

Self drive holidays

SD09 Dordogne valley

7-day & 6-night tour from Libourne to Brive along the Dordogne River



Itinerary

Day 1 - Libourne and Saint Emilion.

You will leave Bordeaux to join **Libourne**, fortified town founded in the beginning of the 13th century by the order of the king of England at the confluence of the Dordogne and the Isle to allow loading of the products of Gascogne towards England and the countries of Northern Europe. You will discover some remains of the city, then through the vineyard, you will reach **Saint Emilion**. Overhanging the Dordogne, the medieval city is world famous for these prestigious wines, Château Cheval Blanc, Château Ausone, Château Pavie... and also for the richness of its historic monuments and its troglodytic church, largest in Europe, excavated by the monks from 8th to 12th centuries. You will traverse the sloping streets of the village and will climb to the Tower of Roy, last remains of a fortified castle dated from the 13th century before tasting these famous macarons manufactured since many centuries based on a recipe of the Ursulines sisters.

Day 2 – Vineyards of St Emilion and Monbazillac.

Drive of about fifty kilometres to visit the vineyard of St Emilion and the seven other villages which constitute the **jurade of St Emilion** classified by UNESCO as the world heritage of Humanity. You will discover these historical villages, their Romanesque churches, the ruins of fortified castles, testimony of a tumultuous past. Then you will go along the Dordogne to reach **Sainte Foy la Grande**, one of the rare French fortified towns (bastide) founded in 1255. This fortified place was very coveted for centuries, became English in the 15th century and then Protestant in the 16th! From there, you will go and discover the vineyard of **Monbazillac** which extends to the south of Bergerac on left bank of the Dordogne. This vineyard, which produces syrupy whites, is harvested by hand in successive sorts, collecting only the over-ripened grains covered with the noble rot and the others continuing to “roast”.

Day 3 – Tour of Bergerac – the Dordogne from Bergerac to Tremolat.

The day starts with the visit of **Bergerac**. This town which extends on both sides of the Dordogne has expanded rapidly since 12th century with the development of trade across the river and was a stronghold of Protestantism in the 16th century. The old town has been restored and is worth a visit just like the very interesting tobacco museum. Today the city is surrounded by vineyards which produce several AOC wines, the Bergerac, the coasts of Bergerac, the Monbazillac, the Montravel and the Pécharmant. You will leave Bergerac and go along the Dordogne by some small routes to discover the **castle of Lanquais** then the village of **Couze and St Font**, small locality which was specialized in the manufacturing of the Holland paper since 16th century. You will visit the Larroque water-mill which still manufactures filigree paper using ancient methods. Further, you will climb to the **chapel St Front de Colubri** built in the 12th century at the top of the cliff dominating the Dordogne to protect the sailors, who faced the rapids of the Saut de la Gratusse. The route will take you to the **abbey of Cadouin** founded in 1115. The church and the cloister built at the end of the 15th century in flamboyant Gothic style were restored during last centuries and form a beautiful architectural unit which shelters the Holy Shroud museum which was the place of pilgrimages and religious ardour for many centuries ...and a very interesting museum of the velocipede! You will pass over the Dordogne and then Vézère to reach **Limeuil**, old village risen in tiers along the cliff and whose lanes climb towards the church and the ancient castle site. Before reaching the village, you will visit the chapel St Martin whose construction (1194) was financed by Henri II of Plantagenêt in atonement of the murder of the archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket. You will carry on your route towards the panoramic viewpoint of Sors where you will admire the Dordogne before arriving at the **circle of Trémolat** where the Dordogne lounges at the bottom of high white cliffs in a circular arc. The views are magnificent. Then you will join the village of Trémolat and its Romanesque church of the 12th century.

