

FRANCE –THE HAUT QUERCY & LOT RIVER VALLEY

7-days / 6-nights – our most popular GUIDED culinary walks based at St Cirq Lapopie & Mauroux



Over several years we have developed a wonderful selection of small group fully guided walking tours in France. In the Lot or Dordogne Valleys of southwest France, on one of the prettiest sections of the Way of St James (*Chemin St Jacques*) in the Massif Centrale, walks in the Basque Pyrenees region bordering northern Spain and in Catalonia on the Spanish Mediterranean coast. Quality accommodation, food and wine play an important role in each itinerary, as do the seasons, seasonal foods and flowers especially in autumn.

This area of southwest France, known as the 'Quercy', bordering the Dordogne and the region of Occitanie, was given by Eleanor of Aquitaine to Henri d'Anjou in 1152, two years before he became Henry II of England, and its beauty and timelessness has changed little since. The Lot River is one of the most beautiful rivers of France (along with the Dordogne and the Tarn) and this holiday will show you why. The Haut Quercy and Dordogne are known today as the gastronomic heart of France.

Our English-speaking host and guide has lived in the southwest of France for many years, enthused by the romance and beauty of the area. His love of the flora and fauna, fascination for the region's food, wine and local traditions and his personal contacts, make these very special holiday experiences offering considerably more than you could find as an individual traveller.

These bespoke small group walking holidays are very much in the theme of informal and very personal house parties staying in the most charming, quality auberges where the beds and bathrooms are usually spacious and very comfortable with lovely views often over the Lot Valley and the surrounding countryside.

Cost from: **\$4640** per person twin share Single room supplement from \$745 (limited availability)

Departs: Ask for details

Tour includes: 6 nights in comfortable, quality hotels, inns and private homes with ensuite bathroom; All meals and wine (and pre meal evening drinks); Fully guided walking, support staff and vehicle, luggage transfers, All local transport for the walks and knowledgeable guides; Maximum group size of 14.

Not included: Transport to and from the walk and personal expenses

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations

Suggested itinerary:

Day 1 We meet in the morning at Toulouse airport and drive into Toulouse to have lunch in one of your hosts favourite restaurants. After lunch we continue to Albi to visit the massive cathedral built as a statement to the Cathars not to mess with the church again! In the afternoon we continue to the medieval village of St Cirq Lapopie, This village, voted as THE prettiest village in France sits in an outstanding position over the river Lot surrounded by iron red and manganese blue cliffs. People say this is a miracle of medieval beauty and staying here is a truly magical experience. We stay at a small auberge in the heart of the village for four nights. All bedrooms have bathrooms en suite. Dinner is in St Cirq Lapopie.

"St Cirq Lapopie cast a singular spell over me of the kind that holds you in its grasp forever" André Breton. Leader of the Surrealist movement.

Day 2 After breakfast we start our walk to Chateau Couanac. This 16th century chateau was once owned by the Prince Bishops of Cahors and sits majestically like a ship moored at sea in its massive oakland estate. We will stop for a picnic lunch under the poplar trees and limestone cliffs before continuing on foot to the chateau. We return to St Cirq Lapopie by vehicle. You have the option to return by vehicle to St Cirq after lunch allowing for free time in the afternoon to explore the village's artisan shops and pretty streets. Dinner tonight in St Cirq Lapopie. **Walk @ 9km + optional 7km**

Day 3 We drive after breakfast into the Célé river valley and walk the 'Four Bridges' weaving from valley floor with poplars and chequered with fields of corn stooks up to the cliffs affording beautiful views. This is an extraordinary timeless landscape where it feels as though nothing has changed since the Middle Ages. We picnic in historic Marcilhac beside an abbey which was sacked by the English in the Hundred Years War. In the afternoon we set off on foot downstream where the last of the stone bridges spans the babbling brook before driving back to the hotel. Dinner in St Cirq Lapopie. **Walk: @ 14km**

Day 4 After breakfast we drive to the small town of Limogne in the heart of the cause and walk towards Château Couanac. This is a quieter walking day. We will have lunch in a hugely popular local restaurant. In the afternoon we drive to the Château Cénévieres perched above and overlooking the river and across to a pretty hilltop village. This beautiful chateau is steeped in history. It has been in the hands of the same family since they bought it from the former Minister for War to Louis XVI in 1793. After visiting the chateau there is an optional walk back to St Cirq Lapopie. Dinner is in the village. **Walk @ 7km + optional 7km**

Day 5 We leave St Cirq on foot, descending to an ancient tow path, carved by bargemen into the cliffs alongside the river, part of the historic Chemin de St Jacques or Way of St James. This is a wonderfully picturesque walk. We drive to the medieval city of Cahors for market day, an excellent restaurant lunch near the cathedral, then continue through the Quercy Blanc landscape. We visit the famous medieval masterpiece of the Pont Valentré and pass through the tiny bastide of Castelfranc before arriving at the charming Quercy manor house Le Vert where we stay for two nights. Le Vert is characterised by impeccable hospitality and food, and the bedrooms and en suite bathrooms are spacious and well-appointed. **Walk @ 5km**

Day 6 A short drive to Château Chambert and then a walk over Jurassic limestone plateaux and valleys. We pass through vineyards and tiny villages before arriving for a good basic French cuisine lunch in a popular café routier. In the afternoon we visit the medieval 16th Century castle of Bonaguil built by Baron Berenger de Roquefeuil. We drive back to the manor house for a break before our farewell dinner. **Walk @ 10km**

Day 7 The tour ends after breakfast with a transfer to Toulouse Airport



Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations



Other **Outdoor Travel** walking holidays in this style included gastronomic walks in rural **Suffolk** in England in summer and **The Best of the St James Way**, taking in the route of the *Chemin St Jacques / Way of St James* from Le Puy en Velay to Conques in France and in the **Basque Country** region of the Pyrenees bordering Spain with a visit to the Guggenheim in Bilbao. If you are interested in good food and cooking **Outdoor Travel** also offer the **Dordogne Quercy, French Cooking and Walking, A Taste of Truffles** – ask for details:

Contact OUTDOOR TRAVEL for more details, brochures and reservations

- Call Toll free on 1800 331 582 or (03) 57551743 or Fax (03) 57501020
- Email info@outdoortravel.com.au
- Web: <http://www.outdoortravel.com.au>
- Mail: Outdoor Travel Pty Ltd, PO Box 286, Bright, VIC 3741, Australia