

Journey in Dordogne Valley between Lot and Corrèze

{ TURNKEY TOUR 1 TO 4 DAYS }

TRAVEL GUIDE

*Upstream of the Dordogne, from Causses du Quercy
to the first of the great dams in the Haut Pays.*



© Christophe Baulhié - Agence Vent d'Austan



© Malika Turin - Vallée de la Dordogne



© Lot Tourisme - Teddy Verneuil

© Christophe Baulhié - Agence Vent d'Austan

DORDOGNE Valley

2023/2024 Edition



Lot and Corrèze,

from Occitanie to Limousin



The golden slates that sing beneath the sunshine, the deep valleys surrounded by cliffs, villages clinging to mountainsides or sitting on the riverbank : the Causses du Quercy have an accent that rolls like the drystone on the walls and pebbles on the riverbed...

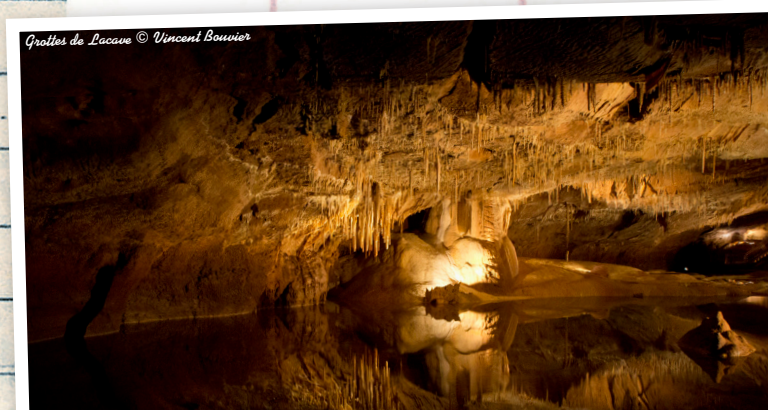
This is where your adventure begins : on the edge of Occitanie.

A 4-day trip (or more) travelling up the Dordogne, a source of life and age-old trade route. This is a place where nature, man and history have created a land of contrasts to give the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve soul.

As you explore the different routes, the scenery's often unexpected and wild beauty is a constant call to all your senses whether you're beneath «the starriest sky in France», deep in the Causse, visiting some of the Most Beautiful Villages in France or stopping at the ports that keep the bargemen's legacy alive. Padirac Cave, Rocamadour, Collonges-la-Rouge, Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne and Argentat-sur-Dordogne are just a few of the highlights on your trip back in time and off the beaten track.

The adventure keeps up the exciting pace as you head to Haute-Dordogne and the land of the great dams. It even delves into legends and medieval fantasy in a whirlwind of images bursting with the Espérance River, cliffs, towns with personality and forgotten fortresses.

Whether you take the road or footpath, river or trail, the valley is bursting with treasures and gems gifted by the centuries.



Day 1

Souillac and Padirac



1 Zoom



Souillac : Hit the road !

Souillac Abbey is the perfect start point to venture towards the **Dordogne Valley villages in the Lot**, tackle the cliffs lining the Dordogne in Saint-Sozy before taking the D15 over to the left bank and listening to what the bubbling Alvignac has to say. Head east (take the D60 and D90 or the little roads through the cause if you prefer) to continue your adventure to the **centre of the Earth at Padirac Cave**, an ancient source of mystery and legend before it revealed one of Mother Nature's masterpieces.

2 Glance

There's no way you can visit Souillac without dropping in on the **descendants of Louis Roque**, the man who set up a **distillery in a former convent in town in 1905**.

The 6th generation of the family keeps the delicious legacy alive today : the **art of blending plum brandy**.

Visit the cellar and museum to soak up the family tradition of togetherness and tasting outstanding tipples (please drink responsibly) : brandy, classic spirits with fruity flavours, heady with local walnuts or Cahor wine etc.



3

Rocks and Men

Several hiking loops have appeared around Saint-Sozy. One of them is called «des rochers et des hommes» (Rocks and Men) and is legendary for its **panoramic view of the Dordogne Valley** stretching from Causse de Martel to Causse de Gramat.

