

C103-ST Between Limousin & Quercy



This hike covers the last, wooded and undulating foothills of the Massif Central. You will discover charming medieval villages, Saint Céré dominated by the imposing château's ruins, Beaulieu sur Dordogne built around a monastery, Carennac, known for its cloister and the château where Fenelon stayed, Loubressac perched on a ridge and Autoire with its magnificent houses flanked by pepper pot turrets. You will cross the Glanes or Queyssac vineyards, which produce excellent wines. You will penetrate a world of darkness, visiting the Grottes de Presque (Presque Grotto) and the Gouffre de Padirac, where for centuries the gaping hole was regarded as one of the gates of Hell...and which contains marvels fashioned and sculpted by nature. Finally you will cross the Causse, a limestone plateau covered with sparse pastureland and stunted shrubs to reach Saint Céré, the end of this walk.

Itinerary

Day 1 - Arrival at SAINT CERE – this charming town situated on the crossroads of the Limousin, Auvergne and Quercy regions boasts a number of old houses and is dominated by the St Laurent towers, vestiges of a medieval château that defended the Bave and Dordogne valleys. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*

Day 2 – from SAINT CERE to PORT DE GAGNAC (16 km) You will climb to the St Laurent towers and walk around the ramparts where magnificent views over the Bave and Dordogne valleys await you. Then you will reach Cornac, a small village in the Mamoul valley built on a former Gallo-Roman estate. Then you will climb towards Glanes, across the vines and fields of walnut trees. Thanks to the efforts of some of the winemakers who have formed a cooperative, the vin de pays (table wine) from the Glanes hillsides has started to make a name for itself and received a number of awards. You will make your way down towards Gagnac, an old fortified town that was taken and retaken many times during the Hundred Years War, destroyed during the Wars of Religion, and in which there remain some beautiful properties from this tumultuous past. You will cross the Céré to reach Port de Gagnac, a port where goods reaching Dordogne by road to avoid taxes imposed by the Lord of Castelnau, owner of the land, were unloaded.



Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.

Day 3 – from PORT DE GAGNAC to BEAULIEU SUR DORDOGNE (12 km). This is a short walk. Through the woods you will reach the village of Altillac, which looks out over the Dordogne and where the 16th century church houses a baptism font dating from Roman times. You will follow the Dordogne before crossing the river on a footbridge to discover the magnificent village of Beaulieu that grew up around the former Benedictine monastery, of which only the Romanesque church survives. The small backstreets of the old town have some beautifully decorated Renaissance houses. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*



Day 4 – from BEAULIEU to CARENNAC (19 km) Going cross-country and through the woods you will reach Queyssac les Vignes, a small village built on a fairly steep-sided ridge, dominated by the church and the Tower, vestige of a old fortress. From the top of this tower you will enjoy magnificent panoramic views across the area. Queyssac village is best known for its syrupy white and red straw wines, enjoyed as an aperitif. Then you will descend towards Queyssac Bas hamlet, with its 11th century chapel, before reaching the Dordogne via Bétaille, an old medieval town that boomed in the 19th century. You will cross the Dordogne to reach Carennac, picturesque old village with Quercy-style houses around the priory. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*

Day 5 – from CARENNAC to LOUBRESSAC (18 km) The day will begin with a tour of Carennac, formerly a dependency of the powerful Cluny abbey. Under its own steam, Carennac parish became a priory and undertook the construction of the current Saint-Pierre church, a 11th century Roman edifice. Inside the priory, you will discover a half-Romanesque, half-Gothic cloister, and in the chapter room an entombment from the end of the 15th century. The Château des Doyens was built in the 16th century. From 1681 to 1685 it welcomed the famous François de Salignac de Lamoignon, future archbishop of Cambrai, who chose this “happy corner of the earth” to write “The Adventures of Telemachus”. You will visit the village with its many old-style houses, its old dovecotes and its maze of narrow streets. Then you will leave the village to climb onto the Causse via the ruins of the enigmatic Château de Taillefer. You will walk along paths bordered by low dry-stone walls across an arid and wild landscape, covered with short grass, dotted with stunted oak trees and populated by sheep. You will reach the Gouffre de Padirac to discover a subterranean world and its river, then continue to the perched village of Loubressac. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*

Day 6 - from LOUBRESSAC to AUTOIRE (16 km) You will cross the Causse again to reach a magnificent village that looks out over the Dordogne, Céré and Bave valleys: Loubressac. Take the time to stroll in the old, narrow, winding backstreets discovering the old ochre-stone houses decorated with flower-covered balconies and old staircases that vanish into the trellises. The village is dominated by the 15th century château and houses a beautiful 13th century chapel. Walking cross-country you will reach the Siran hamlet, which looks out over the grandiose Cirque d’Autoire (Autoire Circle). You can admire the waterfall, this magnificent landscape bordered by impressive cliffs, before heading down towards Autoire village via the Château des Anglais (the Englishmen’s château), once a look-out post, then a robber’s hideout. You will visit the medieval village with its old houses, its châteaux, its manor and its Romanesque church. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*

Day 7 - from AUTOIRE to SAINT CERE (16 km) You will leave the village to visit the Grotte de Presque (Presque Grotto). The braver ones can climb the cliff onto the Causse d’Autoire, the others can walk around this rocky cliff through the village of St Médard de Presque and climb back up the small Merdalou valley. Inside the Grottes de Presque, visitors are treated to 350 metres of rooms and galleries containing concretions, and particularly stalagmite columns in curious shapes reaching 8 to 10 metres high, some very delicate like the “Cierges” (candles). Multi-faceted stone streams flow into the Salle des Draperies, (Hangings Room), the Salle de la Grande Cuve (Great Font Room), and the Salle de Marbre Rouge (Red Marble Room). At the entrance to the Salle des Merveilles (Room of Marvels), brilliantly white, delicate columns rise up. Then via the Causse, you will reach the Négrie valley, near an old mill, and follow the stream that flows down to Saint Céré. *Dinner, night and breakfast in a 2-star hotel.*



Day 8 – SAINT CERE – The walk ends after breakfast

Season

From April 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-star hotels with breakfasts
- 7 dinners
- Hotel to hotel luggage transfer
- 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 with English-speaking support (24/24 7/7 days)

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 train: The nearest rail station is Bretenoux-Biars. Trains from Paris or Toulouse to Brive la Gaillarde and change to Bretenoux. Taxi from Bretenoux to St Céré.

By car: First join the A20 motorway. Leave it exit 52 if you come from North of France and continue via Veyrac and Bretenoux to Saint Céré.

Leave it exit 56 if you come from South and drive via Gramat to St Céré.

Where to park: Free unguarded parking in Saint Céré by the hotel.

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.

