

# Wines and Waters of France 2024

As a passionate sommelier and wine educator, I invite you to embark on a unique and immersive journey through the "Wines and Waters of France." Imagine leisurely week-long boat trips navigating picturesque rivers and canals, surrounded by charming villages, rolling vineyards, and captivating landscapes.

Join me as we delve into the world of French viniculture. I'll share my in-depth knowledge, liberally pouring theory into practice with curated tastings at carefully chosen wineries. We'll explore the unique terroir of each region, savoring the diverse flavors and characteristics of each sip.

But it's not just about the wine. We'll delve into the local gastronomy, exploring bustling markets, savoring authentic cuisine at charming restaurants, and indulging in local delicacies like artisanal cheeses and freshly baked bread. Each region offers something unique, even for the most discerning palate.

Beyond the vine, we'll discover the rich history and culture. Visit historical sites, admire charming architecture, and cycle along picturesque trails, immersing ourselves in the heart of each region.

In 2024, four captivating boat journeys await:

- [Loire Valley](#): Cruise through fairytale castles and sip world-renowned wines.
- [Languedoc](#) (Canal du Midi): Navigate the historic canal, exploring vibrant towns and sun-drenched vineyards.
- [Cahors](#): Discover the stunning Malbec region, known for its bold and flavorful wines.
- [Gascony](#): Uncover the charm and diversity of southwest France, boasting unique grape varieties and stunning scenery.

Complement your experience with optional 3-day car trips to nearby regions:

- [Northern Burgundy](#): Explore the prestigious vineyards of Chablis, hidden gems like Irancy.
- [Southwest France](#): Discover Toulouse, Albi, and Cordes-sur-Ciel, known for their unique and diverse wines.
- Bordeaux ([option 1](#), [option 2](#)): Immerse yourself in the grandeur and tradition of world-renowned Bordeaux wines.

Join me on this unforgettable journey through the heart of French wine and culture. Let's raise a glass to new experiences, delectable flavors, and memories that will last a lifetime.

[Prices and conditions](#)

## France 2024, Trips overview

Dates	Trips	What do we drink	What do we explore
September 2-9	Loire Valley (boat, 7 days)	Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé (Sauvignon Blanc), also Pinot noir and Gamay (red and rose)	Impressive Briare Aqueduct, a structure in which Eiffel himself played a part. Famous Gien Castle, once a "country house" for the French royal family. Ancient graceful Sancerre, capital of local viniculture. And the second capital, eldest Pouilly-Fumé.
September 9-12	Chablis, Irancy, Auxerre (3 days)	Chablis and Bourgogne blanc (Chardonnay), Bourgogne rouge (Pinot noir), Aligoté, Melon de Bourgogne, sparkling Crémant de Bourgogne, Ratafia de Bourgogne, Kir	AC Chablis with its unique chardonnay and its charming capital. Elegant old Auxerre. AC Irancy, a place that perfectly demonstrates the influence of terroir on the taste of wine.
September 13-16	Toulouse, Albi, Cordes-sur-Ciel (3 days)	Wines of Fronton and Gaillac on the base of local varieties Negret, Duras, Fer Servadou, Brauocol, and Len de l'el. Dry red; white from dry to sweet; sparkling of different types – traditional, rural, and pearl.	Toulouse, Albi, and Albigenian fortress Cordes-sur-Ciel appears to float ethereally in the sky
September 16-23	Canal du Midi (boat, 7 days)	Languedoc res on the base of Carignan, Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre, Merlot, and Cabernet sauvignon; rose; whites (Chardonnay, Chenin blanc), sparkling Crémant de Limoux, fortified wines	The largest in Europe and completely restored medieval fortified city of Carcassonne, Argens-Minervois, Trebes, picturesque Puichéric - Venice of Minervois.
September 23-30	Cahors (boat, 7 days)	Cahors (Malbec and its blends with Merlot and Tannat), also rose (malbec) and whites (Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, and Viognier)	Lot, the most beautiful river in France. The picturesque Cahors with a thousand-year history and the Valentre Bridge, built with the help of the devil. Luzech and Saint-Cirq-Lapopie included in the list of the most beautiful villages in France. Pech-Merle cave, famous for its gallery of prehistoric paintings.
Option 1 Sept 30 - Oct 2 Option 2 October 4-6	Bordeaux (3 days)	Bordeaux reds (different AOC), Bordeaux whites, Sauternes, Claret	Stylish Bordeaux, the capital of France's most prosperous wine region; Saint-Emilion, one of the leading Bordeaux AC, with its charming capital; AC Grave and Barsac, famous for their dry whites and Sauternes in addition to the powerful reds.
October 7-14	Gascony (boat, 7 days)	Armagnac and Buzet wines – reds from Merlot, Cabernet, and malbec, rose form Cabernet franc, whites from Sauvignon blanc and gris, Semillon, and Muscadelle.	Majestic Nérac, hometown of Henri IV the Magnificent. Ancient Condom, the capital of Armagnac. The medieval fortified city of Vianne. A fortified village Larressingle. included in the list of the most beautiful villages of France.

## **Loire Valley: Homeland of Sauvignon Blanc**

The Loire Valley is vast and varied, but this route delves into the Haute-Loire, renowned for its Sauvignon Blanc. Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé stand at the region's core, producing some of the finest old-world Sauvignon Blanc. These wines are robust, crisp, highly mineral, often devoid of fruity aromas, and occasionally carry a subtle smoky undertone. Alongside Sauvignon Blanc, the Haute-Loire crafts light red and rosé wines from Pinot Noir and Gamay grapes.

