



“Spectacular South West”

Customised Sample Tour in the Dordogne, France

The southwestern French region of Perigord, or as many of us know it, the “Dordogne”, is a feast of historic sites, perched villages and deep river valleys in the “land of 1,000 chateaux” – another castle seemingly appearing at almost every bend in the road and on every rocky outcrop. This truly is one of the most spectacular regions of France, with its beautiful honey coloured stone buildings, dramatic scenery and temperate climate. History comes alive in the Dordogne; a culture dating from the extraordinary 15,000 year-old prehistoric cave paintings to life in Medieval France and the gruesome stories of the Hundred Years War and Richard the Lionheart.

Perigord is renowned for its love of food and wine, and boasts an ancient gastronomic heritage. It’s known as the foie gras, duck and truffle capital of France. Every season also brings its own superb natural larder, including spring’s white asparagus, morel mushrooms and strawberries; summer’s bounty of fresh fruit; autumn’s walnuts, wild ceps and girolle mushrooms; and the famed black truffles of winter. There is also a great variety of local cheeses such as Cabécou, which is made from raw goat’s milk, and the soft walnut-liqueur-washed cheese crafted by the monks at Abbaye d'Echourgnac. The full bodied red & luscious white wines of nearby Bordeaux make the perfect accompaniment.

This itinerary suits a group perfectly; relaxed travelling, with a combination of some of the most picturesque medieval towns and villages in France, colourful country markets, stunning countryside, amazing historic sites, wonderful food and wine and plenty of free time to simply enjoy the environs of your beautiful villa “Le Village” (this is a suggested property only, to give you an idea of what can be rented in the Dordogne)... with gorgeous convivial outdoor areas, indoor and al fresco dining, tastefully decorated ensuite bedrooms, heated pool, bicycles... overlooking beautiful views and the 13th century Chateau Fenelon.

ITINERARY

DAY ONE

Our tour begins with an afternoon pick up at a central location in Bordeaux. To get to Bordeaux, we recommend taking the train from Paris (quicker and easier than flying) and there are also some direct flights from London; alternatively, a few days in Bordeaux is a delightful stay and we can recommend some fabulous hotels. After meeting at the designated pick-up point, we’ll transfer to our private villa in the Dordogne.

This evening, as we will have only just arrived, we suggest a chef-catered dinner at the villa.



1/16 Hurry Place
Pahran Vic 3181
0413 055 360



DAY TWO

Today we'll make a leisurely start to the day, enjoy our first breakfast at the villa, and then begin our discovery of medieval France with a visit to the 12th century feudal village of Beynac. The chateau of Beynac is ancient – built in the time of Richard the Lionheart – and it has undergone a fantastic restoration which enables visitors to see it in all its glory, filled with colourful tapestries, frescoes and fireplaces. Looking out from the castle ramparts you'll see several other castles close by, a reminder that during the Hundred Years War more than 1000 castles were built in the Dordogne to support the fight against the British. Beynac has featured in a couple of well-known films set in the Dordogne, including *Chocolat* and *The Joan of Arc Story*. We'll get the bus to drop us at the chateau, at the top of a magnificent rocky outcrop, and it's a gorgeous walk downhill through the village to the river after we've finished our visit.

There's nothing like a long lunch, dining al fresco, at a good French country restaurant. So let's do that today! We can do a light dinner on the terrace at the villa this evening – supplies will have been organised in advance, for the first couple of days.

DAY THREE

Today we'll explore the exquisite town of Sarlat-La-Caneda, a short drive from the villa. Known to the locals simply as "Sarlat", this is one of my favourite towns in all of France – it's jaw droppingly beautiful! Due to impeccable restoration after WW2, under the direction of the French Resistance hero and Minister of Culture Andre Malraux, Sarlat has remained beautifully preserved and one of the towns that is most representative of 14th century France. It's a delight to wander in, especially in the evenings when the stone buildings of the old town are illuminated, creating a magical ambience. Picture cobblestone streets and laneways, magnificent historic architecture, and numerous atmospheric cafes and restaurants dotted throughout the town.

With that in mind, after relaxing at the villa this afternoon, we will return to Sarlat for dinner at the renowned "Le Presidial", seat of the royal court in the 17th century... with fantastic outdoor dining on the terrace.

DAY FOUR

Today, something totally different... and a must-do when you're visiting the Dordogne! The Vezere Valley is famous throughout the world for its prehistoric caves and cave paintings, mainly of animals that the first *Homo Sapiens* hunted, including the now extinct mammoth. They are incredible.

The Grotte de Font de Gaume was discovered in 1901 by a local schoolmaster. It had been known by the local population prior to that but they did not realise the significance of the paintings (they used to have the odd party in the caves, not realising they were surrounded by 15,000 year old works of art)! This is the only remaining site in France with polychrome paintings open to the public.

At Font de Gaume you'll be seeing the real thing - actual extraordinary pictures created by the Palaeolithic artists, who used colours derived from mineral oxides, carbon and ochre, and utilised various binders including spit, animal fat, urine, water and blood. What is even more amazing is the technique they created using the natural shape of the rock face to create the contours of the animals' bodies. All by the light of oil lamps! Experts call this cave "one of the six giants" of Palaeolithic art. Visitor numbers are limited each year – we organise the visit many months in advance – and we will walk through the cave with an expert guide showing us the paintings by torchlight.

