



## Castles in the Cradle of Mankind Tour

### Tour Overview

**Tour Dates:** You may begin this tour on any day. See [Schedule](#) for blackout dates and additional tour scheduling considerations.

**Location:** The region of France known as Black Périgord, black for the darkness created by its large tracks of thick forests. Its long history is everywhere in evidence -- from its medieval villages with their looming castles, largely unchanged after 500 years, to the prehistoric cave dwellings with their 55,000 year old murals. The Dordogne River, long the embattled border between France and England, continues to separate the castles of the once rival nations. But you won't find hostilities now. Instead you'll enjoy tranquil cycling along the quiet, scenic roads that connect the splendidly preserved 15th century villages.

Overnight destinations include Sarlat and Montignac. The train trip from Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport to Sarlat requires 7.5 hours. Because of the time required to make the return trip to Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport from Montignac (7.5+ hours), you should plan to layover at least 1 night in Paris on the back-end of your tour. The train trip from Montignac to downtown Paris requires 4.5 - 5.5 hours.

**Tour Type:** Hub & Spoke Tour

**Terrain:** Easy to challenging. Most of the routes are flat and gently rolling, though occasional climbs to cross the plateau and to reach the castles add a bit of challenge.

**Length:** 4 days / 5 nights to 7 days / 8 nights. You can choose any combination of nights in Sarlat and Montignac.

**Distance:** Choose from 8 day-trips ranging from 24 - 34 miles (38 - 55 km) in length. In addition to the route instructions provided for each of the day-trip rides, we also provide the most direct route to the castles in the event that you want to make a repeat visit.

### Highlights:

**Experience prehistory firsthand** as you explore the Font de Gaume and Lascaux II caves, offering the world's finest prehistoric cave paintings, and Les Eyzies with its much-renowned museum, cave, and cliff-dwellings.

**Explore the Troglodytic cliff dwellings** at La Roque-Gageac, Les Eyzies, and La-Roque-St-Christophe.

**Tour magnificent medieval castles** set along the scenic shores of the Dordogne River.

**Marvel at some of the world's most beautiful gardens** (often located on the grounds of the castles).

**Relax as you lazily paddle** your way down the Vézère River in a canoe.

**Enjoy free wine tasting** opportunities nearly everywhere along your route.

**Sarlat**, perhaps the most extraordinarily restored medieval village in Europe.

**Delight over some of France's finest wines** and tastiest cheeses and *fois gras*!

## **Hub 1: Sarlat**

Sarlat is practically a living museum of the 15th century, Sarlat's Golden Age. In fact, its entire medieval center has been granted protected status to preserve its historic grandeur. Sarlat's tiny medieval streets are lined with a vast array of wonderful restaurants offering cuisines from around the world, laid back sidewalk cafés, lively bars and exciting galleries, boutiques and shops. Located in a valley amidst the splendor of the rolling hills of the Périgord countryside, a more appealing or wonderful base location could be hardly imagined.

## **Day Trip Descriptions**

### **Spoke 1: Prehistoric Artists**

**Route:** Begins and ends in Sarlat. Very hilly with climbing required throughout, this is the most challenging of the spokes. If the idea of climbing for much of the day does not appeal to you, it is better to approach Les Eyzies from Montignac. See Hub 2: Spoke 1: The Cradle of Mankind below.

**Distance:** 54 km / 33 miles

**Description:** This ride takes you through the dense Périgord forests to some of the world's most notable sites for prehistoric cave art. The route is absolutely gorgeous through wooded hills and pristine landscapes. Noteworthy sites along the route include the village of Les Eyzies, known as the capital of prehistory, with its Museum of Prehistory, the Grotte de Font-de-Gaume (cave paintings), and the Abri de Cap Blanc, known for its prehistoric sculptures.

