



FRANCE Dossier Ref. FDR

Dordogne Adventure

Extra Departures: Please note: that departures 23JUL04, 30JUL04, 06AUG04, 12AUG04, 20AUG04 & 27AUG04 will operate Friday/Friday and the itinerary will remain the same as below.

Amended 19 Jan 2004. Valid from 01 May 2004 to 31 Aug 2005

JOINING INFORMATION

Please consult your agent for flights to reach the joining point of this trip. When a booking has been made a separate 'joining instructions' voucher will be forwarded to you giving details of our joining hotel and where to rendezvous with the Tour Leader. **NB You must bring a copy of your insurance policy with you to show to the tour leader at the start of the tour.** NB The joining information is occasionally subject to change and must be checked with your agent immediately prior to departure.

JOINING TOUR ABROAD

8 days/7 nights Land Only
Brive to Souillac

Join Brive on Sunday (day 1)

End Souillac on Sunday (day 8)

Clients booked on 'Land Only' arrangements should make their way to Brive railway station. The Joining Point is some distance from the first nightstop so it is important to rendez-vous with the group at an exact time. Please check the 'Joining Instructions' with EXPLORE or your agent before finalising your travel arrangements.

SPECIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Among the many highlights featured on this tour, we particularly mention:

- * **DORDOGNE RIVER** Paddle down the river on inflatable canoes.
- * **BACKROADS OF DORDOGNE** Cycling through an unspoilt corner of France.
- * **CASTLENAU-BRETENOUX** Cycle to fortified château.
- * **CARENAC** Explore attractive riverside village.
- * **MARTEL** Walk from historic town.

The Dordogne river meanders through southwest France from the Auvergne to the Bordelais, flowing into the Bay of Biscay north of Bordeaux. Our exploration concentrates on rural Périgord, renowned for its exquisite gastronomy and fine wines. The history of the region dates back more than 25,000 years, when prehistoric man left fascinating paintings in caves all along the Dordogne valley. In their turn the Romans also left their mark, planting vines and building bridges. A thousand years later many castles and fortified villages were built throughout the region – these became the setting for the bitter Hundred Years War, which in 1453 finally brought to an end 300 years of English rule. This is an active trip – we paddle sturdy inflatable canoes downriver from Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne to Souillac through rolling countryside and dramatic limestone cliffs. We cycle out of the river valley to fortified châteaux,

Earth Matters

- Brushing up on 'school French' is a great way to build friendly relationships with local people.
- As we use the train on this tour we significantly reduce the amount of pollution caused by carbon dioxide emissions.



underground caverns and historic towns; walk to medieval villages; explore on foot several attractive riverside towns and villages. We'll sample the true flavour of traditional France: lunches tend to be picnics along the river, but in the evenings we can either eat out at the excellent local restaurants, or perhaps enjoy a barbecue on the campsite. Continental breakfasts are prepared in camp.

FITNESS & PACE OF THE RIVER:

We travel the river as a group – in a small flotilla – with our tour leader showing the way. As paddling, walking and cycling are integral activities of the tour, a reasonable level of fitness is required – especially from mid-summer onwards when the water level is low, paddling becomes harder and it may be hot. Approximate timings for each river journey, cycle ride or walk are given below, but please note these may vary according to the river conditions, the weather and of course the ability of the group. On any day you may choose to skip a particular canoe or bike journey, and travel on to the next nightstop by vehicle instead. **Please note: although adult and children's lifejackets are supplied on the canoe journeys, and must be worn on the river at all times, an ability to swim is nonetheless essential. Cycle helmets are provided in all sizes, but for a guaranteed fit you may prefer to bring your own from home.**

LAND ONLY ITINERARY

Note: While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day route printed below, a degree of flexibility is built into the itinerary, depending on the level of the river. Overnight stops may occasionally vary from those suggested.

Day 1. Sunday. Join tour Brive railway station; transfer to Beaulieu

Arrive at Brive railway station and transfer to our campsite near Beaulieu. **Overnight camping and breakfast. C+.**

Day 2. In Beaulieu; canoe to Puybrun

Beaulieu is a typical Dordogne village with its old city walls still largely intact. Narrow cobbled streets fan out from the centre to reach a circular perimeter wall with many entrance gates. The morning is free for exploration; the 12th century Abbey church is well worth a visit to see the carved doorway depicting the Last Judgement, a masterpiece of Romanesque sculpture. After lunch we have a full safety briefing and then take to the river for the first time to learn the intricacies of propelling our boats. When everyone feels comfortable with the boats we

set off downriver. The gentle pace gives us ample time to enjoy the natural beauty of the scenery along the way, as we make our way to the hamlet of Puybrun, and our overnight campsite. Here there are spectacular views of the castle of Castelnau-Bretenoux, which dominates the whole valley. **Total 10 kms canoeing; 3 to 3.5 hrs approx. 2 nights camping (campsite with pool) and breakfast. C+.**