Thousands of years ago, the river carved out a path between two limestone plateaus to form lofty cliffs covered in ivy, moss and juniper that hide natural caves used by mankind since the dawn of time.

NB : the route runs along narrow cliff roads and can be slippery when wet.





Zoom

Alvignac-Miers and its spring water

The spa resort may have had its ups and downs since opening to therapy guests, but its architecture and history still go hand in hand with the famously spring that was uncovered centuries ago next to

Alvignac, near Lac de la Source lake.

People say that its sodium sulfate water can alleviate digestive and urinary tract issues. It is home to early 20th century buildings whose style is in keeping with the era, including the Pavillon des Eaux (water pavilion), drilling and spring buildings, Kiosque du Bouillon and Grand Hôtel, which was made into a restaurant overlooking the lake and a spa dating back to 1911.



Vue générale sur la Pile d'Assiettes au Lac Supérieur de la Salmière du grand Dôme © Louis Nespoulous



5

Visite étonnante - Soirée Explorateurs © Christoph Gerigk - SLS de Padirac

In the belly of the Earth : Padirac Cave

How do you like the sound of **exploring a secret universe** that has been thousands of years in the making deep beneath our feet ? Since it opened to visitors in 1899, **Padirac Cave** has been **the biggest underground tourist attraction in France**. The figures are mind-boggling when it comes to reaching the depths : 35m diameter opening, 75m beneath the surface of the cause, up to 103m tracking the river that runs along 40km of galleries with 2km open to visitors... The adventure begins on board a boat steered by your captain before you feast your eyes on a mineral spectacle, with the unforgettable and iconic Lac de la Pluie lake under a 60m long stalactite, Lac des Gours lake with its lagoon shimmer and the Grand Dôme whose lofty ceiling looms 94m high.



Take the D673 south west. Yes, you're moving away from the river but towards a **legendary destination : Rocamadour**.

Sites

- **Louis Roque distillery in Souillac**
www.lavieilleprune.com
- **Rocks and men hiking trail in St Sozy**
www.vallee-dordogne.com/offres/des-rochers-et-des-hommes-saint-sozy-fr-418053
- **Source Salmière spring in Miers-Alvignac**
www.vallee-dordogne.com
- **Padirac Cave in Padirac**
www.gouffre-de-padirac.com

Where to stay

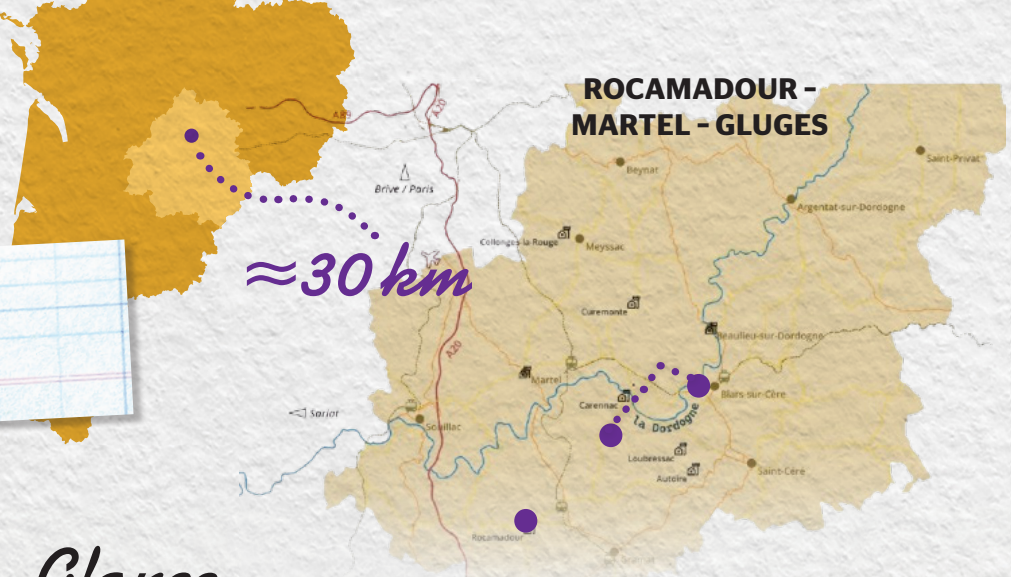
- **Camping La Clairière in Lamothe-Fénelon**
www.la-clairiere-camping.fr
- **Camping les Ondines in Souillac**
www.camping-lesondines.com
- **Nature camp Lodg'ing in Lacave**
www.lodg-ing.com/dordogne

