



# RIDE WORLD WIDE

## France - Dordogne & Gironde Rides 2012

### Riding Trip Information sheet

These rides explore the Gironde, Lot and Dordogne in south-west France, some of the most historically interesting areas in the whole country. The region boasts some 1,200 chateaux, is steeped with Anglo French history dating back to the Huguenot era and has a landscape of beautiful oak forests and rolling hills which together make it a glorious area to explore by horse. As well as this, there is superb local cuisine which includes delicacies such as foie gras, magret de canard, delicious cheeses, and wonderful Cahors and Bordeaux wines. The rides are organised by an experienced French guide Michel and his Canadian wife Colleen, and are an excellent way to get to know all that this lovely part of France has to offer. The Western style riding is relaxed and fun, the food and drink has been described as 'gourmet' and Michel and Colleen are charming, knowledgeable and welcoming hosts. They make a special effort to ensure each trip is memorable and always highly personal.

**Dates** 6 night trips are run from set dates between April and October. Other dates can be arranged on request. Please see the set departure dates overleaf and call us to check availability.



**The Horses** The horses used are owned by Michel, your guide, and are locally bred French saddle horses of mixed blood. They are between about 14.2hh and 16.2hh and are of a medium build. They are well schooled, good-natured and sensible but are also forward going, responsive and enjoyable to ride. They are ridden western style and are used to neck reining, going best when ridden with a loose contact with the mouth. Saddles are English endurance saddles ('Maclellans' or Western saddles are also available on request - please let us know when you book if you prefer western tack). Saddle bags are provided.

**Riding** A number of different itineraries / routes are offered and the number of days riding and amount of riding each day varies a little with the itinerary chosen but full days are usually 4 to 6 hours, half days around 3 hours. The Vineyards of Bordeaux Ride includes 4 ½ days riding and the Perigord Ride also includes 4 ½ days riding and half a day sightseeing. The Vineyards & Chateaux Ride includes between 4 and 5 hours riding on 4 days and a day of sightseeing (though those who wish can ride for an extra charge instead of sightseeing). The Haut de Baran & Chateau de Rouffiac Rides include between 4 and 6 hours riding on 4 days and a day of sightseeing (again those who wish may be able to ride instead of sightseeing). The Quercy Ride includes 5 days riding with between 5 and 6 hours riding each day. Riding hours on each trip are broken up with rest stops and a long break for lunch. Rides are run for a minimum of 2 or 3 and a maximum of 7 riders and are lead personally by Michel, who is an experienced guide as well as being extremely knowledgeable about the local area. He also speaks fluent English! Michel generally tacks up and un-tacks the horses for you each day and luggage is transported for you from hotel to hotel by a back-up vehicle which also normally meets you at lunch stops. There is a weight limit of 86kgs on the Vineyards of Bordeaux & Quercy Rides and 90kgs on the other rides although occasionally, by prior arrangement, these limits can be exceeded for experienced, fit riders - please call us to discuss.



**Pace** The rides are at a relaxed pace, which is slow to moderate overall and largely governed by the terrain, the terrain on the Quercy ride probably being the most difficult and often requiring a slower pace. The Bordeaux Ride offers more chances for longer canters, particularly on the beach day. The routes followed take you from village to village and there will be some road work every day in the vicinity of local villages. In places on all of the rides you follow narrow winding tracks, riding through forests and descending into, or climbing out of, the valleys where you will need to ride slowly or may be asked to dismount and lead your horse; in other places routes go through open fields and along wide forest tracks which offer good chances for a canter. Routes are carefully planned and there are usually chances for good trots and canters on most days if weather conditions allow.

