



Château George 7 offers wine tours with lunch

TRAVEL SECRETS OF THE LOCAL EXPERTS

We asked eight of Bordeaux's top English-speaking wine-country trip planners and guides to reveal their favourite places, from off-the-beaten-track secrets to once-in-a-lifetime gems

STORY CEIL MILLER BOUCHET

Of the 57 appellations in the Bordeaux region, our guides (*see 'Meet the experts', p104*) picked out Sauternes and Fronsac as must-visit appellations for their low-key charm, bucolic landscapes, family-owned properties and growing roster of wine tourism experiences.

A perfect day in Sauternes, according to Janice Brooks, offers so much more than the usual cellar visit followed by a sip and swirl. Her favourites include **Château Sigalas Rabaud** (www.chateau-sigalas-rabaud.com), a small, family-owned property where your guide could be the marquis himself. 'There are children's games, and delicious gourmet tapas or meals on the terrace overlooking the vines, plus beautiful guest rooms,' Brooks says. Also family-owned, **Château Coutet** (www.chateaucoutet.com), introduces its sweet white wines through jellies made from the different grape varieties: Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc and Muscadelle.

At **Château de Rayne Vigneau** (www.raynevigneau.fr), for a bird's-eye appreciation of the appellation, try a fanciful tasting in the property's treehouse, perched atop a centuries-old cedar tree. For a more intimate view of the region's golden wines, Sarah Seguret recommends booking a visit at **Château de Myrat** (www.chateaudemyrat.fr), 'an elegant 18th-century property owned by descendants of one of the oldest families in Bordeaux winemaking, where peacocks strut on the lawn and a family member usually greets visitors'. Finally, all of our guides and experts recommend **Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey** (www.chateau-lafaurie-peyraguey.com), a sumptuous property owned by the CEO of Lalique, the French glassmaker. In addition to the winery, the estate boasts a luxury hotel in the restored château and a one-star Michelin restaurant overlooking the vineyards.

Meanwhile, *Decanter's* Bordeaux correspondent Jane Anson called Fronsac, along with neighbouring Canon-Fronsac, the 'Tuscany of the Gironde' (*Decanter*, March 2015) for the way

the land 'unfurls in great waves along the river's edge, its valley, copses and knots of truffle oaks providing shelter to the lush rows of Merlot and Cabernet Franc vines'. With its small, charming wineries and vineyard-swathed slopes along the Dordogne river, this appellation 'is still undeservedly in the shadow of neighbouring St-Emilion', according to Wendy Narby, who recommends visiting the new winery owned by 'fellow Brit' Sally Evans at **Château George 7** (www.chateaugeorge7.com). **Château de la Rivière** (www.chateau-de-la-riviere.com) also offers a wine tourism experience, complete with rooms.

An estate for everyone

Bordeaux's wineries have traditionally focused primarily on making legendary wines, and so hospitality – including receiving the general public – is more of a recent phenomenon. The good news is that an increasing number of properties have developed their tourism infrastructure over the past years. However, 'the vast majority of vineyard tours and wine tastings in Bordeaux are by appointment only and are private', says Martin Hurst. Overleaf, our experts recommend the best properties to visit based on your specific needs or interests. ►

Learn as you go: where to get educated

The Bordeaux Wine Council (www.bordeaux.com) gets top marks in wine education from all of our experts – many of whom teach there – for its wide array of English-language wine education, ranging from half-day introductory classes to week-long in-depth explorations. Its website is also a treasure trove of information about the region and its wines. Also in Bordeaux, **L'Atelier de Dégustation**

(www.latelierdegustation.com) offers private English-language wine tasting and education classes in the heart of the historic Chartrons district, where the wine merchants traditionally housed their barrels in stone warehouses. For Right Bank aficionados, the **Maison du Vin de St-Emilion** (www.maisonduvinsaintemilion.com) offers both beginners' and in-depth classes.

