long road-and-track days slower than they look on paper. Waterproof footwear, gaiters or quick-drying trail shoes are a practical choice depending on preference, but the key is allowing enough time so that bad weather does not force unsafe or exhausting distances.

In autumn and winter, parts of the route pass through hunting areas. Take local signage seriously, wear visible clothing where appropriate and check locally if walking during active chasse periods.

The final approach to Mont-Saint-Michel

The GR22 finishes at **Le Mont-Saint-Michel** via **Pontorson**, **Beauvoir** and the causeway/footbridge. Use the managed approach to the Mont.

Do **not** attempt to cross the bay sands independently. Mont-Saint-Michel bay has fast tides and quicksand; bay crossings should only be made with a licensed guide. For the GR22 finish, plan to arrive by the causeway/footbridge rather than by walking across the open sands.

What matters most in planning

The main planning priorities are accommodation, stage length and transport. Navigation is generally manageable because the route is waymarked, and the terrain is not technical, but the length of the walk leaves little room for vague daily plans.

There is no special permit issue that usually defines the GR22. More important is booking rural accommodation ahead, carrying food through thin-service stretches, checking transport before relying on it, and leaving enough margin for mud, rain and fatigue.

Towns, Villages and Overnight Stops

Accommodation planning on the GR22 is straightforward in the larger towns, but needs care through the Perche, southern Orne and Normandy bocage. The useful pattern is to use major towns for full resupply and recovery, then book rural nights well ahead where accommodation and evening meals may be limited.

Do not assume that a small village stage-end has a shop, restaurant or available bed on arrival. Rural accommodation, food availability, local buses and opening days should be checked before travelling.

Paris (parvis de Notre-Dame)

The route starts on the parvis de Notre-Dame on the Île de la Cité, so Paris is the easiest place on the whole walk for pre-hike logistics. It has comprehensive rail, metro and air links, and is the best place to solve any missing kit, maps, phone issues or last-minute food before setting off.

Most walkers will stay here the night before starting rather than treating it as a trail stop. The first kilometres are urban, so there is no need to carry a large food load out of the city unless walking a very long first day.

Issy-les-Moulineaux

Issy-les-Moulineaux is one of the western Paris suburbs passed as the GR22 leaves the capital. It is not usually a destination stop, but it gives an early chance to use urban services before the route becomes progressively quieter.

Accommodation and food options are part of the wider Paris suburban belt, but exact locations relative to the waymarked line should be checked if planning to break the first day here. Public transport is generally strong in this urban section, but current local connections should be checked before relying on them.

Meudon

Meudon sits on the early suburban section west of Paris. It can be useful for walkers making a very short first stage or for anyone starting the trail from the western side of the city rather than from central Paris.

It is not a critical overnight stop for most thru-hikers. Treat it as an urban services point, then plan the next proper stop around the Versailles area, Saint-Cyr-l'École or Montfort-l'Amaury depending on pace.

Sèvres

Sèvres is another practical early-route suburb before the walk leaves the dense Paris edge. Food, cafés and local transport are more likely here than in the rural sections later on, though exact opening times and links should be checked before travelling.

For most walkers, Sèvres is a passing point rather than an overnight. It is useful mainly if splitting the Paris exit into a short acclimatisation day.

Versailles area / Saint-Cyr-l'École

The Versailles area and Saint-Cyr-l'École make a practical first-stage alternative for walkers who do not want to push all the way to Montfort-l'Amaury from Notre-Dame. Versailles is also one of the useful railheads on or near the route corridor.

This is a sensible place to break the urban-to-rural transition, especially if arriving in Paris late or starting after midday. Accommodation, food and rail options should be easier here than in the smaller villages beyond, but specific availability and current train times should still be checked before booking the stage.

Montfort-l'Amaury

Montfort-l'Amaury is a key early overnight stop and is used as the first night on a very brisk itinerary from Paris. It sits after the western suburban exit and before the route heads into quieter forest and countryside.

This is a good place to be organised for the next day: carry enough food and water to cover a more rural section, and do not assume frequent services immediately ahead. Accommodation should be booked ahead in peak walking periods or if following long daily stages.

Forêt de Rambouillet

The Forêt de Rambouillet is a major early landscape section rather than a town stop. It is a large former royal hunting forest and is one of the first places where the GR22 feels properly away from the Paris region.

Plan it as a walking section, not as a resupply point. Start with food, water and a clear overnight plan for the far side, as forest tracks and rural edges are less forgiving than the urban approach if timing slips.

Houdan

Houdan is a useful waypoint in the early western section beyond the Rambouillet country. It can help break up the long distances between Montfort-l'Amaury, Boncourt and the Avre valley.

Whether it works as an overnight depends on the exact stage split and accommodation availability. This should be checked before travelling, particularly if using a non-standard itinerary.

Boncourt

Boncourt appears as an overnight point on a brisk stage plan after Montfort-l'Amaury. Treat it as a small rural stop rather than a guaranteed service centre.

Book accommodation before committing to this stage end, and confirm whether an evening meal or nearby food is available. If not, carry food from the previous larger settlement.

Anet (near)

The GR22 passes near Anet before continuing towards Saint-Lubin-des-Joncherets and Verneuil-sur-Avre. It is a possible reference point for route planning in the early Normandy approach, but it is not one of the main named accommodation hubs.

Use it as a waypoint unless accommodation has been arranged nearby. If depending on local buses, taxis, food or lodging in this area, this should be checked before travelling.

Saint-Lubin-des-Joncherets

Saint-Lubin-des-Joncherets sits before the longer push towards Verneuil-sur-Avre. It can be useful for splitting the approach to Verneuil if the official or personal stage distances are too long.

Do not assume that services match those of the larger railhead towns. Check accommodation, food and onward transport before building a night around it.

Verneuil-sur-Avre (Verneuil-d'Avre-et-d'Iton)

Verneuil-sur-Avre is one of the most useful stops on the first half of the GR22. It is a historic former frontier town on the Avre, has accommodation options, and is one of the useful railheads for joining, leaving or section-hiking the route.

This is a strong resupply and recovery point before the quieter Perche stages. If a rest, laundry, replacement footwear or schedule reset is needed, Verneuil is a much better candidate than the smaller villages immediately west.

Saint-Maurice-lès-Charencey

Saint-Maurice-lès-Charencey lies in the quieter country after Verneuil-sur-Avre. It marks the transition towards the Perche, where accommodation becomes thinner and daily logistics matter more.

It can be useful as a rural stage point, but only with a booking in place. Confirm food and meal arrangements with the accommodation, as village services may not cover a late-arriving walker.

Malétable

Malétable is used as an overnight point on the brisk itinerary after Verneuil-sur-Avre. This is rural Perche country, so it should be treated as a pre-booked stop rather than a place to arrive speculatively.

Carry enough food to cover the end of the day and the next morning unless meals are arranged. Accommodation and any local services should be checked before travelling.

La Chapelle-Montligeon

La Chapelle-Montligeon is one of the named Perche settlements on the route. It can provide a useful intermediate point between the Avre valley and the Alençon approach, depending on how the stages are split.

As with other rural Perche stops, plan around limited accommodation and services. Book ahead, and confirm whether food is available locally or through the lodging.

Bellême (near)

The route passes near Bellême in the Perche. This area is attractive walking country, but it is also where walkers need to avoid over-optimistic assumptions about food and beds.

Bellême can be useful for an itinerary variation or a nearby overnight if it fits the stage plan. Exact distance from the GR22 line, accommodation availability and transport options should be checked before travelling.

Aillières-Beauvoir

Aillières-Beauvoir is a rural overnight point on the approach to Alençon. It follows one of the longest stage groupings in the brisk schedule, so arriving with a confirmed bed and meal plan is important.

This is not a place to rely on for full resupply unless current services have been checked. Most walkers should use it as a booked rural stop before the easier logistics of Alençon.

Alençon

Alençon is one of the major practical anchors of the GR22. It is the Orne préfecture, a useful railhead, and a good place for accommodation, food, rest and resupply after the Perche.

It is also a sensible place to join or leave the trail for a section hike. Check current SNCF/TER times before relying on the railway, especially if connecting with regional services.

Saint-Nicolas-des-Bois

Saint-Nicolas-des-Bois lies after Alençon as the route heads towards Carrouges and the Normandie-Maine country. It is more of a route settlement than a guaranteed service hub.

Use it for stage planning only if accommodation and meals have been arranged. Otherwise, Alençon and Carrouges are the more reliable practical anchors on this section.

Carrouges

Carrouges is an important overnight stop between Alençon and Bagnoles-de-l'Orne. It works well as a stage end because it breaks the walk through the wooded and rural southern Orne section.

Accommodation should still be booked ahead, especially if following a tight schedule. Use Alençon beforehand or Bagnoles-de-l'Orne afterwards for broader resupply rather than depending entirely on rural services here.

Bagnoles-de-l'Orne

Bagnoles-de-l'Orne is one of the best recovery stops on the western half of the GR22. It is a Belle Époque thermal spa town in the Forêt des Andaines within the Parc naturel régional Normandie-Maine, and it has accommodation options suited to walkers needing a proper overnight.

This is a good place to slow the pace, dry kit, eat properly and reset before the Domfront and Mortain stages. It is also one of the more comfortable stops if building a rest day into a longer 24-30 day itinerary.

Domfront-en-Poiraise

Domfront-en-Poiraise is a medieval hilltop town above the Varenne gorge and a strong overnight stop after Bagnoles-de-l'Orne. On the brisk schedule the stage into Domfront is short, making it useful for

recovery before the much longer onward leg towards Mortain.

Accommodation is available in this part of the route, but book ahead. It is also a good place to organise food for the next rural stretch, where services thin out again.

Lonlay-l'Abbaye

Lonlay-l'Abbaye sits between Domfront-en-Poiraie and Mortain. It can be useful for walkers who want to split what is otherwise a demanding section.

Treat it as a small rural stop: accommodation, food and onward transport should all be checked before travelling. If no suitable bed is available, plan the Domfront-to-Mortain section carefully and start early.

Mortain

Mortain is a key overnight town in the western half of the GR22, known for its Grande and Petite Cascade and granite hill country. It is a useful place to stop before the route continues through quieter bocage towards Saint-Pois, Le Petit-Celland and Avranches.

Accommodation is part of the mixed lodging pattern on this route, but advance booking remains sensible. This is also a good point to resupply before the next rural stretch.

