

FRANCE - BORDEAUX WINE TRAILS

8-days / 7-nights inn-to-inn guided cycling



Bordeaux – the name symbolises some of the most expensive and prestigious wines of the world. This slice of fertile land at the lower reaches of the Dordogne and Garonne Rivers is perhaps the most famous and renowned wine region on earth. But this tour is not just about wine. From the Périgord, we follow the meandering Dordogne River on its downhill trajectory to where it meets the Garonne, through medieval villages and past prehistoric settlements, ancient castles, thickly wooded forests and fields of sunflowers.

There is so much history here. Our tour begins in the epicentre of Palaeolithic man at Les Eyzies, where there are some 150 pre-historic settlements and Stone Age cave art sites. The Romans arrived sometime between the 3rd and 1st Centuries BC, scattering the Celts and the Gauls and bringing the first vines to the region from their homeland. The Romans were later sacked by the Vandals, Visigoths and Franks; Aquitaine, now incorporating Bordeaux, the Périgord and Gascony, was hotly contested over the next few centuries. By the 12th Century it was a Duchy under Eleanor of Aquitaine. Upon her marriage to Henry, Duke of Normandy – later King Henry II of England – the region fell into English hands and remained so for three hundred years. The English love of claret helped Bordeaux develop its reputation for fine wines.

The area suffered heavily during the Hundred Years' War between the French and the English, and the Wars of Religion in the 16th Century between Catholics and Protestants. Many of the fortified bastide towns and castles of the region date to these fierce conflicts. The region is now more peaceful, so we can cycle and sample with few worries. We taste wines from lesser-known appellations like Pécharmant near Bergerac which still provide excellent quality and great value, and the exquisite dessert wines of Monbazillac and Montravel. And we won't forget the more noted appellations including Saint Émilion and Haut Médoc.

Cost from: \$3040 per person, twin-share.

Single supplement from \$735.

Departs: 11th July, 2020.

Grading: Easy to moderate - average 40-65km daily over flat to gently undulating terrain.

Includes: 7 nights in carefully selected 2- and 3-star hotels (all rooms with private bathrooms), breakfast and dinner daily, wine-tasting at vineyards, route notes, luggage transfers, cycle tour guide, hire of quality multi-gear hybrid touring bicycle with helmet, lock, panniers and water bottle, transfers from/to nearby train stations at start and end of tour.

Not included: Lunches, drinks, entrance fees at local attractions, personal expenses.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations



Suggested itinerary: *please note weather and road conditions, group interests and the decision of the tour guide will influence the final route taken each day:*

Day 1: Arrive Angoulême or Les Eyzies

Meet at Angoulême station this afternoon for the transfer to your hotel, or make your own way to the hotel at Les Eyzies. Home to the National Museum of Prehistory and surrounded by archaeological sites, the remains of Stone Age settlements and significant cave art sites, Les Eyzies makes a justifiable claim to the title 'capital of prehistory.' The famous caves of Lascaux, the Cro-Magnon rock shelter where the earliest skeletons of *homo sapiens* were discovered, and the polychrome cave paintings in Font-de-Gaume are all close by.

Our usual hotel is a family-run property in a converted mill on the banks of the river Beune and we are well looked after by our hosts. We dine in the hotel restaurant which specialises in Dordogne cuisine, including duck and foie gras, using local ingredients such as truffles and escargot. The restaurant has an extensive cellar with local and regional wines at reasonable prices.

Day 2: Les Eyzies to Lalinde

cycling @ 40km

Our ride takes us over the 'Cingle de Tremolat' with wonderful views across the Dordogne valley. Lunch is at the lovely bastide town of Limeuil where the Dordogne and Vézère rivers meet. We end the day at Lalinde, another bastide and once an important town where the canal took boat-traffic past the rapids of the Dordogne.

Day 3: Lalinde to Ste-Foy-la-Grand

cycling @ 65km

Today we enter Bordeaux wine country. We're headed for Sainte-Foy-la-Grand, just the other side of the Bergerac appellation, but en route we visit two very special areas within Bergerac.

