

Short breaks in THE DORDOGNE

Jennifer Ladonne suggests two perfect Dordogne weekends, exploring caves, châteaux and gastronomy



There are few places in the world that are as fascinating underground as they are above, but the Dordogne is one of them. It unites France's

UNESCO-listed prehistoric caves with countless attractions in the light of day: sky-high perched villages, bewitching gardens, romantic châteaux, beautiful landscapes and a rich gastronomic tradition. Add to that standout hotels which are destinations unto themselves.

The following itineraries offer the ideal overview of all the Dordogne has to offer, and can be mixed up in whatever way best suits your interests.

GETAWAY 1 ROUTE DU BONHEUR

The ultimate connoisseur's weekend

This four-day, three-night gourmet escapade follows a route well known to gastronomes that begins in wine village Saint-Émilion and ends at Château de la Treyne, one of the Dordogne's – and France's – most enchanting hotels.

DAY 1: FROM BORDEAUX TO SAINT-ÉMILION

At the doorway of the Dordogne, this gem of a village is known for its picturesque,



Yannick Alléno is executive chef at Saint-Émilion's exquisite Hôtel de Pavie, above

honey-coloured stone buildings and ramparts with magical views over its UNESCO-inscribed vineyards, a medieval church hewn into a cliffside and charming cobbled streets lined with boutiques, cafés and bars where you can taste the renowned reds and local crémant.

Night and dinner: Hôtel de Pavie

Set in three medieval stone buildings, this five-star hotel occupies a plum spot at the

heights of the village, along with Saint-Émilion's most impressive terrace and views. Light-filled interiors mix museum-quality artworks, designer furnishings and views over the village rooftops. The restaurant is a big draw, with a menu designed by two-star chef Yannick Alléno and spectacularly executed by chef Sébastien Faramond. Dinner starts with an apéro on the terrace overlooking the village and continues over multiple courses in the chic dining room.



Frank and Ricki Campbell at Château de Fayolle

DAY 2: SAINT-ÉMILION TO TRÉMOLAT Lunch, wine tasting and antiques at Château de Fayolle

Sample Frank and Ricki Campbell's award-winning reds, whites and sparkling wines at this contemporary tasting room, lunch counter and boutique. Visitors are welcome for a stroll or picnic in the grounds and to shop at the antiques store at this lovely 15th-century château surrounded by vineyards, meadows and woods (reserve in advance for lunch).

Afternoon in Bergerac

Yes, this is the town of Cyrano fame, but the real draw is the riverside setting, charming medieval half-timber houses



The cloisters at UNESCO-listed Cadouin Abbey



Best known for Cyrano, Bergerac's charms include its riverside setting and cobbled alleys

and cobbled alleys. If you arrive on a Wednesday or Saturday, the colourful farmers' market is a bonus.

Cloître de Cadouin

Founded in 1115, Cadouin Abbey, a UNESCO World Heritage site and a stopover on the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela, features a Romanesque church and an exquisite Flamboyant Gothic cloister.



Dine at Le Vieux Logis in charming Trémolat

Night and dinner: Le Vieux Logis

This vine-clad manor house in the charming hamlet of Trémolat is one of the region's best hotels, beloved for its antiques-filled rooms and contemporary amenities. In cool weather, guests can relax around the fire and in summer they can enjoy the pool and gardens. For dining, Michelin-starred chef Vincent Arnould serves classic contemporary French dishes highlighting the regional flavours: truffles, foie gras, and Périgord wines. Be sure to set aside time to stroll around the charming village.

DAY 3: TRÉMOLAT TO LACAVE: GARDENS, CAVES, CHÂTEAUX Morning at Château des Milandes

This beautiful château is famous for being the longtime home of Josephine Baker.

Visitors can learn about her extraordinary life as an actor and dancer and also as a decorated spy for the French Resistance. The château, chapel, gardens and small zoo are must-sees.