Saint-Pois

Saint-Pois is a rural waypoint between Mortain and Le Petit-Celland. It may be useful for splitting the stage, but it should not be treated as a guaranteed full-service stop.

If planning to sleep here or nearby, arrange accommodation and meals in advance. Carry food if arrival timing is uncertain.

Le Petit-Celland

Le Petit-Celland is an overnight point on the brisk itinerary before Avranches. It sits in the Normandy bocage, where accommodation is thinner than in the larger towns.

A confirmed booking is important here. The following stage to Avranches is shorter on the brisk plan, but do not leave food planning until the village unless current services have been checked.

Avranches

Avranches is one of the most important stops near the end of the GR22. It is a hill town above Mont-Saint-Michel bay, has accommodation options, and is a useful railhead for joining or leaving the route.

This is the last major reset point before the final approach through Pontaubault, Pontorson, Beauvoir and the Mont. It is a good place for a final resupply, a schedule adjustment and checking current transport onward from Avranches or Pontorson.

Pontaubault

Pontaubault lies just south of Avranches on the final approach and is known for its multi-arch stone bridge over the Sélune. It is more useful as a route landmark than as a primary overnight base.

If using it to split the final approach, check accommodation and food before committing. Many walkers will continue towards Pontorson, Beauvoir or Le Mont-Saint-Michel depending on timing and bookings.

Pontorson

Pontorson is the nearest station to Mont-Saint-Michel and one of the most practical final-night options. It connects the finish area with lines towards Rennes and Paris, with onward access to the Mont by shuttle or on foot.

This is the best logistics point for anyone finishing, starting a short final section, or avoiding uncertainty around transport after reaching the abbey. Current SNCF/TER, shuttle and regional bus times should be checked before travelling.

Beauvoir

Beauvoir sits on the mainland approach between Pontorson and Le Mont-Saint-Michel. It can work as a final overnight if the aim is to reach the Mont early the next day or to avoid rushing the causeway/footbridge approach.

Accommodation and food availability should be checked before travelling. From here, stay on the official access route to the Mont; do not attempt to cross the bay sands without a licensed guide.

Le Mont-Saint-Michel

Le Mont-Saint-Michel is the finish of the GR22 at the abbey on the tidal island. Accommodation is available in the wider Pontorson/Mont-Saint-Michel area, but final-night beds should be booked early because this is one of France's most visited monuments.

The safe walking finish is via Beauvoir and the causeway/footbridge. Do not cross the bay sands independently: fast tides and quicksand make a licensed guide essential for any bay crossing away from the official access route.

Getting to the Start

The GR22 starts on the **parvis de la cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris**, on the Île de la Cité in central Paris. The first walking kilometres leave the city westwards through **Issy-les-Moulineaux, Meudon and Sèvres**, so the main task is simply reaching central Paris and starting from the correct point rather than a suburban railhead.

By train

Paris is the simplest access point on the whole route, with extensive national and international rail links. Arrive into Paris, then use the city's public transport network or a short taxi ride to reach the **parvis de Notre-Dame**.

Allow time to cross the city if arriving at a mainline station and starting the same day. The first stage is long on many schedules, so an early start from Notre-Dame is useful, especially if walking through the western suburbs and beyond Paris on day one.

For walkers joining later rather than starting at Notre-Dame, useful railheads along the route include **Versailles, Dreux, Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon and Avranches**. Current SNCF/TER services and any onward local connections should be checked before travelling.

By bus

Long-distance coach services can be used to reach Paris, but they are usually less convenient than rail for a trail start in the city centre. From the coach arrival point, continue by Paris public transport or taxi to Notre-Dame.

Local buses are not normally needed to reach the start itself, but they may be relevant if staying outside central Paris the night before. This should be checked before travelling.

By car

Driving to the start is possible but rarely the cleanest option for a point-to-point walk of around **563 km** ending at **Le Mont-Saint-Michel** in the Manche. Leaving a car in Paris for several weeks creates avoidable parking cost and return-logistics problems.

If driving is unavoidable, use secure paid long-stay parking and continue to Notre-Dame by public transport or taxi. Do not assume that convenient long-stay parking will be available close to the cathedral; current parking conditions, prices and maximum stay rules should be checked before travelling.

A better plan for most walkers is to travel to Paris by train, walk west to Mont-Saint-Michel, then return from the finish via **Pontorson**, the nearest station to Mont-Saint-Michel, using connections towards Rennes and Paris. Current SNCF/TER and regional bus times should be checked before booking fixed onward travel.

From the nearest airport

Paris has major air links, making the GR22 one of the easiest French long-distance trails to reach from abroad. From the airport, continue into central Paris by rail, metro or other public transport, then make for the **parvis de Notre-Dame**.

Avoid planning a long first walking day immediately after a late flight. A night in Paris before starting gives time to buy food, check maps and waymarking notes, and leave the cathedral square early the next morning.

Airport-to-city transport changes with engineering works, strikes and timetable revisions. This should be checked before travelling.

Where to stay before starting

The most practical pre-start base is **central Paris**, within easy reach of the Île de la Cité. Staying close to Notre-Dame keeps the first morning simple and avoids losing time crossing the city before the walking begins.

Another workable option is to stay in the western side of Paris if accommodation is cheaper or more convenient, then travel back to Notre-Dame for the official start. Do not skip the start unless deliberately section-hiking; the GR22 leaves Paris westwards through **Issy-les-Moulineaux, Meudon and Sèvres**.

Book the first few nights of the walk before setting off, especially if following a brisk schedule. Accommodation becomes thinner later across the quieter **Perche** and Normandy bocage, so the Paris start is the right place to finalise rural bookings and check current transport options for any planned bail-out points.

Getting Home from the Finish

The GR22 finishes at the abbey on Le Mont-Saint-Michel. For onward travel, plan to leave the island by the official causeway/footbridge route towards Beauvoir and Pontorson; do not try to cross the bay sands independently as a shortcut, because of fast tides and quicksand.

Pontorson is the key transport point for the finish. Services from this end of the route are much more limited than in Paris, so check current SNCF/TER and regional bus times before committing to a same-day departure.

By train

The nearest station is Pontorson, which serves Mont-Saint-Michel via shuttle/walk connections between the Mont, Beauvoir and the town. Pontorson is the practical railhead for getting back towards Rennes and Paris.

For longer journeys, expect to connect rather than assume a direct service. SNCF/TER timings can vary by season and day of week, so check the current timetable before booking accommodation or onward tickets.

If finishing late in the day, staying at Le Mont-Saint-Michel, Beauvoir or Pontorson is usually safer than relying on a late connection. This is especially sensible after the final Avranches to Le Mont-Saint-Michel stage, when tired legs, abbey visit time and shuttle/train timings can easily clash.

By bus

The final area is served by local shuttle/bus links between the Mont-Saint-Michel visitor area, Beauvoir and Pontorson, but details are timetable-dependent. This should be checked before travelling.

Do not assume evening buses will line up neatly with a walking finish at the abbey. If a bus connection to Pontorson is essential, check the last departure before starting the final stage from Avranches.

By car/taxi

A taxi is the simplest fallback from the Mont-Saint-Michel area to Pontorson, and can also be useful for reaching Avranches if rail or bus connections work better from there. Availability should not be assumed late in the day, so book ahead if you need a fixed onward train.

Private pick-up is straightforward in planning terms, but remember that the trail finish is on the Mont itself and access is managed around the causeway/visitor area. Arrange a clear meeting point away from the crowded island lanes.

From the nearest airport

For most international hikers, the simplest onward plan is to travel by train from Pontorson towards Rennes or Paris, then continue to the relevant airport from there. The best airport choice depends on flight availability and current rail connections, so this should be checked before travelling.

If flying the same day, leave a generous buffer. A finish at Le Mont-Saint-Michel can involve walking off the island, shuttle or taxi time to Pontorson, a rail connection, and then airport transfer time at the far end.

Where to stay at the finish

The most convenient finish-area bases are Le Mont-Saint-Michel, Beauvoir and Pontorson. Staying locally gives time to visit the abbey properly and removes the pressure of catching a same-day train after the final stage.

Avranches is also a useful nearby trail town if you prefer to break the ending earlier or need wider onward transport options. Wherever you stay, book ahead in busy periods: Mont-Saint-Michel is one of France's most visited sites, and accommodation close to the finish can fill well before quieter inland stops.

Which Direction Should You Walk?

Standard direction: Paris to Le Mont-Saint-Michel

The natural and traditional direction for the GR22 is westbound, from the parvis de Notre-Dame in central Paris to Le Mont-Saint-Michel. This follows the route's identity as a modern walking line towards the Mont, with the abbey as the clear destination rather than the starting point.

Logistically, westbound is also the simpler choice for most walkers. Paris is the easiest place to reach, with comprehensive rail, metro and air links, and the first kilometres can be started without arranging rural transfers. At the far end, Pontorson is the nearest station to Mont-Saint-Michel, with shuttle or walking access towards the Mont; current SNCF/TER and regional bus times should be checked before travelling.

The scenery also builds well in this direction. The walk leaves the urban start through Issy-les-Moulineaux, Meudon and Sèvres, then moves into the Forêt de Rambouillet, the Perche, the Normandy bocage, the granite country around Domfront-en-Poiraie and Mortain, and finally the salt marshes of Mont-Saint-Michel bay. That progression gives the route a strong sense of westward travel and a memorable final approach.

The psychological finish is the strongest argument for walking westbound. After several hundred kilometres of lowland walking, arriving at Le Mont-Saint-Michel across the causeway/footbridge is a far more satisfying end point than leaving it behind on day one. Do not attempt to cross the bay sands independently; use the established approach unless walking with a licensed guide.

Reverse direction: Le Mont-Saint-Michel to Paris

Walking eastbound is possible, as the GR is waymarked and the terrain is non-technical. It may suit walkers who particularly want to finish in Paris, or who have personal travel plans that make Mont-Saint-Michel the easier starting point.

However, the reverse direction is usually less elegant. You begin with the route's most dramatic landmark, then spend the following days moving inland through Avranches, Mortain, Domfront-en-Poiraie, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Alençon, the Perche and the Paris approaches. The final kilometres into the capital are practical rather than uplifting, especially compared with ending at the abbey.

Transport can also feel less convenient at the start. Reaching the Mont normally involves travelling via Pontorson and then using the shuttle or walking approach towards Beauvoir and the causeway area. This should be checked before travelling, especially outside peak visitor periods or when relying on regional connections.