Where to eat

- **Au fil de l'eau in Miers-Alvignac**
www.aufildeleau-miers.fr

Day 2

Rocamadour to
Martel



1 Glance



Rocamadour de nuit © Christophe Bonthe - Agence Vent d'Aulan

As you head over the drawbridge, the **sacred town of Rocamadour** appears like a mirage above the Alzou Valley, a tributary of the Dordogne... Capture the moment ; soak up the history and landscape.

You need more than a day to uncover all its mysteries. But let's get back on the D840 towards **the Espérance River** or visit Montvalent, where a welcoming beach awaits on the left bank if you want to cool off. It's the same way to cross the bridge to the other bank and canoe base then onto Martel which, just like the town we started the day in, belongs to the VIP circle of the **«Most Beautiful Villages in France.»**

Rocamadour

A trip here can be mystical, spiritual, architectural, memorable or touristy.

Rocamadour... «Houses on the river, churches on the houses, rocks on the churches, castle on the rock» : is how the author Pierre Loti described the sacred town.

This cliffside labyrinth was **a major pilgrimage site** in the Middle Ages, a key stage of the **Way of St James**, the last section of the Chemin d'Amadour hiking trail that runs 500km from Soulac-sur-Mer in Gironde to the Causses du Quercy, and is now a UNESCO World Heritage site.

From the only street lined with shops and restaurants, **Notre-Dame Chapel**, the castle walls and Saint-Amadour Crypt to Saint-Sauveur Basilica and its 7 chapels (including Notre-Dame Chapel)... prepare to get your calf muscles working ! If you're not tired out from all the climbing, make like the pilgrims of old and scale the 216 steps to the top on your knees.

Just don't try to pull Durandal, Roland de Roncevaux's legendary sword, out of the rock next to Notre-Dame Chapel... The real sword in the stone !



Rocamadour panorama - @ Dominique Viet

2



Orgue Rocamadour - Vallée Dordogne © Eric Martin Le Figaro

3

Swim beneath the cliffs

Cool off with a dip at **Gluges Plage**, a pebble beach in Montvalent on the left bank of the Dordogne, looking onto the lofty limestone cliffs which you scour to find each crevice and bird native to the rock. Swimming in the crystal-clear (and shallow water in this area) Espérance River is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Lifeguards in summer.

The Dordogne has been a communication and trade route since Antiquity (or even earlier)... It still is, and setting sail on a canoe to see another side to the valley and its riverbanks is a great (and safe) adventure for all the family (ages 5 and over). No experience is alike no matter which route you choose, what with the changing currents, hills that peak and trough as the day goes by and aquatic creatures that join the rowers.



St Sozy village-port@Thomas Lambelin

4

Notre coup de 

Stroll around the town with 7 towers

Martel has been thriving since it was founded between the 11th and 12th century on an ancient crossroads where Atlantic salt and Aquitaine wine passed through. It's a joy exploring the wealthy trade town's lanes lined with cute little boutiques and buzzing terraces. Soak up centuries of architectural wonder in the «town with 7 towers»: Palais de la Raymondie, Saint-Maur Church, Hôtel Condamine, the market hall, mansions and fortified gates. We should mention that the **truffle** trade has flourished here since the 19th century. There's even a **steam train** named after it: the **Truffadou** train used to transport truffles and now takes visitors to the cliffside.

Let's cross the Causses du Quercy Regional Nature Park north on one of the many paths leading to Corrèze and leave Lot to explore the very first of the «**Most Beautiful Villages in France**»... **Collonges-la-Rouge**.