**Riding experience** To participate in one of these rides you should have a reasonable amount of experience. You do not need to be an expert rider, but should be comfortable, balanced and secure in the saddle at a walk, trot and canter and able to control a well-schooled horse outside in open country at all these paces. You should also be used to riding over different, sometimes rough, terrain. The rides are aimed at reasonably competent riders but as the horses are sensible and well-mannered and the rides are not fast, they are well suited to confident riders of an intermediate ability. As with all our 'progressive' rides, you will be spending quite a time in the saddle each day, so will enjoy your holiday much more if you are reasonably riding fit and we recommend regular riding practice in the months before you go to get used to the hours in the saddle.



**Accommodation** Accommodation on the rides is in a variety of good quality 3\* & 4\* hotels, and chambres d'hotels (a couple of nights on the Quercy Ride are in 2\* hotels). On the progressive rides, the hotels used are all carefully chosen for comfort and character. Most of them are small and personal, usually in the countryside, and range from a traditional and quaint village hotel, to converted watermills, manor houses and a lovely 13<sup>th</sup> Century chateau. Individual bedrooms will be simple but comfortable with their own private bathroom, with loo and shower or bath. Many of the hotels have excellent restaurants and several also have their own swimming pool for a relaxing dip after the day's ride. The Haut de Baran & Chateau de Rouffiac Rides are based at historic chateaux in the heart of the Dordogne. The Haut de Baran has 7 beautiful bedrooms, all with individual bathrooms, and there is a swimming pool and Jacuzzi, whilst the Chateau de Rouffiac is smaller with 4 double bedrooms all with ensuite bathrooms. Rates assume accommodation in twin bedded rooms but single rooms are available at a supplement.



**Meals** The food in this area of France is a highlight and a special effort is made with both food and wine on the rides, ensuring you are extremely well fed and able to sample some of the many wonderful local specialities such as 'foie gras' and 'magret de canard', as well as the delicious local wines! Breakfast will usually be French style and eaten at your hotel - coffee, tea or hot chocolate and croissants. Lunch is a varied and delicious picnic, brought by the back-up vehicle to meet you when you are out riding - perhaps fresh bread, salads, a selection of cheese, pate, cold meat or quiche, followed by fruit and with wine and coffee included. In the evening, there will be a three course dinner eaten as a group with your host at your hotel, or at one of the excellent local restaurants. Menus are varied and carefully chosen for you to include some of the different local dishes. Half a bottle of wine per person is included with lunch and dinner and extra drinks and spirits are available and will be charged to your bar bill. Vegetarians can be well catered for, but if you have any special dietary requirements please let us know in advance so that arrangements can be made.



**Weather** The weather in the Dordogne is mild and daytime temperatures between April and October usually range from about 15 to 35 degrees C. In April, May, September and October daytime temperatures are usually between 15 and 25 degrees C and from June to August the range is usually 20 to 35 degrees C, July and August being the hottest months. In spring and early summer there are many wild flowers on the routes you ride and fresh leaves on the vines are a wonderful bright new green. Temperatures in November, February and March average around 10 degrees C during the day. Rain is possible year round, but showers are most likely during the spring and autumn months (October, November & December have the highest rainfall statistically).

**What to bring** We will send you a list of things we suggest you bring when you book.

**Itinerary** Examples of the set date itineraries are set out below, although please note that these itineraries are only a guide as to what is planned and the day by day arrangements may be altered by your guide at his discretion if the weather or any other unforeseen events require. Please enquire for the Quercy Ride itinerary.

### Perigord Ride - Example itinerary

**Day 1** - You will be met at Bergerac airport at 17.30 and driven to a country hotel set in lovely rolling countryside where the first night is spent. Dinner with the group and your host Michel and overnight Domaine du Moulin de Labique. (D)

**Day 2** - After breakfast meet the horses, mount up and set off riding, following one of the pilgrim routes to Santiago de Compostella, to the Chateau de Biron. This chateau's architecture spans eight centuries and it is one of the best preserved castles in Europe. A picnic lunch followed by a visit to the chateau for those who wish. In the afternoon, ride on into the Dordogne and to Monpazier, a lovely, well preserved bastide town founded in 1284 by Edward I, King of England and famous for its architecture. There will be time to look around the town, perhaps stopping in the square for a drink, before dinner and the night at the atmospheric Hotel Edward 1st. (B,L,D)

