

C100-CO Dordogne and Haut Quercy



Quercy is a large limestone plateau cut out by the valleys of the Dordogne, Lot and Aveyron rivers and by many other streams that delimit the Causses - arid stretches of land covered with sparse meadows and grazing flocks of sheep. To the north, Haut Quercy - formed by the Causses de Martel and the Causses de Gramat - leans against the Massif Central. The majority of this hike crosses through the Dordogne River Valley, from Souillac to Saint-Cere, at times straying to the Causse de Gramat, to discover magnificent sites such as the valley of Ouyse, the hillside town of Rocamadour, Castelnau, and the Cirque d'Autoire. You will be thrilled by the Gouffre de Padirac's underground river, a strange and marvellous underworld. Though your days will be spent investigating the wilderness of the

region, your evenings won't let you forget that this is one of the main centres of gourmet cuisine and gentle living.

Itinerary

Day 1 - Arrival at SOUILLAC, a small, prosperous town built around a Benedictine abbey on the banks of the Dordogne River. Spend the day visiting the Musée des Automates, and the remarkable abbey with three cupolas on pendentives, fine carved capitals and a statue of the prophet Isaiah, a masterpiece of Romanesque art. Stroll in the old historic city near the abbey - *Lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel*

Day 2 - SOUILLAC - LACAVE (14 km). You will have a few hours before the hike to look at Souillac in the softer light of morning. In the beginning of afternoon, You will leave Souillac walking along the Dordogne. You will climb through the forest and then descend to the village of Pinsac and Dordogne which draw a large loop. You will cross over it and admire the castle of Treyne perched on the cliff above the river. You will continue through fields to the hamlet of Meyraguet before joining the one of Belcastel and the hotel by the pont de l'Ouyse (bridge). *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel with pool (excellent 1 star-Michelin restaurant)*

Day 3 - CALES - ROCAMADOUR (18 km). You will visit the Grottes de Lacave (1 hour and a half tour) and make your way up the Ouyse valley (a remarkable site in the Lot department), wild and mysterious and spotted with old watermills, including the 13th century fortified watermill of Cougnaguet where everything works as it used to! The subterranean waters of the Gouffre de Cabouy rise above ground here as the the source of the Ouyse. You will continue the hike through the Alzou Valley and will arrive in Rocamadour for night. *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel in the city*





Day 4 - ROCAMADOUR – MEYRONNE (14 km). This morning will begin with a quiet visit of Rocamadour city. This is the second-most-visited place in France after le Mont Saint Michel. Once a revered site among the Christian community, Rocamadour remains a holy place for many pilgrims, notably those on the path to Santiago de Compostella. Clinging to the cliffs of the Alzou canyon, the medieval village has many interesting facets: vestiges of a former castle and a hospital for pilgrims, Basilica of Saint Sauveur and the pilgrimage chapel of the Black Virgin, narrow old streets lined with beautiful gates and homes dating back to the Middle-Ages. You will leave the city through l'Hospitalet, a village built on the cliffs' edge, and pass through Le Causse and the picturesque villages of Mayrinhaac-le-Francaal and Bougayrou to arrive in Meyronne, an old cliffside village that looks out over the

river, yet sits in the shadow of an old fortified castle converted into a comfortable hotel where you will rest for the night - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel with pool (former chateau of Cahors' bishops)*

Day 5 – MEYRONNE – MARTEL (19,5 Km) – You will leave the village through countryside to another loop of the Dordogne River from where you will ascent o to the Causse (dry limestone plateau) and continue through woods to the lovely village of Montvalent and then to Port de Gluges where you will cross over the river. On thre other bank you will go to the belvedere of Copeyre to admire the cirque of Montvalent and a large loop of Dordogne at bottom. You will discover the village of Gluges with houses built under the cliffs and continue you walk along the Dordogne and later through woods and fields to reach Martel a small medieval town with seven towers - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel with beautiful gardens and pool*

Day 6 - CARENNAC - LOUBRESSAC (19 km). Transfer by taxi from Martel to Carennac. The village has developed from the 11th century onward after a priory was founded by the abbey of Cluny. The village has a number of houses dating back to the Middle-Ages, and a beautiful 12th century Norman church called St Pieter's. Its cloister, half-Romanesque half-Flamboyant-Gothic, shelters a remarkable 16th century entombment. You will leave the village and walk across the Gramat Causse to the Padirac Gouffre. Here you will be treated to a boat tour that begins 103 meters below ground and takes you along 500 meters of river. Next will come a guided walking tour through the vast cavernous galleries, including the Grand Dome that reaches 94 meters in height! You will exit again into open air and continue your walk to Loubressac, a beautiful village opposite the feudal castle of Castelnau, a very imposing 12th to 15th century fortress and one the finest examples of the military architecture of the Middle-Ages - *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel with pool*

Day 7 - LOUBRESSAC – BRETENOUX (16 km). In the morning, you will visit the charming village of Loubressac, with its narrow, flowered streets, ancient houses and its castle. After leaving Loubressac, you will walk to a beautiful site: the Cirque d'Autoire. From the top of the cliffs, a spectacular view of the Bave Valley spreads before you. You will walk down to the village of Autoire, nestled in the hollow of the valley lined by impressive cliffs. You will descend towards the Chateau de Castelnau, one of the most beautiful fortified castles in France. After having toured the chateau you will continue on to the charming village of Bretenoux, which was built up around the Place des Consuls. A taxi will now escort you to your destination for the day, Beaulieu sur Dordogne, a lovely medieval town situated on a wide bend in the river built around the 12th century abbey-church of St Pierre which belonged to an 12th-13th Benedictine abbey. *Dinner, lodging and breakfast in a 3-star hotel at Beaulieu.*

Day 8 – BEAULIEU SUR DORDOGNE. Transfer by taxi to the Bretenoux rail station in late morning.



Season

From April to end of october

Including

- 7 nights' accommodation in handpicked 3-star hotels
- 7 breakfasts – 6 gourmet dinners
- Hotel to hotel luggage transfer along the trail.
- Taxi transfers as written in the description.
- A set of maps (1/25 000 scale) with the route marked on and detailed route notes describing the trail.
- A daily itinerary together with information about facilities and places of interest along the trail.
- Emergency assistance.

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

Getting there and away

By train - Souillac is on the Paris-Toulouse line and is about 5 hours from Paris Austerlitz station. To return, transfer by taxi to the Bretenoux station to join Brive on the Paris-Toulouse line.

By car - Souillac is accessible by the RN20 Paris-Toulouse road and the A20 motorway.

Where to park - unguarded free car parkings at Souillac. Transfer by taxi between Beaulieu and Souillac to get your car back (at your expense)

Walk difficulty

Grade 2 - walks of 4 to 6 hours a day. Some stages could be more 20 km (13/15 miles) and rolling uplands, ascents mainly gradual than steep of up to 500 m. An average level of fitness or some experience with walking is recommended.