Gradients, weather and accommodation

There is no major climbing advantage in either direction. The GR22 is a lowland endurance walk, with a high point of about 400 m and roughly 7,250 m of cumulative ascent spread across many days. The challenge is repeated distance over rolling ground, not steep mountain ascents or technical descents.

Weather and wind direction are not usually a decisive reason to choose one direction over the other. Mud, waterlogged tracks and exposed road sections after rain matter more than any theoretical wind

advantage, particularly through forest tracks, bocage lanes and farmland paths.

Accommodation planning is important whichever way you walk. The larger service points — including Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraie, Mortain, Avranches and Pontorson/Mont-Saint-Michel — help break the route up, but rural accommodation is thinner across the Perche and bocage sections. Book those nights ahead in either direction rather than assuming there will be a nearby bed at the end of a long stage.

Recommendation

Walk the GR22 westbound from Paris to Le Mont-Saint-Michel unless there is a specific travel reason to do otherwise. It is the traditional and most coherent direction, has the cleanest start logistics, gives the best landscape progression, and saves the route's most powerful moment — the approach to Le Mont-Saint-Michel — for the finish.

Accommodation Along the Route

The GR22 works well as an inn-to-inn walk, but only with advance planning. Accommodation is straightforward in Paris, the larger towns, spa resorts and the Mont-Saint-Michel approach; it becomes much thinner across the Perche and the Normandy bocage, where villages may have little or no practical choice for a walker arriving on foot.

Most hikers should book the rural nights first, then fit the easier town nights around them. The most awkward sections are not the famous start or finish, but the quieter middle kilometres between Verneuil-sur-Avre, the Perche villages, Alençon, Carrouges, Mortain and Avranches.

Where accommodation is easiest

The strongest overnight bases are the larger towns and established visitor stops: Paris, Versailles/Saint-Cyr-l'École, Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraie, Mortain, Avranches, Pontorson, Beauvoir and Le Mont-Saint-Michel.

These places are the most suitable for rest days, laundry, resupply and regrouping after long stages. Bagnoles-de-l'Orne is particularly useful on the western half of the walk because it is a spa town with a better accommodation base than many surrounding rural settlements.

Where accommodation is limited

Expect fewer options through the Forêt de Rambouillet margins, the Perche, and the bocage sections of southern Orne and Manche. Places such as Boncourt, Malétable, Aillières-Beauvoir, Saint-Nicolas-des-Bois, Lonlay-l'Abbaye, Saint-Pois and Le Petit-Celland should not be treated as turn-up-and-find-a-bed stops.

In these areas, a chambre d'hôtes, gîte or campsite may decide whether a stage is practical. Opening days, seasonal availability and exact location relative to the GR22 matter, so these nights should be checked before travelling and booked before committing to the day's distance.

Booking strategy

For a brisk 21-day schedule, daily distances are often long enough that accommodation location becomes a major planning constraint. For the very fast 13-day grouping, several days exceed 40 km and some exceed 50 km, so this schedule only makes sense for fit walkers who have secured the overnight stops in advance.

A more forgiving 24–30 day plan gives better flexibility, but it does not remove the need to book rural beds. Splitting a long official stage may require using accommodation slightly off the route, or arranging a local taxi transfer between the trail and a nearby town.

Summer weekends, French public holidays and school-holiday periods can put pressure on the better-known places, especially Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Avranches, Pontorson, Beauvoir and Le Mont-Saint-Michel. The finish at Mont-Saint-Michel is one of France's busiest visitor areas, so accommodation near the Mont should be booked early if staying there rather than in Pontorson or Beauvoir.

Campsites, gîtes and chambres d'hôtes

Accommodation on this route is mixed: hotels in towns, chambres d'hôtes and gîtes in rural areas, and campsites in some towns and resorts. A camping-based plan can reduce costs and add flexibility, but it still needs careful checking because campsites are not guaranteed at every useful stage point and may operate seasonally.

For walkers relying on gîtes or chambres d'hôtes, arrival time matters. Many rural hosts require advance notice, and evening meals may need to be requested when booking rather than assumed on arrival.

Luggage transfer and taxi options

There is no need to carry camping gear if accommodation is pre-booked carefully, but luggage transfer or occasional taxi transfers can help solve difficult gaps. This is most useful where the GR22 passes through small villages without enough beds, or where a hiker wants to shorten the longest days without changing the overall itinerary.

Do not assume a same-day taxi will be available in the smallest settlements. Transfers should be arranged ahead through the accommodation provider or a local taxi firm, and the pickup point should be clear because some rural lanes and hamlets can be awkward to describe after a long walking day.

Accommodation planning table

Place	Accommodation level	Best for	Notes
Paris	Good	Start night, late arrival, transport connections	Very wide choice before starting from the parvis de Notre-Dame. Book centrally if making an early start.
Issy-les-Moulineaux, Meudon, Sèvres	Good	Short first day or city-edge stop	Useful if avoiding an overlong first day out of Paris, though many walkers continue towards the western suburbs.
Versailles area / Saint-Cyr-l'École	Good	First-night alternative, rail access	Practical for those splitting the Paris exit or joining the route west of the city.
Montfort-l'Amaury	Limited to good	Early-stage overnight	A useful stop after the Paris suburbs and before the quieter country beyond. Book ahead at weekends.
Forêt de Rambouillet area	Limited	Stage shaping	Do not rely on finding accommodation within the forest itself; plan around edge towns and pre-booked rural options.
Houdan / Boncourt area	Limited	Rural overnight between Montfort-l'Amaury and the Avre	Important for breaking long days. Availability should be checked before fixing the itinerary.
Saint-Lubin-des-Joncherets / Anet area	Limited	Intermediate stop before Verneuil-sur-Avre	Useful if splitting the long approach to Verneuil-sur-Avre. This should be checked before travelling.

Place	Accommodation level	Best for	Notes
Verneuil-sur-Avre	Good	Strong waypoint, resupply, recovery night	One of the better accommodation bases before entering thinner Perche countryside.
Saint-Maurice-lès-Charencey / Malétable	Limited	Rural Perche-stage stop	Accommodation is likely to dictate the day length; book before relying on either as an overnight.
La Chapelle-Montligeon / Bellême area	Limited	Perche overnight, quieter walking	Good for splitting the Perche section if a bed is available. Check exact distance from the GR22.
Aillières-Beauvoir	Limited	Final rural stop before Alençon	Useful in a staged itinerary, but not a place to leave unbooked.
Alençon	Good	Major service stop, rest day, resupply	One of the best places on the route for hotels, food, transport links and resetting the itinerary.
Saint-Nicolas-des-Bois	Limited	Shortening the Alençon-Carrouges section	Rural stop with limited options; check availability before building a stage around it.
Carrouges	Limited to good	Overnight between Alençon and Bagnoles-de-l'Orne	A practical waypoint before the Forêt des Andaines and Bagnoles-de-l'Orne. Booking ahead is sensible.
Bagnoles-de-l'Orne	Good	Rest night, spa-town facilities, western-half reset	One of the strongest accommodation stops on the route, but popular periods can fill.
Domfront-en-Poiraie	Good	Historic town stop, shorter day from Bagnoles-de-l'Orne	A useful base before the longer bocage stages towards Mortain.
Lonlay-l'Abbaye	Limited	Breaking the Domfront-Mortain section	Consider this area if avoiding a very long day, but confirm beds and meals in advance.
Mortain	Good	Overnight before the Manche countryside	A useful service town before the quieter stretch towards Le Petit-Celland and Avranches.
Saint-Pois / Le Petit-Celland	Limited	Rural stage break before Avranches	These stops need careful booking; they are not ideal for a spontaneous inn-to-inn plan.
Avranches	Good	Major pre-finish base, resupply, rest night	One of the best places to pause before the final approach to Mont-Saint-Michel bay.
Pontaubault	Limited	Shortening the Avranches-Pontorson/Mont section	Useful as a route waypoint, but accommodation choice should be checked before planning an overnight.
Pontorson	Good	Practical final-night base, station access	Often the most practical base for the Mont-Saint-Michel finish, especially if using onward transport.

Place	Accommodation level	Best for	Notes
Beauvoir	Good	Final approach to the Mont	Convenient for walkers wanting to stay close to the causeway/footbridge area. Book ahead in busy periods.
Le Mont-Saint-Michel	Good but high-demand	Finale night, special finish	Accommodation on or near the Mont is popular and should be booked early. Use the causeway/footbridge; do not cross the bay sands without a licensed guide.

Camping and Wild Camping

Camping can work on the GR22, but it is not the simplest way to walk the route end to end. This is a lowland trail through towns, bocage farmland, forests and villages rather than a remote mountain route, so planning revolves around official campsites, booked accommodation and occasional permitted pitches rather than simply finding open ground at the end of the day.

The main practical issue is spacing. On a brisk itinerary, several days are long — especially across the Perche and Normandy bocage — and campsites may not fall conveniently at the end of each stage. If carrying a tent, plan each night in advance rather than assuming there will be a suitable place near the GR waymarks.

Campsites and where camping fits best

The route's better-served towns and spa/resort areas are the most realistic places to look for formal campsites or tent-friendly accommodation. Useful areas to check include Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraie, Mortain, Avranches, Pontorson and the Mont-Saint-Michel/Beauvoir area.

Camping is least practical at the Paris end. The route starts in central Paris and leaves via Issy-les-Moulineaux, Meudon, Sèvres and the Versailles/Saint-Cyr-l'École area, where urban logistics and accommodation booking matter more than carrying camping gear.

It becomes more plausible once the walk reaches quieter countryside: the Forêt de Rambouillet, the Perche, the southern Orne and the Normandy bocage. Even there, rural services can be thin, so campsite opening dates and pitch availability should be checked before travelling.

Wild camping and bivouac realities

Do not treat the GR22 as a free-camping route. Much of the walk crosses private farmland, managed woodland, villages and protected or sensitive landscapes, including the Parc naturel régional du Perche, the Parc naturel régional Normandie-Maine area around Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, and the Mont-Saint-Michel bay approaches.

If a discreet overnight bivouac is being considered, local rules and landowner permission must come first. Do not pitch in fields, working farm entrances, forestry operations, near livestock, beside houses, or anywhere signed as restricted. The legality and local tolerance of bivouacking can vary by commune, forest and protected area, so this should be checked locally.

The final approach to Le Mont-Saint-Michel is not a place for informal camping. The bay environment is sensitive and tidal, and the safe walking approach is via Pontorson, Beauvoir and the causeway/footbridge. Do not walk out across the bay sands without a licensed guide.

