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Sleeping Beauty's Castle - Ussé

Photos by Circa Tours

## *Bordeaux, Dordogne and the Loire Valley*

Bordeaux - Sarlat - Tours  
(9 days - 8 nights)

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# SAMPLE ITINERARY

This is an example of a possible itinerary. It can be resized, reorganized and customized to fit your interests, budget and schedule. It can also be combined with other tours.

## HIGHLIGHTS (9 days - 8 nights)

DAY	ACTIVITIES (prior to or after a stay in Paris)	NIGHT
1	Leave <b>Paris</b> from Montparnasse train station to <b>Bordeaux</b> . Afternoon at leisure	Bordeaux
2	Full-day wine tour (choice of 5 different programs)	Bordeaux
3	Private transfer/guided tour to <b>Sarlat</b> with visits along the way: St Emilion, then follow scenic Dordogne River (Montbazillac, Bergerac, Chateau des Milandes, etc.). Afternoon at leisure	Sarlat
4	Day trip to the caves of Rouffignac (original paintings), Lascaux II and Les Eyzies (National Prehistory Museum)	Sarlat
5	Full-day private tour. Visit the following sites: Combarelles (engravings), Font de Gaume (paintings), Cap Blanc (sculpture)	Sarlat
6	Train to <b>Loire Valley</b> . Rest of the day at leisure	Tours
7	Day trip to Villandry, Azay le Rideau, Langeais and Usse (self-guided visits)	Tours
8	Day trip to Chambord, Cheverny and Blois (guided visits and lunch)	Tours
9	Half-day trip to Chenonceau and Amboise or Clos Luce (self-guided visits) Train to Paris in late afternoon	Paris

## ITINERARY (for more options, see our “France Highlights”)

**Day 1:** Enjoy a comfortable (and fast) ride on the TGV (high-speed train) to **Bordeaux**. Check in your hotel and start discovering this beautiful city on your own - the historic center, the Pont de Pierre or perhaps an initiation to wine tasting at the Ecole du Vin.

**Day 2:** Bordeaux is arguably the world capital of wine. So, there are many possibilities for a wine tour today. Here are some choices:

**Saint Emilion wine tour** - Depart for Saint Emilion and stop at Planete Bordeaux for a wine tasting. Arrive in Saint Emilion and visit the village. Lunch and exploration at leisure. Visit and wine tasting session in one of the many local “classified chateaus”.

**Sauternes and Graves wine tour** - Start off with the discovery of the Sauternes white wines which are blended from Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc, and Muscadelle grapes that have been affected by *Botrytis Cinerea* (the golden rot). After lunch, enjoy the visit and tasting of wines from two other chateaus including a “classified growth” of the Pessac appellation.

**Medoc wine tour** - Visit and wine tasting in two prestigious “classified growth” chateaus. Then, follow the castle road to admire some of the most famous chateaus in the Bordeaux region (Margaux, Palmer, Beychevelle...). In the afternoon, reach “La Winery” which is set in 65-acre park and end the tour with a wine tasting session.



**Bordeaux World Heritage Site and St Emilion tour** - Start with a panoramic tour of the World Heritage classified historical city of Bordeaux. Then, head out to charming St Emilion. Walking tour and free time for lunch and personal exploration, followed by a visit and wine tasting session in a “classified growth” chateau.

**A day at “La Winery”** - This unique tour will take you to an avant-garde cultural site set in a scenic 65-acre park just 30 minutes north of Bordeaux, on the road to the Médoc.



This attractive glass and steel complex (no Renaissance chateau or traditional winemaking facilities here) offers newcomers and wine enthusiasts alike a creative, accessible and personalized approach to wine. While at La Winery, enjoy a wine tasting session accompanied by local cheese. Then, go on a tour of the surrounding vineyards. Take a tour focusing on the artwork on display around the grounds and discover your "wine sign" based on the kinds of wine you like. Every activity here is dedicated to the art and treasures of wine.



**Day 3:** This morning, you can take the train to **Sarlat** or have a private driver escort you on a leisurely guided tour along the scenic **Dordogne River**. There are several possibilities for stops along the way. Here are a few suggestions: Medieval St Emilion and its monolithic church, carved from a limestone cliff, the Montbazillac wine region, quaint Bergerac, the Chateau des Milandes, once owned by jazz performer Josephine Baker, etc. This afternoon, enjoy beautifully restored Sarlat at your own pace. Tucked among hills adorned with corn and wheat fields, Sarlat is the quintessential medieval town (many "period movies" have been shot on location there).

**Day 4:** Some 20,000 years ago unknown painters created breathtaking cave paintings in the Dordogne region in the south of France. This morning is the start of your expedition back into prehistoric times. Start with a tour of Les Eyzies and visit an authentic troglodyte shelter or the National Prehistory Museum (the most important Paleolithic collection in France). Then, on to the cave of Rouffignac (more like an underground maze) decorated with dozens of original paintings. Finally, visit the world-renowned Lascaux II, a perfect reproduction of the original cave discovered in 1940.



