

# Paris to Pyrénées

## Bike and Hike Dordogne & Pyrénées

8 – 21 July 2012



The Dordogne is a land of perched medieval castles, walnut and apple orchards, winding rivers, dense woodland, Cro-Magnon cave dwellings and art and honey-coloured stone villages built into cliffs. The history winds back visibly to the times of the Viking invasions, to Eleanor of Aquitaine and her son Richard the Lionheart, to the Hundred Years War and the Wars of Religion. The cuisine is rich and hearty; the land of the foie-gras, the magret de canard, cabecou cheeses and les pommes salardaise. It's wines are rich Cahors reds, fruity Monbazillac whites and the delightful Pecharmant. The country markets in this region sell the finest, freshest produce by the banks of the river and as we travel along we shall see and taste it all!

### Week 1: Biking in the Dordogne

This 3-star cycling holiday has been designed for people who love a leisurely day's cycling; stopping regularly to sample food and sightsee with a good break for lunch and drink stops. We recommend having done some cycling before you arrive to acclimatise, but the bike seats are comfortable and you are able to go at your own pace. Everyone is furnished with route maps for this purpose. On average we will travel 35-45kms per day (about 3 hours of riding). The Dordogne is spectacular rural countryside of hills and valleys so there will be some uphill rides (as well as downhill bits too!) and stair-climbing at the Chateaux and villages we visit. We will venture into buildings over 900 years old perched on cliff tops and with breathtaking views. Those who would like to ride further each day are more than welcome and maps for this can be provided if we are told in advance of your trip. Most of our rides are on bike tracks but some parts of each ride shall be on country roads with traffic. Bike helmets are optional in France but we recommend you wear a helmet for your personal safety.

#### Day 1 - July 8 - Arrive in Paris

Tour starts when you arrive and check in at our centrally located 3-star hotel and join the group for dinner (D).

#### Day 2 - July 9 - Arrive in Souillac

Welcome to the Dordogne! After our first night in Paris we travel by train to the medieval township of **Souillac**. At our centrally-located 3-star hotel we will be provided with our bike, maps, routes notes, etc. We then have time to explore the lovely 11th century Saint Mary's Abbey and a range of boutiques along the cobbled streets of this town which dates from the foundation of a Benedictine Monastery in the year 655. Wander down to the banks of the Dordogne, which you will be following over the next few days (B/D).



### **Day 3 - July 10 - Souillac to Rocamadour & Park Causses de Quercy (45kms)**

Today's ride takes you eastwards, through the beautiful and wild Causses de Quercy National park. Your goal on this loop is the incredible town of Rocamadour. Spectacular for its setting, the town seems to tumble down the side of a steep cliff face, with narrow cobblestoned streets and shops zig-zagging downwards. As one of the five starting points for the St Jacques de Compostelle pilgrimage routes, it is also one of the most important pilgrimage sites in France.

Here you will visit the Saint Sauveur Church and Saint Amador Crypt, both classed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and see the 1,100 year old Black Virgin original 12<sup>th</sup> century frescoes and the legendary sword of Roland. After lunch our return ride takes you back to our hotel in **Souillac** for a second night and dinner together with the group (B/D).



### **Day 4 - July 11 - Souillac to Sarlat (35km)**

Our second day's ride is beautiful, following the bends and curves of the Dordogne on bike tracks. En route we will spot the Chateau of Fenelon which, like so many of the region's castles, has been attacked, damaged, and rebuilt a multitude of times over the centuries. We finish our day following a bike path through lush greenery all the way into the medieval town of Sarlat. This incredible UNESCO Heritage Site, the largest medieval ensemble in Europe, is best explored in the evening, when the beautiful "lauze" stone roofs and tiny cobblestoned streets are lit up beautifully by the municipality. Dinner with the group this evening in **Sarlat** (B/D).



