

The spouts in Bordeaux's Le Miroir d'Eau shoot out both water and then fog, which create a pool that reflects the Place de la Bourse.



Aquitaine and the art of living

It begins in Bordeaux and just keeps getting better

BY *Lin Stranberg*

“Art, wine and food — these sum up the Aquitaine lifestyle,” said Bordeaux guide Bruno Beurrier, pointing up to signs with those headings as he steered me through a door at **Mollat** (*mollat.com*), the vast warren of rooms that is France’s largest independent bookstore.

Aquitaine, the region in southwest France that includes the Dordogne and now Limousin and Poitou-Charentes, teems with art, history, and stellar food and wine, starting with the revitalized city of Bordeaux itself. >

BORDEAUX BUZZ

After years of being under the radar, Bordeaux is buzzing and seems to be on everyone's list. For all that, this small and beautiful cosmopolitan city on the Garonne River is surprisingly unpretentious — and a lot of fun.

TIP:

Air France (airfrance.com) has convenient connections to Bordeaux from Paris, and a Paris stopover is free in either direction whatever your final destination. TGV train service between Paris and Bordeaux starts later this year.

Remarkably, most of Bordeaux's 1310 hectares are a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It's an officially designated Town of Art and History with more than 350 official monuments, second only to Paris. The façades of its elegant 18th century buildings are fresh after a massive clean-up program spearheaded by dynamic mayor Alain Juppé, who was France's Prime Minister under President Jacques Chirac.

The city's waterfront district along the Garonne has been transformed by the new **Cité du Vin** (bordeaux.fr/p47144/la-cite-du-vin), toasting Bordeaux's reputation for *joie de vivre* and its celebrity status in the world of wine. Somewhere between an international viticulture museum and a hi-tech temple to the history of the grape, the Cité du Vin, with its distinctive architecture and many interactive experiences, is the new icon of 21st century Bordeaux.

TIP:

Call in at the **Cité du Vin's** front desk for great info on regional wine tours. Pause on the eight floor Belvedere for a glass of wine — included with your ticket — and take in the wraparound deck before heading to Le 7 Restaurant for the fine cuisine and panoramic view.

PLAYS AND STAYS

You can catch sophisticated opera and ballet performances at Bordeaux's 18th century **Grand Théâtre** (opera-bordeaux.com), one of the oldest in Europe. Nearby, the newer hotel zone includes **The Intercontinental Grand** (bordeaux.intercontinental.com) a Jacques Garcia-designed five-star with two Gordon Ramsay restaurants (from €285); **Mama Shelter** (mamashelter.com/en/Bordeaux), the trendy Philippe Starck-designed hipster hotel inside the Deco bones of the 1930s Gaz Building (from €69); and the **Etche-Ona Bordeaux** (bordeaux-hotel.com), a solid Best Western close to everything (from €138).

TIP:

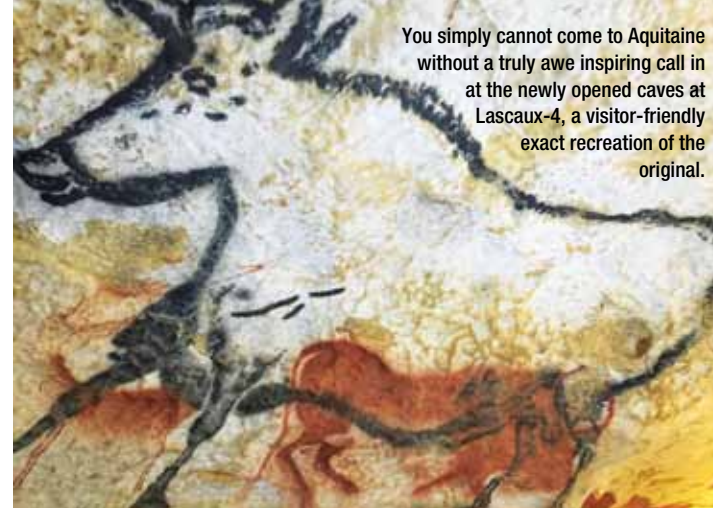
Bordeaux's sleek new **tramway system** is handily accessible and will take you almost everywhere you want to go. No need to bother with cabs.

