



The Pilgrims, Castles & Cave Art 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 Périgord and Lot Regions of France. Overnight destinations include Sarlat, Rocamadour, the Dordogne Valley, Limeuil, and Montignac. The train trip from Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport to Sarlat requires 6.5 - 7.5 hours. Because of the time required to make the return trip to Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport from Sarlat, you should plan to layover at least 1 night in Paris on the back-end of your tour.

Tour Type: Circuit tour

Terrain: Easy to moderately challenging. Most cycling is flat or gently rolling in the river valleys. Some long climbs are required when cycling from one river valley to the next, but these are limited to only a few. Of course, following each climb, you'll be rewarded with breathtaking vistas and an exhilarating descent. This itinerary is much less physically demanding than our Wine, Castles & Cave Paintings Tour and Magical Lot Tour.

Length: 6 days / 7 nights

Distance: Total: 161 miles / 260 km. Average per day: 27 miles / 43 km.

Highlights:

- Sarlat, perhaps the most extraordinarily restored medieval village in Europe.
- Rocamadour, the beautiful cliff-hanging village that has hosted pilgrims for one thousand years, and continues to do so.
- Magnificent medieval castles (English guided tours available) set along the scenic shores of the Dordogne River.
- The Troglodytic cliff dwellings and subtropical vegetation of La Roque-Gageac.
- Phenomenal sites of prehistory including the Grotte du Font de Gaume and Lascaux II caves, home of some of the world's finest prehistoric cave paintings; and Les Eyzies with its much-renowned museum, cave, and cliff-dwellings.
- Visits to seven villages officially classified as among the most beautiful in France.
- The unspoiled beauty of the Valley of the Vézère.
- Delight over some of France's finest wines and tastiest cheeses and *fois gras*!

Daily Itinerary

Arrive in Sarlat. Spend 1 night.

Your Diverse Directions representative will meet you at the Sarlat train station upon your arrival, will drive you to your hotel, and will deliver your rental bikes. Once you've received your bikes you're free to relax and enjoy all the sights of 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 historical 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 setting could be hardly imagined. The Tourist Information Office will provide you materials needed to do a self-guided walking tour of the old town as well as hillside walks, in English.

Day 1: Bike from Sarlat to Rocamadour - 55 km / 34 miles. Spend 1 night.

Today's ride begins in the thickly wooded region known as *Périgord Noir* (Black Dordogne) so named for the shadows cast by all those trees. You'll cycle your first 10 kilometers through this dense forest on a shaded, paved bike path that steadily descends to the Dordogne River, the course of which you'll follow for much of the remainder of the day. Your riverside cycling continues along tranquil roads with an opportunity to visit your first castle, the Chateau de Fénelon coming up shortly.

Near Souillac you enter the *Département* of the Lot, beyond which the landscape changes rather dramatically, as the dryer and more rugged hills of the *Causse de Gramat* come into view. The terrain becomes more rolling, but continues to be easy as you cycle in the ever-shrinking river valley.

To reach Rocamadour you leave the river and climb to the top of the *causse*, a limestone plateau that looks like nothing else and that is the signature of this region. Of course, the climb is necessary because the Dordogne, like all rivers in the area, has for eons carved a deep canyon across the landscape.

After a short descent your climbing efforts are rewarded with your first views of Rocamadour dramatically clinging to the side of the canyon carved by the River Alzou. Built right into the cliff face, the village rises from the river to the top of the *causse*. Rocamadour has been a holy pilgrimage sight for ten centuries and a stopover on the way to Santiago de Compostella, Spain's most famous pilgrimage destination. Today you can use an elevator to whisk yourself between the levels of the village. Pilgrims in the Middle Ages didn't have it so good; many actually made the ascent on their knees in penance, paying homage at each of the Stations of the Cross en route. There is still something sacred in the air here that invites you to imagine a time when thousands of pilgrims arrived without the benefit of paved roads or even bicycles.

While in Rocamadour you will hopefully have time to visit the Forêt des Singes (the Forest of Monkeys), a 50-acre cageless refuge for 130 Barbary Macaques. As if on safari, you're able to observe these wonderfully social beings up close as they go about their daily lives. They're very curious and will be watching you too. While in Rocamadour you must treat yourself to *cabécou*, a locally produced goat cheese; it's awesome.

Day 2: Bike from Rocamadour to the Dordogne Valley - 48 km / 30 miles. Spend 2 nights.

Today's ride begins with a very short climb to the top of the *causse*, followed by almost 10 kilometers of descent as you return to the river valley. The views are incredible! When you've reached the Dordogne River again, you'll have the opportunity to visit les Grottes de Lacave, a series of underground caverns with 60-meter high ceilings and underground lakes. After some

bucolic cycling you'll return to Souillac, this time with an opportunity to visit its 12th century abbey and enjoy wondering the narrow streets of its medieval core.

A few kilometers beyond Souillac you'll leave the city traffic and cycle the north bank of the Dordogne on a recently developed rail trail. You'll enjoy a smooth, paved ride that includes a 500 meter long rail tunnel that takes you right through the cliffs by the river. You'll leave the bike path to experience the charming villages of Aillac and Carsac, and then the series of gorgeous riverside villages that are the day's final destination. You'll spend two nights in one of these villages -- Montfort, Vitrac, Domme, Cénac, or La Roque-Gageac -- perfectly positioned to immerse yourself in one of the most dense concentrations of castles anywhere.