### **Day 5 - July 12 - "The Prettiest Villages of France" (35 or 45km)**

The loop ride for the day is one of the most picturesque, passing through some of the "prettiest villages of France" (this is an official national rating!) and castles which once warred against each other across the river. We will visit typical villages such as Beynac, with its imposing castle built high above the Dordogne River by the Barons of Beynac. We may decide to picnic lunch in medieval Domme. This village, an excellent example of the Bastide villages (fortified villages) of Medieval France, was built in the 13th century by Philip the Bold. There are still examples of medieval graffiti by the templar knights, and a spectacular panorama to the valley below! We will pass also through La Roque Gageac, with its narrow houses flat against the cliffside overlooking the Dordogne, built around original troglodyte dwellings, before returning to **Sarlat** for a second night. Dinner with the group included at a local bistro tonight (B/D).



### **Day 6 - July 13 - Sarlat to Les-Eyzies-de-Tayac (45km)**

Our route today takes us between the lush and green Dordogne and Vezere River Valleys. Here we are in the heart of the Dordogne's rich countryside; where truffles and cep mushrooms, walnut orchards, and grapes grow and of course goose and duck farms for the famous foie gras. Our ride continues to the prehistoric capital, Les-Eyzies-de-Tayac with the National Prehistory Museum, and the Font de Gaume Cro-Magnon cave paintings. Tonight we shall dine together in one of the many restaurants in **Les Eyzies** (B/D).

**TOUR INCLUSIONS: All accommodation, transfers, train travel, guiding, bike hire, maps, breakfasts and dinners.**

**NOT INCLUDED: Entry fees, lunches, alcohol, international airfares.**



## Week 2 : Hiking in the Pyrénées

This week we are based at a chalet guesthouse in the high mountain village of Bareges. The house has been fully renovated to a 3-star standard, and has spacious en-suite bedrooms, sauna, dining room, comfortable lounge with bar, and a sunny patio garden. Each day's walk is leisurely, spectacular and designed to be enjoyable but not gruelling. Expect to do between 3-6 hours hiking, walking and strolling stretched throughout the day with **one rest day** for pursuing other diversions such as viewing the **Tour de France** which passes through our village.

### Day 7 - July 14 - Bastille Day

After breakfast we leave **Les Eyzies** and the Dordogne and transfer to Bordeaux where we shall take the train to Lourdes and transfer to our mountain chalet in the Pyrenees to begin our second exciting week of exploration.

Your afternoon after arrival is free to wander and explore. We suggest a leisurely stroll to the Crêperie at St Justin where you can enjoy a traditional French snack in the sunshine. The restaurant where we will dine tonight is located on an isolated promontory looking across the lovely Bastan Valley and is accessible only on foot (B/D).

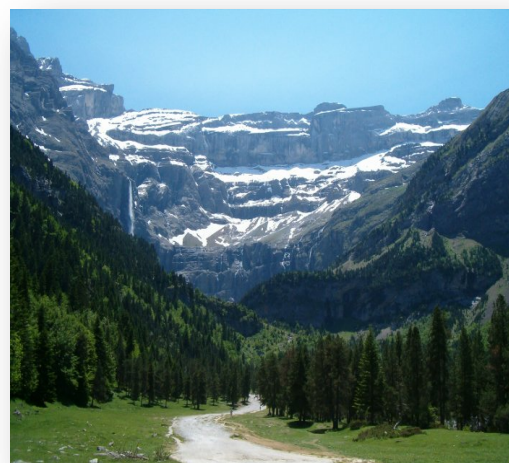
### Day 8 - July 15 - Montagne Fleuri circuit

An interesting introductory walk this morning from the village, giving us a chance to get to know the area and view the week's destinations from on high. Looking back towards the higher peaks in the south we explore the agricultural heritage of the middle mountains. The transhumance (moving of animals up and down the mountains with the changing seasons) is still practiced here and is one of the main reasons for its listing with UNESCO. Along the walk we see the farms, villages and methods that have resisted change for hundreds and possibly thousands of years. Some highlights are the "estive" (summer pasture) barns, the 10th century font in Sers Church, and the numerous fortified churches including the Templars Church in Luz, as well as the impressive 80m high 'Pont Napoleon' bridge, which spans the gorges above Luz (B/L/D).