The small village of Les Eyzies-de-Tayac is known as the "Valley of Man", this gorgeous location on the Vézère River having been inhabited for more than 500,000 years. The reason? Along this portion of the Vézère, the river has carved out a valley in the limestone plateau that is perforated by numerous caves. These caves have provided rock shelters along the overhanging ledges for millennia. The shallow hollows in the cliff, warmed by the rays of the sun and protected by branches covered with hides and furs, provided early inhabitants with the perfect shelter from a climate still chilled from the last Ice Age.

The treasure of Les Eyzies includes more than a century of study and research, 200 sites indexed and recorded, thousands of tons of earth sieved and examined, thousands of objects categorized, labeled and now on display, and hundreds of drawings identified, analyzed, deciphered, and even interpreted. Troglodytic shelters furnished in the Middle Ages pepper the cliff face, together with intricate narrow passages and furtive stairways. Major sights to visit in Les Eyzies include the Museum of Prehistory and the Grotte de Font-de-Gaume, which contains some of the world's best preserved cave paintings.

### **Spoke 2: (Mostly) Bike Path Circuit to the Châteaux de Fénelon & Montfort**

**Route:** Begins and ends in Sarlat. Easy. The route is primarily flat or gently rolling.

**Distance:** 43 km / 27 miles

**Description:** This day trip takes advantage of recently completed rail trails in the area to provide serene cycling along the river as well as the opportunity to visit two castles. From Sarlat you'll coast down one of these rail trails directly to the valley, pausing to admire the beautiful view from the old railroad bridge over the Dordogne River-- now for bike and pedestrian use only. The bike path ends in the pretty village of Groléjac, where you'll begin cycling the south bank of the Dordogne to the Castle of Fénelon.

At Saint Julien, you'll cross the Dordogne to the north bank and connect with another rail trail, this one following the north bank of the river. Almost immediately you traverse a 500-meter lit tunnel, after which you return to enjoying stunning views of the river. You'll exit the bike path to visit the charming village of Carsac

and the village and Chateau de Montfort, one of the most photographed of all the Dordogne castles. Please note that only the ramparts and the grounds of this castle can be visited. After a particularly dramatic stretch, where the road is tightly wedged between the river and the riverside cliffs, you arrive in Vitrac where you'll have a choice of two different routes for your return ride to Sarlat: one more scenic, with less traffic, but hillier; and one that is easier, but more shared with autos.

### **Spoke 3: Château de Beynac, Jardins de Marqueyssac, & La Roque-Gageac**

**Route:** Begins and ends in Sarlat. The first 7 km / 4 miles of this ride entail a good bit of climbing, but this is soon behind you, and the remainder of the ride is primarily flat and gently rolling, with the exception of the 900 meter climb to the gardens of Marqueyssac.

**Distance:** 38 km / 24 miles

**Description:** This day trip provides the opportunity to visit one of the valley's most interesting castles, the beautiful gardens of the privately owned Château de Marqueyssac, and the amazing village of La Roque-Gageac. Leaving Sarlat on a quiet, mountainous road, the early portion of this ride is a bit challenging, but equally rewarding for its serene wooded cycling. By the time you near the Château de Beynac you have little climbing left to reach its commanding position high above the Dordogne. Following your castle visit (allow 2 hours), you'll have to spend some time in the village of Beynac, officially classified as one of "The Most Beautiful Villages in France."

From Beynac it is just a short ride to the Château de Marqueyssac. Its "suspended gardens" hugging the cliff's edge are considered to be among the most beautiful in France. And of course, being atop the cliff's edge, you'll enjoy stunning views of the Dordogne River and Valley.

Finally, you'll cycle on to the riverside village of La Roque-Gageac which, owing to its unique setting, enjoys a subtropical microclimate, complete with banana trees. La Roque-Gageac's setting, wedged between the limestone cliffs and the river, is absolutely gorgeous, and it is little wonder that it too has been classified as one of "The Most Beautiful Villages in France." Above the village you'll have the opportunity to explore Troglodytic dwellings all along the cliffs, which for centuries housed those seeking shelter and security. Back at river level, you may also take advantage of one of the many boat operators offering cruises along the Dordogne for yet another perspective on this unique area.