**Day 3** - This morning's ride continues further north to the beautiful bastide of Montferrand-du-Perigord. Located on the Couze river, the village is dominated by a half ruined chateau from the 12th century. After a picnic lunch in the village, continue on a lovely ride through the farmlands and forests of the area, before arriving just outside Cadouin, located within the Bessède forest. With its 12th century Romanesque church and Gothic cloister, the abbey of Cadouin is classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. An opportunity to visit to this beautiful abbey before transferring to your nearby hotel for the evening. (B,L,D)

**Day 4** - Today's ride continues through the Bessède forest to Belvès, another beautiful and unique bastide classified as one of the most beautiful villages in France. In the afternoon there will be the opportunity to drive to the Gouffre de Proumeyssac - known as 'The Crystal Cathedral'. The largest developed abyss in the Perigord, the Cavern of Proumeyssac is a beautiful underground vault decorated with a multitude of crystals. The visit includes a beautiful light show at the beginning of the tour. After returning to Belvès, you can either relax at the hotel, located within the walls of this 11th century fortified village, or explore the village on foot before dinner. (B,L,D)



**Day 5** - After breakfast ride south through the chestnut woods of the Dordogne. Lunch will be at a family run duck farm with a chance to taste some of the farms products, including 'foie gras' accompanied by a sweet wine from the Monbazillac vineyard near Bergerac. In the afternoon ride on to the medieval village of Villefranche du Perigord, a 13th century bastide built by Alphonse de Poitiers, brother of King Louis. Dinner and overnight at the Hotel Restaurant La Bastide in Villefranche du Perigord. (B,L,D)

**Day 6** - After breakfast rejoin the horses and the ride continues through the forests to the Chateau de Bonaguil, a medieval fortress, built on a rock face in the fifteenth century. A picnic lunch followed by a tour of this wonderful castle. Continue riding out of the forest past unspoilt villages and fields of wheat, maize and sunflowers then cross the Lot river into an area of orchards and vineyards. The ride ends at a charming country hotel. Dinner in the stone and timber dining room is a wonderful end to a great day of riding. (B,L,D)

**Day 7** - After breakfast, transfer back to Agen railway station (at 10.00 am) or to Bergerac airport. (B)

### **Vineyards of Bordeaux Ride - Example itinerary**

The Gironde region and its major port, Bordeaux, have a rich and varied cultural heritage, most famously known for its prestigious wine-producing chateaux and some of the world's best Romanesque and Gothic architecture in France. The week starts with a visit of the 12<sup>th</sup> century medieval village of St. Emilion, with an architectural legacy almost without equal. Then cross the Gironde estuary by boat with the horses, and ride on through the Médoc vineyards and its most famous chateaux - Latour, Pichon-Longueville, and Lafite Rothschild among others. Continue through miles of pine forests, on sandy terrain which offers excellent going, before ending on the sandy beaches of the Atlantic.

**Day 1** - You will be met at Bordeaux train station at 14.00 or at Bordeaux airport and taken to your hotel in St. Emilion for the afternoon / evening. The medieval town of St. Emilion has one of the most important architectural heritages in Europe and its jurisdiction is listed as a world heritage site by UNESCO. Standing proudly on the top of a hill overlooking the Dordogne valley, the village, with its sun baked, Roman tiled roofs, was built in the shape of an amphitheatre. Visit a monolithic cellar in the village before enjoying your first wine tasting - a Grand Cru - before dinner at your hotel (D).