### Day 9 - July 16 - Cirque de Gavarnie

A visit to the cirque (circus or round shape) made famous by the writings of Victor Hugo and the exploits of the Pyreneistes under Count Henri Russell. The cirque saw the first ever roped climbs; the invention of alpinism in the late 1800s. Avoiding the main valley path, we take a lesser-known route from Gavarnie village, climbing up to a spectacular balcony path, then down into the cirque and making our way right to the end to stand in the spray of the "Grande Cascade", Europe's tallest free-hanging waterfall. Here the cirque walls reach five times the height of the Eiffel tower. The return to the village is by another unfrequented route through flowery meadows, which will still be in bloom in early July (B/L/D).



### Day 10 - July 17 - Lac de Gaube

A walk up to the see one of the iconic glacial lakes of the Pyrenees, the Lac de Gaube, which sits in a perfect example of a hanging valley beneath the North face of the Vignemale, the highest peak in the French Pyrenees.

After walking up to the lake we make our way back down to the open valley and meadows of the Marcadau, with its distinctive granite rock formations and Caledonian pines. Stopping for a coffee in front of the pounding waters of the Pont d'Espagne waterfall, we then follow part of the GR10 (the long distance coast to coast trail across the Pyrenees, from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean), down the Chemin des Cascades. The path descends through woodland alongside multiple waterfalls that thunder over the great, rounded granite blocks left in the wake of the glaciers, taking us down to our end point at La Raillaire.

### **Day 11 - July 18 - LA TOUR DE FRANCE CYCLE RACE through our village**

This is your free day to use as you please. For those who would like to we have deliberately scheduled this day for you to watch the exciting Tour de France bicycle race as the riders pass through our mountain village, one of the highest and steepest legs of their journey round France.

Or you could try out the thermal spa in the village of Bareges, visit the Pic du Midi observatory or take the bus to the pretty towns of Luz St Sauveur or Argelès-Gazost. Here you can stock up on the delicious local sheep' cheeses and 'saucissons sec' (knobbly French salamis) (B/D).



### **Day 12 - July 19 - Trek through the Pyrenees National Park**

Today we walk South from the village into the verdant beech trees of the Ayre forest, and then up and out of the tree line onto the Plateau de Lumiere.

The route then skirts the valley following the old irrigation channels of the high estive pastures and takes us into the folds of the Bolou valley ("bolou" is a local word for "round rocks" - the area has its own language; a dialect of occitan).

From the bottom of the Bolou valley we have a long, steady climb up into the rugged granite peaks and jewel-like lakes of the Neouvielle nature reserve and the Pyrenees National Park. The night is spent at the recently refurbished Refuge de la Glere, which sits perched above the crystal blue lake from which it takes its name (B/L/D).



### **Day 13 - July 20 - Trek through the Pyrenees National Park**

This morning we explore this wild unspoilt lake-land of the Pyrenees, following a young mountain torrent on its route between a necklace of small lakes. We hike into the unspoilt wilderness of the Néouvielle nature reserve – a maze of gigantic boulders, granite domes and pockets of tiny flower-strewn meadows, topped by 3000m snow-capped peaks. The landscape here in the Néouvielle Natural Park is very wild and rugged, with few signs of human passage.

In the afternoon we return to the village via the refuge and the local sheep's cheese maker, stopping on the way to visit camp Rollot, the site of a famous WWII resistance camp and a very nice café. There is time in the afternoon for a stroll into the Cirque de Gavarnie itself, if legs and minds are willing! We spend our last night back at our original chalet at Barèges for our last dinner together (B/L/D).



### **Day 14 - July 21 - Finis!**

We farewell our mountain guide and new Pyrenéan friends as we depart for the train station and our trip back to Paris. French Fusion Travel can help you with onward travel arrangements if necessary (B).

**TOUR INCLUSIONS:** Accommodation, transfers, train travel, trekking & mountaineering guides, meals as specified.  
**NOT INCLUDED:** International airfares, some meals, alcohol.

Price per person based on twin-share is \$6,600 for a two-week holiday of a lifetime.  
Single supplement: \$1,800 pp extra on the above price.

Please contact us for a booking form and terms and conditions of payment.