

C013-ST Bay of Arcachon



Communicating with the ocean through a gully and alimented by fresh waters through the Eyre, small river in the Landes region (south west France). A world in itself, where winters are mild and summers never suffer from scorching heat. From the Pilat dune to the Cap Ferret's extremity, the basin unfolds a wide range of landscapes, colors and perfumes. Compared to the lively rhythm of local beach resorts, you will discover the more peaceful, intimate and laborious life of the oyster farming villages as well as the small picturesque small ports. You will stroll along long sandy beaches, immense oyster parks and will cross pine forests. At the bottom of the basin where water and land no longer separate, you will be fascinated by the flora and the fauna of the very secretive world of the prés-salés (salty pastures) and swamps, paradise to millions of birds. Birds that made the shore, the islands and the strands of sand their own.

Itinerary

Day 1 - Arrival in ARCACHON, internationally renowned beach-resort, born during the 19th century, from the imagination of pioneers who were audacious enough to gamble everything on salt-water bath fashion. Discover this city, the winter town and its sumptuous villas dating from the second empire, its churches and its port. *Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel in the center of town.*

Day 2 - ARCACHON- GUJAN MESTRAS (16 km) You will leave Arcachon walking along its large avenues lined with beautiful villas or passing by Arcachon harbor and Aiguillon headland before reaching the oyster ports of La Teste and du Rocher. After having crossed the canal des Landes, you enter Gujan- Mestras, capital of the oyster-farming which has 7 ports dedicated to the breeding of oyster. You will discover these ports and these wooden huts aligned along the channel where the flat-bottomed boats and some pinasses, boats symbols of the basin, are moored... You will go along the dam and will see marshes with "tons" (underground shelter made for hunting waterfowl). After having visited La Barbotière oyster port, you will retrace your steps to reach St Michel chapel in Gujan. *Transfer by taxi from Gujan to Arcachon - Lodging and breakfast in the same hotel.*

Day 3 – PORT DE LA MOLLE – PORT D'AUDENGE (16 km) *transfer by taxi from Arcachon to Portde la Molle* . From the port de La Molle you will walk the dyke which delimits the Arcachon basin and the ornithological park of Teich . You will discover the estuary of Eyre, integral part of the park. This particular site offers diverse landscapes, between forests, meadows and lagoons. There, you will be able to observe many birds such as swans, gray herons, egrets or couples of storks. Then, going upward the course of the Eyre River, you will come across the port of Biganos before reaching the port of Tuiles. You will then continue walking toward Audenge where you will reach the basin again by the port of Audenge where old basins are used as swimming pools. *Transfer to Arcachon by taxi. Lodging and breakfast in the same hotel.*



Day 4 - PONT DE CERTES – ARES (24 or 15 km) Transfer by taxi to Pont de Certes (bridge of Certes) or Lanton beach. Walking along shore and on dykes of the domaine de Certes (vast property with fishponds), you will reach 'la Pointe de Branne' (headland). Beautiful views of the basin. You will come back towards land before continuing your trip toward the beach of Lanton and later to the port of Cassy walking a shady lane. You will keep on via the port of Taussat which preserved some typical wooden huts, and later via the port of Betey before reaching Andernos les Bains, a pleasant seaside resort. At low tide you might prefer the beach to the promenade leading to the St Eloi church. At end you will continue to the port of St Brice, frontier between Andernos and Arès. There again you will be able to walk on beach at low tide beach before reaching the center of town where your hotel is located. *Lodging and breakfast in a 3 star hotel in the center of town.*

Day 5 - ARES – LEGE CAP FERRET (20 km). You reach the bank of the basin and the oyster farming port of Arès before visiting the reserve of the prés-salés (pasture along the salt water banks, enriched by marine salt which give the meat a very particular flavor very much appreciated by connoisseurs). This delicate environment, today protected, harbors a large quantity of halophyte plants (living on more or less salty grounds) as well as a large fauna including over 145 species of birds. These 'prés salés' (salty meadows) used to be pasture to cattle and ovine and the old fish farms are testimonies to an ancient practice of intensive salt-water fish farming (bass, plaice, conger eel...). You will cross the swamps to later reach the hamlet of Jane de Bay on the edge of the basin. Then you will discover famous oyster farming villages created by fishermen, originating from the Gujan region, from Mestras or from the Teste, and who during fishing season used to settle on the North West coast of the basin well harbored from North winds and where they used to build their cabins. You will visit such villages as Claouey, Les Jacquets, Le Petit Piquey, Le Grand Piquey, l'Herbe. The latest might be the most picturesque. Ancient fief of a rich family where they required that be erected the famous "Algerian villa" of which only remains a Moorish style chapel. Transfer by taxi from L'herbe village to the hotel - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 2 star hotel near basin bank*