Afterwards, we'll stop in the little village of Les Eyzies for lunch and then continue with a visit to La Roque St Christophe, the largest cave site in Western Europe. This ancient troglodyte village comprises a series of small caves and a huge kilometre long ledge, sitting on a rocky outcrop with spectacular views across the countryside. These natural cavities were occupied by man from prehistoric times, then modified in the Middle Ages, to become a troglodyte fort and city until the early Renaissance. La Roque is like an open book on 55,000 years of human survival!

Self-catered dinner on the terrace at the villa this evening.



DAY FIVE

Today is the Wednesday market in Sarlat – this is one of the best markets of the region and you can browse a superb range of local produce, as well as clothing, jewellery, pottery and linen in the boutiques. We'll take plenty of time to enjoy the market, buy stuff for our lunch and then head over to the beautiful riverside village of La Roque Gageac, classified as one of the “plus beaux villages de France” (as is Beynac – there are a whopping 22 of these villages in the Dordogne!).

We'll have a relaxed picnic on the banks of the river (with local wine, of course), with the little village meandering the hillside behind us, and then spend an hour cruising on a “Gabare” or traditional Dordogne riverboat. There are fabulous views of the village and several chateaux, including Castelnaud, from the river.

Self-catered dinner on the terrace at the villa this evening.

DAY SIX

This morning we'll take a drive along the Dordogne to visit the Chateau of Castelnaud, with its fascinating medieval military museum and stunning views over the Dordogne Valley. The Lords of Castelnaud spent the Middle Ages pretty much in semi-permanent conflict with the Barons of Beynac, across the valley, but also spent much of the Hundred Years War (which in fact lasted 116 years) being passed back and forth between the English and French forces. To add to their pain, even before the Hundred Years War in 1214 the Lord of Castelnaud was besieged and lost control of his home, because he was a Cathar, part of that doomed group of “heretics” who were cleansed from the sacred soil of France during a crusade led by Pope Innocent III (a misnamed man if ever there was one!).

One of the highlights of a visit to Castelnaud is their collection of Medieval war machines including the enormous Trebuchet. Trebuchets came in handy for catapulting just about anything at your enemies, including rocks, boiling tar, fire, and rotting and disease-ridden bodies. Nice.

We can eat a light lunch at an outdoor restaurant near Castelnaud before returning to the villa for a relaxing afternoon by the pool.

We suggest this evening we have the bus come back and pick us up to transfer to Sarlat, to again enjoy the atmosphere of the town in the evening. This time, you choose where you want to eat, from one of the many cute little restaurants scattered throughout the town.

DAY SEVEN

Perched on a hilltop 150 metres overlooking the Dordogne Valley below, the views from the village of Domme are breathtaking. This is of course why bastide (fortified medieval) towns were built in such places, in order to see enemies approaching and to have the high ground in case of attack. Constructed in 1281 at the behest of the French King Philip III, Domme served as a key strategic defence in the Hundred Years War.

Another of ‘The Most Beautiful Villages of France’, Domme is different, however, to the villages we've already seen this week. For one thing, the fortified walls are still standing, so we can walk under the town's arches and explore the ramparts. Incredibly, you can still see graffiti etched into stone walls by the Knights Templar who were imprisoned and sentenced to death here in the early 14th century.

There's a couple of great little restaurants in town to have a light lunch, before we go back to the villa to enjoy our last afternoon.

For our final evening, I suggest a chef-catered dinner at the villa which leaves us free to relax and be pampered!

DAY EIGHT

Today we'll be leaving our beautiful villa and returning to Bordeaux. On the way we will stop for lunch at St Emilion, famous for its vineyards and superb wines. Saint Emilion is the oldest active wine producing appellation in the Bordeaux region, with a history that dates back to the times of the ancient Romans; in fact, numerous Roman ruins are scattered all over the St. Emilion vineyards. The Jurade of St Emilion was formed in 1199 and St. Emilion was the first region in Bordeaux to export their wines to Britain.

St Emilion himself was a miracle-working Benedictine monk who lived in a cave here between AD 750 and 767. One of the most renowned miracles he performed (apparently on a regular basis!) was to cure women of infertility. The village grew up around his presence and later on became a stop on pilgrimage routes, which in turn gave rise to a number of religious monuments, including the largest monolithic church in Europe. This is incredible – the church's belfry sits at the top of the village and the ground level is at the very bottom of the village, extending underground. St Emilion's cobblestone streets wind down the hill to end at the town square, which is the perfect place to have lunch in the sunshine before continuing to Bordeaux.

You may choose to stay in Bordeaux for a couple of nights; or continue on to Paris, easily reached by train and air. There are also regular flights to London, and train services continue south into Spain.

MEALS: The meals in this itinerary are suggestions only – you are a group of friends and may wish to do things differently! We have just made suggestions based on a range of choices so that a couple of nights we'll be self-catering, a couple of nights enjoying local restaurants, and the first and final nights being catered as you will probably feel less like organising yourselves on those nights.

PRICES ON APPLICATION AND WILL DEPEND ON THE SIZE OF THE GROUP, FINAL ITINERARY AND STANDARD OF ACCOMMODATION.

VILLA "LE VILLAGE"



"Le Village is a collection of four pretty stone buildings, La Balade, a five bedroom stone house with swimming pool; La Cour , a beautiful stone four bedroom property said to date from the 17th century, with a 10m swimming pool and a chapel suitable for big dinners or parties; and La Loge and La Maisonette, two one bedroom cottages. Set in beautiful gardens and surrounded by green fields, Le Village is a serene and secluded retreat with all modern comforts on hand. Interiors are a charming mix of original features, with wooden ceiling beams and exposed stonewalls, and comfortable and stylish furnishings, while outside spaces boast private terraces and pool patios with countryside views."

Bikes are also available for those who like to cycle.