Water and supplies when camping

Campers need to plan water more carefully than walkers using hotels or chambres d'hôtes. The route has regular towns and villages, but there are also long rural stretches where shops, cafés and public services may be limited or closed.

Fill up in reliable settlements before leaving for the day, especially across the Perche and Normandy bocage. Do not rely on field ditches, streams or forest water as dependable drinking sources; if using any untreated natural water, it should be filtered or purified.

On longer stages, carry enough capacity to finish the day even if the expected service is closed. This is particularly important in warm weather and on Sunday or holiday periods, when rural resupply can be limited.

Fire, waste and low-impact camping

Open fires are not appropriate on this route. Forests, farmland, dry verges and protected areas all make fire a serious risk, and local bans may apply in dry periods. Use a small stove only where it is permitted and safe, and never leave scorch marks or ash.

Follow strict Leave No Trace practice: camp late, leave early, keep tents out of sight, pack out all rubbish, avoid noise, and do not disturb livestock or crops. Human waste should be dealt with responsibly and well away from paths, watercourses and settlements.

In autumn and winter, parts of the route pass through hunting areas. If walking or camping near woods and farmland during the chasse season, pay attention to local signs, avoid active hunting zones, and wear visible colours during the day.

Food, Water and Resupply

The GR22 is not a wilderness trail, but resupply still needs planning. Food is straightforward in Paris, the western suburbs and the larger towns, then becomes much less predictable through the Forêt de Rambouillet, the Perche and the Normandy bocage, where villages can be small and opening hours limited.

Plan around the larger service points on the route: Montfort-l'Amaury, Houdan, Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Carrouges, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraie, Mortain, Avranches and Pontorson. Between these, carry enough food for the full walking day, especially on long rural stages or when arriving late.

Food resupply

In towns, use bakeries, small grocery shops, supermarkets, cafés and restaurants where available. In smaller villages, do not assume there will be an open shop, a hot meal, or food available after mid-afternoon. Rural French services often have weekly closing days, limited lunchtime/evening hours, and reduced Sunday or Monday opening; this should be checked before travelling.

Accommodation planning and food planning should be done together. When booking chambres d'hôtes, gîtes or rural hotels, ask whether dinner, breakfast and a packed lunch are available. This is particularly important across the quieter Perche and bocage sections, where the trail may pass through farmland and woodland for long stretches without a reliable shop or café.

On a brisk itinerary with 25–30 km days, leave each morning with lunch already sorted. On the longer grouped stages — such as the rural crossings around Verneuil-sur-Avre, Malétable, Aillières-Beauvoir, Mortain and Le Petit-Celland — carry an emergency meal or substantial snacks as well as the day's planned food.

Water

Water is easiest to manage in towns, accommodation, cafés and restaurants. Refill fully before leaving larger places and before entering forests or long bocage sections. Public fountains or taps should only be used if clearly marked as drinking water.

Do not rely on natural water as a primary source. The route crosses lowland farmland, forest, small rivers and eventually the salt-marsh edge of Mont-Saint-Michel bay; any stream, river or unmarked source should be treated or filtered, and bay or marsh water is not usable for drinking.

For most stages, start with at least 1.5–2 litres of water. In hot weather, on long road-and-field sections, or where the next open service is uncertain, 2.5–3 litres is safer. The weight is worth carrying when village services are closed or when accommodation is several kilometres beyond the last resupply point.

Section-by-section resupply planning

Section	Food availability	Water availability	Notes
Paris to Montfort-l'Amaury	Very good at the start and through the western suburbs, then more dependent on towns and villages as the route leaves the Paris region.	Easy in urban areas; refill before quieter woodland and rural stretches.	Do not set out from the city assuming every later suburb or village service will suit walking hours. Buy lunch early if making a long first day.
Montfort-l'Amaury to Verneuil-sur-Avre	Moderate. Montfort-l'Amaury, Houdan and Verneuil-sur-Avre are the key planning points; smaller places may have limited services.	Refill in towns and at accommodation. Natural sources should be treated.	The Forêt de Rambouillet and rural approaches can mean long gaps between reliable food stops. Carry the day's food.
Verneuil-sur-Avre to Alençon via the Perche	Limited to moderate. Verneuil-sur-Avre and Alençon are the main dependable anchors; villages such as Saint-Maurice-lès-Charencey, La Chapelle-Montligeon and Aillières-Beauvoir require advance checking.	Refill before leaving accommodation or larger settlements. Do not rely on streams or field-edge water.	This is one of the sections where accommodation and meals should be booked together. Carry extra food if walking long stages through the Perche.
Alençon to Bagnoles-de-l'Orne via Carrouges	Moderate. Alençon, Carrouges and Bagnoles-de-l'Orne are the main resupply points.	Good at towns and booked accommodation; carry enough between them.	The route crosses forest and rural Normandie-Maine country, so cafés or shops between main stops should be treated as a bonus, not a plan.
Bagnoles-de-l'Orne to Mortain via Domfront-en-Poiraise and Lonlay-l'Abbaye	Moderate in the named towns, thinner between them. Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraise and Mortain are the key stops.	Refill at accommodation and in towns. Treat natural water.	The Bagnoles to Domfront stage can be short on some itineraries, but Domfront to Mortain can be a long rural day. Leave Domfront with lunch and spare snacks.
Mortain to Avranches via Saint-Pois and Le Petit-Celland	Limited between towns. Mortain and Avranches are the main anchors; Saint-Pois and Le Petit-Celland need advance checking.	Carry enough water for the full day unless a refill has been arranged or checked.	This can be a demanding food-carry section if walking long stages through the Manche countryside. Confirm dinner options before committing to rural overnight stops.
Avranches to Le Mont-Saint-Michel via Pontaubault, Pontorson and Beauvoir	Good at Avranches and Pontorson, with services around Beauvoir and the Mont, but opening hours can be seasonal.	Refill before the final approach. Do not use salt-marsh or bay water.	The final approach is not remote, but tourist-area services can be busy, seasonal or expensive. Carry enough food and water to avoid depending on a specific café being open.

Practical carrying strategy

A sensible default is one full day of food, plus high-energy emergency snacks, between each major town. On rural nights, add the next morning's breakfast and lunch unless the accommodation has clearly agreed to provide them.

For water, refill whenever there is a reliable opportunity rather than waiting until bottles are nearly empty. This is especially important in summer, on road sections, and through forest or bocage where the map may show villages but not necessarily open services.

Navigation and Waymarking

The GR22 is an official Grande Randonnée route and is waymarked with the standard red-and-white GR balisage. In normal conditions it is a straightforward trail to follow for a walker used to signed long-distance paths, but it is not a route to walk from waymarks alone without a map or offline line to check against.

The navigation challenge is not technical terrain; it is the length of the route and the number of junctions across suburbs, forests, bocage lanes and quiet roads. A missed turn early in a 25–30 km day can become expensive in time and energy, especially where accommodation is thin.

Waymarking on the ground

Expect red-and-white paint flashes on posts, walls, trees, road furniture and pathside objects. As on other French GR routes, a straight-on mark indicates the route continues, a directional mark indicates a turn, and a crossed mark indicates the wrong way.

Waymarking should be treated as the primary on-the-ground guide, but it can be hidden by vegetation, weathered, temporarily removed by forestry or road works, or easy to miss at complex junctions. Take particular care at village exits, woodland track junctions and where the GR leaves a road onto a field or forest path.

Sections needing extra attention

The start through Paris and the western suburbs needs concentration because the walking is urban and there are many competing streets, parks and crossings. The route leaves from the parvis de Notre-Dame and heads west via Issy-les-Moulineaux, Meudon and Sèvres before reaching the Versailles / Saint-Cyr-l'École area.

The Forêt de Rambouillet and later forested sections are generally pleasant walking, but woodland navigation can be repetitive. Check the line at track crossroads rather than assuming the broadest track is the GR.

Across the Perche and Normandy bocage, the route uses a mixture of paths, lanes and small roads. Hedgerow country can make visibility limited, and turns between lanes and farm tracks are easy to overshoot if walking quickly.

The final approach to Le Mont-Saint-Michel should be kept to the signed landward route via Pontorson, Beauvoir and the causeway/footbridge. Do not attempt to cross the bay sands independently; fast tides and quicksand make unguided crossings dangerous.

Maps, guidebook and GPX

The most useful planning reference is the official FFRandonnée topo-guide for the GR22, published for the Paris to Mont-Saint-Michel route. It is sensible to pair this with an offline digital map or GPX track, especially for long stages and accommodation-driven detours.

MonGR, the FFRandonnée route platform, provides an interactive itinerary for the GR22. If using a GPX track from any app or website, make sure it matches the current GR22 alignment before relying on it, as

total distance figures vary between roughly 549 km and 567 km depending on the source.

Paper mapping is still worth carrying in some form, even if most navigation is by phone. A printed topo-guide, printed daily extracts or offline map tiles give a fallback if a phone battery fails, the screen is unusable in heavy rain, or live data is unavailable.

Phone signal and offline use

Do not depend on continuous mobile signal. The route passes through major towns such as Versailles, Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraie, Avranches and Pontorson, but it also crosses forests and rural bocage where reception may be weaker.

Download maps, the route line and accommodation locations before leaving each town. Carry a power bank on longer days, particularly on the brisk schedules where stages can be long and there may be little spare daylight for correcting mistakes.

Suitability for less experienced navigators

The GR22 suits walkers with limited navigation experience better than an unmarked mountain route: it is lowland, non-technical and officially waymarked. However, it still requires basic competence with a map or navigation app, especially when leaving towns, crossing forests and joining small lanes in farmland.

A first-time long-distance walker should not treat the GR22 as a simple stroll between signs. The safest approach is to follow the red-and-white marks, keep an offline route line open, and check the next village or major waypoint regularly rather than waiting until something feels wrong.

Terrain, Conditions and Difficulty in Practice

The GR22 is difficult in the way many lowland thru-hikes are difficult: not through technical terrain, but through repeated long days on mixed surfaces. There is no high-mountain ground, no scrambling and no sustained exposure, but 563 km and about 7,250 m of cumulative ascent make foot care, pacing and weather management important.

The high point is only about 400 m, reached in the wooded hills of the Perche / southern Orne. The route still climbs and descends frequently through rolling countryside, especially once it leaves the flatter Paris-region approaches and enters the Perche, the Normandie-Maine country, and the granite hills around Domfront-en-Poiraise and Mortain.