The Loire boasts renowned white limestone castles, including the 600-year-old Gien Castle, once a "country house" for the French royal family, and the majestic Sancerre castles. We'll also explore the Briare Aqueduct, a stunning feat of engineering that has long held the title of the world's longest aqueduct, as we glide along its waters. Throughout the Loire, medieval villages dot the hillsides amidst vineyards, inviting us to wander their streets.

In culinary terms, the Loire is synonymous with cheeses, particularly goat cheeses, and abundant mushrooms cultivated in the region.

### **Day 1, September 2, Monday**

Briare, our starting point, is a city worth exploring; you can't see it in just a couple of hours. Therefore, Briare will be given the first half of the first day and the last day.

In the morning, we'll delve into the charm of old Briare, including visits to the Château des Barrières and the Church of Saint-Etienne. As we explore, we'll also marvel at the impressive Aqueduct, a structure in which Eiffel himself played a part. We'll not only admire the aqueduct from the barge but also stroll alongside it, taking in its grandeur from every angle.

From 12:00 to 3:00 PM – Check-in on the barge.

At 3:00 PM, we'll set sail, navigating through three consecutive locks and gliding along the famous aqueduct until we reach the ancient town of Chatillon-sur-Loire, where we'll spend the night.

### **Day 2, September 3, Tuesday**

In the morning, our journey takes us to Leray, with captivating stops along the way at two renowned wineries for tours and delightful tastings. We'll also take a leisurely stroll through Beaulieu-sur-Loire, where we'll discover the rich history of the town, including landmarks such

as the 11th-century Church of Saint-Etienne, the town hall, remnants of a fortress with sections of the walls and a guardhouse, as well as an ancient washhouse and other intriguing sites.

Upon reaching Leray, we'll delve into the charm of this ancient, quaint village, home to the magnificent 12th-century Collegiate Church of Saint-Martin and the picturesque 17th-century Villat Castle. Here, amidst the historical ambiance, we'll conclude our day and settle in for the night.

### **Day 3, September 4, Wednesday**

As the morning sun graces Leray, we bid farewell to this charming village and embark on the next leg of our journey.

In the afternoon, our travels lead us to Bannay, where we'll enjoy a leisurely bicycle ride of approximately 6 kilometers each way to visit a couple of captivating wineries for tastings.

In the evening, we set sail once more, making our way to the enchanting town of Sancerre, where we'll moor for the night, immersed in the tranquil beauty of this renowned wine region.

### **Day 4, September 5, Thursday**

This day is dedicated to the exploration of Sancerre, a picturesque town nestled in the heart of the Loire Valley. Alongside its counterpart, Pouilly-sur-Loire, on the opposite bank, Sancerre is renowned as the birthplace and epitome of Sauvignon Blanc, producing some of the finest wines in the region.

Our day begins with visits to 2-3 esteemed wineries, where we'll have the opportunity to sample the exquisite wines crafted on the left bank of the river.

Beyond its viticultural prowess, Sancerre boasts a rich tapestry of history and culture. We'll immerse ourselves in the charm of the old town, ascend the Tower of Feuds for panoramic views of the city and surrounding vineyards, and explore landmarks such as Sancerre Castle, Notre-Dame Cathedral, and Saint-Père-la-Non Cathedral.

No visit to Sancerre is complete without savoring its unique local delicacy, the renowned Crottin de Chavignol goat cheese, predominantly crafted in the nearby village of Chavignol, just 5 kilometers from Sancerre.

In the evening, we'll set sail for Champlain, where we'll anchor for the night, reflecting on the day's adventures amidst the serene beauty of the Loire River.

## **Day 5, September 6, Friday**

In the morning, we embark on a cycling adventure to the right bank of the Loire, journeying to Pouilly-sur-Loire, a scenic route spanning approximately 8 kilometers each way, punctuated by captivating stops along the way.

Pouilly-sur-Loire is the distinguished second heart of Sauvignon Blanc, offering a unique contrast to Sancerre. Immersed in medieval charm, we explore this historic city, delving into its rich heritage.

Our itinerary includes a visit to the esteemed Pouilly Fumé wine museum, where we'll indulge in a tour and tasting session. Additionally, we'll visit select wineries, admiring the picturesque vineyards, and savoring the exquisite wines they produce.

In the evening, we'll return to the barge and set sail back to Sancerre, where we'll anchor for the night, reminiscing on the day's discoveries amidst the tranquil ambiance of the Loire Valley.

## **Day 6, September 7, Saturday**

We kick off the morning with a visit to the iconic House of Sancerre, a must-see wine museum in the region. I'll give you a quick tour and then we'll dive into wine tasting.

Around noon, we'll head over to Boulleret for an intriguing stop. Our first stop is the fascinating Buranlure Castle, a medieval fortress that stood tall between France and Burgundy in the 14th to 16th centuries.

Afterward, we'll hop on our bikes for a leisurely ride to the right bank, covering about 5 kilometers each way. Along the way, we'll drop by a few top-notch wineries for some well-deserved tastings amidst the scenic vineyards.

After this, we'll sail back to Leray, our cozy haven for the night, where we can unwind and reflect on the day's adventures.

## **Day 7, September 8, Sunday**

We'll start the day by setting sail once again, continuing our journey along the picturesque Loire River. Our first stop will be in Beaulieu-sur-Loire, where we'll take a leisurely stroll and soak in the charming ambiance of this quaint town.

