



Cycling Dordogne Self-Guided – **Dordogne** (8 days / 7 nights)

The route follows the S. bank of the R. Dordogne on a little road heading West from the ancient town of Souillac, through tiny sun-baked villages, lingering for a day to explore and shop in the Renaissance town of Sarlat-la-Canèda, and visit some of the many chateaux which tower above the river here; amongst them Beynac and Montfort, Castelnaud with a Museum of Mediaeval Warfare, Les Milandes, once the home of Josephine Baker, and the fortified Bastide-town of Domme.

Reaching St. Cyprien you turn north to Les Eyzies, nestling beneath towering cliffs at the confluence of the Dordogne's tributary the Vézère and the little R. Beune. After a day here to take in some pre-historic caves, and perhaps picnic on the willow-hung banks of the river, follow the R.Vézère upstream and N. West, riding beneath the troglodytic site of La Roque St. Christophe, and lunching beside the golden stones of St. Leon, (a canoe trip is a possible diversion here). Take time to visit the beautiful chateau of Losse on the way to Montignac and the world-famous painted caves of Lascaux. Turn and head back S. East via the chateau of Salignac and the Italianate gardens of the manoir d'Eyrignac to Souillac astride the Dordogne.

The Dordogne was frequently a frontier between the French and English armies in the Hundred Years War in the 14th Century, and many chateaux and fortified Bastide-towns remain. It meanders here through a dramatic landscape of fine golden limestone, which lends itself superbly to carving and stone-work, hence the splendid castles and manorial houses hereabouts. Also the cave-riddled cliffs of the R. Vézère and its tributaries, the Beune and the Petit Beune which were among the earliest "desirable residences". Whilst many of the openings you will see are formed by natural erosion, many others are the work of ancient man. The triangle formed by the towns of Sarlat, Les Eyzies and Montignac has often been called the cradle of civilisation. The reason for the cave-paintings remains unclear, but the fact that these particular caves were never inhabited and that often paintings and engravings were made in almost inaccessible locations suggests a religious or magical significance.

Accommodation is in a pleasant mix of 2 and 3-star hotels, some with pools.

Périgord, the pre-revolution name of the area, also describes the cuisine which combines black truffles, still hunted in the traditional manner using pigs and dogs, in flavoursome sauces with goose and duck, together with other wild mushrooms such as ceps and the beautiful golden Chanterelles. Also on the menu is foie gras, the delicately-flavoured liver of carefully-fattened geese.

Locally-grown walnuts and chestnuts find their way into a variety of salads, as well as into liqueurs, cakes and open tarts. Local wine-growing areas include Bergerac to the West for both red and white varieties and the fine reds of the Cahors region. Both are less well-known than Bordeaux outside France, but justly reputed among connoisseurs.

ROUTE DETAIL:

Note: *The daily distances may seem modest but remember, there is a massive amount to see and visit here. Add your own trips if you are feeling exercise-deprived!*

Day 1 Individual arrival in the bustling old town of Souillac, straddling the R. Dordogne. Settle into your hotel and explore the old quarter.
Overnight, Souillac.

Day 2 (30km / 19m) Collect bikes, then cycle on tiny roads alongside the R. Dordogne. Visit the Chateau de Fénelon on the way to the Renaissance town of Sarlat.

First of two nights in Sarlat.

Day 3 (32km / 20m) Take an extra day here to explore and shop, and cycle out to visit the *bastide* town of Domme and lovely old la Roque Gageac tucked beneath cliffs alongside the Dordogne. **Second night Sarlat.**

Days 4 (48km / 30m) Cycle across rolling country to visit the Chateau of Beynac before arriving at Castelnaud dominated by its own 12^C chateau. The nearby chateau of les Milandes (home of Josephine Baker) can also be visited before you arrive in the delightful old town of St. Cyprien. From here you leave the Dordogne to arrive in the Vézère valley and the cliffs of les Eyzies, renowned world-wide as the centre of Pre-History.

First of two nights in les Eyzies.

Day 5. Take a day to visit the Museum and caves such as Font de Gaume and to explore the local area. **Second night les Eyzies.**

Day 6 (32km / 20m) Bike along the Vézère valley beneath the towering cliffs of la Roque St. Christophe, a remarkable troglodytic site inhabited from prehistoric times until the 18th Century! Continue via the Romanesque church of St. Leon sur Vézère to Montignac, and the world-famous cave-paintings of Lascaux. **Overnight, Montignac.**

Day 7 (43km / 27m) Return to Souillac past the golden limestone village of St. Geniès, and the 13th century convent of Salignac. The lovely 18th century Italianate gardens of Eyrignac can be visited. Return bikes on arrival. **Overnight, Souillac.**

Day 8 Take time to visit the fine Romanesque abbey church with its splendid carved doorway before you leave. Tour ends after breakfast.

LOGISTICS:

Souillac is easily accessible by train from Paris, Gare d'Austerlitz (4hrs) or from Toulouse (2hrs). By road from Paris is approximately 5hrs.

Terrain: *Easy to moderate, often flat, some sharp climbs.*

Self-Guided Dates: *Daily departures April – October.*

Included: *Daily breakfast, 7nights hotel accommodation with private facilities, **note that 5 evening meals are not included (one night Sarlat and one night les Eyzies)**. Luggage transported daily. Hybrid road bike, helmet etc. Local contact. Route notes and maps.*

Not included: *2 dinners, lunches, drinks, phone calls, etc.*