FOR BEGINNERS

Wendy Narby recommends that beginners head to the Entre-deux-Mers region, where her favourite estates, **Château Lestrille** (www.lestrille.com) and **Château Thieuley** (www.thieuley.com), are among the properties of the regional red appellations (Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur) that comprise nearly half of Bordeaux's wine production. 'Entre-deux-Mers properties usually produce red, white, rosé, claret and often sparkling crémant de Bordeaux,' she says, 'so they provide a great chance to taste the whole range.' Sarah Seguret takes her beginners to **Château de la Dauphine** (www.chateau-dauphine.com) in Fronsac, where 'a lot of thought has gone into the visits, and the guides are knowledgeable and personable'. If St-Emilion is getting busy, Seguret says, this biodynamic vineyard, with its historic house and lovely garden, is the place to turn.

FOR WINE CONNOISSEURS

The legendary finesse of Bordeaux wines stems from the assemblage, or blending, of various varieties in both white and red wines. For the wine aficionado, a blending class is an opportunity to make like a mad scientist while learning more about this technique. Our experts send their clients to the blending and expert tasting experiences offered by **Château La Tour de Bessan** (www.marielaurelurton.com) on the Left Bank and, on the Right Bank, **Château de Ferrand** (www.chateauferrand.com).

FOR FAMILIES

A number of châteaux can provide private entertainment for children to enjoy while their

adults sip the estate wines. **Château Saint Ahon** (www.saintahon.com), **Château Marquis de Terme** (www.chateau-marquis-de-terme.com) and **Château d'Agassac** (www.agassac.com), for example, allow junior connoisseurs to sample different grape juices while their adults taste – Château d'Agassac even provides an iPad 'treasure hunt'. Reserve in advance, and Château Marquis de Terme will mind your children in a playroom, lead them on a tour of the property's 'garden of the senses' and provide specially designed workshops, says Narby.

Château de Ferrand, owned by Pauline Bich of the Bic pen family and her husband, Philippe Chandon-Moët, of the Champagne-producing dynasty, understandably features the best colouring kit for children, according to Martin Hurst, who also notes that this beautiful property has more of a casual, 'Napa-like vibe', stemming from a recent renovation that 'respected the grounds and heritage but added unique design elements like the spectacular revolving tasting bar'. Also in St-Emilion, young ones delight in the 'little experts tour' at **Château La Dominique** (www.chateau-ladominique.com), says Caroline Matthews.

FOR HISTORY BUFFS

The spectacular **Château La Tour Carnet** (www.bernard-magrez.com), with its stone bridges spanning the medieval castle moat, is living history at its best. Inside the 13th-century castle, a jaw-dropping assortment of antique treasures accumulated by owner Bernard Magrez – from coats of armour to historic harpsichords – fill the stately panelled rooms. ►



Clockwise from above: tours at Château Coutet; the picture-perfect Château Troplong Mondot; the library at Château Sigalas Rabaud; Château Latour Ségur, which offers B&B accommodation



Room with a view: the best chateau stays in Bordeaux

'More and more wine properties are opening up their chateau bedrooms to guests,' says Martin Hurst, who often sends his clients to **Château Beauregard** (www.chateau-beauregard.com) in Pomerol, where the historic charterhouse has been restored with five private rooms, and **Château Le Pape** (www.haut-bailly.com), which has also refurbished its elegant property to receive guests in an intimate setting just outside the Bordeaux city limits.

On the Right Bank, **Château Troplong Mondot** (www.troplong-mondot.com) gets top marks from all of our experts. With the postcard-perfect view (right) of the village of St-Emilion (a 20-minute

stroll through the vines) and impeccable wine-country art de vivre, you can't go wrong choosing one of the charmingly decorated rooms in the main property or the private two-bedroom cottage in the midst of the vineyard.

Our experts also recommend **Château Biac** (www.chateaubiac.com) in Langon, just southeast of Bordeaux, for its three guesthouses brimming with rustic charm. According to Janice Brooks: 'They have the most gorgeous view of any estate in the region and the owners are so warm and hospitable, you'll feel like family in no time.'