Martel @COCHISE

Sites

- **Rocamadour**
www.vallee-dordogne.com/rocamadour
- **Gluges Plage**
www.vallee-dordogne.com
- **Canoe base**
www.vallee-dordogne.com
- **Martel**
www.vallee-dordogne.com
- **Martel steam train**
www.trainduhautquercy.info

Where to stay

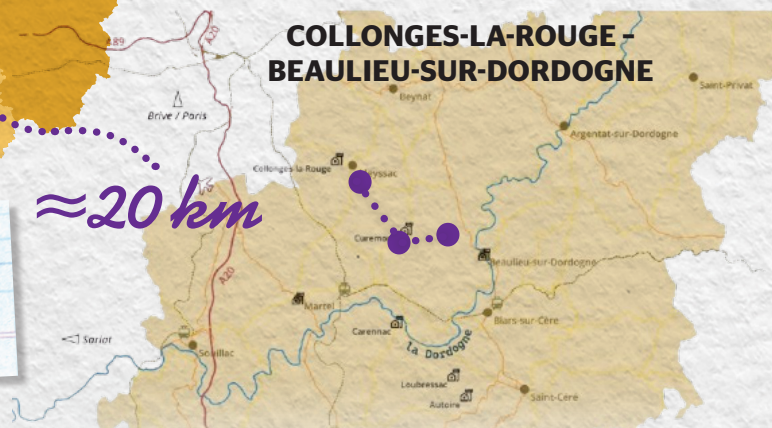
- **Camping le Ventoulou in Thégra**
www.camping-leventoulou.com
- **Nature camp Lodg'ing in Lacave**
www.lodg-ing.com/dordogne

Where to eat

- **Le Belvédère in Rocamadour**
www.hotel-le-belvedere.fr
- **Maison Sophie in Martel**
www.tourisme-lot.com

Day 3

Collonges-la-Rouge to Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne



1

If you manage to tear yourself away from the warm atmosphere and hypnotic red shades in the aptly-named **Collonges-la-Rouge**, take the RD166 and RD10 to revisit the **Corrèze vineyard** in Branceilles and its vibrant winemaking heritage.

Vine stocks, a winery, tastings and then you're back to the **Dordogne River** as you drive along one of the little roads skimming the **Lot landscapes**.



The **waterfront town of Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne** keeps watch over the river, as it has since the Middle Ages.

The adventure continues further along the river...



2

Collonges-la-Rouge

Collonges-la-Rouge lies within Quercy and Limousin and the red town burnishes against the green surrounding valley. You won't believe your eyes as you gaze at the town on the Meysac fault.

The rolling horizon is at its peak at dawn and dusk, so take a walk to soak up the architecture and history of a village that's had many lives. **Red sandstone buildings**, ochre stone slates or blue grey slates : the buildings come together in harmony. Saint-Pierre Church, Renaissance castles, the old grain and wine market hall and Pénitents Chapel capture centuries gone by : a stage for pilgrims on the **Way of St James** in the Middle Ages, a castellany for the **Turenne viscount** from the 13th century, a thriving trade town from the 16th century and headquarters for the Black Penitents until the late 19th century...

A **traditional village** where you'll love wandering around its shops and restaurant terraces. It's no wonder the **«Most Beautiful Villages in France»** accolade began here!

3

The Corrèze vineyard revival

You simply must stop at the winery and sample **Branceilles wine** : each bottle has a story to tell ! Back in the 1980s, locals said that the «clay-limestone truffle soil, a by-product of being so close to the Dordogne Valley, would be good for vine growing...» And they were right. The **Corrèze vineyard** was rather large between Gallo-Roman times until the phylloxera infestation in 1880. Branceilles even won a prize at the 1878 Foire de Paris. Passionate vineyards have brought it back to life by getting together to found the Mille et Une Pierres winery.

4 *Glance*




Let's return to the banks of the Espérance to another of the «Most Beautiful Villages in France» : **Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne**. The little fishing and farming village was part of the great river trade era and has been a prime location since the Early Middle Ages with the foundation of a Benedictine Abbey (856-858). Beyond the banks, the reflection of the Pénitents Chapel belltower seems to sink into the Dordogne. You can get to know the Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne lanes on several tours or go on a trip back in time with a fun-filled Terra Aventura geocaching adventure.