Path surfaces and road walking

Underfoot, expect a varied lowland mix: urban pavements leaving Paris, suburban paths through Issy-les-Moulineaux, Meudon and Sèvres, forest tracks in and around the Forêt de Rambouillet, field and woodland paths, bocage lanes, and quiet roads through rural Normandy and the Perche.

Road walking is part of the character of the route. Much of it is on minor lanes rather than busy roads, but long hard-surface sections can still be tiring over consecutive days, particularly on a brisk 21-day schedule with regular 25–30 km days or more.

Forest tracks are generally straightforward in dry weather, but can become heavy going after rain. In the Forêt de Rambouillet, the Perche and the Forêt des Andaines around Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, wet woodland ground can mean mud, standing water and slower progress.

Mud, waterlogged ground and bocage lanes

The route's most common underfoot difficulty is mud rather than rock. Bocage country — hedged fields, enclosed lanes and small woodland corridors — can hold water after sustained rain, especially where paths are shaded or used by farm traffic.

After wet weather, allow more time for the rural stages between Verneuil-sur-Avre, La Chapelle-Montligeon, Alençon, Carrouges, Domfront-en-Poiraise, Mortain and Avranches. Waterproof footwear or fast-drying trail shoes both work, but footwear should be chosen for repeated wet grass, muddy paths and long road sections rather than for mountain terrain.

The final approach towards Mont-Saint-Michel includes the salt marsh landscape of the bay. The GR approach is via Pontorson, Beauvoir and the causeway/footbridge to Le Mont-Saint-Michel; do not attempt to cross the bay sands independently. Fast tides and quicksand make the bay a specialist environment, and any bay crossing should only be made with a licensed guide.

Climbs, descents and physical effort

The climbs are rarely large on their own, but the route is not flat. The cumulative ascent of about 7,250 m comes from repeated small climbs through rolling hills, forested ridges and bocage valleys.

The hardest days in practice are usually those that combine distance, hard surfaces and poor underfoot conditions. A long lane-walking day after rain can feel more demanding than the elevation profile

suggests.

The staged schedule used on many fast itineraries includes some very long days, including 40 km-plus sections. Walkers taking 24–30 days will usually find the terrain moderate; walkers compressing the route into a brisk three-week or shorter plan should treat it as a serious endurance walk.

Technical difficulty and exposure

There is no technical mountain terrain on the GR22. Navigation is helped by the red-and-white GR waymarking, and the route is fundamentally a walking trail rather than an alpine or scrambling route.

Exposure is limited. The route passes through forests, farmland, towns and low hills rather than open high ridges. Weather can still matter on exposed agricultural lanes and on the final approach across the open bay landscape near Mont-Saint-Michel, where wind and rain can make an otherwise simple walk feel harsh.

Livestock, fields and rural access

The route crosses working rural landscapes, especially through the Perche and Normandy bocage. Expect agricultural tracks, hedged lanes and field-edge walking rather than a continuous wilderness footpath.

Livestock may be present in farmland areas, and the final bay landscape is associated with salt-meadow sheep. Keep gates and barriers as found, avoid disturbing animals, and take particular care if walking with a dog; local restrictions and access arrangements should be checked before travelling.

Seasonal conditions

Spring is often a good season for the GR22, with mild temperatures and long enough daylight for steady progress. Paths through woodland and bocage can still be muddy after rain, so do not assume spring conditions will be dry.

Summer gives the longest daylight and usually the easiest ground, but hard road sections and open lanes can become tiring in heat. Carry enough water between villages, especially on rural days where services are thinner.

Autumn can be excellent for cooler walking, but rain can make forest and bocage sections slower and messier. Parts of the route pass through hunting areas in autumn and winter; visibility, awareness and local notices matter, and any current closures or diversions should be checked before travelling.

Winter is not the main season for this route. The low altitude avoids mountain hazards, but short daylight, wet ground, reduced services and hunting activity can make logistics and safety less straightforward than the moderate terrain rating suggests.

Weather and Best Time to Walk

The GR22 is best planned for **spring, summer or autumn**. It is a lowland route with no mountain terrain — the high point is only about 400 m — but weather still matters because the walk is long, exposed in places, and includes many forest tracks, field paths, bocage lanes and quiet roads that can become muddy after rain.

For most walkers, the most balanced periods are **late spring and early autumn**: enough daylight for long stages, generally manageable temperatures, and less pressure on accommodation than in peak holiday periods. **Summer** is perfectly realistic, but long 25–30 km days can feel hard in heat, especially on road and lane sections with limited shade between villages.

Seasonal planning

Season	What to expect	Practical advice
Spring	A good walking season, with fresh conditions and longer days building through the season. Rain can leave forest tracks and bocage paths muddy.	Carry waterproofs and footwear that copes with wet grass, mud and lanes. Rural accommodation should still be booked ahead where villages are small.
Summer	Long daylight hours are useful for a brisk schedule, and services are generally easier to plan around. Heat can make the long lowland stages tiring.	Start early on hot days, carry enough water between settlements, and avoid underestimating road-walking fatigue. Book ahead around popular stops such as Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Avranches, Pontorson and Le Mont-Saint-Michel.
Autumn	Often a strong choice for distance walking, with cooler conditions and quieter places than high summer. Rain becomes more consequential as paths soften.	Expect mud in the Forêt de Rambouillet, the Perche, the Forêt des Andaines and the Normandy bocage after wet spells. Parts of the route pass through hunting areas in autumn/winter, so wear visible colours and pay attention to local signs.
Winter	Not the natural season for this route. The GR22 has no high-mountain hazards, but short days, wet ground, cold rain, possible ice and reduced rural services make a thru-hike much less convenient.	A full winter walk is only realistic for experienced, self-sufficient walkers with flexible staging and pre-booked accommodation. This should be checked before travelling.

Rain, mud and underfoot conditions

The main weather issue is not altitude but **wet ground**. After prolonged rain, field edges, woodland paths and bocage tracks can become muddy or waterlogged, while quiet lanes may still leave long, hard-surface kilometres on tired feet.

Waterproof footwear is useful, but so is a realistic sock and blister strategy: repeated wet grass, mud and tarmac over several weeks can cause more trouble than any single difficult section. Trekking poles are helpful on slippery woodland and farm tracks, particularly in the rolling Perche and the wooded Orne/Manche sections.

Heat and daylight

A 21-day schedule means consistently long walking days, and the stage pattern includes several very long days. In warm weather, this is the main challenge: the route is not technically hard, but heat, hard surfaces and limited recovery time can quickly accumulate.

In summer, use the longer daylight to start early and keep the hottest part of the day flexible. In spring and autumn, check sunrise and sunset before committing to the longest stages, especially where accommodation is thin and there are few easy bail-out options between villages.

Wind, fog and the Mont-Saint-Michel approach

The final approach through Avranches, Pontaubault, Pontorson and Beauvoir to Le Mont-Saint-Michel reaches open bay country, where wind, rain and poor visibility can make the last kilometres feel very different from the inland bocage. The official walking finish is via the causeway/footbridge approach to the Mont.

Do **not** attempt to cross the bay sands independently. Fast tides and quicksand are real hazards around Mont-Saint-Michel bay; any bay crossing should only be done with a licensed guide.

Accommodation and services by season

Accommodation is mixed along the GR22 — hotels, chambres d'hôtes, gîtes and campsites — but it is unevenly distributed. The quieter Perche and bocage sections need more planning than the larger towns such as Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraie, Mortain, Avranches and Pontorson.

In summer, popular areas near Mont-Saint-Michel can book up. Outside the main season, smaller rural places and campsites may have limited opening periods, so each night should be arranged before relying on it. This should be checked before travelling.

Safety Notes

The GR22 is a lowland, non-technical route, but it is not a casual walk. The main risks are accumulated fatigue, long road and lane sections, muddy or waterlogged tracks after rain, variable weather, and the final approach to Mont-Saint-Michel bay.

For emergencies in France, call **112**. Carry ID, travel insurance details, a charged phone and a backup power bank, especially on the longer rural stages through the Perche, southern Orne and Manche bocage.

Navigation and mobile signal

The GR22 is waymarked with red-and-white Grande Randonnée balisage, but waymarks should not be your only navigation system. Carry the current FFRandonnée topo-guide or reliable offline mapping, and expect junctions in forests, field edges and bocage lanes where signs can be missed.

Mobile coverage is generally less of a concern than on mountain routes, but do not assume constant signal in forests, valleys or rural farmland. Download maps and accommodation details before leaving each town.

Check for any trail diversions before setting off. This should be checked before travelling, and again locally on the day if weather, forestry work or roadworks may affect the route.

Distance, fatigue and solo walking

The safety challenge on this route is endurance rather than exposure. A brisk itinerary can involve repeated 25–30 km days, and some stage plans are considerably longer, so blisters, tendon pain and general fatigue can become more serious than any single obstacle.

Solo walkers should be especially conservative with daily distance in the quieter Perche and bocage sections, where accommodation and transport options are thinner. Share the day's intended destination with someone, and have a realistic exit plan via towns such as Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Avranches or Pontorson where onward transport may be available.

Verify current SNCF/TER and regional bus times before relying on them. Rural services can be limited, and missing the last connection may leave a long walk or expensive transfer.

Roads, lanes and the Paris start

The GR22 begins in central Paris and leaves the city through Issy-les-Moulineaux, Meudon and Sèvres before reaching quieter country. Use normal urban walking precautions: watch crossings, cycle lanes, kerbs and traffic, particularly when carrying a full pack.

Further west, the route includes quiet roads and bocage lanes. Walk facing oncoming traffic where there is no pavement, use a light or reflective item in poor visibility, and take extra care on bends, narrow lanes and after dark.

Mud, forests and underfoot conditions

Forest tracks, field paths and woodland sections can become muddy or waterlogged after rain, especially in the Forêt de Rambouillet, the Perche, the Forêt des Andaines area and the Normandy bocage. Waterproof footwear with good grip is more useful here than technical mountain gear.

Wet leaves, rutted farm tracks and churned-up gateways can be slow and slippery. Build margin into long stages rather than planning every day at best-case pace.

Weather, heat and exposure

This is a Spring, Summer and Autumn route, but conditions can still change quickly over a long day. Carry waterproofs, an insulating layer and sun protection even though the high point is only around 400 m.

Open farmland, road sections and the final approach near Mont-Saint-Michel bay can feel exposed in wind, rain or heat. In warm weather, start early, carry enough water between villages, and do not rely on finding shops or cafés in every small settlement.