Lunch and afternoon at the Jardins de Marqueyssac

These exquisite gardens, perched high above the River Dordogne, merit at least an hour, if not an entire morning, to wander the nearly four miles of pathways surrounded by more than 150,000 hand-pruned boxwoods, with breathtaking viewpoints, gardens, rock gardens and a charming play area for kids. Every Thursday throughout July and August the garden stays open until midnight under candlelight.



Take your time at the Jardins de Marqueyssac

Sarlat

No trip to the Dordogne is complete without a visit to the area's poster child village. If you can go off-season, that's the best as it's quieter; if you're in high season, the crowds still won't manage to tarnish its extreme charm. Wednesdays and Saturdays are market days, best experienced off-season.

Night and dinner: Château de la Treyne From the approach to this magical hotel perched atop a cliffside overlooking the Dordogne River, you'll see why the château, spanning six centuries of architecture, is often compared to a storybook castle. The enchantment is neverending: from its elegant grounds harbouring a pool, flower and kitchen gardens and miles of lovely forest trails, to its splendid interiors and Michelin-starred restaurant, it's a jewel in the Dordogne. A word to the wise: get there at check-in time so as not to waste a minute of your time here.



River views at enchanting Château de la Treyne

DAY 4: ROCAMADOUR & SURROUNDS

If time permits, the perched village of Rocamadour, the extraordinary Gouffre de Padirac – one of France's most stunning caves with a turquoise-blue underground lake – and the adorable medieval village of Martel are all within a half-hour drive from the hotel. »



The Gouffre de Padirac cave is unlike no other

GETAWAY 2
FROM THE HEIGHTS TO THE UNDERWORLD

Villages, gardens and grottos

DAY 1: PÉRIGUEUX MARKET, CAVES

Morning and lunch in Périgueux
 Try to arrive in Périgueux on market day (Wednesdays and Saturdays) when stalls are set up next to the Cathédrale Saint-Front. The old town is a picturesque mix of medieval and Renaissance architecture and one of the more authentic towns in the Dordogne. The Vesunna Gallo-Roman Museum houses fascinating vestiges of the city's Roman past. For coffee or brunch, try Cacaothé. For lunch, Café Louise on the market square is a good choice.

Afternoon at Lascaux IV

An absolute must-see when in the Dordogne, this legendary cave is a perfect replica of the one discovered in 1940, which is now closed due to its extreme fragility. The 600-plus animal paintings are breathtaking, and the museum itself, in a soaring modern building with interactive rooms and a great boutique, adds to the general splendour.

Night and dinner: Hôtel de Bouilhac

Antiques mingle with contemporary touches at this historic 17th-century château in Montignac-Lascaux, five minutes from Lascaux IV. Each of its 17 rooms is unique, and the splendid first-floor deluxe suites include giant balconies and river views. The indoor pool and spa are great for unwinding before a gourmet dinner at the excellent Ro.Bo restaurant.



Dine well and spend the night at the handsome 17th-century Hôtel de Bouilhac



The Vesunna Gallo-Roman Museum, dedicated to the Roman origins of Périgueux



The otherworldly Gouffre de Proumeyssac

DAY 2: FROM MONTIGNAC-LASCAUX TO LES EYZIES

Morning underground

Some of the best of the 147 prehistoric sites and decorated caves of the Vézère Valley listed by UNESCO World Heritage are clustered here. Sadly, you won't have time to visit them all, so choose according to your particular interests. If cave drawings are your thing, head to the marvellous Grotte de Rouffignac (nicknamed the Cave of a Hundred Mammoths) or the Grotte de Font-de-Gaume. For stalactites, stalagmites and other crystallised formations, the magical

Grotte du Grand Roc and the Gouffre de Proumeyssac, with its blue underground lake, are spectacular.