Day 4 – Along the Dordogne from Tremolat to Sarlat

You will continue along the Dordogne to reach the villages of **Urval** dominated by its fortified church and of Siorac en Périgord which keep many remains of their rural past (apparatus to shoe oxen, village oven,...) You will cross the river and will go along cliff to join **St Cyprien** whose lanes around the imposing church (which belonged to an abbey) shelter many old houses. Then you will arrive at **Beynac et Cazenac**. This village clung to the cliff is dominated by its castle, formidable fortified place which played an important role during Hundred Years' War, the Dordogne being the border between the English and French territories ! You will climb up le caminal del Panieraires, very sloping small pedestrian lane bordered with old houses to reach the castle (to visit) and discover a magnificent panorama on the twists and turns of the Dordogne. You will stop a few kilometres further to visit the **hanging gardens of Marqueyssac**. Arranged over a rocky spur, the park dominates of its high calcareous cliffs the valley of the Dordogne and offers one of the most beautiful panoramas of Périgord. Then you will reach **La Roque Gageac**, this village built on the steep faces of cliff is one of the most beautiful sites of the Dordogne valley. You will traverse the green lanes of the village where the simple houses of peasants and craftsmen stood near the rich mansions of notables. Finally, you will arrive at **Sarlat** at the end of the day.

Day 5 – Tour of Sarlat

The morning is devoted to the visit of Sarlat - You will fall under the charm of this old town while walking through the maze of narrow streets with the medieval looks which shelter many special Gothic mansions and magnificently restored Renaissance. Capital of the Périgord Noir, Sarlat is an exceptionally protected town. Sarlat became a city in the 8th century. Border between the Kings of France and England during the Hundred Years' War, Sarlat became English in 1360 and released after ten years by Du Guesclin. The cathedral of Saint-Sacerdos was set up under Henri IV. From 18th century, Sarlat lied dormant for 150 years before becoming again prosperous with the arrival of Railway. The exceptional number of registered or classified buildings made Sarlat capital of the Périgord noir, the first European city in terms of heritage.

Free afternoon or discovering of the gardens of Eyrignac manor at 20 km from Sarlat

Day 6 – Along the Dordogne from Castelnaud to Souillac.

You join Vézac and the edges of the Dordogne, which you cross to go to visit the **castle of Castelnaud**, fortified castle of the 12th century which overhangs the Dordogne. This strategic place was much disputed during the Hundred Years' War and the rivalry between Castelnaud and Beynac whose fortress stands opposite the other bank, was fierce. Then you will go along the edges of the Dordogne discovering the round towers crested of pepper pots from the castle of Feyrac (not visited) to reach the elegant **castle of Milandes**. This Renaissance building was modified in the 19th century and was the property of famous Joséphine Baker, a big music hall star, born to St Louis (Missouri). Magnificent panorama on the Dordogne valley. You will reach **Domme** after having crossed the Céou river and passing in front of the magnificent Romanesque church of Cénac and St Julien.

This fortified town founded in 1281 by King Philippe Le Hardi to thwart the territorial expansion of England and to better control the river traffic, is classified among the most beautiful villages of France. It is necessary to stroll in the small streets to better discover the eventful history of this fortified town, built at the edge of the cliff, 150 meters above the Dordogne. You will go down again towards the Dordogne and Vitrac to arrive at **Montfort** and its castle. Built on a cliff which overhangs a meander of the Dordogne (magnificent view), it must have been attacked, destroyed and rebuilt many times. You will stop to visit the very beautiful church of **Carsac-Aillac** which stands in the surroundings of greenery. Further, built in a succession of rocky terraces, the **castle of Fénelon**, one of the most beautiful castles of Périgord Noir, has kept its defensive system and its stone roof. You will cross again the Dordogne, will pass in front of the magnificent **castle of Rouffillac** (... which you can rent for your next holidays...!) to join Carlux, a typical Périgord village perched on a rocky spur with beautiful stone houses and small streets. Do not miss the sarrazine chimney of 11th century, the stone market and the church Ste Catherine. **Souillac**, the town developed around an abbey founded in the 10th century and which glowed in the whole region during many centuries with its ups and downs, and the tragic periods like the Religion wars. We suggest you a walk to discover the old town and to visit the abbey Ste Marie and the church St Martin.

Day 7 –Along the Dordogne from Souillac to Bretenoux. Brive la Gaillarde

The day begins with the visit of **Rocamadour**, high place of Christendom in the middle ages, village clung on the cliff and dominated by its castle. This mythical village, filled with the worship of a black virgin, has been the symbol of faith and hope for many centuries. You will visit the village and the religious city. The day starts by the visit of the caves of Lacave. You will be filled with wonder by the beauty of this underground world, these concretions reminding of the animals, the monsters of legends, huge rooms of more than 60 meters high or these underground lakes (guided tour of 1.20 hour).