First up is Pécharment, locally styled as 'the St Émilion of Bergerac'. This appellation dates from long before Bergerac was similarly honoured, and the growers take great pride in their wines. We partake in wine tasting at Château Tiregand, courtesy of le Comte de St Exupéry. The Comte is a lovely bloke, a great host and a highly respected winemaker in the region. He makes wine tasting interesting and a great pleasure.

In the afternoon we continue cycling through Monbazillac, home of exquisite sweet wines, extremely difficult to make. The yields are tiny, and as you'll see the vigneronns are justly proud of their wines. Dominique Vidal, of Château Fonmouges where we sample wines this afternoon, is a specialist with an encyclopaedic knowledge of his subject. Afterwards we pass through Bergerac, with a beautiful old centre and a rich history. We end the day in Ste-Foy, one of the best preserved bastides in France.

Day 4: Ste-Foy to St-Émilion

cycling @ 45km

Today we follow the Dordogne, first passing through the appellation of Montravel. Most wine-drinkers would be hard placed to locate Montravel, but actually it's a fascinating appellation. A single estate can produce wines under five separate *Appellation d'Origin Contrôllée*, and at le Puy Servain we meet one of the finest winemakers in the region. Wine tasting at Puy Servain can be a marathon – we'll have to pace ourselves!

Passing the 'monument of shame' (the Monument Talbot, where the English Admiral Talbot finally lost the Hundred Years' War in 1453) we cycle through Castillon to arrive in St Émilion. St Émilion, with its medieval cobbles, centuries-old wine traditions and ancient monolithic church, is unforgettable. We have the chance to visit Château Belair, one of St Émilion's premier wine estates, for a wine tasting and a tour of their amazing underground caverns, and this evening we eat at one of the top restaurants in St Émilion. Of all of our cycling tours in France, this features perhaps the finest gourmet food of all.

Day 5: St-Émilion to Blaye

cycling @ 65km

A long and rewarding ride today. We leave the Dordogne behind us at Libourne and begin our acquaintance with the Gironde estuary that will last the rest of the week. We pass through St Andre de Cubzac, birthplace and resting place of Jacques Cousteau, and we cycle through Pomerol, Fronsac and the Côtes de Bourg on our way to the Gironde port of Blaye, gateway to Bordeaux. Depending on timing today, we can taste at one of the premier estates in this under-rated appellation, Château Peybonhomme-les-Tours, and perhaps at the Syndicat du Vin in Blaye, courtesy of the aptly named Monsieur Château. Our hotel in Blaye is a delightful auberge, where the owner has a deserved reputation for her adventurous cooking. Blaye boasts a huge Citadelle that once protected the approaches to Bordeaux from the English.

Day 6: Blaye to Pauillac

cycling @ 25km

We cross the Gironde by ferry to Cussac, and make our way to the Bernard family at Château du Raux in the Haut Médoc. This is exactly the popular image of wine-making in France, a family estate producing quality wines as a family business. The son, Patrick, is a highly qualified wine-maker, and provides a fascinating insight into wine – with luck we will taste direct from the barrel. After lunch we visit one of the more famous names of the Haut Médoc at Chateau Lynch-Bages, and time permitting visit the museum at Mouton Rothschild. Normally we avoid the carefully manicured estates of the Grand Cru Classé in the Haut Médoc, but it is fascinating to see the differences. We stay in Pauillac, a world centre of fine wine, for two nights.

Day 7: Pauillac circuit

cycling @ 55km

We 'descend' from the Haut Médoc (literally the High Medoc) to the Médoc and the landscape changes. Centuries ago Dutch engineers built causeways between the gravel areas of the Médoc and drained the land in between to reclaim the land that we cycle through today, and the gravel deposits are where the vineyards are. Leaving the well-known vineyards of the Haut Médoc we can visit two fascinating estates today. At Le Tour de By they still use huge wooden vats that are almost never seen these days, and at Château Loudenne we can see how a superbly organised commercial vineyard works. We cycle back to Pauillac to end the day.

Day 8: Departure day.

Tour arrangements end after breakfast at your hotel in Pauillac. There is an optional morning transfer to Bordeaux St Jean train station if required. Transfer to Bordeaux airport can be arranged at additional cost.



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Contact Outdoor Travel for details and reservations

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