

France: Dordogne 10-day tour

Tour code: JDD10

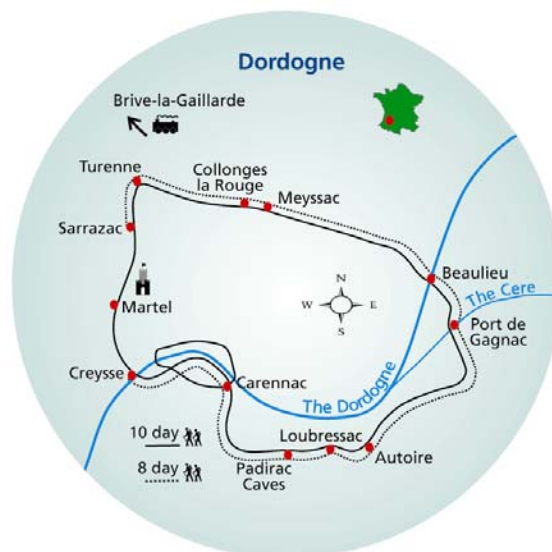
Revised: October 09

We offer two tours in this area, an 8-day tour and a 10-day tour. Much of the route is common to both.

The 10-day tour is a circuit of approx. 120km, in the area of the Upper Dordogne Valley. This is a region largely away from normal tourist haunts in the Departments of Correze and Lot. The scenery is varied, taking in the limestone plateaux or Causses, covered mainly with rough pasture & scrub oak, and then later wooded hills, which slope steeply down to the Dordogne at the delightful former river port of Beaulieu. The route skirts the natural amphitheatre of the Cirque de Montvalent, whose great cliffs overhang the Dordogne between Carennac and Creysse, and visits the historic towns of Creysse and Martel. Six villages on this tour are on the unofficial but prestigious list of '143 most beautiful villages in France'.

Curemonte, stretched out along a ridge; the gentlemen's houses or *gentilhommières* of Autoire; Loubressac, on a high spur above the Dordogne valley; Carennac, with its elaborate abbey church;

Turenne, encircling a hilltop castle; and the celebrated red sandstone village of Collonges-la-Rouge. Castles, stone-built mediaeval villages, ruins and caves lend daily interest to the circuit, 'une surprise a chaque pas'. The individual, family - run hotels offer the sort of cooking that people come to France for, and several have noted chefs. This is the land of truffles, foie gras, magret de canard and rich dark wines.



Information & reservations call Outdoor Travel (03) 57 501441

Arrival: Between 5pm and 7pm on first day.

First hotel: Meysac, 2km from Collonges-la-Rouge, 25 km from mainline railway station at Brive (cost approx. 45 Euros per taxi, or + 40% on Sundays and holidays and from 7am to 7pm).

End of Tour: As first hotel. Taxi to train station at Brive.

Travel:

- By air to Toulouse, daily flights on British Airways from Heathrow. Followed by shuttle bus (20 min) then 2hr 15 min non-TGV train journey to Brive. (But infrequent trains, especially on Saturdays). Then train to Quatre Routes plus taxi, or taxi direct from Brive to first hotel.
- By air to Paris. Direct flights from Heathrow and many regional airports to Paris CDG, then RER and metro to Paris Austerlitz and 4 hour non-TGV train journey to Brive, plus train to Quatre Routes and taxi, or taxi direct from Brive to first hotel.
- By car ferry or Le Shuttle tunnel Dover to Calais then 800km drive via Paris and Brive. (Or overnight ferries Portsmouth - le Havre or Caen.)
- By Eurostar and train, St Pancras-Paris-Brive. Train times vary greatly but can be checked on Rail Europe's website at www.sncf.com
- Alternatively book Land Only and use cheap flights such as Ryanair London (Stansted) - Limoges or Rodez, plus taxi and Sncf Limoges to Brive etc, or Rodez - St. Denis Pres Martel,

plus taxi to Meysac. (But infrequent return trains may necessitate an overnight stay in Rodez).

Season: April to mid-October

Level of Difficulty

Fitness: This tour is graded: 'Moderate' This should present no difficulties for anyone in reasonable condition and accustomed to walking.

Day stages: 14km to 22km per day with average altitude gains of 350m. 4 to 7 hours walking per day.

Waymarks: Waymarks for the 10-day tour are usually Grande Randonnee style (white over red). The trail follows in the main, well-established paths and presents no special difficulties. (Very occasionally you may encounter short sections somewhat overgrown with stinging nettles or brambles; gloves and/or a small pair of secateurs could be useful here). Gloves or secateurs could be useful for occasional overgrown sections.

General Information

Baths: it is not normal for your room to have a bath, the main reason being that it takes up a lot of space, some hotels/guesthouses may have a separate room in the house where a bath is available to guests, but in the main it is showers.

Breakfast: in countries such as France/Italy/Spain/Greece etc are usually coffee and toast/croissant, if you want more for breakfast then we would suggest you purchase some food the night before. It is important for you to tell us if you have any dietary requirements when you book your holiday so that we can inform everyone that you are staying with.

Single Supplements: are payable on most of our tours. The single supplement guarantees the privacy of your own room, however, rooms can at times be small and in some places may not enjoy the same facilities as double/twin rooms.

Language: Don't expect everyone to speak English, please try to learn a bit of French and take a phrase book

Luggage: When staying in hotels, sometimes your luggage will have been taken to your room awaiting your arrival. However don't be surprised if your luggage is waiting for you to take it up to your room.