Day 3. In Puybrun; cycle to Château de Castelnau-Bretenoux

Leaving the river behind, we take to our bikes and cycle to the mighty castle of Castelnau-Bretenoux. Constructed between the 11th and 13th centuries, Castelnau-Bretenoux is one of the most impressive examples of medieval architecture in southern France. Built on a high terrace and triangular in shape, it is flanked by six huge towers. Deep ditches and a solid rampart made it an impregnable fortress which garrisoned 1,500 men and 100 horses during the bloody Hundred Years War. After visiting the castle we cycle back via Bretenoux to Puybrun where the afternoon is left free for further personal exploration, or you may choose to relax by the pool! **Total 14 kms cycling; 2 hrs approx.**

Day 4. Cycle to Vayrac; visit Carenac

This morning we cycle along side the river – here the section of the river is wide and open, affording great views back to Castelnau-Bretenoux and to the rolling hills and ridges beyond. We cross the river to Carenac, a delightful village which saddles a cliff overlooking the river and the isle of Calypso. Here we take a stroll through Carenac's maze of alleys and old streets lined with stone manor houses with red-tiled roofs. Setting off once more we follow the quiet road which follows the river to the charming market town of Fiorac. This is one of the most beautiful parts of the Dordogne Valley, the Cirque de Montvalent, where châteaux perch high on the cliffs above. Finally we arrive at Vayrac. Steeped in history, this area was the last bastion of resistance to Julius Caesar's advancing Roman army in 51BC. **Total 15 kms cycling; 2.5 to 3 hrs approx. 2 nights camping (campsite with pool) and breakfast. C+.**

Day 5. In Vayrac; optional visit to Rocamadour & Padirac

Today we have the chance either to relax for a day at Vayrac, possibly taking a stroll into town or enjoying the excellent facilities at our campsite, or to make an optional venture by minibus and bike to two of the region's most spectacular sites: the medieval pilgrimage

village of Rocamadour and the amazing cave complex at Padirac. We take a minibus to the beautiful village of Rocamadour, clinging to the 150m cliff edge, has been visited by pilgrims since the 13th Century and was one of the largest halting places on the route to Santiago do Compostela in northern Spain. After spending some time exploring the medieval streets we board our bikes and continue to the Gouffre de Padirac – an incredible cave complex, where underground lakes, caverns and passages can be explored on foot and by boat. Some of the subterranean passages reach nearly 100m in height and are draped with spectacular stalactites, some up to 75m tall! From Rocamadour to Padirac, and then on to Vayrac, the cycle journey takes us initially across undulating land, but then is mainly downhill as we make our way back down towards the river. *Total 32 kms cycling; 4.5 hrs approx.*

Day 6. Walk from Martel; canoe to Creysse
A short bus journey takes us out of the river valley to the medieval town of Martel, a sleepy settlement once occupied by the Moors. Close to the intricately constructed market place is the Gothic church of St. Maur, originally designed as a fortress. Descending on foot, we make our way to the riverside village of Gluges, attractively sited under high cliffs with good views southwards across the river. We have lunch before setting out along the river again. The scenery along the river becomes more dramatic now, as the Dordogne cuts gorges and canyons into the rock. Our campsite close to the lovely village of Creysse is a perfect place to relax at the end of an active day. *Total 6kms canoeing, approx 1.5 hrs. Overnight camping (campsite with pool) and breakfast. C+.*

Day 7. Canoe to Lacave
As we canoe downriver, the Dordogne twists and turns to the tiny village of Lacave, overlooked by the impressive Château Belcastel, perched on a cliff overlooking the valley. From Lacave we have the option to explore the Grottes de Lacave, another remarkable underground labyrinth of tunnels and lakes. A guided visit to the complex (optional) involves travelling into the caverns first by electric train, then by lift, and finally on foot through the one kilometre long gallery lined with strangely shaped stalactites and stalagmites. In the afternoon we return to the river and canoe a short but very beautiful stretch from Lacave. Alternatively there are many interesting walks in the area,

EXPLORE ACCOMMODATION RATINGS :

The following key is intended as a guide to the type of accommodation listed for each night stop. We stress that standards may vary and reserve the right to make changes as necessary without warning.

Camping – under canvas or bivouac

C+ : Designated campsite, usually with fixed WC/ shower. Possibly with fixed pre-erected tents.

C : Natural/Rough/Wild/Bush Camp. Limited or no facilities. Temporary WC. Usually need to pitch own tents.

ROOMING : On this tour all accommodation is in tents on fully serviced campsites. We provide one tent for every two people, but as the tents are technically for 3 people (dimensions: 200cm x 210cm x 125cm high, with a 130cm porch area for storing luggage), you may choose to sleep 3 to a tent. This can easily be arranged locally through your Tour Leader.

Please note that tents are not pre-erected and you will be required to put up and take down your own tent.

To help us with your rooming arrangements, please detail any preferences on the Booking Form (page 31 of the brochure).