**Day 5:** Prehistoric Dordogne has more in store for you today. Visit some of the following sites: Combarelles (engravings), Font de Gaume (paintings), Cap Blanc (sculpture) and/or la Roque St Christophe.

**Day 6:** Today is a travel day, to the fabulous **Loire Valley**. First, a regular train from Sarlat to Bordeaux, then the TGV again to the city of Tours in the Touraine region. Explore the city on your own this afternoon.

**Day 7:** From the most basic prehistoric art in Dordogne, you'll go on to see some of the most refined architecture ever designed. The Loire Valley is

known as the "Chateau Country" of France. It boasts hundreds of historic chateaus ranging from fortified medieval fortresses to neoclassical manors. For centuries the Val de Loire has been the playground of the kings of France, hence the plethora of some of the handsomest architecture in the world. Today's list includes: **Villandry** - a relatively simple structure, but world-famous for the sophisticated decorative and vegetable gardens that surround it; **Azay-le-Rideau** - a picture-perfect Renaissance chateau reflecting its image in the Indre River, **Langeais** - a 10<sup>th</sup>-century fortress and **Usse** - another picture-perfect Renaissance chateau, the setting for Sleeping Beauty's story.

**Day 8:** Enjoy more chateaus today: **Chambord** - another typical "Renaissance" construction that was originally a royal hunting lodge and is also famous for its impressive double-spiral staircase; **Cheverny** - a smaller, privately-owned, lavishly decorated country residence with a foxhound breeding kennel on the grounds and **Blois** - a massive building in the center of town with an elegant mixture of 16th-century Gothic and 17th-century classical architecture.

**Day 9:** Last but equally as impressive: Classic Renaissance **Chenonceau**, spanning the River Cher and surrounded by beautiful rose and formal French gardens; **Amboise** filled with luxurious rooms and furnishings, and with stunning views over the Loire River or **Clos-Luce** (a stone's throw from Amboise), where Leonardo da Vinci lived for the last few years of his life. It contains interesting scale models of some of his inventions. Return to Paris by train in the afternoon.



Hello, my name is **Pierre Mainguené**. I personally handcrafted this itinerary.



I am the co-founder and president of Circa Tours. I was born and raised in Brittany, France so, as a native European, I love everything about the “old country” especially France, Spain and Portugal, the three countries we specialize in. I love their history (and there is lots of it), their art (same thing), their cuisine (especially in France, Catalonia and the Basque Country), their wine (everywhere), their lifestyle and the endless diversity of the local cultures.

In dozens of trips I have taken to Europe, I have traveled to nearly every corner of those countries, and I continue my journey of discovery every year. I am a Travel-Institute certified France and Spain Specialist, and I am also recognized by the Tourist Office of Portugal as a certified Portugal Specialist.

My goal is to create the best possible trip for you. I am always ready to listen to your wishes (however creative) and feedback, and I will always enjoy sharing my experiences with you.

That’s me, by the way, in front of a Joaquin Sorolla painting in Madrid. And, the following are some comments made by a few of our clients:

- “Our trip was fantastic! We had such a wonderful time! All went well including getting our train tickets to Seville changed the day of the strike. Our guides were nothing less than phenomenal! We can't thank you and your staff enough for putting together a trip that was worthy of our 30th anniversary celebration!” M.B., Massachusetts
- “Pierre. Thank you for your services. I really enjoyed dealing with you. You are so knowledgeable, pleasant and professional. I certainly will recommend you to friends.” J.L., Colorado
- “It was not a good trip - it was a GREAT trip! Truly everything was fabulous, ran smoothly, and worked well. The guides were excellent, the itinerary perfect. We enjoyed Spain very much and will ask you for assistance on our next journey to southern Europe!” J.K., California
- “Circa Tours did a good job. They worked very closely with us in putting the program together. We were very pleased with how efficient everything ran. The information we received from Circa Tours was done up very well, which allowed us to just pull the appropriate paperwork and be on our way. The tours were very well done. The guides we had with the local travel providers did a very good job of explaining the areas we toured. Pierre at Circa Tours made sure we saw a bit of everything.” D.T., Florida
- “We are all home, safe and sound - very tired, but in a hazy daze of love for France. Thank you and Carolyn SO much for arranging such an amazing trip for all of us. Throughout the trip, my sisters, mom and myself could be heard saying such things as, “THANK YOU, PIERRE”...or, “thank goodness for Pierre!!!” Martine was an excellent guide, by the way...very good, nice, thorough and professional. We wouldn't have been able to do HALF of what we did (and certainly not with nearly as much carefree enjoyment) with out her. Thank you and Carolyn for all of you expertise and care in helping us and doing all of the hard work for us! Thank you! Thank you!!!” K.B., Iowa