

### France: Gironde, Vineyards to the Ocean

Tour code: CGR

Revised: Nov 05

This is a self-guided, easy going, hotel-based on-road cycle tour exploring the delights of the Gironde region. This is the viticultural and forest area lying between the Dordogne and Gironne river (both tributaries of the Gironde) and the Atlantic Ocean, by the bay and dunes around Arachon. Apart from the rolling nature of some of the vineyards, the ride is generally flattish and covers only up to about 50km per day, so you will have plenty of time for relaxing, looking around and perhaps having a few extended picnics. All in all it is a tour for leisure and for enjoying the ample delights of rural France – and especially the great Bordeaux cru.

Before The Hundred Years War 1337-1456, the region was run by the 'English' Plantagenet Kings and supplied the bulk of the wine for England, as well as supplying tithes to the absentee monarchs. Hopefully you will get the chance to sample quite a few of these wines. There is quite a lot of variety on the tour, from the Parc National Regional des Landes de Gascogne, to the bastide towns of Cadillac and Chateau Malrome. However perhaps the main emphasis of the tour is water - the rivers that you pass on the way, the Bay of Arcachon and the little oyster villages that you pass along the seaside towards the end of the tour.

#### Season

Start any day, March to November.

#### Level of Difficulty

Grade B (Moderate cycling), over flattish terrain – can be warm. Day stages 39 to 50km. The terrain is relatively flat, with short climbs out of the river valleys onto the intervening vineyard areas. This makes cycling easy and enjoyable.

#### The Bikes

On this tour bike hire is included in the tour price and no security deposit is required.

The bikes are 21-speed hybrid bikes equipped with aluminium frame, lock saddlebag, pump, basic repair kit, water holder and key lock. You can bring youngish children on this tour as the bike supplier can provide a trailer. Helmets are also included if you want them, but we would recommend that for sizing and hygiene reasons that you bring your own. Please bring your own drinks bottles. Road assistance will be given in the event of serious breakage or damage.

Before travelling, we will need to be advised your height and inside leg measurements, so that we can organize for the correct bikes to be available for your arrival.

#### Maps & Route Notes

We provide adapted maps

We also provide specially researched route descriptions.

#### Accommodation & Meals

Hotels normally with en suite shower and WC. Note that the hotels described below may vary depending upon the availability. Half board on 5 nights, B&B only on 2 nights. Picnic lunches are not included in the tour price but are available from hotels or local shops. We indicate in the route notes where there are suitable restaurants or cafes for lunch stops, or recommend you carry food if there are none convenient to the route.

❑ **Night 1. In Capien** here you will be at a 'Bacchus' 3 star wine estate hotel, actually a chateau. You will be given wine with your meal here and you will be able to sample many more. This chateau overlooks the Garonne, 30km to the south of Bordeaux. There is an attractive living room and a large park to wander around the grounds. Dinner & Breakfast included.

❑ **Night 2: In Saint Macaire.** We stay in a three star hotel in the heart of the Mediaeval city. This was an old merchant's house dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and has been completely renovated to provide the perfect combination of beauty of local heritage with the latest modern facilities. Dinner & Breakfast are included.

❑ **Night 3: In Saint Symphorien Village,** you will stay at a charming house, with a small swimming pool in the garden. The rooms are very well appointed with the emphasis on whiteness, light and linen. Fittings replicate Georgian era furnishings. Dinner & Breakfast are provided.

❑ **Night 4: In Le Barp** is spent in a 2 star hotel in the nice countryside. It is a stone built building with a terrace tangled in suspended vines. The place is popular for its local cooking. Dinner, & breakfast are included.

❑ **Night 5, 6 & 7: In Acachon.** We stay at an attractive 3 star hotel in the heart of the town, 150metres from the beach. The hotel has comfortable standard rooms, living room and a shady garden. Breakfasts and dinner on the first night are included.

#### Arrival

Our Flights are to Bordeaux via British Airways from London Gatwick. If you would prefer to go by train, then you will need to contact us. Train prices may vary more throughout the year.