Next, we'll cruise over to Chatillon-sur-Loire, our final destination for the day. Here, we'll have the pleasure of tasting some exquisite local wines at a nearby winery. Afterwards, we'll have the opportunity to explore the town's historic streets, adorned with charming half-timbered houses and lined with the bustling street of winemakers. Don't miss the chance to admire the tranquil beauty of the river from the quaint washhouse, and perhaps wander through the enchanting ruins of Chateau Gaillard.

## **Day 8, September 9, Monday**

As our journey draws to a close, we'll make our way back to Briare in the early morning, where we'll disembark from the barge and bid farewell to our floating home (9 am).

Our first stop of the day will be the fascinating Mosaic Museum, located within a working mosaic factory. Originally established in Paris in the 19th century, the factory relocated to Briare and continues to produce exquisite mosaics that adorn projects around the globe. Prepare to be amazed by the intricate artistry and craftsmanship on display, as we delve into the rich history of mosaic-making. (10 am)

Next, we'll embark on a short excursion (by car) to visit the magnificent Gien Castle, situated just 10 km from Briar. This stunning Renaissance castle, dating back to the 15th century, was once the cherished residence of Anne of France, a prominent figure in French history. Today, the castle houses the esteemed International Hunting Museum, offering a glimpse into the noble tradition of hunting. (1:30 pm)

After our castle exploration, we'll return to Briard for the final highlight of our journey - a wine tasting at a charming family winery. With roots tracing back to the 17th century, this esteemed winery has been crafting exceptional wines that encapsulate the essence of the Haute-Loire region.

With our tasting concluded, our journey through the Haute-Loire comes to an end.

For those seeking further adventure, an optional three-day trip awaits, as we set off by car for Auxerre to explore Northern Burgundy.

## **Three days in Northern Burgundy**

### **Chablis – Auxerre – Irancy**

Even in France, Burgundy stands out as a gastronomic paradise, boasting cheeses, snails, beef dishes, gougères, rich wine sauces, and much more.

Adjacent to the Haute-Loire, Northern Burgundy offers wine enthusiasts a completely different selection of wines to explore. Over the course of three days, we'll visit three distinct places, each offering its own perspective on the region's wine culture. We'll stay in Auxerre and visit other places by car.

With each destination offering a unique glimpse into Northern Burgundy's wine world, this trip promises to be a delightful addition to any barge excursion on the Loire.

#### **September 10, Tuesday, Auxerre**

Auxerre, with its elegant old town charm, presents an opportunity to savor a wide array of wines from the region: Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, exquisite sparkling Crémant de Bourgogne, rare Aligoté, and Melon de Bourgogne. In addition to sampling wines, we'll also indulge in Ratafia de Bourgogne and the renowned Kir cocktail, originating from Burgundy and beloved worldwide.

#### **September 11, Wednesday, Chablis**

The renowned Chablis region is famous for its distinctive Chardonnay, offering a taste experience unlike any other in the world. Chablis wines are crisp, clean, highly mineral-driven, with minimal fruity undertones.

#### **September 12, Thursday, Irancy**

Irancy, an enchanting winemaking village, offers a captivating exploration of terroir's influence on wine flavor profiles. Irancy wineries are celebrated for crafting light yet intricately complex northern Pinot Noir.

In the afternoon, we'll return to Auxerre to bid farewell.

## **Three days in the South-West**

### **Toulouse – Albi – Cordes-sur-Ciel**

Located just west of Languedoc, the wine-producing Southwest of France has a rich history dating back to Roman times. During the Middle Ages, wines from the South-West were highly sought after and supplied to royal courts. However, competition from Bordeaux and the devastation of phylloxera led to a decline in the region. Fortunately, the end of the 20th century saw a revival of its winemaking traditions.

Our journey will take us to Fronton and Gaillac, regions that supply Toulouse with its wine. These areas boast a diverse array of wines crafted from ancient indigenous varieties such as Negret, Duras, Fer Servadou, Braucon, and Len de l'el, complemented by Bordeaux varietals like Syrah, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon. While these wines may be difficult to find overseas, they offer a unique tasting experience that can only be fully appreciated on-site.

Fronton and Gaillac offer a wide selection of wines, ranging from light and refreshing reds to robust reds suitable for aging. Additionally, Gaillac's white wines are incredibly diverse, including dry, semi-dry, and sweet varieties made from late-harvest grapes. Sparkling wines are also abundant, produced using both traditional and ancient methods, including the rare "rural" (ancestrale) style and "pearl" wines with a slight carbonation from malolactic fermentation.

During our visit, we'll explore selected wineries that showcase the diverse wine world of Fronton and Gaillac. We'll have the opportunity to taste some of the finest wines while delving into the history and winemaking techniques behind them.

This trip serves as an ideal introduction to the region before embarking on a barge journey along the Canal du Midi.

### **September 13, Friday**

#### **Toulouse**

We'll begin our day in Toulouse, the vibrant capital of Occitania, steeped in history dating back to its Roman origins. Known as the "pink city" due to the distinctive color of its brick architecture, Toulouse offers a blend of elegance and charm.

Our exploration of Toulouse will take us to its central square, adorned with the grand Capitol building and the 18th-century city hall. We'll marvel at the Basilica of Saint-Sernin, a masterpiece of Romanesque architecture and a UNESCO World Heritage site. Nearby, we'll visit



the Jacobin monastery, where the renowned philosopher Thomas Aquinas is laid to rest, and admire the opulent Renaissance mansions that line the streets.