In cooler seasons, short daylight and wet ground are a bigger concern than altitude. A headtorch is sensible on long-stage itineraries, particularly if accommodation is still several kilometres away late in the day.

Water, rivers and the Mont-Saint-Michel bay finish

There are no mountain river crossings or technical water hazards on the standard route, but wet ground and drainage ditches can make lowland paths awkward after prolonged rain. Do not shortcut across flooded fields or unstable banks.

The critical water-related safety rule is at the finish: **do not walk across the bay sands to Le Mont-Saint-Michel without a licensed guide**. The bay has fast tides and areas of quicksand. Use the official causeway/footbridge approach via Pontorson and Beauvoir unless taking part in a properly guided bay crossing.

Livestock, farmland and hunting season

The GR22 crosses working farmland and salt-marsh grazing country near Mont-Saint-Michel. Keep to the marked path, close gates where required, give livestock space, and avoid walking between animals and their young.

In autumn and winter, parts of the route pass through hunting areas. Wear a bright layer, stay on marked paths, observe local signs, and make your presence clear without leaving the trail.

Daily safety checklist

Before leaving each morning, check:

- the day's distance and whether it is realistic in current conditions;
- weather, daylight and expected temperature;
- water and food availability before the next town or booked stop;
- accommodation booking and arrival arrangements, especially in rural sections;

- offline maps, battery level and backup power;
- any trail diversions or local access notices;
- transport options if the stage needs to be shortened;
- whether hunting activity, forestry work or roadworks could affect the route.

Most problems on the GR22 are avoided by conservative pacing and good logistics. Treat the route as a long-distance endurance walk, not a series of short day walks joined together.

Gear Recommendations

The GR22 is not a technical mountain route, but it is a long, repetitive lowland walk with plenty of hard surfaces, forest tracks, bocage lanes and muddy field or woodland sections after rain. Gear choices should prioritise foot comfort, weather protection, navigation redundancy and the ability to manage long days between services.

Footwear

Choose footwear for distance rather than altitude. A well-cushioned trail shoe or lightweight walking shoe suits many dry-season walkers because the route includes quiet roads, lanes and firm tracks as well as paths.

Waterproof shoes or lightweight boots are a better choice in spring, autumn or after wet weather, especially through the Forêt de Rambouillet, the Perche, the Forêt des Andaines area and the Normandy bocage. Low gaiters are useful for wet grass, mud and leaf litter, but heavy mountain boots are unnecessary for most walkers.

Pack blister treatment and spare socks. The difficulty on the GR22 comes from repeated 25–30 km days — or longer on a brisk schedule — so small foot problems can become trip-ending if ignored.

Waterproofs and Layers

Carry a proper waterproof jacket throughout the season. The route crosses lowland France rather than high mountains, but long exposed road and field sections become unpleasant quickly in sustained rain.

A waterproof pack cover or dry bags are worth using, particularly if relying on booked accommodation and carrying clothes, electronics and documents. Waterproof trousers are advisable in spring and autumn, and useful after heavy rain when vegetation is wet.

A light fleece or synthetic insulating layer is enough for most walkers outside cold weather, but do not treat the low altitude as a guarantee of warmth. The final approach to Mont-Saint-Michel bay can feel cooler and windier than the inland stages.

Navigation

The GR22 is a Grande Randonnée with red-and-white GR waymarking, but do not rely on paint marks alone. Carry the official FFRandonnée topo-guide, an offline map or GPX track, and enough battery power to use navigation late in the day.

This is especially important where the route moves between forest tracks, bocage lanes and small rural paths. Trail diversions and transport links should be checked before travelling.

Water and Food Carry

A 1.5–2 litre water capacity is sensible for most days, with more in hot weather or on longer rural stages. Towns such as Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraie, Avranches and Pontorson are useful service points, but the quieter Perche and bocage sections require more planning.

Carry lunch and reliable snacks each day rather than assuming a café or shop will appear at the right time. If staying in rural accommodation, check evening meals and breakfast arrangements when booking.

Trekking Poles

Trekking poles are optional but useful on this route. They help reduce fatigue over repeated long days, add stability on muddy tracks, and can make road walking less punishing if used comfortably.

They are not needed for technical terrain, and fast hikers may prefer to leave them behind unless already used to walking with poles.

Power and Electronics

Carry a power bank if using a phone for navigation, bookings, translation, weather checks or transport planning. This is particularly useful on longer days through rural areas where charging opportunities may be limited until evening.

Keep digital tickets, accommodation details and route files available offline. Mobile signal should not be treated as guaranteed everywhere along the route.

Sun, Insects and Seasonal Extras

In summer, carry a sun hat, sunglasses, sunscreen and enough water capacity for long warm sections on lanes and open farmland. Insect repellent is useful in warm, damp conditions around woodland, hedgerows and meadows.

In spring and autumn, prioritise mud management: waterproof footwear, gaiters and dry bags matter more than ultra-light minimalism. In autumn and winter, parts of the route pass through hunting areas, so a bright item of clothing or pack cover is a sensible visibility measure.

Do not walk across the bay sands to Le Mont-Saint-Michel unless with a licensed guide. For the GR22 finish, use the causeway/footbridge approach via Pontorson and Beauvoir.

Inn-to-Inn Hikers

Inn-to-inn walkers can keep the pack light, but should still carry full waterproofs, a warm layer, navigation, water, lunch and basic first aid. Accommodation is thinner in rural sections, so booking details and contact numbers should be easy to access offline.

A light pair of evening footwear can be useful after long road-heavy days, but avoid carrying unnecessary town clothing. The biggest comfort gain is usually reducing pack weight and protecting feet.

Campers

Camping is possible in the broader accommodation mix, but campsites are not available in every village or rural stage. Plan camping nights in advance and do not assume a tent pitch will solve gaps in accommodation.

A lightweight three-season shelter, sleeping mat and sleeping bag are appropriate for spring to autumn use. Keep wet-weather resilience high: the route can be muddy or waterlogged after rain, and drying

gear may be difficult on consecutive damp days.

Wild camping rules and local restrictions should be checked before travelling.

Fast and Section Hikers

Fast hikers and section walkers should still carry enough gear to be self-sufficient for a full day. A lighter pack is useful on the GR22, but stripping out waterproofs, insulation or navigation is a poor trade-off when stages are long and rural services are uneven.

For single-day sections near railheads such as Versailles, Dreux, Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Avranches or Pontorson, take the same essentials as for a normal day hike: waterproof layer, warm layer, food, water, offline navigation and a battery reserve. Current SNCF/TER and regional bus times should be checked before relying on public transport.

Budget and Costs

The GR22 is a eurozone walk, so all planning should be done in € and current prices should be checked before booking. Exact costs vary sharply between central Paris, rural Perche villages, Normandy spa towns such as Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, and the high-demand finish around Pontorson, Beauvoir and Le Mont-Saint-Michel.

The biggest budget decision is accommodation. This is not a wild, mountain hut-style route: most walkers use a mix of hotels, chambres d'hôtes, gîtes and campsites, with rural nights in the Perche and Normandy bocage needing the most forward planning.

Budget styles

Style	What it usually means on this route	Main risks
Budget	Campsites where available, simple gîtes, supermarket food, bakery lunches, limited restaurant meals, public transport to/from the route	Campsites and cheap beds are not evenly spaced; rural stages may force a paid room or taxi
Mid-range	Hotels or chambres d'hôtes most nights, picnic lunches, occasional restaurant meals, sensible use of trains/buses at the start and finish	Accommodation can still be thin between the larger towns, so booking ahead matters
Comfortable	Private rooms throughout, more restaurant meals, taxi links where accommodation is off-route, possible rest nights in places such as Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne or Avranches	Costs rise near Paris and Mont-Saint-Michel, especially if booking late

Accommodation costs

Accommodation is the largest variable cost. Paris at the start and the Mont-Saint-Michel area at the finish are likely to be the most expensive parts of the trip, while smaller inland towns may offer better value but fewer choices.

Useful overnight bases with a broader chance of services include Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraie, Mortain, Avranches and Pontorson. Rural sections through the Perche and bocage can have limited beds, so a cheap theoretical itinerary may become expensive if the only available room is off-route or in a higher-priced property.

Campsites can reduce costs, but they should not be assumed at every stage. Opening dates, walker facilities and exact locations should be checked before travelling, especially outside the main summer season.

Food and drink

Food costs are easier to control than accommodation. The cheapest approach is to buy breakfast and lunch from bakeries, supermarkets and small food shops, then use restaurants only where needed.

A mid-range plan should allow for picnic lunches on most days and a proper evening meal in towns. In quieter villages, do not rely on late-opening shops or restaurants without checking ahead; carrying an emergency meal is sensible on the longer rural stages.

Paris, Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Avranches, Pontorson and the Mont-Saint-Michel area offer more choice, but tourist pricing can be higher near the finish. Rural accommodation that includes or offers dinner can be worth paying for where there is no nearby food option.

Transport costs

The start is straightforward because the GR22 begins in central Paris at the parvis de Notre-Dame, with extensive rail, metro and air access. Costs depend on where you are arriving from and whether a Paris hotel night is needed before starting.

Along the route, useful railheads include Versailles, Dreux, Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon and Avranches. The finish is normally handled via Pontorson, the nearest station to Mont-Saint-Michel, with onward shuttle or walking access towards the Mont through Beauvoir and the causeway/footbridge.

SNCF/TER and regional bus times should be checked before relying on them. This is particularly important if section-hiking, bailing out mid-route, or using public transport to bridge an accommodation gap.

Taxis and off-route accommodation

Taxi costs can become significant if accommodation is not available directly on the route. This is most likely in the quieter Perche and bocage sections, where village services may be sparse and stage lengths can be awkward.

If a taxi is needed, book it before the walking day rather than assuming one will be available in a small village at the end of the stage. For two or more walkers, taxi costs may be manageable when split; for a solo walker, they can quickly change the daily budget.

Luggage transfer and packages

Do not assume continuous luggage transfer exists for the whole GR22 unless it has been arranged in advance. The route crosses several departments and a mixture of urban, rural and tourist areas, so any baggage service or self-guided package should be checked carefully for exactly which stages it covers.

A luggage-transfer or self-guided arrangement, where available, will usually move the trip into a comfortable budget category. It may still be worthwhile for walkers using shorter stages, private rooms and pre-booked accommodation, but the current price and coverage should be checked before booking.