**Day 2** - After breakfast transfer to meet the horses near the village of Bourg. After allocation of the horses you set off riding northward along the Gironde River to the Citadelle de Blaye, built by Vauban (military engineer of Louis the 14<sup>th</sup>) in 1689 and set with star-shaped bastions. Lunch in the walls of the Citadelle and in the afternoon both horses and riders board a boat to cross the Gironde estuary (approx 30 minutes). Arriving at Port Lamarque, you set off riding again to your destination, a 4\* Chateau hotel in the village of Moulis en Médoc. Enjoy the chateau's own wine with dinner in their private dining room. (B,L,D)

**Day 3** - Today the ride continues through the Médoc region, passing many of the most prestigious and beautiful chateaux of the area - Chateau Lanessan, Beaucaillou, Pichon-Longueville, Latour and Lafitte Rothschild, to name a few. You will stop at Chateau Lanessan for a picnic lunch on the grounds with the opportunity to taste the chateau's wine. After lunch, there will be time to visit the horse museum before riding off again to the famous Chateau Pichon-Longueville (Grand Cru Pauillac). After a visit and a winetasting you will be transferred to your hotel nearby, Chateau Pomys, which is also a classified Cru Bourgeois appellation St Estèphe. Dinner in the restaurant accompanied by the chateaus own wine. *It is possible to arrange a massage here but this requires a two week advance booking. Please advise if you wish to have a booking made.* Night at the Chateau Pomys. (B,L,D)

**Day 4** - Breakfast and a morning ride to Chateau Loudenne, a charming pink manor house from the 17<sup>th</sup> century with an 18<sup>th</sup> century Victorian cellar and a remarkable view over the Gironde estuary. Enjoy a picnic in the garden while sampling the chateau's wine. In the afternoon you will have the choice between a short ride along the estuary or to take the afternoon off and relax at the Chateau instead (massage optional again). In the evening a private dinner in the company of the chateau's owners (if they are at home), tasting their own wine. Night at the Chateau Loudenne. (B,L,D)

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**Day 5** - Breakfast and feeling rested after the relaxing day yesterday, set off on the longest ride of the week. Leave behind the last of the vineyards and ride towards the ocean, crossing miles of marshland used primarily as pasture for horses and cattle. You will stop for another wonderful lunch with winetasting, at Chateau Laujac, where they not only produce a fine Cru Bourgeois, but also raise cattle (Limousin breed) and French Saddlebred horses. In the afternoon there will be some nice canters through the forest before arriving at a local riding centre. A short transfer to your nearby 4\* hotel where the next two nights are spent. A delicious dinner with the opportunity, again, to try some of the area's specialties. (B,L,D)



**Day 6** - The ride today takes you primarily through the sandy pine forests of the region and the soft going allows opportunities for some nice canters before arriving at the sandy beaches and dunes of the Atlantic Ocean. Stop here for a delicious picnic lunch, letting the horses relax their legs in the sea. In the afternoon there will be a short ride returning back through the forest to the riding centre where the horses will have a well deserved rest. Transfer back to the hotel for a farewell dinner and the final night. (B,L,D)

**Day 7** - After breakfast, transfer back to Bordeaux airport (or to Lesparre Medoc railway station at 08.00). (B)



### **Vineyards and Chateaux of Cahors - Example itinerary**

The Cahors vineyards are located in one of the most beautiful and varied areas of France. The ride takes you through a region which boasts over 200 vineyards and is redolent in history. The route winds through vineyards, forests and farmland, past medieval villages and chateaux. Even if you are not a wine drinker, this route has been designed to please and pamper just about anyone. The accommodation and food are superb, the trails and scenery unforgettable.