No visit to Toulouse would be complete without sampling its culinary delights. We'll indulge in the famous Toulouse cassoulet, a hearty dish featuring beans, sausage, and duck confit, renowned for its rich flavor. We'll also savor candied violets, a local delicacy that has become synonymous with the city's culinary heritage.

As the sun sets, we'll retire to our accommodations in Toulouse, reflecting on the day's adventures in this enchanting city.

## **September 14, Saturday**

### **Albi**

On this day, we'll drive to Albi and selected wineries nearby.

Albi is a city renowned for its stunning architectural wonders spanning various epochs. Often referred to as the "red city" due to its distinctive brick and stone buildings, Albi exudes a timeless charm.

Our exploration of Albi begins with a stroll through its historic center, a UNESCO World Heritage site nestled along the banks of the picturesque Tarn River. We'll marvel at the awe-inspiring Gothic Cathedral of Sainte-Cécile, adorned with intricate sculptures and boasting a rich collection of frescoes that tell captivating stories of religious devotion.

Next, we'll cross the millennia-old bridge over the Tarn, one of the oldest in Europe, offering panoramic views of the city's skyline and surrounding countryside. Our journey continues with a visit to the Toulouse-Lautrec Museum, home to the most extensive collection of painters' works.

We'll spend the night in Albi.

## **September 15, Sunday**

### **Cordes-sur-Ciel**

On this day, we'll drive to Cordes-sur-Ciel and selected wineries nearby.

Cordes-sur-Ciel is an enchanting Albigensian fortress perched majestically on the banks of the Tarn River. Renowned as one of the earliest fortified cities in Occitanie, Cordes-sur-Ciel

beckons with its timeless allure and rich medieval heritage. Built atop a cliff, the city appears to float ethereally in the sky, offering a mesmerizing glimpse into the past.

As we explore Cordes-sur-Ciel, we'll traverse its winding cobblestone streets and marvel at its well-preserved medieval architecture. From imposing stone ramparts to quaint artisan workshops, every corner exudes a sense of history and charm. Following extensive restoration efforts in the 20th century, Cordes-sur-Ciel provides a captivating window into medieval life, allowing us to immerse ourselves fully in its storied past.

In the evening, we'll return to Toulouse. With those setting off on a trip on a barge along the Canal du Midi, we leave by train to Argents-Minerva. For the rest of the group, it's a fond adieu as we reflect on the unforgettable experiences shared amidst the timeless landscapes of Southern France.

## **Canal du Midi**

### **New World of French viniculture**

Embark on a journey through the Languedoc, where innovative winemaking approaches blend with traditional techniques. Renowned for its aromatic, robust red wines, Languedoc offers a palate of flavors to explore. Our voyage traverses the Minervois region, where Carignan, Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre grapes reign supreme. Continuing through Malepère, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon add depth to these varietals, crafting distinctive blends.

In addition to its renowned reds, Languedoc produces delightful rosés and select white wines. For connoisseurs of sweet indulgences, the region offers exquisite fortified wines rivaling the finest Ports. Sparkling wine enthusiasts will delight in Crémant de Limoux, crafted primarily from Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc grapes.

The Canal du Midi itself is a marvel of engineering, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Flanked by vineyards, cypress groves, and pine forests, its banks are steeped in history, tracing back to the Roman Empire. Along our journey, we'll encounter medieval castles, ancient abbeys, and the iconic Carcassonne fortress, a timeless testament to the medieval era.

#### **Day 1, September 16, Monday**

We'll begin our adventure by immersing ourselves in the charm of the ancient town of Argens-Minervois. Wander through its picturesque streets adorned with castles and churches, taking in the ambiance of history and beauty. Along the way, we'll stop at one or two wineries to savor the region's renowned wines.

From 12:00 to 3:00 PM, we'll check in on the barge and settle in for our journey.

At 3:00 PM, we'll embark on our sail towards Homps, where we'll anchor for the night.

#### **Day 2, September 17, Tuesday**

We'll start our day by delving into the rich history of Homps, an ancient village steeped in significance as a key stop along the old Roman road and a historical hub for wine transport. With monuments dating back to the 11th century, there's much to discover. Our journey continues with a captivating tour and tasting at a local winery.

Next, we'll set sail for Puichéric, a charming small town nestled at the confluence of three rivers and affectionately dubbed the Venice of Minervois. In Puichéric, we'll meander through its streets, visit the impressive 6th-century castle, explore a couple of wineries, and settle in for the night.

### **Day 3, September 18, Wednesday**

Our morning journey takes us towards Trèbes, with a delightful stopover in the charming town of Marseillette. Famous for its picturesque apple orchards and unexpected rice fields, Marseillette offers a unique blend of natural beauty and agricultural heritage. Here, we'll take the opportunity to explore the town and indulge in tastings at a couple of local wineries.

Upon arriving in Trèbes, a quaint ancient city nestled between two rivers, we'll delve into its rich gastronomic offerings alongside its renowned wine scene. We'll visit a local winery to savor the distinct flavors of the region. Trèbes is also celebrated for its plum orchards and olive oil production, offering a diverse culinary experience. Chocolate enthusiasts will delight in a tour and tasting at the confectionery factory, where French classics like candied violet petals and macarons are crafted. We'll spend the night in Trèbes, immersed in its culinary delights and cultural treasures.

### **Day 4, September 19, Thursday**

Our day begins with an early morning sail to the iconic city of Carcassonne.