Day 3: Cycle the Circuit of Dordogne Valley Castles and some of France's most beautiful Villages - 37 km / 23 miles.

Your cycling day begins with a visit to the bastide of Domme, one of France's most formidably positioned, fortified medieval towns, and classified as one of the most beautiful villages in France. We'll take you up the back way to avoid an even more severe climb, but the views from the top are definitely worth the effort.

On your way to the castles from Domme you'll pass through the riverside village of la Roque-Gageac which enjoys a subtropical microclimate due to its unique setting wedged between towering cliffs and the Dordogne River. In addition to being another of France's most beautiful villages, la Roque-Gageac is also known for its Troglydic cave dwellings. With a short climb past subtropical vegetation (even banana trees!) you can view the caves that were used for centuries as homes. And these homes have some of the best views in the world!

Continuing your cycling, you'll pass the following castles: Château la Malartrie, Castelnaud, Château de Beynac, and Château de Marqueyssac. You'll definitely want to tour Castelnaud and Beynac, both of which are open to the public and are tremendously worthwhile. And both the villages of Castelnaud and Beynac are also classified as among France's most beautiful. If you have time, you'll want to visit the renowned gardens of the Château de Marqueyssac; like the Château la Malartrie, it is privately owned and cannot be toured, but the gardens are open to the public.

On the ride back to your hotel or B&B you'll have one more opportunity to stop in La Roque-Gageac. If you need to rest awhile, you can hire a boat there for more relaxed touring along the river.

Day 4: Bike from the Dordogne Valley to Limeuil - 39 km / 24 miles. Spend 1 night.

After yesterday's whirlwind of sights, today's ride is all about enjoying the natural beauty of the Dordogne. You'll begin by cycling serene, riverside roads past Château Feyrac (privately owned) and the Château des Milandes, the interior and gardens of which can be toured. This castle was made famous by Josephine Baker, who made it the home for her "Rainbow Tribe," twelve adopted children of all races. Ms. Baker was an African-American entertainer who dazzled French audiences after emigrating from the US to escape Jim Crow discrimination and share her talents with those who didn't judge her by the color of her skin.

Following closely by the Dordogne you'll have the opportunity to visit more lovely villages, like Saint Cyprien, Mouzens, Coux, and Bigaroque before reaching the ultimate of France's most beautiful villages, Limeuil. Located at the confluence of the Dordogne and Vézère Rivers, this gorgeous village rises high above the valley with outstanding views of the two rivers. This evening is all about kicking back and enjoying the joie-de-vivre that is France. You'll not want to leave this peaceful paradise.

Day 5: Bike from Limeuil to Montignac - 41 km / 25 miles. Spend 1 night.

From Limeuil you'll leave the banks of the Dordogne and begin following the Vézère River. We've kept this day's mileage fairly low to ensure you'll have plenty of time and energy to enjoy the many sights on your way to Montignac. If you're interested in things prehistoric, you'll want to

spend some time in Les Ezyies, where you can visit the Museum of Prehistory, a prehistoric cave shelter, and the Grotte de Font-de-Gaume, site of some of France's most famous prehistoric cave paintings.

After leaving Les Ezyies, you'll enjoy particularly dramatic scenery along the cliff-studded banks of the Vézère River. These cliffs are full of caves that have been used as homes for millennia; many of these cave dwellings are open to the public. La-Roque-St-Christophe is particularly magnificent and is set in truly one of the most beautiful spots in all of nature. Just beyond La-Roque-St-Christophe you'll pass through yet another of France's most beautiful villages, Saint-Léon-sur-Vézère. Here you'll want to enjoy a wine and cheese break along the pristine riverfront.

Your cycling day ends in Montignac, home of Lascaux II, the painstakingly created reproduction of France's most important source of cave art. Lascaux II was created when it was discovered that the breath of humans was damaging the paintings of the original. Today, it is open only to scientists, but to continue sharing this awesome human treasure with the public, the French created a world-renowned replica. Montignac is a charming town, beautifully set, and with a wealth of services.

Day 6: Bike from Montignac to Sarlat - 40 km / 25 miles. Spend 1 night.

Your final cycling day provides yet another day of memorable cycling along quiet roads and among a number of medieval villages including St.-Armand-de-Coly -- yes, also designated as one of France's most beautiful villages -- Coly, and St. Geniès. You'll have the time today to visit each of these in a leisurely way. Beyond St. Geniès, you'll enjoy pastoral riding that becomes increasingly wooded as you near Sarlat.

Your final kilometers into Sarlat are a dramatic descent that is totally thrilling. Back in Sarlat you'll be thankful for one more opportunity to lose yourself in its splendor. Perhaps you didn't have quite enough time to explore on your arrival day; there is indeed much to see and absorb. Sarlat is best explored on foot, as its historic center is very compact and must be taken in slowly. So park those bikes, get back out there, and enjoy a *verre* as the French say. Rental bikes will be picked up at your hotel in the late afternoon.

Tour Price: US \$895.00 per person

- **Children's Price** - Children 16 years or younger traveling with 2 adults: \$400.00 per child.
- **Tour Deposit:** \$250.00 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.

The tour price includes:

- Tour Documentation: Route instructions, map, Pre-trip Preparation Guide, On-Road Quick Reference Guide, and Sights Guide.
- Bike Rental for 6 Days: Excellent quality 27-speed hybrid or 30-speed 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
- Daily Baggage Transfers
- 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 Sarlat 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](#).