Families can relax at **Château Latour Ségur** (www.chambredhotessaint

emilion.fr) in Lussac St-Emilion, where proprietors Corinne Dray and André Nizet offer three gorgeous B&B suites in their renovated main building, a classified historic monument. Nicole Croft says children can explore the vast park and pay a visit to the chickens, donkeys and dogs while adults head to the spa in the former limestone quarry.

For posh luxury and serene surroundings, alight at the **Hotel & Restaurant Lalique**, a Relais & Châteaux property aglow from Silvio Denz's crystalline embellishments and the golden Sauternes wine produced by the surrounding vineyards of his Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey (see p101).

The two-hour wine tour and tasting covers seven centuries of local history, culminating with a taste of three of the property’s wines. Nicole Croft recommends soaking in history at **Château Angludet** (www.chateau-angludet.fr) in Margaux, owned by the Sichel family, who have been in the Bordeaux wine trade and viticulture for six generations; daughter Daisy Sichel leads the wine education programme. Another Margaux property, **Château Prieuré-Lichine** (www.prieure-lichine.fr) offers a special historical overview tour covering the Médoc that culminates in a tasting.

Top dining experiences
FINE

The Michelin Guide announced its 2021 awards at the beginning of January, and two restaurants in Bordeaux received a star for the first time: **L’Observatoire du Gabriel** (www.bordeaux-gabriel.fr), owned by the Boüard family of Château Angélys that anchors Bordeaux city’s gorgeous 18th-century Place de la Bourse, and an innovative vegan restaurant, **ONA** (www.clairvallee.com), in Arès, a waterfront town on Arcachon Bay, an hour’s drive west of Bordeaux. There are now four two-star restaurants and 16 one-star restaurants in and around Bordeaux.

COUNTRY CASUAL

Even in a region brimming with sun-dappled terraces, magnificent wine lists and soul-satisfying country cuisine, St-Emilion’s **Logis de la Cadène** (www.logisdelacadene.fr), an unassuming manse built in 1848 in the heart of the village and now run by the owners of Château Angélys, stands out, according to several of our experts. Other favourites include **La Table de Catusseau** (www.latabledecatusseau.fr) in Pomerol, and on the Left Bank, **Restaurant le Bontemps** (@*RestaurantLeBontemps*) country kitchen in Cussac-Fort Médoc, which Mary Dardenne says is ‘relatively undiscovered by tourists’.

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Martin Hurst

Back on the Right Bank, Nicole Croft takes her clients to **La Réserve du Presbytère** (www.lareservedupresbytere.fr) in Montagne St-Emilion, where she notes ‘the great chef Jean-François Robert serves harmonious gastronomic cuisine at reasonable prices’, while Wendy Narby recommends **Le Caffe Cuisine** (@*caffe.cuisine*) in Branne, just across the river Dordogne from St-Emilion, for the ‘welcoming shabby-chic atmosphere and innovative cuisine that is both affordable and local’.

Over by the Garonne river, **L’Entrée Jardin** (www.restaurant-entree-jardin.com) in Cadillac, with its medieval castle, is one of Sarah Seguret’s favourites for its ‘great-value local cuisine and well-priced wine list’. And, in the restored Bages village on the Left Bank, Château Lynch-Bages’ **Café Lavinal** (www.jmcazes.com/en/cafe-lavinal) remains a popular stop for those visiting Pauillac.

ESTATE BASED

Bordeaux châteaux also provide a range of dining options, from picnic charcuterie boards to private meals with wine pairings inside exclusive dining rooms. Our guides recommend picking up a picnic from the well-stocked gourmet shop inside the elegant 17th-century charterhouse at **Château de Cérons** (www.chateaudecerons.com), at the heart of 30ha of Graves vineyards overlooking the river Garonne opposite Cadillac. Owners Xavier and Caroline Perromat are always around for a friendly ‘bonjour’ before settling guests under their magnolia tree for a leisurely lunch.



