

CASTLES IN THE CRADLE OF MANKIND

BY DIVERSE DIRECTIONS: SELF-GUIDED BICYCLE TOURS

Tour Overview

Tour Dates You may begin this tour on any day except Sunday. See Schedule page on our website for additional tour scheduling details.

Location The region of France known as Black Périgord, black for the darkness created by its large tracks of thick forests. Overnight destinations include 5 nights in Sarlat and 3 nights in Montignac. The train trip from Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport to Sarlat requires about 7 hours. Because of the time required to make the return trip to Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport from Montignac, plan to layover at least 1 night in Paris on the back-end of your tour.

Type Hub & Spoke Tour. This tour is available with standard support.

Terrain The terrain of this area consists primarily of rolling hills -- from gentle to wicked. The most popular day trip (the castle circuit) however, requires no long climbs. If you're into serious cycling, this tour includes plenty of options to test your meddle!

Length 7 days / 8 nights. Ride as many days as you like. Day trips include options for adding distance and challenge. Day trips can also be shortened.

Distance Choose from 11 day-trips ranging from 16 - 41 miles (26 - 66 km) in length.

Day-Trip Descriptions

Base 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 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 or wonderful base location could be hardly imagined.

Spoke 1: Prehistoric Artists

Route: Begins and ends in Sarlat. Very hilly with climbing required throughout.

Distance: 54 km / 33 miles

Description: This daytrip 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, Grotte du Font du Gaume (cave paintings), and the Abri de Cap Blanc, known for its prehistoric cave sculptures.

Spoke 2: The Heights of Black Périgord

Route: Begins and ends in Sarlat. Very hilly though with some climbing breaks in the form of fairly flat stretches.

Distance: 68 km / 42 miles

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Description: This day trip takes you through the dense Périgord forests to St. Cyprien, a beautiful village overlooking the Dordogne valley; Belvès, a medieval bastide commanding more tremendous views and considered one of the most beautiful villages in France; and then on to the left-bank Dordogne castles. Splendid scenery, quiet roads, and castles are the hallmarks of this day's ride.

Spoke 3: Bucolic Beauty

Route: Begins and ends in Sarlat. The easiest of the longer rides, the terrain is flat and moderately rolling for the most part, with an occasional climb to permit you to enjoy panoramic views of your surroundings.

Distance: 41 km / 25 miles

Description: This day trip features tiny, quiet country roads and the opportunity to visit aquatic gardens and the Castle of Fénelon. Most of the ride is wooded, passing through an occasional little village. Villages of note include Carsac, St. Julien, and Carlux.

Spoke 4: Salignac

Route: Begins and ends in Sarlat. Tough climbs at the beginning and end of the ride, but also lots of gently rolling and flat terrain in between.

Distance: 48.5 km / 30 miles

Description: This day trip takes you past numerous castles that dot the wooded landscape of this sparsely populated part of Périgord. Villages include St. Crépin, Salignac, Borrèze, and St. Nathalène.

Option: Optional side trip to the Jardins d'Eyrignac, France's most visited garden owing to its incredible beauty.

Spoke 5: Dordogne Castle Circuit

Route: Begins and ends in Sarlat. Mostly flat with a few gentle climbs. Of course, if you elect to tour any of the castles you'll be passing on the circuit, a fairly steep, but short, climb up to the castle awaits you.

Distance: 53 km / 33 miles

Description: This day trip takes you in a loop past both sides of the castle-studded Dordogne River with the opportunity to see the following castles: Château la Malartrie, Castelnaud, Château des Milandes, Château Feyrac, Château de Beynac, and Château de Marqueyssac. Don't worry about touring all the castles you'll pass. Some are closed to the public altogether and thus can be only appreciated from the exterior; others only open their extraordinary gardens to the public. However, the interiors of at least three of castles are open to the public (see Spokes 6 and 7). Along your route you'll also pass through the riverside village of la Roque-Gageac which, due to its unique setting, enjoys a subtropical microclimate. If you need to rest awhile, you can hire a boat in la Roque-Gageac for more relaxed touring along the river.

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Spoke 6: Right Bank Castles

Route: Begins and ends in Sarlat. Mostly flat.

Distance: 36 km / 22 miles

Description: This day trip is designed for those who wish to spend the day touring in depth the sights on the right-bank of the Dordogne. These sights include the Château de Beynac, (offering the best guided tour on the right bank), and the gardens of the Château de Marqueyssac. Finally, this route also includes the riverside village of la Roque-Gageac with its Troglodytic cliff dwellings, magnificent views, unique microclimate and relaxing boat rides along the Dordogne.

Spoke 7: Left Bank Castles

Route: Begins and ends in Sarlat. Mostly flat.

Distance: 43 km / 26 miles

Description: This day trip is designed for those who wish to spend the day touring in depth the sights on the left-bank of the Dordogne. These sights include the Castelnaud castle, (offering the best guided tour on the left bank), and the Château des Milandes and its gardens. Milandes was for decades the home of Josephine Baker, a Black American entertainer who captured the hearts of Europe in the 1920s. She purchased the castle as the home for her "rainbow tribe," the many children of all races that she adopted.

Spoke 8: Domme

Route: Begins and ends in Sarlat. Mostly flat until the climb up to Domme, about 3 km of climbing.

Distance: 25 km / 16 miles

Description: This day trip's destination is the bastide of Domme, a magnificently preserved fortified medieval village commanding an awesome view of the Dordogne Valley. One can easily spend a half-day exploring its sights and attractions.

Spoke 9: The Route to Montignac

Route: Begins in Sarlat and ends in Montignac. Lots of ups and downs and some long climbs.

Distance: 31 km / 19 miles

Description: This day trip's destination is your second tour base, Montignac. The route is wooded, hilly, and beautiful. You will savor the solitude as you cycle silently through idyllic countryside. Take the time to stop and explore the lovely village of St. Genies, the only sizeable village through which you will pass.

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Base 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 greatest cave paintings. It 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 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.

Spoke 10: 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 you have long climb if you choose to continue on to Les Eyzies.

Distance: 32 km / 20 miles

Description: The Vézère Valley is so incredibly beautiful that it is easy to understand why people have been settling here for 55,000 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.

Option: Optional side trip to les Eyzies, the capital of Prehistory, adds 28 km / 17 miles.

Spoke 11: Terrasson Loop

Route: Begins and ends in Montignac. Though there are a couple of long climbs on this loop, much of the ride is flat or rolling.

Distance: 40 km / 25 miles

Description: This day trip takes you through the tiny historic villages of Saint-Amand-de-Coly and Coly before continuing on to the relative metropolis of Terrasson, where you can easily spend an afternoon exploring, sightseeing and shopping.