Carcassonne, boasting three kilometers of double walls and 52 towers, stands as the largest walled city in Europe. Immaculately restored in the 19th century, it offers a captivating journey back in time to medieval splendor.

In Carcassonne's Upper Town, we'll embark on a fascinating exploration, delving into its rich history through visits to museums and leisurely strolls in picturesque gardens. A highlight of our visit will be crossing the Old Bridge over the tranquil waters of the Aude River.

Amidst our cultural immersion, we'll indulge in the region's renowned wines with tastings at select wineries, savoring the distinctive flavors of Carcassonne's vineyards.

As the day draws to a close, we'll retreat to the enchanting ambiance of Carcassonne, where we'll spend the night, surrounded by the echoes of its medieval past.

## **Day 5, September 20, Friday**

Our morning begins with a delightful exploration of the Bastide, the lower fortified city of Carcassonne, before we set sail once again, retracing our journey towards Trèbes.

Upon our arrival in Trèbes in the afternoon, we'll immerse ourselves in the flavors of the region with visits to two or three esteemed wineries, indulging in tastings that capture the essence of Trèbes' viticultural heritage.

As evening descends, we'll settle into the tranquility of Trèbes, where we'll spend the night.

## **Day 6, September 21, Saturday**

In the morning, we'll embark on our journey to Puichéric.

Upon reaching Puichéric, we'll trade our boat for bicycles and venture on an enchanting 8-kilometer ride to Rieux Minervois, an ancient village steeped in history, dating back to the 10th century. Here, we'll marvel at the unique hexagonal church adorned with intricate Romanesque sculptures.

Immersing ourselves in the rich viticultural heritage of the village, we'll pause at select wineries for tastings, savoring the distinct flavors of the region's renowned wines.

As evening approaches, we'll return to Puichéric for the night's rest.

## **Day 7, September 22, Sunday**

In the morning, we'll set sail once again, heading back towards Argents-Minervois.

En route, we'll pause in the quaint village of La Redorte, where we'll indulge in a delightful wine tasting session at a local winery, followed by a leisurely stroll through the charming streets.

Continuing our journey, we'll make a stop in Homps, where we'll swap our boat for bicycles and embark on a scenic ride of approximately 7 kilometers to Olonzac, the captivating capital of Minervois. Here, amidst the idyllic surroundings, we'll have the opportunity to taste more exquisite wines and soak in the ambiance of this historic town. Before concluding our exploration, we'll also visit the picturesque Lake Jouarres.

As the day draws to a close, we'll return to Argents-Minervois, where we'll spend the night.

## **Day 8, September 23, Monday**

At 9:00 in the morning, it's time to bid farewell to our beloved barge and embark on our individual journeys.

# Cahors

## Exploring the Birthplace of Malbec

Cahors is renowned for its robust "black" wines—dry, potent, and boasting a pronounced tannic profile, with a lingering, vibrant finish. These wines were the cornerstone of Cahors' prosperity during the Middle Ages. At the heart of these wines lies Malbec, known locally as Cot. It was here in Cahors that Malbec originated before journeying to Argentina, where it became emblematic of the nation. However, Argentine and French Malbecs exhibit notable differences; Argentina has embraced different clones, while its distinct climate has left its mark on the grape.

In Cahors, winemakers craft both pure Malbec varietals and blends, often incorporating Merlot and Tannat. Additionally, the region produces rosé wines from Malbec and outstanding white wines made from Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, and Viognier (classified as IGT).

Nestled within Cahors is a city steeped in a millennium of history, its streets bearing the marks of time. The iconic Valentre Bridge, a fortified marvel from the 14th century spanning the Lot River, stands as a testament to the city's past. Legend has it that the devil himself had a hand in its construction.

Flowing gracefully through the landscape, the Lot River is among France's most picturesque waterways, meandering through crimson canyons and hills adorned with medieval fortresses and quaint villages. Two such villages, Luzech and Saint-Cirq-Lapopie, fortified and charming, have earned places on the list of France's most beautiful locales. Moreover, the region is renowned for its caverns, with Pech-Merle boasting a renowned collection of prehistoric cave art.

Cahors' culinary scene rivals that of Burgundy in the eyes of gourmets. From foie gras to truffles, saffron, duck confit, an array of cheeses, and myriad other delicacies, epicurean delights await exploration.

### **Day 1, September 23, Monday**

Our journey commences in the captivating city of Cahors, serving as the focal point of our adventure. Steeped in medieval grandeur and rich history, Cahors offers a wealth of sights to explore. On the first day, we embark on a discovery of the iconic Valentre Bridge and its neighboring landmarks.

Between 12:00 and 15:00, we'll check-in aboard the barge, our floating sanctuary for the voyage ahead. At 15:00, we'll cast off, setting sail for Douelle.

Upon arrival in Douelle, we'll visit a local winery for a tour and tasting experience, immersing ourselves in the essence of the region's renowned wines.

We'll settle in Douelle for a restful night, embracing the tranquility of our surroundings.

## **Day 2, September 24, Tuesday**

As the morning unfolds, those inclined to venture out are invited to join a picturesque hike spanning approximately 4 kilometers, offering panoramic views of the enchanting Lot Valley.

Later in the day, we'll set sail towards Luzech, with a captivating stop en route at the Chateau de Cayx, a distinguished winery under the ownership of the Swedish royal family. Here, we'll have the opportunity to admire the chateau's splendor and savor its exquisite wines.