Clockwise from above: L’Observatoire du Gabriel; vegan dining at ONA; Les Sources de Caudalie’s Rouge at Château Smith Haut Lafitte



MEET OUR PANEL OF BORDEAUX EXPERTS

Martin Hurst & Tim Olson of The Bordeaux Concierge left New York careers to run private, tailor-made tours and experiences for wine lovers, as well as road trip itineraries. thebordeauxconcierge.com

Janice Brooks of Bordeaux with a Smile is an Alabama native and a trained actor who also instructs masters students in wine and spirits. She focuses on wine-country history. bordeauxwithasmile@gmail.com

Mary Dardenne of Decanter Tours (no relation) works with independent travellers and wine club groups. Originally from Texas, she’s a certified travel advisor with The Travel Institute decantertraveltours.com

Sarah Seguret, who works with My Bordeaux Tours, is an Irish native and accredited tour guide who specialises in biodynamic wines, as well as the latest trends in wine viticulture and gourmet dining. mybordeauxtours.com

Caroline Matthews of Uncorked Wine Tours used to work for Moët Hennessy, until her job brought her to the area in 2008 and she stayed. She specialises in bespoke private tours. uncorkedwinetours.com

Wendy Narby, who runs Insider Tasting, is English but has lived in France for more than 30 years. Her trips feature everything from yoga in the vineyards to design-oriented visits that mix architecture with private tastings. insidertasting.com

Nicolle Croft of Wine Guide Bordeaux arrived from England in 1989. A WSET-certified teacher, she has developed a deep knowledge of the small independent producers of Bordeaux, which she shares in her tours and her book *Bordeaux Sip by Sip*. wineguidebordeaux.com

On the Left Bank, reserve an open-air lunch or evening meal prepared by the private chef at **Château Lamothe-Bergeron** (www.lamothebergeron.fr). This Haut-Médoc property, fully restored in 2015, produces affordable, easy-drinking Bordeaux Supérieur wines. **L’Atelier de Candale** (www.atelierdecandale.com) – a casual, light-drenched restaurant in an intimate château outside St-Emilion – also gets top marks for its spacious outdoor patio, perfect for lazy al fresco lunches overlooking the vineyards and the Dordogne river valley. Other perennial country charmers with terraces include regional restaurant empresario Nicholas Lascombes’ **La Chapelle** (www.lachapelledeguiraud.com), with its terrace overlooking Château Guiraud’s kitchen garden, and **Les Sources de Caudalie’s Rouge** (www.sources-caudalie.com) at Château Smith Haut Lafitte. For the finest pairing of wines and seasonal cuisine in an intimate 19th-century setting, Martin Hurst recommends booking ‘La Table Privée’ at **Château Haut-Bailly** (www.haut-bailly.com), where he says chef Jean-Charles Poinsoir creates each course to complement the wines and to bring new layers of complexity to the tasting.

Adventure time

From strolling to cycling, there’s no better way to work off a wine-soaked lunch than to explore the outdoors. Our experts agree that Margaux’s flat Left Bank terrain makes for a pleasant day between the châteaux, with plenty of bucolic spots to picnic (or nap) along by the Garonne. For example, Wendy Narby likes the guided cycling tour offered at Château Marquis de Terme (*see p102*); there’s also a scooter tour. For serious bikers, Caroline Matthews recommends the Entre-deux-Mers region’s Roger Lapébie cycle path (www.af3v.org), named after the famed French cyclist. Cycling the 57km path running between Bordeaux and Sauveterre-de-Guyenne reveals a land of spectacular fortified villages, medieval castles and ancient churches. A particularly pleasant stretch ‘takes you within striking distance of Château Reynier and Château de Carmasac, both owned by different members of the Lurton family’, Matthews says. Fronsac and the area around St-Emilion get high reviews for active adventuring. Pick up a walking or cycling map at the tourism office in St-Emilion (www.saint-emilion-tourisme.com). But unless you’re training for the Tour de France, Nicolle Croft recommends renting an electric bike at **Lovelec33** (www.location-velo-electrique-libourne.fr) before heading out of town to tackle the rolling Right Bank terrain. **D**