A hilly stretch along tiny, deserted local roads follows that affords tremendous views of the valley. From Vitrac, you'll have a choice of two different routes for your return ride to Sarlat: one more scenic, with less traffic, but hillier; and one that is easier, but with more vehicular traffic.

### **Spoke 4: Château de Montfort, Bastide de Domme, & Château de Castelnaud**

**Route:** Begins and ends in Sarlat. This ride provides the opportunity to visit two castles, as well as the remarkably preserved Bastide (fortified village) of Domme. Three long climbs are required (including the final ascent to the Château de Castelnaud), but none of these should serve as a deterrent to the average cyclist. This route is particularly beautiful.

**Distance:** 49 km / 30 miles

**Description:** This ride begins with the quick descent to the Dordogne Valley via a dedicated bike path that you will exit near Carsac, both to visit that village and the village and Chateau de Montfort, one of the most photographed of all the Dordogne castles. Please note that only the ramparts and the grounds of this castle can be visited. After a particularly dramatic stretch, where the road is tightly wedged between the river and the riverside cliffs, you arrive in Vitrac where you'll cross the Dordogne and take a tiny, winding, traffic-free road to Domme.

Domme sits on a rocky promontory, poised on a cliff that offers sweeping views over the River Dordogne's slow meanders. The town is a fortified bastide that uses the natural setting as an essential feature of the town's defenses. Towards the cliff, the sheer ruggedness of the land meant that those building Domme could omit reinforcing its entrances; nature herself would be enough to put off the most rabid of foes. On the other sides, it was deemed necessary to construct a solid town wall, enhanced by impressive gates that still exist. Within its walls, the town retains a striking medieval feel. Domme, too, is officially classified as one of "The Most Beautiful Villages in France."

After an exhilarating descent from Domme and a short stop in the pretty village of Cénac at its base, you begin a long wooded climb with more views of the valley. A series of quiet, tiny roads takes you on to the 12th century Château de Castelnaud which, like Beynac's castle, demands an extensive visit. Your return ride to Sarlat provides another opportunity to visit the village of La Roque-Gageac.

### **Spoke 5: La Roque-Gageac, Château Les Milandes, Envaux, & Château de Castelnaud**

**Route:** Begins and ends in Sarlat. This ride provides another opportunity to visit the beautiful village of La Roque-Gageac, this time entering the village from the cliff side; the Château Les Milandes, and a second opportunity to visit the Château de Castelnaud. The ride begins with a long 1.8 km / 1.1 mile climb from Sarlat to the top of the plateau, requires a moderate climb to the Château des Milandes, and a long climb to the Castelnaud (if you choose.) Otherwise, the route is flat or gently rolling.

**Distance:** 46 km / 28 miles

**Description:** After the long climb from Sarlat to the top of the plateau, you'll joyously cycle a series of tiny, gently rolling roads atop the wooded mountains for pure cycling pleasure. These roads are barely a car's width in breadth and see virtually no traffic. Then suddenly you plunge to La Roque-Gageac from far above the tops of the cliffs that rise behind the village. From La Roque-Gageac you'll cross the Dordogne for a lovely ride along the south bank to the Château Les Milandes.

Built in the 15th century, Château Les Milandes is best known for a more recent occupant. From the end of World War II until 1968, Château Les Milandes was owned by American Josephine Baker (1906 – 1975.) All her life, Josephine was animated by an exemplary determination and courage that she expressed both in the glitter of the music hall and in her ideal of universal brotherhood. After having experienced the living conditions of blacks in the American South, Josephine left her native St. Louis to join a troop of "girls" at the age of thirteen. In 1925 she crossed the Atlantic with the Black Revue, followed by the Folies Bergères, where she appeared wearing her famous belt of bananas. Between scandal and triumph, the black Venus conquered Paris and adopted France her "second love." After fighting for her new country during World War II, she and her husband purchased Milandes castle. There she installed her "world village", the twelve children of all origins whom she adopted, proving to all that "there is only one race, the human race."