The starting point of the tour is Capien, near to Bordeaux, You arrive at the railway station or the airport and transfer to the first hotel by a taxi (Included in the tour price) where you will be warmly received. You will also get your route book and any extra documentation there. The area is in the middle of the wine growing area.

Air and rail tickets are included for UK-based full-package customers. You will receive up-to-date train times for your date of travel, or alternatively you can visit Rail Europe's website at [www.sncf.com](http://www.sncf.com) (text in French or English), or at [www.bahn.de](http://www.bahn.de) (text in German, but a very fast and efficient site, with all changes of train detailed). Alternatively you can check out the links from our website at [www.sherpaexpeditions.com](http://www.sherpaexpeditions.com)

## Itinerary Guide

**Day 1. Arrive in Bordeaux and transfer to Capian is included.** The starting point of the tour is Capian, near to Bordeaux, You arrive at the railway station or the airport and you will be transferred to the first hotel where you will be warmly received. You will need to give us previously details of arrival times and locations etc, if you are a 'Land only' customer. You will also get your route book, bike and any extra documentation there. The area is in the middle of the wine growing area and dinner will be served in the company of your hosts.

**Day 2. Capian to Saint Macaire 35 km approx.** This ride takes you into the 'Entre-Deux-Mer' area. Cycling through the Premeieres Cotes de Bordeaux winegrowing area. You get some superb views of the Garonne River and visit the charming old merchant town called Saint Macaire as well as Cadillac where you can visit former residences of the artist Henri Toulouse – Lautrec and the writer Francois Mauriac. This is an old 'bastide' town and the chateau is worth a look

□ **Day 3. Saint Macaire to Saint Symphorien 38 km approx.** From the village you cross to the left bank of the Garonne river, the tour follows the twisting roads through the World famous vines of the Sauternes area, including the jewel in its crown – 'Chateau Yquem.' You pedal onto Budos then through valleys carved out by the River Ciron to Leogats and Nouaillan, then onto Balizac where you enter the 'Landes de Gascogne regional Nature Park,' before reaching Saint Symphorien. Occasionally you may stay in the village of Origine instead which is another 6 km.

□ **Day 4. Saint Symphorien to Le Barp 38 km approx.** Today's ride takes you throughout the Regional Nature park. You will be riding along a lovely little forest road offering great scenic variety and taking you westwards. Heading towards Louchats, the pine forest becomes denser and the scent of pine resin richer. Leave your bike at the site of the lagoons of Gat –Mort. Hosten lake offer plenty of shade by the shore, perfect for an afternoon nap! A cycling track will then take you between pine trees and heather, to the small road leading to Le Barp.

□ **Day 5. Le Barp to the bay of Arcachon and the ocean. 51 km.** Today you begin with a gentle cycle ride along the cycling track to Mios, where you join a minor road as the pine forest gradually thins. Crossing over the railway line takes you to Le Teich where the park meets the sea. You can have a look around the ornithological park and take a break. From here then take the coastal path, with the salt from the bay under your wheels and follow the scent of the sea air to Gujan-Mestras. A link road will connect you with the minor forest road taking you as far as the Atlantic Seaboard. There you can pay a visit to the Dune du Pyla, where you can leave your bike and climb to the top of the highest dune in Europe with great views from the top. Then in your own time roll along to your hotel.

□ **Day 6. Around Cap Ferret.** Today you can take the boat with your bike to cross Arcachon to reach the cap Ferret and ride on the other side of the bay. Leave your bike to walk up to the top of the lighthouse and then pedal on to reach the very pretty village of l'herbe, some reservoirs and the 'Tapper's Shack.' You must however be careful not to miss the last boat departure back across the bay to return to the hotel.

□ **Day 7. Into the Domaine de Certes in Audenge.** Leave Arcachon and take the cycling track via the port of La Teste. Leave the track and visit the 7 oyster ports of Gujan Mestras. This minor road runs around the bay. Then head back to your hotel for your last night.

□ **Day 8. End of Tour.** After breakfast take the train back from Arcachon to Bordeaux, for flight or rail connections (not included approx 9 E).