With more than a thousand restaurants and 13 Michelin stars, there are almost too many good



Don't give the region's wines all your attention; make sure you visit Bordeaux's superlative market for vegetables, cheese, meat, baked goods and even oysters.

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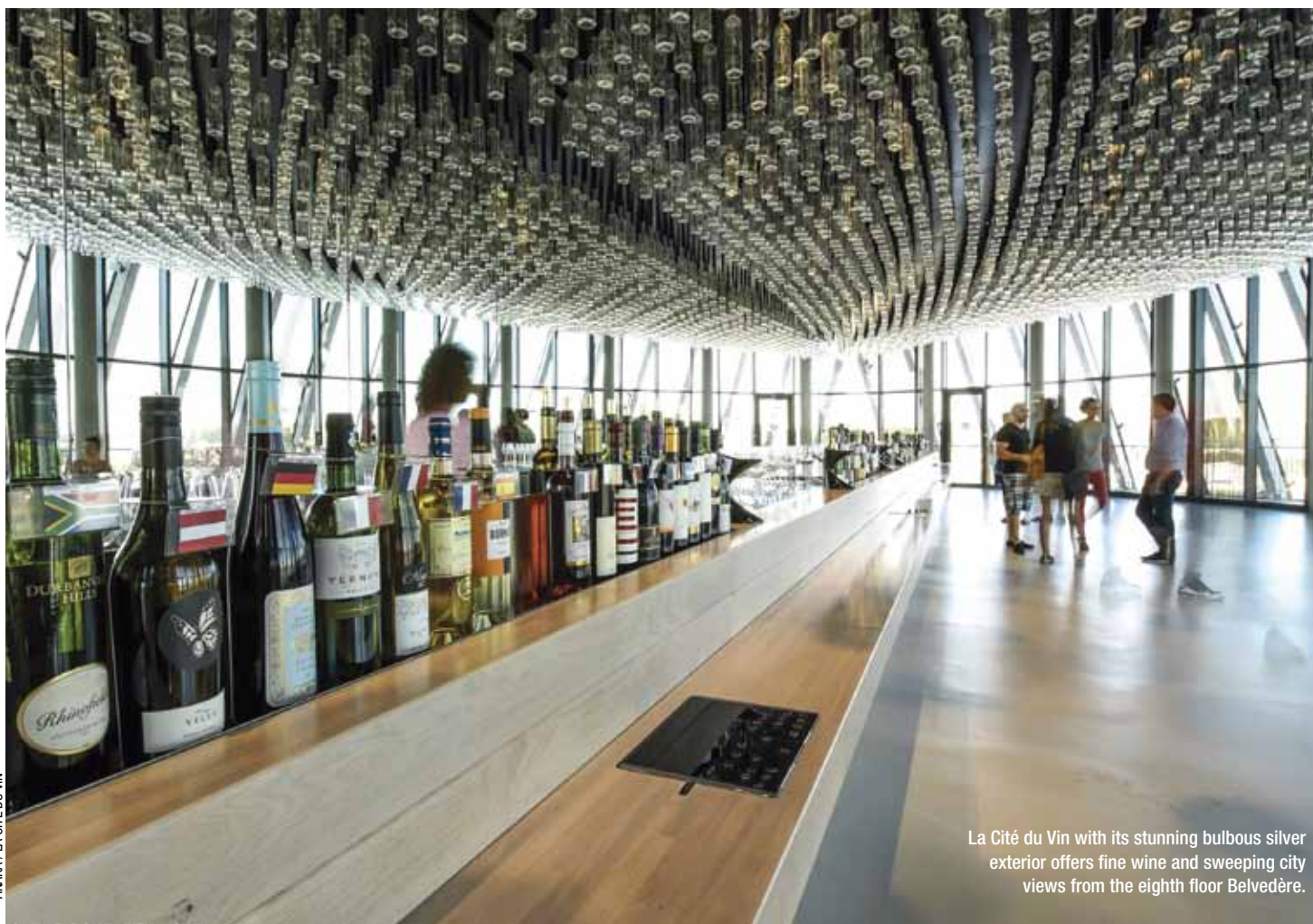


You simply cannot come to Aquitaine without a truly awe inspiring call in at the newly opened caves at Lascaux-4, a visitor-friendly exact recreation of the original.