Budgeting tips specific to the GR22

- Book rural nights early, especially between the larger service towns.
- Do not plan a campsite-only itinerary without checking opening dates and spacing.
- Carry food for long rural stages where shops may be limited.
- Expect higher prices around Paris and Le Mont-Saint-Michel than in smaller inland towns.
- Allow a contingency for taxis if accommodation is off-route or public transport does not fit the walking schedule.
- If walking the route in a brisk 21-day schedule, daily costs may be higher because long stages reduce flexibility in choosing cheaper accommodation.

Luggage Transfer, Guided Tours and Support Services

The GR22 is best planned as an independent long-distance walk rather than a heavily serviced trail. Its strength is that it links towns, railheads and accommodation across Île-de-France, the Perche and Normandy, but support services are not something to assume automatically from one night to the next.

For a supported trip, arrange services before leaving Paris, especially through the quieter Perche and bocage sections where accommodation is thinner and daily distances can be long. Availability of route-wide luggage transfer, guided packages and taxi coverage can change by season and area. This should be checked before travelling.

Luggage transfer

Treat luggage transfer on the GR22 as a pre-arranged service rather than a guaranteed trail facility. The practical approach is usually to organise bag movement between booked accommodation, either through a walking-holiday operator, a local taxi, or with help from accommodation hosts where they are willing to coordinate onward transfer.

This is most useful for walkers staying in hotels, chambres d'hôtes or gîtes and walking with a daypack. It is less useful for campers or anyone staying in very small rural places where reception hours, vehicle access and staff availability may be limited.

Before booking, ask each provider or accommodation:

Check	Why it matters on the GR22
Exact pick-up and drop-off addresses	Rural accommodation may not sit directly on the GR22.
Latest bag drop-off time	Long walking days can make late arrivals common.
Maximum bag weight	Limits vary and should be agreed before arrival.
Whether transfers cover every stage	Some quieter Perche and bocage sections may need local arrangements.
Contact number for the day	Essential if a bag is delayed or a stage is shortened.
Payment method and cancellation terms	Confirm current prices before booking.

Do not pack valuables, medication, passports or the day's waterproofs in a transferred bag. Carry anything essential for continuing the walk if the bag is delayed.

Self-guided walking packages

A self-guided package can suit walkers who want the route, accommodation and luggage movement handled in advance, while still walking independently each day. Typical packages on French long-distance routes include accommodation booking, route notes or GPS material, luggage transfer and local assistance, but inclusions vary and should be checked carefully.

For the GR22, ask whether the package covers the full Paris to Le Mont-Saint-Michel route or only selected sections, such as the Normandy approach. Also check whether the itinerary follows the official

GR22 throughout or uses road transfers to manage accommodation gaps.

A self-guided package is most useful if you are travelling in peak holiday periods, want private rooms most nights, or do not want to negotiate rural accommodation and taxi logistics in French. It is less necessary for experienced walkers who are comfortable booking town-to-town accommodation and using railheads such as Versailles, Dreux, Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Avranches and Pontorson as access points.

Guided options

A fully guided end-to-end walk from Paris to Le Mont-Saint-Michel is a specialist undertaking because of the route length. If a guided trip is required, expect to look for a custom or small-group arrangement rather than assuming regular departures along the whole 563 km trail. Dates, group size, baggage support and included transfers should all be checked before booking.

Guiding is generally unnecessary for navigation on the GR22 itself: it is a waymarked Grande Randonnée with red-and-white GR balisage and no technical mountain terrain. The main challenges are endurance, accommodation planning and managing long rural days.

The exception is the bay at Le Mont-Saint-Michel. Do not cross the bay sands independently; fast tides and quicksand make this unsafe without a licensed guide. The standard GR22 finish reaches Le Mont-Saint-Michel via Pontorson, Beauvoir and the causeway/footbridge.

Taxi transfers and local support

Taxis are the most flexible support tool on this route. They can shorten an overlong day, connect an off-route guesthouse, bypass a closed or waterlogged section, or get you back to a railhead if plans change.

They are particularly useful around rural stage ends and accommodation gaps, including the Perche and Normandy bocage sections. In smaller places, taxis should be booked ahead rather than called at the end of the day, especially on Sundays, public holidays or evenings.

Useful transfer hubs include the larger towns and rail-linked points on or near the route: Versailles, Dreux, Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Avranches and Pontorson. Current SNCF/TER and regional bus times should be verified before relying on them, and taxis should be arranged to match actual arrival times rather than timetable assumptions.

When support is worth paying for

Support services make most sense if you are following a fast schedule, carrying injury-sensitive gear, walking with limited French, or booking accommodation in advance through the quieter rural sections. They can also make the route more practical for walkers who want to enjoy the long cultural traverse without carrying a full thru-hiking load.

Strong independent walkers can complete the GR22 without paid support, provided accommodation and resupply are planned carefully. The route is not technically difficult, but its length, mud-prone lowland paths and occasional long days mean that transport and taxi backup should still be part of the plan.

Shorter Hikes and Best Sections

The GR22 works well as a section-hike because several practical trail towns sit on or near railheads, especially Paris, Versailles, Dreux, Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Avranches and Pontorson. Rural bus links and onward transfers are much less predictable, so any short itinerary away from those railheads should be planned around current SNCF/TER and regional bus times.

Distances below are approximate and based on the route stages used in this guide. Check the current GR22 topo-guide or MonGR itinerary before booking accommodation, especially where a section starts or ends in a smaller village.

Best for	Section	Approx. distance	Why choose it	Transport notes
Best day walk / finale	Avranches to Le Mont-Saint-Michel via Pontaubault, Pontorson and Beauvoir	29 km	The strongest single-day experience on the route: Avranches above the bay, the Sélune crossing at Pontaubault, salt-marsh country and the final approach to the abbey.	Avranches and Pontorson are useful railheads. From the Mont, return via the causeway/footbridge towards Beauvoir/Pontorson; current shuttle and train times should be checked before travelling. Do not attempt to cross the bay sands without a licensed guide.
Best weekend section	Alençon to Bagnoles-de-l'Orne via Saint-Nicolas-des-Bois and Carrouges	67 km	A compact two-day or relaxed three-day section through the Normandie-Maine area, with forested ground, a good overnight target at Carrouges and a comfortable finish in the spa town of Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.	Alençon is a key railhead. Transport from Bagnoles-de-l'Orne onwards is less certain than from the larger rail towns, so bus/taxi options should be checked before committing.
Best 3-day section	Alençon to Domfront-en-Poiraise via Carrouges and Bagnoles-de-l'Orne	81 km	One of the most satisfying short thru-hikes on the GR22: Alençon, forest tracks, Carrouges, the Forêt des Andaines, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne and the medieval hilltop finish at Domfront.	Start at Alençon by rail. Onward public transport from Domfront-en-Poiraise should be checked before travelling; accommodation should be booked ahead in the smaller overnight stops.
Best 4-5 day western section	Bagnoles-de-l'Orne to Avranches via Domfront-en-Poiraise, Mortain and Le Petit-Celland	129 km	A stronger endurance section with the granite country of the southern Orne and Manche, Domfront above the Varenne gorge, Mortain's waterfalls and a clear finish at Avranches.	Avranches is a useful railhead at the end. Starting access to Bagnoles-de-l'Orne and intermediate bus links should be checked before travelling.

Best for	Section	Approx. distance	Why choose it	Transport notes
Best for public transport	Paris / Versailles area to Verneuil-sur-Avre	about 119 km if walked as the first three HikeList stages to Verneuil-sur-Avre	The most practical part of the GR22 to divide into shorter trips, with the urban start, western Paris suburbs, the Versailles/Saint-Cyr-l'École area and onward countryside towards Verneuil-sur-Avre.	Paris has comprehensive rail, metro and air links. Versailles, Dreux and Verneuil-sur-Avre are useful railheads for breaking the route, but exact stage endpoints and current services should be checked before travelling.
Best for villages and accommodation	Bagnoles-de-l'Orne to Mortain via Domfront-en-Poiraise and Lonlay-l'Abbaye	60 km	A manageable western section linking several named service points and characterful stops, with a spa-town start, Domfront's old town and Mortain as a strong overnight or finish point.	Accommodation is generally easier to organise here than in the thinnest bocage sections, but rural rooms and gîtes should still be booked ahead. Public transport at the smaller places should be checked before travelling.
Best for camping logistics	Bagnoles-de-l'Orne to Avranches	129 km	This is the most sensible camping-oriented short section because it links several towns where campsites may be available, including Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraise, Mortain and Avranches.	Campsites can be seasonal and may sit away from the GR line, so opening dates, pitch availability and any local transport need checking before booking. Do not rely on informal camping as the main plan.

Beginner-friendly choices

For newer long-distance walkers, the best introduction is **Bagnoles-de-l'Orne to Domfront-en-Poiraise**, about **14 km**. It is short by GR22 standards, starts and ends in established trail towns, and gives a useful sample of the western half without committing to a 25–30 km day.

The main caution is access. Neither end is as straightforward as Paris, Alençon, Avranches or Pontorson, so current bus or taxi arrangements should be checked before travelling.

Strongest scenic short section

For pure impact, choose **Avranches to Le Mont-Saint-Michel**, about **29 km**. It gives the bay approach, salt marshes, the Pontaubault crossing and the UNESCO finish in one long day.

This is not the easiest day on the route because of the distance and the logistics at the finish. Start early, use the causeway/footbridge to reach the Mont, and never walk the bay sands independently.

Highlights and Points of Interest

The GR22 is at its best when treated as a cultural and landscape crossing rather than a pure point-to-point march. The strongest places to slow down are the historic towns, the forest and bocage sections, and the final approach across Mont-Saint-Michel bay.