Arriving in Luzech, we'll drop anchor and embark on an exploration of this ancient village, graced with the esteemed title of one of the most beautiful villages in France. Our itinerary includes a visit to the serene "pilgrim garden" and delightful tastings at handpicked wineries, allowing us to indulge in the region's vinicultural treasures.

We'll settle in Luzech for a restful night.

## **Day 3, September 25, Wednesday**

Our morning begins with a visit to the captivating Mill Museum in Luzech, offering insights into the region's rich milling heritage. Following this enriching experience, we'll set sail for Cahors, our next destination.

En route to Cahors, we'll pause at a noteworthy winery, where we'll have the pleasure of indulging in tastings of their finest selections.

Upon arrival in Cahors, we'll embark on a delightful exploration of the old city, delving into its storied past and uncovering hidden gems such as the "secret gardens" nestled within the stone walls of the ancient fortress. Our itinerary includes visits to a couple of esteemed wine tasting venues, where we'll have the opportunity to sample the renowned wines of the region.

Tonight, we'll find comfort and relaxation in the charming ambiance of Cahors.



## **Day 4, September 26, Thursday**

As the morning unfolds, we'll navigate our way to Vers, our next destination along the serene waters.

Upon arrival in Vers, we'll immerse ourselves in the tranquil beauty of the surroundings, taking time to explore the quaint and historic village of Mairie. Perched gracefully above the river, Mairie boasts an elegant church and timeless charm. Here, amidst the picturesque scenery, we'll have the pleasure of indulging in wine tastings at a captivating winery, savoring the distinctive flavors of the region.

As the day transitions into evening, we'll settle in Vers for a night.

## **Day 5, September 27, Friday**

In the morning, we'll start a leisurely sail towards the captivating village of Saint-Cirq-Lapopie, a medieval gem nestled atop a majestic cliff overlooking the Lot.

En route, we'll pause at a fascinating winery, eager to sample the distinctive flavors of the region and immerse ourselves in its rich viticultural heritage.

Our journey continues to Bouzies, where ancient caves once served as strategic defenses during the tumultuous Hundred Years' War. Here, we'll stroll along a picturesque barge path carved into the rock, tracing the footsteps of history amidst breathtaking natural beauty.

In the afternoon, we'll arrive at Saint-Cirq-Lapopie, a village steeped in medieval charm and renowned as one of France's most beautiful destinations. Amidst its narrow streets and ancient buildings, we'll explore the saffron museum, delving into the fascinating history of this prized spice.

For the night we'll settle into the enchanting ambiance of Saint-Cirq-Lapopie.

## **Day 6, September 28, Saturday**

In the morning, we'll set sail for Bouzies. From there, we'll embark on a bicycle excursion to explore the picturesque medieval village and castle of Cabrerets, nestled along a tranquil tributary of the Lot. Our journey will also lead us to the renowned Pech-Merle cave, famous for its captivating prehistoric paintings. With each pedal stroke, we'll immerse ourselves in the timeless beauty and rich history of the region, covering a scenic 15-kilometer circular route with two enchanting stops along the way.

Following a leisurely lunch, we'll resume our voyage towards Arcambal, where we'll anchor for the night.

### **Day 7, September 29, Sunday**

As the day unfolds, we'll begin with a captivating exploration of Arcambal, where history comes alive amidst the ancient walls of Bousquet Castle, founded in the 12th century. We'll also discover the timeless charm of the churches of St. Anthony and the Assumption of Our Lady, which have stood as silent witnesses to centuries of stories and traditions.

In the afternoon, our journey continues as we set sail for Cahors, with a delightful stop along the way for a wine tasting experience. Upon our arrival in Cahors, we'll wander through the winding streets of the old town, marveling at the majestic 11th-century monastery and cathedral of St. Stephen. Our adventure will lead us to the monumental Gothic church of St. Bartholomew, where history and architecture blend seamlessly to create an unforgettable impression.

### **Day 8, September 30, Monday**

In the morning, we bid farewell to our barge adventure. At 9:00 AM, it's time to check out and conclude our unforgettable journey along the serene waters of the Lot River.

For those eager to embark on the next chapter of exploration, a "Three Days in Bordeaux" trip awaits. We board the train bound for Bordeaux, where new adventures await. To those parting ways here, we bid fond farewells, cherishing the memories created and the bonds forged during our time together.

## **Three days in Bordeaux**

**September 30 – October 3**

Bordeaux stands as France's largest and most esteemed wine region, serving as the benchmark for success against which other French regions are measured. Here, the art of winemaking reaches its pinnacle, producing top-tier reds, dry whites, and luscious sweet whites. Renowned worldwide, Bordeaux boasts exceptional red wines and Sauternes, the iconic sweet nectar crafted from botrytised grapes. Adding to its allure, Bordeaux also produces distinctive rich rosé wines, known as claret, and exquisite sparkling varieties.

The winemaking landscape in Bordeaux is uniquely shaped by its historical evolution, setting it apart from the rest of France. Delving into its winemaking structure unveils insights crucial for understanding Bordeaux's bottle labeling. Moreover, the region's history is both atypical and enlightening, offering valuable lessons to enthusiasts and connoisseurs alike.

### **September 30, Monday**

At 3:30 PM, we'll convene on the embankment of the old city for a guided tour. Strolling through the majestic streets of the old town and along its scenic riverbanks, I'll regale you with Bordeaux's rich history from a winemaking perspective.