For further details on Rooming, please see page 25.

including the scenic valley of the Ouyse and the attractive Château de la Treyme. *Total 12 kms canoeing; 2.5 hrs approx. Overnight camping (campsite with pool) and breakfast. C+.*

Day 8. Sunday. Tour ends Souillac

PERSONAL EXPENSES

You'll need some extra money to cover meals not included in the tour price, other sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry. As the opportunities to change money are limited, we recommend you take your funds in Euros, mainly in cash. Visa and Mastercard can be used in certain ATM cashpoints (Martel, Beaulieu and Rocamadour).

Meal Plan

Local Food and Drink: Meals not included in the itinerary are paid for separately by the traveller. You should calculate for buying 6 lunches & 7 dinners. Examples of comparative costs are given above.

	UK	France
Tea	£1.20	£1.40
Soft drink	0.80	1.50
Bottled water	0.80	1.20
Bottle of beer	2.50	1.50
Bottle of wine	10.00	6.00
2 Course Meal*	10.00	7.00
3 Course Meal**	18.00	12.00

*Cheap local fare in a small cafe or restaurant.

** (Set menu) typical food in a simple, reasonably comfortable mid-range restaurant.

Other Sightseeing

The following tours and excursions are usually available and may be booked and paid for through the tour leader during your trip. Estimated costs are provided.

ROCAMADOUR & PADIRAC Transport and entrance fees £15.00 (approx – subject to minimum group size).

LACAVE Visit to Lacave caves £4.50.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Our Boats and the River

Despite occasional stretches of 'broken water' previous canoeing experience is not necessary. The inherent stability of our inflatable canoes ensures they are safe – even for absolute novices – provided instructions are followed. We provide one boat for every two people – complete with lifejackets, paddles and a waterproof container for your belongings (note: your main luggage is carried from nightstop to nightstop by vehicle, so all you need carry during the day are items such as waterproofs, suncream, a water bottle, a change of clothing, etc). Fortunately navigation on this part of the Dordogne is not possible for motor boats or sailing craft so the only other boats on the river are canoes or inflatables. Lifejackets must be worn on the river at all times.

Our Bicycles

We use good condition multispeed mountain bikes which come equipped with panniers, pumps and padlocks. **Cycle helmets are available in children's and adult sizes; however you may choose to bring your own from home. Although nearly all the cycling is on minor backroads we strongly advise that helmets are worn at all times.**

Seasonal Climate

The Dordogne region is blessed with an agreeable climate – bright sunny days with little rain during the summer months and temperatures reaching 25-30°C. May, June and September can be cooler and sudden storms are not unknown.

Visa Requirements

Visas not required by U.K. citizens, E.C. nationals, CAN, Aus, NZ & USA. Other nationalities should consult their travel agent or relevant consulate.

Vaccinations & Protection

Nothing compulsory. Tetanus recommended.

Special Note: Visa and Vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

PACKING FOR YOUR TRIP

A complete list of clothing and personal gear is contained in Explore's '**General Information booklet**', available only after a booking has been accepted. Here we make a few specific recommendations with regard to your tour.

Luggage: Main baggage (kitbags or soft rucksacks are ideal) plus a waterproof daysac (for walking or cycling) – we advise you to pack light, and suggest a **maximum weight allowance of 33lbs / 15kgs**. As space is limited inside a tent, soft luggage is preferable to a suitcase. While travelling on the river, luggage is transported between campsites using a support vehicle. A plastic waterproof barrel is provided for each person and is carried on the boat. This is large enough to carry a change of clothing, etc. A supply of plastic bin liners is useful to ensure your belongings remain dry whilst camping.

Clothing: Pack essentially for '**Hot Conditions**'. Little clothing is needed so pack lightly. Expect to live in T-shirts and shorts, but bring a warm fleece for cool evenings and raingear for occasional rain. May, June and September may be slightly cooler. Cycling gloves are useful for the bike rides and also to avoid blisters when paddling. Sunhats, or peaked hats ideally with neck protection, are essential whilst canoeing, as the reflected sunlight can be intense. Please note that French health regulations require that men and boys wear 'proper' (lycra) swimming trunks in pools and not shorts.

Footwear: Plastic sandals are essential for the river (available cheaply locally). Bring a comfortable pair of walking boots or shoes/trainers for walking.

Equipment: Safety helmets are provided (in a variety of sizes) for the cycling, and we strongly recommend that they are used. For additional comfort you may wish to bring a gel saddle. We also provide lifejackets in all sizes for the canoeing, which must be worn at all times on the river. Bicycle locks and puncture repair kits are provided, to be shared amongst the group. You need to bring your own sleeping bags (2-season Jul & Aug, 3-season May, Jun & Sep) and a small torch plus spare batteries. Insect repellent, sunglasses, sunscreen, a sunhat and a bottle/can opener are also handy. Tents, sleeping mats and a small cooking stove with integral canteen are provided, as well as some basic crockery, should you want to cook for yourself on the campsite rather than eat out.