Sites

- Collonges-la-Rouge
www.vallee-dordogne.com
- Vignerons de Branceilles
www.1001-pierres.com
- Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne
www.vallee-dordogne.com
- Gabare Adèle et Clarisse
www.vallee-dordogne.com

Where to stay

- Gîtes la Maison des Etoiles in Noailhac
www.lamaisondesetoiles.fr
- La Ferme des Histoires Mélangées B&B and chalets in Sexcles
www.lafermedeshistoiresmelangees.com

Where to eat

- Cueillette in Aitillac
www.restaurant-cueillette.fr
- Le Turenne
www.leturenne.com

5

Cap sur

Le Château de Jumilhac !

In the wake of the boatmen

Let's stay in Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne (this new adventure is a no-brainer) and set sail on board the **Adèle et Clarisse barge**, a replica of a «courau» (a flat-bottomed boat). These boats used to sail down the Dordogne to Libourne and Bordeaux carrying staves to make barrels and stakes to train vines. The cruise shows you another side of the town and tells you everything you need to know (or almost) about barges and their history here.

Day 4

Argentat-sur-Dordogne to Saint-Geniez-ô-Merle

ARGENTAT-SUR-DORDOGNE



1

We end our adventure by the river, going up the D12 which snakes along the **Espérance River** up to the **Argentat-sur-Dordogne** alluvial plain on the left bank...

It's almost the end of the waterway. The waterway ends at **the Chastang dam** which you can go up the left bank on the D129 to reach.

From here, the valley is harder to explore and you need to head over to Servières-le-Château (D29) before taking the D13 to hook up with the Maronne, a major tributary in the area.

This is where you'll find **the Merle Towers**, nestled in a sprawling curve, oozing mystery and standing the test of time, the forest and space.

2 Glance

A port on the Dordogne

The historical home of bargemen, **Argentat-sur-Dordogne** has always had an unbreakable bond with the Espérance River. The former trade port is now a tourist attraction and marks the transition between the valley and Haute-Dordogne. The charming winding lanes are dotted with old stone slate-roofed houses whilst cobbled quays stand in the port. Argentat-sur-Dordogne keeps pace with the water, barge rides and rowing trips. Fly fishers watch the boats glide by a little further away in the catch-and-release area that attracts keen fishermen from all over France and further afield.

3



An environmentally sensitive area

It's all about reconnecting with nature: the former Argentat-sur-Dordogne gravel pits are now listed as an environmentally sensitive area and subject to exemplary protection and regeneration as part of a Corrèze Council campaign. You can watch the restoration of the 40ha site (over the course of several years) with a guided tour that you can download on a free app. The idea is to encourage flora and fauna to reclaim the habitat. In a setting where the plants are gradually regaining their rightful place, sharing the project with the public helps to introduce rare species. Have you heard of the blackcap, whiskered tern or sand martin? Well, it's time you met them!



4

Wow factor

A giant on the Dordogne

79m high by 300m wide, a reservoir spanning 31km (with enough water to fill 75,000 Olympic swimming pools), 3 turbines weighing 50 tons each and producing enough electricity to supply a population of 186,000: **Chastang dam** is a giant! The industrial structure has been operating since 1951 upstream of Argentat-sur-Dordogne at Servières-le-Château.



It plays a vital role in boosting the valley's economy, tourism and energy. Two viewing platforms enable visitors to see into the structure so they get a sense of its sheer size. The on-site EDF Odysselec provides complete information plus a guided tour of the dam itself (booking required).