### **October 1, Tuesday**

We'll embark on a day trip (by car) to Saint-Émilion, a prominent appellation in Bordeaux known for producing elegant and refreshing red wines. With a winemaking history spanning over 2000 years, the heart of this region lies in the quaint medieval town of Saint-Émilion, nestled atop a limestone cliff. Our day will be filled with a leisurely stroll through the town, insights into the concept of "garage wines" in Saint-Émilion, and visits to several châteaux in the area, where we'll indulge in wine tastings.

## **October 2, Wednesday**

For our second day excursion, we'll venture by car to the Grave and Barsac regions. Renowned for their robust and well-structured red wines, these areas also boast dry, refined whites and the renowned sweet nectar of Sauternes.

## **October 3, Thursday (morning)**

We'll begin our day with a visit to the Wine Museum. This expansive museum offers a wide array of tastings, temporary exhibitions alongside its permanent displays, and engaging workshops. While the museum could easily occupy a full day or more, I'll curate a four-hour excursion to highlight the most captivating aspects for our group.

Following the excursion, we'll bid farewell.

## **Three days in Bordeaux**

### **October 4-6**

Bordeaux stands as France's largest and most esteemed wine region, serving as the benchmark for success against which other French regions are measured. Here, the art of winemaking reaches its pinnacle, producing top-tier reds, dry whites, and luscious sweet whites. Renowned worldwide, Bordeaux boasts exceptional red wines and Sauternes, the iconic sweet nectar crafted from botrytised grapes. Adding to its allure, Bordeaux also produces distinctive rich rosé wines, known as claret, and exquisite sparkling varieties.

The winemaking landscape in Bordeaux is uniquely shaped by its historical evolution, setting it apart from the rest of France. Delving into its winemaking structure unveils insights crucial for understanding Bordeaux's bottle labeling. Moreover, the region's history is both atypical and enlightening, offering valuable lessons to enthusiasts and connoisseurs alike.

### **October 4, Friday**

In the morning, we'll convene on the embankment of the old city for a guided tour. Strolling through the majestic streets of the old town and along its scenic riverbanks, I'll regale you with Bordeaux's rich history from a winemaking perspective.

In the afternoon, we'll continue our day with a visit to the Wine Museum. This expansive museum offers a wide array of tastings, temporary exhibitions alongside its permanent displays, and engaging workshops. While the museum could easily occupy a full day or more, I'll curate a four-hour excursion to highlight the most captivating aspects for our group.

### **October 5, Saturday**

We'll embark on a day trip (by car) to Saint-Émilion, a prominent appellation in Bordeaux known for producing elegant and refreshing red wines. With a winemaking history spanning over 2000 years, the heart of this region lies in the quaint medieval town of Saint-Émilion, nestled atop a limestone cliff. Our day will be filled with a leisurely stroll through the town, insights into the concept of "garage wines" in Saint-Émilion, and visits to several châteaux in the area, where we'll indulge in wine tastings.

## **October 6, Sunday**

For our second day excursion, we'll venture by car to the Grave and Barsac regions. Renowned for their robust and well-structured red wines, these areas also boast dry, refined whites and the renowned sweet nectar of Sauternes.

Following the returning to Bordeaux, we'll bid farewell.

## **Gascony**

### **From the vineyards of Buzet to the capital of Armagnac**

Gascony, renowned for its Armagnac, offers a unique taste of this older sibling of cognac. As the French themselves say: “We gave the world Cognac but kept Armagnac for ourselves.” In its capital, Condom, we'll indulge in a comprehensive Armagnac tasting, exploring how distillation and aging nuances shape its flavors. A traditional Gascon dessert, prunes in Armagnac, will accompany our tasting, offering a delightful local treat.

But Gascony's charms extend beyond Armagnac to its wine heritage. Once highly coveted in the Middle Ages, the region's winemaking tradition faced adversity but has since experienced a remarkable revival. Buzet, known for its robust and aromatic red wines, boasts blends of Merlot, Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Franc. Rosé wines here, primarily crafted from Cabernet Franc, offer a fruity and flavorful profile, while white wines feature Sauvignon blanc and gris, Semillon, and Muscadelle.

For enthusiasts of literature and history, Gascony evokes the spirit of the musketeers, with reminders scattered throughout its towns. Nérac, the majestic hometown of Henri IV the Magnificent, beckons with its castle-turned-museum, offering insights into medieval life. Gascony's fortified towns, built in the 13th century, stand as living testaments to its rich history, with Vianne among the few preserved in its entirety, offering a captivating journey into the Middle Ages.

Gascony's landscape is dotted with charming villages nestled amidst vineyards and plum orchards, with one such gem included in the prestigious list of the most beautiful villages in France.

And no visit to Gascony would be complete without indulging in its culinary delights. From savory duck and goose dishes to delectable prunes, including those soaked in Armagnac, Gascony promises a feast for the senses.

### **Day 1, October 7, Monday**

In the morning, we embark on an excursion to discover the renowned wines of Buzet AOC, showcasing the vibrant winemaking tradition of the South-West region. For those unable to join before sailing, we'll offer a repeat excursion upon our return to Buzet.

From 12:00 to 15:00, we facilitate check-in on the barge.

At 15:00, we set sail towards Vianne, our destination for the night. Vianne, a well-preserved 13th-century fortified town, holds the distinction of being the only one named after a woman. We'll explore its historic fortress walls and charming streets.

## **Day 2, October 8, Tuesday**

We bid farewell to Vianne in the morning and anticipate our arrival in Nérac by mid-afternoon.