**Day 1** - You will be met at Agen railway station at 17.00 (or Bergerac airport) and driven to your hotel, the Chateau de l'Hoste, a traditional and comfortable country hotel in a secluded position with a swimming pool and lovely grounds. Dinner with the group and your host Michel, and overnight at the Chateau de l'Hoste. (D)

**Day 2** - After breakfast meet the horses and set off riding to the village of Tournon d'Agenais where you stop for a picnic lunch overlooking the surrounding countryside. After a picnic lunch below the village ramparts, continue riding across the plateau to Chateau de Chambert. There will be time to taste some of the wines from this award winning vineyard which has been producing Cahors wine since the XII century. Transfer to a nearby chambres d'hotels for dinner and the night. (B,L,D)

**Day 3** - Breakfast and set off riding over through forested hills, stopping for lunch in the small medieval village of Belaye, perched above the Lot River with a panoramic view of the valley. The ride continues through forested hills to reach the Lot valley, where you stop at the Chateau de Grezels for a picnic lunch below the medieval castle. Overlooking the Lot valley and many of the Cahors vineyards, the view from the castle gives a wonderful indication of the days to come. After lunch, ride down into the Lot valley passing through vineyards and crossing the Lot River before climbing into the hills again to the secluded Chateau de Rouffiac where the night is spent. A wine tasting of some of the chateau's best vintages before dinner and the night. (B,L,D)

**Day 4** - Breakfast and a break from riding today, with a chance for some sightseeing and shopping in the historic town of Cahors, founded in the 1st century BC. After lunch in a café in town you will visit the Pont Valentre bridge (a major site on the UNESCO World Heritage list), the only fortified bridge with 3 towers in the world. After exploring the town you return to the chateau for dinner and the night. NOTE Those who prefer to ride today can do so for an extra charge of 100 euros. (B,L,D)

**Day 5** - Today's ride takes you along the Lot river and then up into the hills north of the valley. Lunch and a private wine-tasting at the Domaine du Theron, a charming vineyard which was given a new lease of life when, in 1997, it was taken over by an entrepreneur and lover of French wines. The most modern vineyard in the Lot region, Domaine du Theron, offers outstanding wines and an equally beautiful view from the doors of the winery. After lunch the ride continues back into the valley, crossing the Lot River and finishing at another beautiful, private chateau. There will be a private winetasting with the owner, Count Jean-Baptiste Monpezat (if he is available) and after this you will be transferred a short distance to dinner and the night at a small hotel in Puy-Leveque which is also one of the Lot valley's best restaurants. (B,L,D)



**Day 6** - Breakfast and the ride continues along the river, passing through the beautiful village of Albas. After crossing the river there will be a long canter before stopping at another lovely bastide, Castlefranc, for lunch. A picnic lunch on the banks of the Lot River, below the walls of this old bastide that once belonged to the Bishop of Cahors. In the afternoon the ride will take you back up onto the plateau, offering some spectacular views of the vineyards below. The ride ends at Chateau La Grezette where you will be able to taste what is considered the best of the best Cahors wines. After the tasting you will be driven to the nearby Chateau de Mercues for a special farewell dinner. This 13th century castle perched on a promontory overlooking the Lot River and vineyards below, was once the favorite residence of the Bishops of Cahors. The chateau has recently returned to its vocation as a wine producing estate and it has also been converted into a four-star hotel and restaurant. Dinner in the castle offers an excellent opportunity to sample some of the chateau's vintage wines. (B,L,D)

**Day 7** - Breakfast and a last chance to enjoy the chateau grounds before transfer to Cahors station before midday. (B)

### **Haut de Baran & Chateau de Rouffiac - Example itinerary**

Located in the heart of the Dordogne, Perigord and Quercy regions, these secluded chateaux are perfect places to get away from it all and the Lot valley is ideal for riding, with a number of different routes from the base. Accommodation can be in either chateaux on some dates (your choice), or on other dates is limited to one or other.