Following your visit to the castle your ride continues along the Dordogne's south bank to the pretty village of Envaux, where you circle back and have your second opportunity to visit Castelnaud. Back on the north side of the river, you'll enjoy a rolling stretch of tiny local roads with lovely views of the river and valley before determining which to two return routes to take back to Sarlat.

## **Spoke 6: Château de Salignac & Lovely Saint Geniès**

**Route:** Begins and ends in Sarlat. This ride begins with a long climb from Sarlat, after which you enjoy flat and gently rolling terrain for the remainder of the ride.

**Distance:** 46 km / 28 miles

**Description:** This ride is as much about scenic beauty as it is about castles. The route, which goes northeast from Sarlat, takes you far from the Dordogne Valley and into the beautiful countryside in this part of the area. The long climb to reach this area is well worth it!

A picture postcard Périgord town, Salignac spreads below the 12th – 17th century pepperpot towers of the Château de Salignac. Built by Archbishop Fénelon's feudal ancestors, the château was hotly disputed in all the region's wars. Terraces now replace the once bristling ramparts; among the highlights inside are two floors of vaulted cellars, the chapel, and a Renaissance fireplace.

In addition to the opportunity to visit the medieval village and castle of Salignac, you'll also enjoy the lovely villages of Saint Crépin and Saint Geniès, whose castle has been transformed into a restaurant and B&B. The return ride to Sarlat through the high woods of Black Périgord is a feast for the senses, and ends with a dramatic plunge into Sarlat's hustle and bustle.

## **The Route to Montignac, your Second Hub**

**Route:** Begins in Sarlat and ends in Montignac. This ride begins with the same long climb from Sarlat that is described in the Château de Salignac & Lovely Saint Geniès hub. Following that climb, the route is primarily flat or gently rolling.

**Distance:** 31 km / 19 miles

**Description:** This day trip's destination is your second base location, Montignac. The route is wooded and beautiful, and takes full advantage of tiny traffic-free country lanes to give you the most intimate experience of the region. You'll savor the solitude as you cycle silently through idyllic countryside. Take the time to stop and explore the lovely village of Saint Geniès, the only sizeable village though which you will pass.

## **Hub 2: Montignac**

Montignac is a lovely village straddling both banks of the Vézère River. Its claim to fame is Lascaux, the cave discovered in 1940 that contains the world's most notable prehistoric cave paintings. The original Lascaux however, was closed to the public in the 1960s due to damage from the breath of human visitors. As a result, Lascaux II, a magnificently created replica of the cave's two most beautiful chambers was opened just beneath the original. Even the replica is not to be missed. Beyond Lascaux, Montignac is an ideal place to relax and savor further the beauty that is Périgord.

## **Day Trip Descriptions**

### **Spoke 1: The Cradle of Mankind**

**Route:** Begins and ends in Montignac. The route is flat or gently rolling until you reach La Roque-Saint-Christophe, after which there is a long climb before reaching Les Eyzies. Nonetheless, this route to Les Eyzies is far less demanding than the one from Sarlat.

**Distance:** 55 km / 34 miles

**Description:** The Vézère Valley is so incredibly beautiful that it is easy to understand why people have been settling here for 500,000 or so years. Highlights include the Chateau de Losse, the medieval village of Saint-Léon-sur-Vézère with its castle (and a great place for beginning a canoe ride) and la Roque-Saint-Christophe's

magnificent cliff dwellings in a particularly captivating setting.

And finally, there's the small village of Les Eyzies-de-Tayac, known as the "Valley of Man." This gorgeous location on the Vézère River has been inhabited for more than 500,000 years. The reason? Along this portion of the Vézère, the river has carved out a valley in the limestone plateau that is perforated by numerous caves. These caves have provided rock shelters along the overhanging ledges for millennia. The shallow hollows in the cliff, warmed by the rays of the sun and protected by branches covered with hides and furs, provided early inhabitants with the perfect shelter from a climate still chilled from the last Ice Age.

