

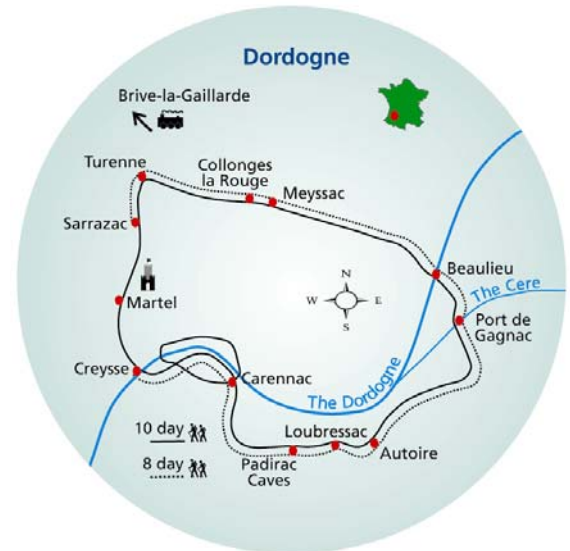
France: Dordogne 8-day tour

Tour code: JDD8

Revised: October 07

We offer two tours in this area, a 7-night/8 day tour and a 9-night/10 day tour. Much of the route is common to both.

The 8-day tour is a circuit of approx. 100km 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 and then later wooded hills, which slope steeply down to the Dordogne at the delightful former river port of Beaulieu. Six villages on this tour are on the unofficial but prestigious list of the '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.



Travel Information

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

First hotel: At Sarrazac 25 km from main line railway station at Brive (cost approx. 35 Euros per taxi, + 40% on Sundays and holidays and 7am to 7pm).

Nearest Airports:

- Paris
- Toulouse

Travel

- 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. Then train to Quatre Routes, plus taxi, or taxi direct from Brive to first hotel.
- By air to Toulouse, daily flights on British Airways or Air France with a small supplement from Heathrow. Followed by 20 min shuttle bus ride then, 2hr 15 min non-TGV train journey to Brive. (But infrequent trains, especially Saturdays).
- 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, then taxi and train to Brive from Limoges or to St Denis pres Martel or Quatre Routes from Rodez (but infrequent trains back to Rodez means you may need to allow a night's stop there).

End of tour: The last hotel is at Creysse. Return via taxi to train station at St Denis pres Martel *or* at Souillac. Both stations are served by trains to Brive (for Paris). Rail tickets (Brive Paris) are included in the Air and Rail Travel package.

Season

April to mid-October

Level of Difficulty

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

Day stages: 15km to 22km per day with average altitude gains of 350m. 3 to 7 hours walking per day.

Waymarks: Waymarks for this 8-day tour are everywhere 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.

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) in country inns and auberges. The rooms all have en-suite 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 route notes the various possibilities for each day.

❑ **Night 1:** 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. Tiny Mme Aussel and her jolly daughter Chantal are as hospitable as their ancestors, the smithy has vanished, and guests are housed in a venerable building with swimming pool nearby.

❑ **Night 2:** Meyssac. A delightful stone building (** Logis) in the heart of town. The interior has been totally modernized with style and individuality. The extensive garden behind the hotel features a swimming pool. As an alternative we occasionally use a chambre d'hote in the countryside near Collonges.

❑ **Night 3:** 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 4:** Port de Gagnac. Old established family-run hotel (**) overlooking the River Cere. Previous clients have remarked on the high quality of the food.

❑ **Night 5:** Autoire. A pleasant old auberge (**Logis) with modernized bedrooms in the centre of this charming old village, dominated by cliffs and a waterfall.

❑ **Night 5 (alternative):** Loubressac. A recently modernised hotel (** Logis) in the middle of the very pretty village and opposite the 'village green.' The XVc fortified village is situated at a height of 380m on the edge of a scarp and there are splendid views over the valley to the north.

❑ **Night 6:** Carennac. An elegant family-run hotel (** Logis) with swimming pool in the centre of this lovely and historic little 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 center of this delightful village. A stream flows beneath the hotel and its terrace.

Outline Itinerary

❑ **Day 1:** Arrive at the tiny village of Sarrazac, deep in a green valley on the edge of the Causse de Martel.

❑ **Day 2:** Sarrazac to Meyssac. 17km Near the half-way point is the picturesque village of Turenne, with its famous castle towering over the surrounding countryside. The dark red sandstone of Collonges' mullioned windows and towers is a stunning sight, as you approach it in the afternoon. We use a comfortable hotel of the same attractive stone in nearby Meyssac or occasionally a Chambre d'Hote in quiet countryside just South of Collonges.

❑ **Day 3:** 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 leading into Beaulieu. Don't miss the abbey church with its magnificent doorway. A footbridge links Beaulieu with the further bank of the Dordogne, where there are tennis courts and a swimming pool.

❑ **Day 4:** Beaulieu to Port de Gagnac, 17km. Great views as you climb out of the Dordogne Valley on the GR 480. From the crest the route descends through splendid mixed woodland of chestnut, oak and conifers, past a trout farm to the valley of the River Cere. One or two short sections of the days 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; we include details of the key-holder in the route notes.

❑ **Day 5:** 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 Castelnau Castle, built on a shoulder of red ironstone. The village of Autoire and its 'gentilhommières' or manorial houses are unforgettable. Occasionally the day continues to Loubressac (20km).

❑ **Day 6:** 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 with its broad panorama. The shorter option then follows the edge of the scarp past the ruined castle at Taillefer to Carennac. The longer option diverts to take in the Gouffre de Padirac where a huge gulf in the limestone plateau opens into a most interesting cave system incorporating a 1km trip on an underground river. The day ends with a sharp descent to Carennac on the banks of the Dordogne.

❑ **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:** Departure from Creysse.

A taxi ride to the train station at St Denis-pres-Martel (15km), from where there are regular trains north to Brive, and less frequently south to Toulouse (with change of trains at Capdenac). Alternatively taxi to Souillac train station, which is on the main Brive-Toulouse line.