5

A spectacular castrum

Still heading upstream: Xaintrie... Its forests, deep gorges and rocky headland overlooking the Maronne. Stones in the rocks... **A feudal city** emerges from the greenery to create a surreal image deep in the landscape. Are they fortress ruins? Not at all... This is one of **medieval Limousin's crowning glories**: the Merle Towers. Or rather: the **Seven Merle Towers**. They were built between the 12th and 15th century, owned by different lords and still overlook a feudal castrum with what's left of an entire village. The collective lordship was strategically positioned on the border between the Aquitaine duchy, Auvergne county and Toulouse county and held its position until the Wars of Religion. Prepare for a mind-blowing history lesson, a setting where any legend rings true and 10 hectares of grounds. Why not try a bit of role play and experience one of the «naturally medieval» events here?

Sites

- **Argentat-sur-Dordogne (19)**
www.vallee-dordogne.com/la-vallee-de-la-dordogne/villes-et-villages/argentat
- **Argentat biodiversity reserve (19)**
www.correze.fr/reserve-biodiversite
- **Chastang dam in Servières-le-Château (19)**
www.barrage-chastang.com
- **Merle Towers in Saint-Geniez-ô-Merle (19)**
www.toursdemerle.fr

Where to stay

- **Gîtes la Maison des Etoiles in Noailhac (19)**
www.lamaisondesetoiles.fr
- **La Ferme des Histoires Mélangées B&B and chalets in Sexcles (19)**
www.lafermedeshistoiresmelangees.com

Where to eat

- **Les Jardins Sothys in Auriac (19)**
www.lesjardinssothys.fr
www.lesjardinssothys.fr/le-restaurant/



Address Book :

Tourism Offices

- **Dordogne Valley Tourist Office**
www.vallee-dordogne.com
- **Our Tourist Information Centers**
 - Argentrat-sur-Dordogne
 - Aubazine
 - Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne
 - Carennac
 - Collonges-la-Rouge
 - Gramat
 - Martel
 - Rocamadour
 - Saint-Céré
 - Souillac

Market Days

- **Tuesday:** Bretenoux, Gramat, Meyssac
- **Wednesday:** Aubazine, Beaulieu, Martel
- **Thursday:** Argentrat, Vayrac, Saint-Laurent-les-tours
- **Friday:** Floirac, Meyssac, Saint-Privat, Souillac
- **Saturday:** Bretenoux, Martel, Saint-Céré, Vayrac, Gramat
- **Sunday:** Beynat, Cressensac, Puybrun, Saint-Céré

Canoe rental

- **Argentat Dordogne Canoë Kayak**
ckcab.fr/
- **Escapade Nature Pays d'Argentat**
www.escapadenatureargentat.com/
- **Canoës Safaraid Dordogne**
www.canoe-kayak-dordogne.com/
- **Corrèze Sports Animations**
www.correze-sports-animations.fr/
- **Carennac Aventure**
www.carennac-aventure.fr/
- **Girac Loisirs Canoë**
www.girac-loisirs.com/
- **Compagnie Sports Nature**
www.compagnie-sports-nature.com/
- **Copeyre Canoë**
canoes-dordogne.fr/
- **Apache Canoë**
<https://www.camping-europe-argentat.fr/>
- **Loisirs Evasion 19**
<https://loisirsevasion19-ragutora.sitew.fr/>



What can you bring back?

- Duck or goose foie gras
- Walnut oil or truffle oil
- Truffles
- Rocamadour goat cheese
- Straw wine from Corrèze
- Wines from Corrèze, Rocamadour, and Coteaux de Glanes



Marché à la truffe-Bretenoux-© Malika Turin

Baignade à Gluges © Cochine Orly




My best memories

Wow!

*A must
see* 

I can paste here, my photos memories...

My favorite sites 

1

2

3

*To see
during my next
visit!*

* Sites and accommodations mentioned in this roadbook are only suggestions. A full list of sites and accommodations is available on our website : www.vallee-dordogne.com (in French).

DORDOGNE Valley

Photos : Dordogne Libre - Ville de Périgueux - Dan Courtice - Sémitour Périgord - Délic & Décolle - OT Périgord Dronne Belle - Frédéric Tessier - Agence Les Conteurs - Aurelie Stapi. porteursdesonges.com - Petite Souris Photographie - C. Mollitor PNRPL - P. Méchineau

Pour retrouver toutes les informations, rendez-vous sur
www.visit-dordogne-valley.co.uk