Day 6 - ROUND WALK AT THE EDGE OF CAP FERRET, IN BETWEEN BASIN AND OCEAN (about 20 km). You will carry on your discovery of the Cape walking along the basin before reaching the end of this strand of sand where a lighthouse is erected. From atop its 53 meters it watches for the peninsula and its terrible channels where the ocean rushes in. Your stroll will continue in between forest and ocean, along these long sandy beaches where the ocean rushes in creating splendid waves famous to many surfing aficionados. Numerous quiet villas are hidden behind these strands of dunes and contrast with lively and intense tourist activities. *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in the same hotel.*

Day 7 - THE DUNE OF THE PILAT (16 km). That morning a boat will lead you to Arcachon therefore leaving Cap Ferret behind. You will cross the basin over and will admire the sandbank of Arguin in between channels, the Ile aux Oiseaux (birds' island) and the famous "cabanes tchanquées" (pile wooden houses). From the landing stage you will reach your



hotel where you may drop off your luggage. A taxi will take you to the bottom of the dune of the Pilat, tallest European dune: 105 meter high, 2700 meter long and 500 meter large. The dune, pretty recently created (it was only 35 meter high in 1855), is still not very stable and is creeping towards the forest at a pace of 3 to 4 meters per year. You will trek along its summit either by a staircase or a marked path. Walk along the edge until you reach the beginning of the forest where you will come across the beach. In between ocean and dune you will walk along the beach so that you reach the beach of la Corniche to then pursue towards the Pilat, still walking along the shore or few alleys bordered by villas on the edge of the forest. You will reach the Pylat s/Mer before discovering the Moulleau, suburb to the West of Arcachon - A very lively place in the summer with its chic boutiques and its fashion cafés. You will be astonished by the church of Notre Dame des Passes (Our Lady of the channels), of Byzantine style, built atop a dune by Dominicans in 1864. It harbors the Vierge de l'Avent (Virgin of Advent), one of three statues in France showing the virgin while pregnant. You will then go back to the port of Arcachon and your hotel - *Lodging and breakfast in a 2-star hotel in the center of town.*

Day 8 - ARCACHON. End of the tour. Do not depart from Arcachon without having visited the winter town, the Moorish park. You might also want to tour the basin by boat to relive this walk from the sea perspective this time.

Season

From middle of March to end of October but be careful this area is very crowded in summer time and we recommend you to reserve at the earliest possible moment.

What's included?

- 7 nights' accommodation in selected 2 or 3-star hotels with breakfasts
- 2 dinners
- Hotel to hotel luggage transfer
- Taxi transfers
- A set of maps (1/25 000 scale) with the route marked on and detailed route notes
- A daily itinerary together with information about facilities and places of interest along the trail.
- Phone Emergency assistance.

Visa fees - transportation fees to and from the walk area - Insurance (strongly recommended on all trips) - Transfers except those mentioned above – Drinks - Additional meals - Spending of personal nature e.g. laundry, souvenirs, phone calls... are not included

Getting there and away

By plane: International Airport Bordeaux-Merignac, 45 minutes from Arcachon

By train: TGV Paris-Arcachon connections all year round in 3.45 hours. Many daily departures from Bordeaux to Arcachon.

By car: Less than an hour from Bordeaux by N 250 road or Highway A63 and A660 to Arcachon

Where to park : pay guarded car park, available in Arcachon.

Walk difficulty

Grade 2 – walks of 4 to 6 hours a day. Some stages could be more 20 km (13/15 miles). The terrain is absolutely flat and the only ascent will be the dune du Pilat! In some areas you will walk on sand. An average level of fitness or some experience with walking is recommended.