Then, you will go along the Dordogne by the villages of Meyronne, St Sozy to join Gluges, small village clung on the abrupt side of the cliff and the panoramic viewpoint of Copeyre from where you will admire the Cirque of Montvalent. You will continue through the villages of Floirac, Mezels to join **Carennac**, very picturesque village with the houses flanked by turrets and gathered around the priory where Fénelon lived. The unit church St Pierre, cloister and castle of Doyens, together are a great architectural wealth. La mise au tombeau which is in the chapter house is magnificent and impresses by the painful expression of the characters. By some small routes on the cliff, you will join the medieval village of **Loubressac**, clung on a headland which overhangs 3 valleys including Dordogne. Then you will visit the **Gouffre of Padirac** (abyss), natural cavity having depth of 75m diameter of 33m which opens on the surface of Causse of Gramat and under which an underground river flows. Elevators or staircases, take you to this river. Then starts a mysterious walk 103 meters below ground for 500m. After the disembarkation in the hall of the Pluie Lake, the visit continues on foot, towards the hall of Grands Gours, the hall of Grand Dôme, whose vault rises to 94 meters height with its Higher Lake situated at 27 meters above the bed of the river (Duration of the visit approximately 1.30 hour) Back to open air, you will reach the viewpoint of the **cirque of Autoire** from where you will admire the splendid panorama of the three valleys and the cascade, before going down towards Autoire, splendid village with its old houses with corbellings and its manor houses flanked by turrets. Further, you will visit the **castle of Castelnau**, one of the most beautiful examples of the military architecture of the Middle Ages. On its bottom, the small village of Castelnau has protected its medieval appearance with very beautiful collegiate church St Louis.

You will arrive at **Bretenoux**, old fortified town founded in 1277 by the very powerful lord of Castelnau then will carry on your route towards Brive la Gaillarde after discovering Beaulieu sur Dordogne a beautiful village built around a former abbey of which the only remains is the splendid Saint Pierre abbey. *The tour ends at Brive la Gaillarde in late afternoon where you can return rental car.*

More details and tips

The car - You can do this tour with your own car or with a rental car (not included in the price). We can get a rental car for you (Please contact us)

Hotels - On this tour, we suggest you stay in hotels of different categories.

Luxe self drive tour SD09-L – 4-star hotels

Comfort Self drive tour SD09-L – 3 & 4-star hotels or chateaus

Standard Self drive tour SD09-ST –2-star hotels

Price includes

- 6 nights on B&B basis in hotels handpicked by us among the best.
- Parking fees if the hotel has one (only for Luxe tours)
- The detailed road book with the GPS waypoints of the main landmarks, villages, attractions and hotels. It also contains maps of cities you will explore. (see below for more details)
- IGN maps of the area (scale 1 cm = 1 km)
- Green Michelin guide (tour guide) of the region
- Emergency phone number available 24/24 and 7/7

Not including

- trip to the departure city of the self-drive tour
- Lunches and dinners (except if written in the tour description)
- Entrances fees to the different tourist sites
- Personal expenses...

Starting and ending cities of tours

Tours start and end in cities or airports where you can easily pick up or return a rental car.

Tours start in the morning of the first day, often with a visit to the city. We recommend you to arrive the day before in the afternoon to better recover from your trip from home.

Tours end in the late afternoon in the last city or airport.

Getting from and away

By car – Take Paris – Bordeaux motorway (A10) Exit 39 (Saint André de Cubzac) and continue along D670 to Libourne.

By train – TGV (high speed trains) from Paris or Paris CDG airport and connection to Libourne. Several car rental agencies in the rail station. Trains from Brive La Gaillarde to Paris or Bordeaux without connection.

By plane – Nearest airport is the international Bordeaux airport where you will rent a car to reach Libourne (50 Km from the airport) and to do the tour. 220 km from Brive to Bordeaux–Airport (motorway)

Other services

We can book a room for you for the night before or for the last day.

Reservation of rental car

We can offer this tour with accommodation in charming B&B (manors, private chateaux, stylish villas...)

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