**Day 1** - You will be met at Cahors railway station at 16.00 (or Bergerac airport) and driven about 40 minutes to the chateau for dinner and the night. (D)

**Day 2** - After breakfast, meet the horses and set off riding into the woods north of the Lot valley, towards the village of Frayssinet, nestled within the forest, where you will have a picnic lunch. After lunch there is the chance to look around this lovely little French village with its ancient convent, church and covered passageways before riding back to the chateau by a different route. Tonight's dinner will be at a nearby restaurant where you will have the opportunity to try some of the area's wonderful cuisine. (B,L,D)



**Day 3** - Today's ride will take you eastwards, winding through the woods and farmland on the plateau, before stopping for lunch and a private wine-tasting at the Domaine du Theron - one of the most modern vineyards in the Lot region. The Domaine du Theron offers outstanding wines and an equally beautiful view from the doors of the winery. After an afternoon ride, return to the chateau and time to relax around the pool (or soak in the Jacuzzi at haut de Baran) before dinner and the night. (B,L,D)

**Day 4** - A break from riding today, with a day of sightseeing in the area (or riding again for those who wish at a small extra charge). This begins with a morning in nearby Sarlat, an exceptionally well-preserved city with architecture that is over 1000 years old lining the streets. A town that has grown up around a Benedictine Abbey, Sarlat has more than enough medieval, Renaissance and 18th century facades, doorways, fountains, turrets, gables and roofscapes to satisfy even the most well-travelled architectural historian. All manner of presents and souvenirs can be found in the local shops – gastronomic gifts are particularly popular! Lunch in one of the town's many cafes, then a drive to the caves of Cognac, discovered only 50 years ago to contain one of the greatest collections of stalagmites and some of the oldest cave paintings found in the world. There are over 300 paintings located in the deepest chamber, dating between 25,000 and 14,000 BC. Return to the chateau for another wonderful dinner. (B,L,D)

**Day 5** - Heading south today, you will cross the Lot river, riding through the valley and many of the area's vineyards. The countryside is dotted with small medieval villages and farms en route to the Chateau Chambert where you'll enjoy a picnic lunch and have the opportunity to try the chateau wine before a private visit of the cellar. After lunch, ride back into the valley and towards the medieval village of Puy L'Eveque, considered one of the most picturesque towns in the region. Dinner at Puy L'Eveque's finest restaurant overlooking the Lot valley. Overnight Haut de Baran. (B,L,D)

**Day 6** - Today's ride will take you through the quiet woodlands and countryside north of the Lot towards the Chateau de Bonaguil, a medieval fortress built on a rock face in the fifteenth century. Before visiting the castle, riders will enjoy a last picnic lunch above the village and castle. (B,L,D)

**Day 7** - After breakfast, transfer to Cahors railway station before midday (or Bergerac airport). (B)



**Travel arrangements** - Ride costs include meeting / transfers at a set time on the first and last days. The meeting and departure point varies - for the Perigord Ride the meeting / departure is Bergerac airport or station. The meeting / departure point for the Vineyards of Bordeaux Ride is Bordeaux airport or station. For the Haut de Baran / Chateau de Rouffiac Rides meeting / departure point is Cahors station (or sometimes Bergerac airport). The meeting point for the Vineyards & Chateaux of Cahors Ride and Quercy Ride is Agen train station (or sometimes Bergerac airport) and return to Cahors station. Meeting times may vary a little depending on travel plans of the group or first bookings and will be confirmed at time of booking or closer to the departure date. Transfers can also be arranged outside set times for an extra charge.

**Flights and International Travel** - Prices quoted above DO NOT include travel between your arrival port in France and the meeting point for the ride. For flights from London to Bergerac, Bordeaux or Toulouse budget around £150 economy return (varies with the airline and season). There are also trains to Agen from Paris or London St. Pancras. Transfers outside set times and from / to alternative meeting or departure points can be arranged at extra cost (eg: transfers from Bordeaux or Toulouse airport are between Euros 160 and 200 each way). Extra transfer costs are payable locally in cash.

**General visa and health information** (NB this is a brief outline - further information will be sent to you if you make a confirmed booking)

**Visas** Holders of full UK passports do not need visas for visits to France whatever the length of stay, although for visits of over 90 days residence permits are required. Holders of other passports should check requirements with the French Consulate.

**Health** No vaccinations are needed by EEC residents to enter France.

(Update 20/02/12)