Lunch at the Eyrygnac Gardens

After a morning underground, you'll feel like Orpheus ascending in the peerless Eyrygnac Gardens' 25 acres of exquisitely sculpted trees, yews and boxwood, French-style flowerbeds and 500 acres of protected woodlands. Dine on healthy



You'll be enchanted by the Eyrygnac Gardens



The family-owned Château de Puymartin

gourmet dishes on the café terrace among trees and flowers. Time permitting, stop at the Château de Puymartin. Owned by the same family for five centuries, this fairytale castle offers a captivating journey through their history – complete with a resident ghost – and boasts magnificent views over the countryside.

Night and dinner: Hôtel Le Centenaire

Expect a warm welcome at this gem of a hotel set conveniently in the centre of town. Many of the hotel's recently

refurbished rooms include a terrace or a balcony overlooking the flower garden, outdoor pool or spacious terrace, and the hotel's bistro and gastronomic restaurants are among the best in the Dordogne.

DAY 3: FROM LES EYZIES TO CÉNAC-ET-SAINT-JULIEN

Historic villages

Views aside, the clifftop village of Domme offers a hefty dose of history, with fortified walls and gates dating back to 1280, and graffiti from the Knights Templar, who were imprisoned in the Porte des Tours from 1306 to 1318 as they awaited trial. Don't miss Domme's renowned grotto. At La Roque-Gageac, nestled romantically in a cliffside across the river from Domme, steep cobblestone paths allow you to view the medieval



The Porte des Tours in Domme

houses or continue up the mountain for eye-popping views from above the village. Meanwhile, the medieval Château de Beynac is one of the prettiest sights in the Dordogne, atop the beautifully preserved town of Beynac.

Night and dinner: Château de Maraval

Two years and an army of craftspeople have transformed this 16th-century



The medieval Château de Beynac sits above the village of Beynac

château and former nunnery into a super-chic haven of tranquillity and relaxation. Besides fabulously beautiful and comfortable rooms and beds, the hotel offers a hammam, whirlpool spa, a heated outdoor pool and acres of beautiful woods and gardens.

DAY 4: MONPAZIER, BIRON AND ITS CHÂTEAU

If you're headed back to Bordeaux, take the time to stop at the villages of Monpazier and Biron. Monpazier, on the tiny Dropt River, is a Plus Beau Village and one of France's best-preserved fortified towns. Three of its original six stone gateways are still intact. The golden stone buildings were erected in 1284 by the England's King Edward I. Topped by a lovely château, Biron offers a charming glimpse of medieval life. 📍



The central square of the medieval bastide village of Monpazier

DORDOGNE ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE:
BY PLANE

Bergerac Dordogne Périgord Airport is the primary gateway to the region, with direct flights from multiple UK cities, including London, Manchester and Bristol.

BY TRAIN AND CAR

Travel direct by train from Paris Montparnasse to Bordeaux Saint-Jean and rent a car at the station (there are lots of options there). You can take a train from Bordeaux to Périgueux, but it is quicker by car (1h 30m) and since you'll need one to follow these itineraries, you'll have a better choice of rental cars and prices in Bordeaux.

WHERE TO STAY

- 4* **Le Château de Maraval:** chateaudemaraval.com
- 5* **Hôtel de Pavie, Saint-Émilion:** hoteldepavie.com/en
- 4* **Le Vieux Logis, Trémolat:** www.vieux-logis.com
- 5* **Château de la Treyne, Lacave:** www.chateaudelatreyne.com/en
- 4* **Hôtel de Bouilhac, Montignac-Lascaux:** www.hoteldebouilhac.com
- 4* **Château de Maraval, Cénac-et-Saint-Julien:** chateaudemaraval.com

TOURISM CONTACTS

- Dordogne-Perigord:** www.dordogne-perigord-tourisme.fr
- Grand Périgueux:** www.tourisme-grandperigueux.fr/en
- Périgueux Tourism:** www.tourisme-grandperigueux.fr/en
- Sarlat Périgord Noir:** en.sarlat-tourisme.com
- Pays de Bergerac:** www.pays-bergerac-tourisme.com/en/home