Accommodation & Meals

Accommodation is on a half board basis (evening meal, bed and breakfast each night) in country inns and auberges. All the accommodation has ensuite facilities. Picnic lunches are not included in the tour cost but are available from hotels at a cost of around 10-12 Euros (order the previous evening) or materials can usually be bought from local shops. We indicate in the route notes the various possibilities for each day.

- ❑ **Nights 1 & 9:** A comfortable hotel (** Logis) with pool near the centre of the pretty market town of Meyssac, 2km from Collonges-la-Rouge. Like Collonges, Meyssac is mainly built of the local deep red sandstone.
- ❑ **Night 2:** Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne. A well-appointed hotel (**) in a quiet street, close to the Dordogne, where you can dine overlooking the water on a summer's evening.
- ❑ **Night 3:** Port de Gagnac. Old established family-run hotel (**) overlooking the River Cere. The restaurant is a favourite with many of our customers.
- ❑ **Night 4:** Autoire. A pleasant old auberge (**Logis) with modernized bedrooms in the centre of this charming village dominated by cliffs and a waterfall.
- ❑ **Nights 5 & 6:** Carennac. An elegant family-run hotel (** Logis) with swimming pool in the centre of this lovely and historic village on the banks of the Dordogne. Excellent restaurant with a good local reputation.
- ❑ **Night 7:** Creysse. Another family run hotel (** Logis) with pool in the centre of a delightful little village. A stream runs beneath the hotel and its terrace.
- ❑ **Night 8:** Sarrazac. The cellar of this establishment (**Logis) was formerly a smithy where, three generations ago, the blacksmith's wife would serve refreshments to waiting customers. The hoteliers are as hospitable as their ancestors, the smithy has vanished, and guests are housed in a venerable building with swimming pool nearby.
- ❑ **Night 9:** As night 1.

Outline itinerary

- ❑ **Day 1:** Arrive at the first accommodation in Meyssac.
- ❑ **Day 2:** Meyssac to Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne 22km. Over undulating country to Curemonte, a mediaeval village where the writer Colette once lived. The day ends with a long descent of an ancient cobbled mule-track into Beaulieu. Don't miss the abbey church with its magnificent doorway. A footbridge links the pleasant waterfront of Beaulieu with the

further bank of the Dordogne, where there are tennis courts and a swimming pool.

❑ **Day 3:** Beaulieu to Port de Gagnac, 17km. Great views as you climb out of the Dordogne Valley on the GR 480. From the crest you descend through splendid mixed woodland of chestnut, oak, and conifers, past a trout farm to the valley of the Cere, once a navigable river. One or two short sections of the day's walk are little frequented and may be rather overgrown in summer. The village of Gagnac (1.5km) is worth a visit, particularly if you are lucky enough to find the church open. Your route notes will have the details covering this.

❑ **Day 4:** Port de Gagnac to Autoire, 15km. A walk through mixed farming country and the one serious wine-growing district on the tour (Glanes). It is a surprise to stumble upon the dramatic red bulk of Castelnaud Castle, built on a shoulder of red ironstone. The village of Autoire with its '*gentilhommières*' or manorial house and waterfall is unforgettable. [Occasionally continue to Loubressac for the night.]

❑ **Day 5:** Autoire to Carennac 15km/19km. After a steep ascent past the limestone crags of the Cirque d'Autoire the next hour is spent crossing a typical *causse* plateau of oak scrub and dry-stone walls to the village of Loubressac on its panoramic hilltop. The 10km option follows the edge of the scarp past the ruined castle at Taillefer to Carennac. The 14km walk diverts to take in the Gouffre de Padirac where a vast chasm in the limestone plateau opens into a most interesting cave system incorporating a 1km trip on an underground river. The day ends with an abrupt descent to Carennac on the banks of the Dordogne.

❑ **Day 6:** Rest day in Carennac. Time to explore this well-preserved mediaeval village. There are various possibilities for walks on both sides of the Dordogne. We describe a circular day's walk of about 15km.

❑ **Day 7:** Carennac to Creysse. 20km. A walk along the heights, with views over the Dordogne river, then close below the limestone cliffs overhanging the tiny village of Gluges, before crossing farmland to the ancient village of Creysse, clustered around a little rocky hill crowned by an ancient twin-aisled church.

❑ **Day 8:** Creysse to Sarrazac 19km. The day starts gently, heading north along a pleasant valley, before ascending steeply onto the limestone plateau or Causse de Martel. Martel retains its covered market square and the house is still visible where Henry II's son, Henry Court-Mantel (so called from the new short cloak he made fashionable) died of his wounds after sacking Rocamadour in 1183. The route continues through scrub oak and along rocky paths to the tiny old village of Sarrazac.

❑ **Day 9:** Sarrazac to Collonges la Rouge 18km. Passing through the ancient village of l'Hopital St Jean (the site of a mediaeval leper hospital), your walk takes in Turenne, the former capital of the region, its houses straggling picturesquely down from the ruined castle. Woods and rolling farmland lead to the glowing red turrets and Romanesque church of Collonges la Rouge. The small town of Meyssac, also mostly of fine red sandstone, is some 2 km further on.

For reservations call Outdoor Travel on (03) 57 501441

Escorted Research & Development trip for 2010:

EJDD29 Thursday 29 April – Saturday 08 May