There's a party every night at the cafés and restaurants in Bordeaux's Place du Parlement.

FRANÇOIS POINCEY



La Cité du Vin with its stunning bulbous silver exterior offers fine wine and sweeping city views from the eighth floor Belvedere.

ANAKA / LA CITÉ DU VIN

meals to be had in Bordeaux. For an authentic, old-school southwest bistro experience, do what French heads of state have done and dine at **La Tupina** (latupina.com). Be sure to save your appetite: this is hearty fare.

BORDEAUX'S OUTBACK

Bordeaux is an ideal bookend for a jaunt through Aquitaine. There's way too much to see in just a few days. One suggestion: focus on exploring some of Périgord-Dordogne and the big-name wine country closest to Bordeaux.

Even if you normally prefer independent, self-directed travel, good food and drink are so much a part of the Aquitaine you might want to leave the getting around to a tour company. **Ophorus** (ophorus.com), is one of several that offer tailored excursions. They'll take you from the high energy of Bordeaux through quiet medieval villages, with fabulous food, and historic hotels. Here are some of the things you'll see.

Cave art at Lascaux 4 in Black Périgord: People have been making art in the caves and cliffs of the Vézère Valley since humanity began. Lascaux, near Montignac, has the finest found to date. The original cave, Lascaux 1, was discovered by local kids in 1940, remained hidden from the German army during World War II, and opened to the public from 1946 until 1963, when it was permanently closed to the public for preservation's sake. Lascaux 2, which replicates about 40 percent of the art, opened to the public in 1983. Lascaux 3, a globe-trotting exhibition, is currently in Japan.

The brand-new **International Centre for Parietal Art** (projet-lascaux.com), or Lascaux 4, opened in December 2016. It fully recreates the environment and art of the original cave, duplicating its undulating contours and prehistoric painting techniques to evoke the same haunting qualities of life and movement. "They've invented everything," Picasso reportedly said to his guide when he visited the original Lascaux back in the day.

Lascaux 4 is designed for all age groups with interactive exhibits, games and content to stimulate thought and fire the imagination — an absolute must see.

TIP:

Lascaux 4 has the power to change your mind about history and art. Go. And take the kids.

Périgueux, Neuvic and more in Dordogne-Périgord: White Périgord got its name from the colour of the stone. Périgueux, the area's principal town and food capital, is architecturally engaging and yet another Town of Art and History, with well-preserved Gallo-Roman, Medieval-Renaissance, 18th and 19th

century buildings. Gastronomy here is steeped in tradition.

For a quick take on the food of the *terroir*, take in the open-air Wednesday market outside the Saint-Front cathedral, then head out to lunch on house-made foie gras, out-of-this-world French fries, cèpes, truffles, and other regional specialties at the excellent **La Ferme St-Louis** ([facebook.com/La-Ferme-Saint-Louis-199131863449913](https://www.facebook.com/La-Ferme-Saint-Louis-199131863449913))

TIP:

Périgord is the place to say, “I’ll have fries with that.” They’re a local staple and usually cooked in duck fat, that superstar of cooking oils.

In the afternoon consider a taste of caviar at the innovative **Neuvic caviar farm** (caviardeneuvic.com) and/or go on to sample the traditional walnut and hazelnut oils at **Le Moulin de la Veyssière** (moulin-delaveyssiere.fr), produced with the same equipment and techniques the Elias family has used for seven generations.

