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Long Weekend review: Discover a cave of historical paintings, open air theatres and a taste for sweet wine in the Dordogne



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Chateau des Vigiers, a 16th-century estate in Bergerac

The weekend:

Get away from the crowds of Bordeaux in south-west France's rural, second-home paradise. The Dordogne is the perfect summer escape; you can either wile away lazy afternoons sipping wine in the shade or, experience the region's three Cs – countryside, culture and, most importantly, cuisine, a weekend tour of medieval market towns and panoramic vistas, where there's a chateau nestled on practically every hillside.

Where?

Fly to Bergerac, in the southern Dordogne, and treat it as a gateway to the rest of the region rather than the destination itself. Rent a car from the airport and head straight to lunch at Maison Vari in the village of Monbazillac, less than half an hour south of the airport. After a long, drawn-out lunch sampling the area's sweet white wine, you can meander to the Chateau of Monbazillac, a stone's throw from the restaurant, or spend the afternoon cycling through quaint villages and local vineyards on an electric bike tour.

The stay:

We stayed at Chateau des Vigiers, a 16th-century estate converted into a luxury hotel that has a one Michelin starred restaurant and a 27-hole golf course. Soak up the evening wandering around the grounds before getting comfortable in the hotel's more relaxed brasserie restaurant that excels at duck dishes, confit and homemade foie gras.

The food:

It wouldn't be a trip to France without revelling in the local food and drink. Market vendors in any of the Dordogne's towns will be happy to show off their huge vegetables, lean mushrooms and an absurdly wide selection of cheeses – make sure you sample local goats cheeses in particular. Though it's often overshadowed by surrounding regions, the local wine selection is still impressive, and it's a great opportunity to get out of your comfort zone and sample some of the world's finest sweet and dessert wines.



Ask about:

The Dordogne's pre-medieval heritage. If you can tear yourself away from relaxing in the sun-filled valleys, make sure to visit the cave paintings of Lascaux. While the original Lascaux Cave, discovered in 1940, has been closed to the public since 1963, a faithful replica of the cave and its intricate, incredibly-preserved paintings that are estimated to be over 17,000 years old are the area's historical highlight. We also squeezed in a trip to Perigueux, in the northern Dordogne, another medieval stronghold that was also previously a Roman outpost.

And after that?

Head over to the medieval city of Sarlat to its cobbled old town and where you can sample endless market offerings of local fruits and cheeses on Saturdays. Early risers may be able to fit in lunch at the elaborately reconstructed gardens of Marqueyssac, a short drive from Sarlat. Perched atop a hill 130 metres above the Dordogne Valley, the charming gardens are almost outshone by its panoramic views, although with six kilometres of trails along three paths, two open-air theatres and two waterfalls, it's pretty close.

Need to know:

BA flights to Bergerac from London City Airport are available from £57, based on a return journey, and are available to book at ba.com/londoncity. Electric bike tours organised through Maison Vari at chateau-vari.com/en/home-maison-vari-bergerac. Classic rooms in the main chateau at Chateau des Vigiers from June to August cost from €113 per night, while the hotel's Prestige rooms start from €176 per night. Book at vigiers.com.