Highlights in route order

Place / area	Why it matters	Planning note
Parvis de Notre-Dame de Paris	The route begins on the square in front of Notre-Dame, on the Île de la Cité: a symbolic pilgrim departure point in the historic centre of Paris.	Allow time at the start, but do not underestimate the long urban exit west through Issy-les-Moulineaux, Meudon and Sèvres.
Forêt de Rambouillet	A large former royal hunting forest in the Yvelines and the first major change in character after the Paris region. Forest tracks replace the suburban start and mark the move into quieter country.	Paths can be muddy after rain. This is one of the early sections where waterproof footwear and good navigation habits begin to matter.
Le Perche and its bocage	Rolling hills, manor farms and dense hedgerow country define the central part of the walk between the Avre and the Orne. This is also Parc naturel régional du Perche territory and the homeland of the Percheron draught horse.	Accommodation and services are thinner in the rural Perche than in the larger towns, so this is not the best section for improvising late in the day.
Verneuil-sur-Avre	A historic former frontier town on the Avre, with the Tour Grise and the church of La Madeleine. It is one of the more substantial and useful waypoints after leaving Île-de-France.	A sensible place to pause, resupply or reset plans before the quieter Perche stages.
Alençon	The Orne préfecture and a significant cultural stop, known for Point d'Alençon needle-lace, recognised by UNESCO as intangible heritage. It sits on the edge of the Normandie-Maine regional park.	One of the better places on the route for services, transport options and a more comfortable overnight stop.
Carrouges and the Normandie-Maine countryside	The route moves through the Orne towards the wooded and hillier western half of the trail. The walking remains lowland, but the landscape becomes more enclosed and rural.	Expect a mix of woodland paths, bocage lanes and quiet roads rather than big open upland views.
Bagnoles-de-l'Orne	A Belle Époque thermal spa town set in the Forêt des Andaines within the Parc naturel régional Normandie-Maine. It is one of the most restful towns on the western half of the GR22.	A good candidate for a shorter day or recovery night, especially on a faster itinerary.
Domfront-en-Poiraie	A medieval hilltop town above the Varenne gorge, with castle ruins and a strong sense of arrival after the forested Orne stages. It is also in poiré, or perry, country.	Worth allowing time for the town rather than treating it only as a bed stop.

Place / area	Why it matters	Planning note
Lonlay-l'Abbaye and the approach to Mortain	The route continues through southern Normandy's granite and bocage country, with a more rugged lowland feel than the early Île-de-France stages.	Daily distances can be long here on a brisk schedule, so decide in advance whether to split stages more gently.
Mortain	A town associated with waterfalls, notably the Grande Cascade and Petite Cascade, and granite hills on the approach into the Manche.	One of the more distinctive natural-interest stops before the final run towards Avranches.
Avranches	A hill town above Mont-Saint-Michel bay and home to medieval manuscripts from the Mont-Saint-Michel scriptorium. It is the major cultural pause before the final approach to the coast.	A strong place to spend extra time before the last day to Le Mont-Saint-Michel.
Pontaubault bridge over the Sélune	A multi-arch stone bridge just south of Avranches, known for its role in the late July/August 1944 breakout when General Patton's US Third Army crossed through the area.	A historically important landmark on the final approach rather than just another river crossing.
Mont-Saint-Michel bay salt marshes	The final landscape opens into the herbus / prés-salés: salt meadows grazed by the renowned agneau de pré-salé sheep. This is the most dramatic change of scenery on the whole route.	Use the signed causeway/footbridge approach to Le Mont-Saint-Michel. Do not cross the bay sands without a licensed guide because of fast tides and quicksand.
Le Mont-Saint-Michel	The finish is the medieval Benedictine abbey crowning a granite tidal island in the bay, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of France's defining monuments.	Aim to arrive with enough time to enjoy the abbey and the island rather than rushing straight to onward transport.

Best places to spend extra time

Bagnoles-de-l'Orne is the most obvious recovery stop, thanks to its spa-town character and forest setting in the Forêt des Andaines. It suits hikers who want one gentler day in the western half of the walk.

Domfront-en-Poiraie rewards a slower schedule with its hilltop medieval setting, castle ruins and position above the Varenne gorge. It is also a good place to appreciate the route's shift into perry country.

Avranches is the best pre-finish cultural stop. Its manuscripts linked to Mont-Saint-Michel give useful context before reaching the abbey itself, and it sits just before the bay landscape begins to dominate.

Le Mont-Saint-Michel deserves time at the end of the walk. The abbey, tidal island setting and salt-marsh approach are the route's natural finale, not just a finish-line photo.

Common Mistakes and Planning Tips

Planning from the headline distance instead of the actual stages

The GR22 is often described at slightly different total lengths, roughly 549–567 km depending on the source, with this guide using about 563 km. The mistake is treating that as a neat average-distance walk and then discovering that real stage planning creates very uneven days.

Fix: build the itinerary from overnight stops, not from the total distance. A brisk 21-day plan still means frequent 25–30 km days, while compressed schedules can create very long stages of 40 km or more; many walkers are better served by 24–30 days or by splitting the route into shorter sections.

Underestimating the first and last logistics

The start is simple to reach in central Paris, but the exit through Issy-les-Moulineaux, Meudon, Sèvres and the Versailles / Saint-Cyr-l'École area is urban and suburban before the route settles into quieter walking. At the other end, Le Mont-Saint-Michel is not a main-line railhead; the nearest useful station is Pontorson, with onward travel to the Mont by shuttle or on foot.

Fix: treat day one and the finish as logistics days, not just walking days. Check current SNCF/TER and regional bus times before relying on Versailles, Dreux, Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Avranches or Pontorson for joining, leaving or shortening the route.

Leaving rural accommodation too late

Accommodation is straightforward in larger towns and recognised stops such as Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraie, Mortain, Avranches and Pontorson / Mont-Saint-Michel. The problem comes in the quieter Perche and Normandy bocage, where rural options are thinner and the distance between suitable overnight stops can force a much longer day than planned.

Fix: book the sparse rural nights first, then shape the rest of the itinerary around them. This is especially important between the Avre, the Perche, the southern Orne and the Manche bocage, where assuming a last-minute bed can turn a moderate walk into an avoidable endurance test.

Assuming every village has food and water on demand

The GR22 passes many villages, but that does not mean every settlement has a reliable shop, café or open service at the time you arrive. Long bocage and forest sections can leave limited resupply between larger towns.

Fix: plan food around known service centres rather than village names on the map. Carry enough food and water to reach the next dependable town or booked stop, and check shop and restaurant opening times before travelling where a meal is essential to the day plan.

Relying only on red-and-white waymarks

The GR22 is a waymarked Grande Randonnée, but waymarks are not a complete navigation plan. Urban turns leaving Paris, forest tracks in the Forêt de Rambouillet and similar-looking bocage lanes can all cause small errors that become costly on long days.

Fix: carry the current FFRandonnée topo-guide, a reliable map or an up-to-date digital track, and use the waymarks as confirmation rather than the only source of navigation. Check for trail diversions before setting off, particularly if using an older GPX file.

Treating the route as easy because it is lowland

The high point is only around 400 m and there is no technical mountain terrain, but the GR22 still accumulates roughly 7,250 m of ascent over the full route. The difficulty is repetition: long daily distances, road and lane walking, mud after rain, and the need to keep moving day after day.

Fix: train for consecutive long walking days, not for altitude alone. Foot care, pack weight, recovery time and realistic stage lengths matter more here than mountain skills.

Ignoring mud and surface conditions

The route uses forest tracks, field paths, woodland paths, bocage lanes and quiet roads. After rain, sections through the Forêt de Rambouillet, the Perche, the southern Orne and the Manche countryside can be muddy or waterlogged.

Fix: choose footwear for mixed lowland conditions rather than dry pavement alone. Waterproofing, good grip and blister prevention are more useful than heavy mountain boots for most walkers, but flimsy shoes can be a poor choice after sustained rain.

Compressing the walk into a fit-walker schedule without recovery space

A 13-stage version of the route contains several very long days, including Paris to Montfort-l'Amaury, Boncourt to Verneuil-sur-Avre, Verneuil-sur-Avre to Malétable, Aillières-Beauvoir to Alençon and the long western stages around Domfront-en-Poiraie, Mortain and Le Petit-Celland. These are not casual touring days.

Fix: add buffer days or split the longest sections if accommodation allows. Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Alençon, Avranches and Pontorson are useful places to slow the pace, restock and reset the schedule.

Forgetting seasonal and hunting considerations

The best walking seasons are spring, summer and autumn, but conditions still vary sharply. In autumn and winter, parts of the route pass through hunting areas, and rural services can be more limited outside busier periods.

Fix: check local information for chasse before walking wooded or rural sections in the hunting season. Wear visible clothing where appropriate, follow any posted notices, and avoid assuming that accommodation or food services operate the same hours year-round.

Misjudging the Mont-Saint-Michel finish

The final approach reaches Mont-Saint-Michel bay via Avranches, Pontaubault, Pontorson and Beauvoir, then the causeway / footbridge to the Mont. A serious mistake is treating the bay sands as a shortcut or an informal scenic approach.

Fix: use the official causeway / footbridge for an independent finish. Do not cross the bay sands to Le Mont-Saint-Michel without a licensed guide because of fast tides and quicksand.

Not having an exit plan

This is a long point-to-point walk across several départements, and fatigue, weather, injury or accommodation gaps can force a change of plan. The route has useful railheads, but they are not evenly spaced and onward connections vary.

Fix: mark practical exit points before starting, especially Versailles, Dreux, Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Avranches and Pontorson. Timetables should be checked before travelling, and again before committing to a bailout day.

Final Advice

The GR22 is best suited to fit, self-reliant walkers who enjoy cultural landscapes, historic towns and long days on lowland paths more than mountain drama. The walking is not technical, but the route's seriousness comes from repetition: many days of 25–30 km or more, mixed surfaces, muddy forest and bocage sections after rain, and roughly 7,250 m of cumulative ascent spread across the full crossing.

The main planning task is accommodation. Towns such as Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, Domfront-en-Poiraie, Mortain, Avranches and Pontorson give useful structure, but the quieter Perche and bocage stretches need advance booking and realistic food planning. Do not assume that every village has beds, shops or evening meals available when you arrive.

A 21-day itinerary is a brisk thru-hike and should only be taken on with good endurance and an acceptance of long road-and-track days. Most walkers will have a better journey by allowing 24–30 days, or by treating the GR22 as a section hike using railheads such as Versailles, Dreux, Verneuil-sur-Avre, Alençon, Avranches and Pontorson. Current SNCF/TER and regional bus times should be checked before travelling.

The most rewarding part of the route is the way it builds slowly: the urban departure from the parvis de Notre-Dame, the forests west of Paris, the Perche and Normandy bocage, then the final approach through Avranches, Pontaubault, Pontorson and Beauvoir towards Le Mont-Saint-Michel. The finish across the bay landscape is exceptional, but the safe approach is by the causeway/footbridge; do not cross the bay sands without a licensed guide because of fast tides and quicksand.

For a successful walk, carry reliable mapping or the official FFRandonnée topo-guide, follow the red-and-white GR waymarks carefully, book rural nights early, and keep each day's distance honest. In autumn and winter, take additional care in forest and rural areas where hunting may be active. Planned well, the GR22 is one of France's great lowland endurance walks: long, practical, historically rich and far more demanding than its modest altitude suggests.