Feudal castles, Sarlat and more in Black Périgord: The fairytale scenery in the Dordogne valley is studded with castles. **Beynac** (chateau-beynac.com), which belonged to Richard the Lionheart when Aquitaine was ruled by England, is the oldest. It sits high above Beynac-et-Cazenac, one of the prettiest villages in France. The chateau is open daily and just 10 minutes from Sarlat, an appealing Gallo-Roman-medieval town visited by more than two million visitors a year.

TIP:

In Sarlat, don’t miss the conversion — by Pritzker-winning local architect Jean Nouvel — of 14th century **Sainte-Marie church** into a covered market, with giant steel doors and a glass elevator in the bell tower.

The goose is golden in Sarlat, a town that boasts some of the most highly rated foie gras in France which may help to explain why American writer and 1930s expatriate Henry Miller called Sarlat “the closest thing to heaven.” The grand medieval, Romanesque and 18th century architecture may be another. Or perhaps it was his stay at **Le Vieux Logis** (vieux-logis.com) in nearby Trémolat, the hotel he booked for a week and stayed on in for a month. I too could have happily stayed on a while in this lovely former tobacco estate, a jewel passed down through the Giraudel family for hundreds of years. (from €165)

“I am not a merchant of soup, I am a merchant of happiness,” says Bernard Giraudel, the soulful nonagenarian proprietor. His immense charm and character raise the bar on Relais & Chateaux members’ hospitality, set high to start with. And the food

TIP:

Book well in advance for lunch or dinner in the airy, high-ceilinged dining room, formerly the tobacco-drying barn.



You could make a case that France is the first and ultimate home of the B&B with Château Troplong in Saint-Emilion being exhibit #1.



Sarlat’s Sainte-Marie’s is no longer a place to pray but somewhere to shop for vegetables thanks to architect Jean Nouvel’s remarkable conversion.



Le Moulin de la Veyssière in Périgord offers caviar from their innovative caviar “farm” as well as the walnut oil being prepared here.



Saint-Emilion is famous for food and drink like the now ubiquitous macarons that have been taken up the world over.

— oh, the food! — from Michelin Chef Vincent Arnould, a Maître Ouvrier de France, is a standout even for the star-studded cuisine of the region.

SAINT-EMILION — ONLY 50 KM FROM BORDEAUX

Saint-Emilion, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is better known as one of the wine world’s greatest appellations. The first vineyards were planted by the Romans long before Emilion, a confessor monk from Brittany, retreated to a rockbound hermitage and the village built up around him. At only 250 inhabitants, it’s still small, yet more than a million tourists navigate its cobbled streets every year.

TIP:

To visit **Saint-Emilion’s hermitage** and other historic sites, you need to book with the tourist office: www.saint-emilion-tourism.com

The tourist office can hook you up with your choice of vineyard tours. The **Chateau Troplong Mondot** (chateau-troplong-mondot.com) is one choice among many that you wouldn’t regret and might even be worth saving up for. A Premier Grand Cru Classé estate on a hill with a picture-perfect vista over the vineyards to Saint-Emilion offers lunch at the Chateau’s Michelin-starred restaurant, **Les Belles Perdrix** (bellesperdrix.com).

TIP:

Chateau Troplong-Mondot has a small and elegant onsite B&B (from €195).

Wine estates, historic chateaux, inns and B&Bs: Aquitaine has thousands of wine estates, and almost as many chateaux, manors and country houses are hotels, inns and B&Bs.

TIP:

Unless you buy a data package in advance, you could be in for a little digital detox along the way. Most hotels and restaurants offer WiFi, but 300-year-old walls are often built to be impenetrable. If you can’t bear to unplug, arrange to rent **My Web Spot** (my-webspot.com) before you go.

Art, wine and food: a trip to Aquitaine can do wonders for developing one’s *art de vivre*. In addition to all the glorious food you can also cycle, kayak, canoe, surf, cook, golf, fish and more. The sites below will help you get started.

Aquitaine: tourisme-aquitaine.fr
Dordogne-Perigord: dordogne-perigord-tourisme.fr
Bordeaux: bordeaux-tourism.co.uk
Atout France: ca.france.fr