The treasure of Les Eyzies includes more than a century of study and research, 200 sites indexed and recorded, thousands of tons of earth sieved and examined, thousands of objects categorized, labeled and now on display, and hundreds of drawings identified, analyzed, deciphered, and even interpreted. Troglodytic shelters furnished in the Middle Ages pepper the cliff face, together with intricate narrow passages and furtive stairways. Les Eyzies is known as the capital of prehistory. Major sights to visit include the Museum of Prehistory and the Grotte de Font-de-Gaume, which contains some of the world's best preserved cave paintings.

### **Spoke 2: Terrasson Loop**

**Route:** Begins and ends in Montignac. Though there are a couple of long, fairly challenging climbs on this loop, but most of the ride is flat or gently rolling.

**Distance:** 42 km / 26 miles

**Description:** This day trip takes you through the tiny historic villages of Saint-Amand-de-Coly and Coly before continuing on to the larger, historic city of Terrasson, where you can easily spend an afternoon exploring, sightseeing and shopping. The return ride takes you through the pretty village of Condat-sur-Vézère before climbing to cliffs along the River Vézère for absolutely stunning views. You'll enjoy tranquil cycling throughout this ride.

### **Tour Prices**

- 7 Days - US \$600.00 per adult & \$325.00 per child\*
- 6 Days - US \$575.00 per adult & \$300.00 per child\*
- 5 Days - US \$550.00 per adult & \$275.00 per child\*
- 4 Days - US \$525.00 per adult & \$250.00 per child\*
- Tour Deposit: \$200.00 per adult and \$100.00 per child. Deposits are charged when tour materials are sent and hotel availability has been confirmed.
- Discounts are available for parties of 5 or more adults.

\*Children 16 years or younger traveling with 2 adults.

#### **The tour price includes:**

- Tour Documentation: Route instructions, map, Pre-trip Preparation Guide, On-Road Quick Reference Guide, and Sights Guide.
- Bike Rental for 4 - 7 Days: Excellent quality hybrid or road / racing bike with handlebar bag, map carrier, cyclometer, water bottle cage, rear rack, lock, repair kit, and helmet. Optional pedal cages.
- Delivery and Pick-up of your rental bike
- Baggage Transfer
- English-Speaking Support Staff
- Reservation of your Accommodations

- Shipping and Handling Charges for US customers, unless expedited shipping is required.
- Basic SAG Support: If you choose not to cycle on one or more days due to weather, illness, etc., AND you notify your Diverse Directions support representative in advance so that you and your bikes can be transported along with your luggage, no additional charges will apply.

**The tour price does NOT include:**

- Hotels: Because you are free to select from a wide range of hotels -- from charming and basic 2-star to 4-star luxury (where available) -- the cost of your hotel accommodations is not bundled into the tour package price. See our Accommodations Options page for the price ranges of each category of hotel. A list of accommodations options for this tour, with website links, is available upon request.
- Meals: You are free to determine your own budget for meals. A wide variety of options are available -- from creating a picnic from provisions obtained at a boulangerie / patisserie, to dining at bistros and restaurants, or taking meals at your hotel (where available.) Please note that breakfasts are NOT included in France hotel rates. However, hotels with restaurants often offer a demi-pension option, which includes the cost of your room, breakfast, and dinner at a reasonable price.
- Transportation from your home to Sarlat and from Montignac to your home.
- Personal expenses
- Insurance
- Postage Charges for non-US customers: The postage required to send your tour materials by US Postal Service Priority Mail will be added to tour orders made from outside the US. This charge averages \$20.00 for delivery within 6 - 10 business days.
- Expedited Shipping (all nations): If the shipment of tour materials must be expedited, the express mail charges will be added to the tour package price.

For Diverse Directions' payment terms, cancellation policy, and all terms & conditions, please see [Terms & Conditions](#).