Nérac, the birthplace of Henri IV the Magnificent, king of Navarre and France, stands as a testament to his illustrious reign. Renowned for ending religious conflicts, fostering national unity, and initiating economic growth and colonial expansion, Henri IV is revered as a hero of the people. Nérac brims with historical significance.

Our exploration of the city will include a visit to the Château of Henri IV, an intriguing museum housing permanent exhibits dedicated to the king, the palace's architecture, and life during his era. We'll also wander through the garden, lovingly crafted by Henri for his sister, and pay homage to the charming girl who gave her name to flirting.

Additionally, we'll have the opportunity to visit a local winery, providing insight into the diverse array of beverages crafted from the region's fertile lands.

We'll spend the night in Nérac, soaking in the ambiance of this historic gem.

## **Day 3, October 9, Wednesday**

As the morning sun graces Nérac, we set our course towards Condom.

En route, we pause at the Moncrabeau pier, where we embark on a delightful bicycle excursion (12 km one way; in case of inclement weather, we'll arrange transportation) to Mezin, a picturesque medieval village. In Mezin, we'll delve into the fascinating history of wine corks at the museum before indulging in tastings and tours at local Armagnac producers.

Following our enriching time in Mezin, we resume our journey and navigate towards Condom, our destination for the night.

## **Day 4, October 10, Thursday**

Today, we immerse ourselves in the essence of Gascony as we delve into the heart of Armagnac in Condom.



Our morning begins with a captivating exploration of the Armagnac Museum, where we uncover the rich history and traditions surrounding this esteemed spirit. Following our museum visit, we venture to one of the local producers for an tour and tasting, gaining insight into the meticulous craft behind Armagnac production.

In the afternoon, we embark on a scenic bicycle ride (6 km one way) to Larressingle, a captivating 13th-century fortified village revered as one of the most beautiful in France. Along the way, we pause to visit another Armagnac producer, further deepening our appreciation for this cherished spirit.

In the evening, we set sail towards Valence-sur-Baise, a fortified city steeped in medieval charm. Here, amidst the historic ambiance of the 13th century, we settle in for the night.

### **Day 5, October 11, Friday**

In the morning, we embark on a leisurely stroll (less than a kilometer) to the Florent Monastery, a captivating former Cistercian abbey transformed into a museum. Here we delve into the rich history and cultural heritage preserved within its walls. Following our museum visit, we continue our exploration with an excursion to a local winery, where we indulge in the exquisite flavors of Gascony wines and Armagnac, immersing ourselves in the region's renowned viticulture and distillation traditions.

In the evening, we set sail once more, returning to Condom, where we'll stay overnight.

### **Day 6, October 12, Saturday**

In the morning, we set sail towards Nerac, our next destination.

En route, we make a delightful stop at a local winery, where we have the pleasure of indulging in a tasting session, savoring the diverse flavors of Gascony's renowned wines.

Continuing our journey, we pause to explore the charming town of Moncrabeau, known as the capital of liars. Here, residents proudly embrace their reputation as some of the most skilled storytellers in Gascony and beyond. Since the 18th century, Moncrabeau has been home to an esteemed Academy of Liars, hosting an annual festival where the King of Liars is crowned amidst jovial celebrations.

As evening falls, we arrive in Nerac, where we settle in for the night.

## **Day 7, October 13, Sunday**

Today, our journey carries us to the enchanting village of Vianne.

In the afternoon, we make a captivating stop in Lavardac. Crossing over to the other side, we delve into the historical charm of Barbast, where a 12th-century Romanesque bridge beckons us to explore. Here, nestled along the banks of the Gueliz River, we discover the remarkable fortified mill, a testament to the region's rich heritage.

In the evening, we return to Vianne, where we retire for the night.

## **Day 8, October 14, Monday**

Early morning, we set sail for Buzet. At 9 am, we bid farewell to the barge and embark on a delightful wine excursion, extending this journey's enchantment to those who were unable to join us on the initial day of our adventure.

## Prices and conditions

### Boat trips

A boat is both a home and a means of transportation.

The boats we use have from 2 to 4 berths, each of which can accommodate two people. A hanging bed can be added for a third person, typically a child.

Each berth typically has a bathroom with a shower.

The boat has a cozy launch and a well-equipped kitchen.

The upper deck has a spacious area with a table and chairs.

Week	Price per cabin, EUR
September, 2-9	3240
September, 9-16	3040
September, 16-23	3040
September, 23-30	2950
September, 30 – October, 7	2730
October, 7 – 14	2730
October, 14 – 21	2730

#### What is included:

- Boat rental and insurance
- Boat piloting by the experienced crew
- Diesel fuel
- Mooring fees, freshwater refills, and electricity costs at ports
- Lock passing fees
- Winery visits and wine tasting fees
- Rental of bicycles and/or taxis from the port to excursion sites and back
- WiFi internet on board

**What is not included:**

- Travel to and from France
- Transfer to and from the port
- Accommodation in France before and after the cruise
- Personal medical insurance
- Meals and wine (except wine tasting at wineries)

**Additional three-day trips**

**Price: 900 euros for two / 550 euros for one**

**What is included:**

- Car rental and insurance for it
- Gasoline, tolls
- Three nights in a two-star hotel based on double occupancy
- Breakfast at the hotel
- Winery visits and wine tasting fees
- Museums

**What is not included:**

- Travel to and from France
- Transfer to and from the starting city of the trip
- Accommodation in France before and after the trip
- Personal medical insurance
- Meals and wine (except wine tasting at wineries)