

Outward BOUND

Canoeing, golf, horse riding, hot-air ballooning, even parachuting – Bordeaux has plenty to offer those who love making their holiday an active one. Whether you're after a different view on the region's many famous vineyards, or looking for a challenge, then this is the place for you

WORDS REBECCA GIBB

HOLED UP

Bordeaux is a golfer's paradise. Amongst its many top-class courses is the acclaimed Golf du Médoc, home of last year's French PGA Open and only half an hour's drive from the centre of Bordeaux.

There are two 18-hole courses at Golf du Médoc – Châteaux and Vignes – with all 36 holes charmingly named after a famous château in the Médoc region. The Châteaux is built in the style of Scottish links courses with wide fairways and fast greens. The Vignes course demands more accuracy thanks to the proliferation of both pine trees and bunkers. Distance markers on a number of fairways take the form of enormous Bordeaux-shaped bottles! Booking in advance is advisable and if you have a non-playing partner who is reluctant to caddy, they could always head for the course spa instead (golfdumedoc.com).

The nearby Lacanau course, which sits in 50 hectares of pine forests, was built on sand dunes beside the ocean so the sound of crashing waves fills the air as you drive off from the tee. This course is a real challenge to any golfer when the winds pick up (golflacanau.com).

ON YOUR BIKE

There can be few better ways to see the Bordeaux countryside than on two wheels. With more than 600km of cycle paths strung out across the region, there are plenty of routes to choose from.

First off, try the Roger Lapébie cycle path, a 50km ride from Bordeaux city to La Sauve, through the shaded woodland and vineyards of Entre-Deux-Mers. The tarmacked track was once a railway line and former stations are now home to restaurants and cycle hire companies. Paths are relatively flat, so this would be suitable for young families as well as the serious lycra-clad cyclist. Most people take the journey over a weekend, returning to the city of Bordeaux via small, country lanes. You can bring your own bike or hire one. The Monségar tourist office provides cycling maps, and they'll even arrange your itinerary, luggage transfers, packed lunches and accommodation. (00 33 5 56 61 82 73; info@entredouxmers.com).

Alternatively head to the Atlantic coast: locals leave the city of Bordeaux in droves during July and August for the resorts of Arcachon and Lacanau, so it may pay to travel there outside of these times. If you're after a challenging cycle trip rather than a beach holiday, a pedal around the bay at Arcachon takes in wild beaches, a salt meadow nature reserve and Le Teich bird sanctuary. The final leg of the journey runs through pine forests before reaching the unspoilt resort of Cap Ferret, and its quaint, shuttered houses. Recommended routes and further information can be found at the tourist office (tourisme-gironde.fr). >>



HORSING AROUND

Whether you are an old hand at riding, or just want to learn a new skill, a horse ride through the vineyards allows you to see the region from a new perspective.

The riding school at Fargues will take you past the vineyards of Sauternes, the most famous sweet wine in the world, including those belonging to Château d'Yquem, the best-known property in the region. You can also explore pine forests surrounding the vineyards, where in the autumn you're likely to spot the locally renowned wood pigeon hunters. A guided two-hour ride costs €24 per person and can be arranged through the Langon tourist office (00 33 5 56 63 68 00; sauternais-graves-langon.com/uk).

Former Bordeaux winemaker Bruno Delmas also offers riding tours in the region, lasting from one hour to three days. Take your pick from trots through Sauternes, Saint-Emilion and Pomerol or Entre-Deux-Mers (bdtours.fr). If you're in a romantic mood, the Haut-Médoc's Château Lanessan offers carriage rides through the vines. For more information contact the regional tourist office (tourisme-gironde.fr).

BORDEAUX FROM ABOVE

For the best view of the region, take to the air. Château Maucaillou in the Moulis-en-Médoc wine district (maucaillou.com) and Taso Hélicoptères in Léognan (tasohelico.com) offer helicopter rides over what are some of the most famous vineyards and châteaux in the world. A 15-minute ride with Taso starts at €135 per person.

Alternatively opt for a sedate hot-air balloon flight over Saint-Emilion. The town was founded by a monk in the 8th century and views from above show its vertiginous lanes and cobbled streets winding delightfully throughout. Flights can be had from €170 per person: Konzept Air (koncept-air.com) and Montgolfières (00 33 557 74 19 10).

Adrenalin junkies should try sky diving. Jumping from a plane at 4,000 metres might not be everyone's idea of a good time but if it's yours, then Air Mauss in Montalivet offer tandem skydives with 45 seconds of free fall near the Atlantic. Plunge downwards then float gently to the ground. A tandem jump, harnessed to an instructor, costs €230 (parachutisem.fr).

WATER WATER EVERYWHERE

You are never far from a river or the coast in Bordeaux, so it's no surprise there's a host of water-related activities on offer. On the outskirts of the city, Le Lac is an aquatic pocket of tranquility. The area was a swampy plain at the end of the Second World War, but has been transformed into an area for water sports, as well as golf courses and hotels. It's perfect for sailing, rowing or swimming and there's a campsite on the banks of Le Lac if you feel like spending a night under canvas.

Alternatively head to the charming town of Lacanau, which boasts a vast lake and 14km of sandy beaches. Sailing and windsurfing are popular, while the nearby Atlantic waves offer ample opportunity to surf, bodyboard or water-ski (lacanau.com). If you can't face squeezing yourself into a wetsuit after too much *steak frites*, a number of companies run boat trips along the estuary and the coastline. One in particular, La Ginette, offers cruises on the Gironde. Or there are trips to the private island of Patiras with its 19th-century lighthouse. Boats depart from Bourg, Blaye and Pauillac (ginette-lagironde.fr), and tickets can be bought from the Blaye tourist office.

CAN YOU CANOE?

The Ciron is a mythical river for Sauternes lovers. It starts in the Landes forests and winds its way for 90km to meet the Garonne. There, it creates morning mists essential to the production of noble rot, shrivelling the grapes and concentrating the juice to golden nectar.

A canoe trip along the gently flowing water through pine and oak forests is a great way to get to know the area. The water sports centre at Bommès in the heart of Sauternes (bommès-nautique.new.fr) hires kayaks and two-person canoes from €12 per person: for a leisurely one-way trip, paddle from Bommès downstream where you'll be picked up, offered a glass of Sauternes and driven back to base. If you're feeling more energetic, a full day's kayaking starts in Prechac, 22km upstream from Bommès. Take a picnic and enjoy the peaceful surroundings and the iridescent dragonflies buzzing near the water's edge.

Lake Lacanau is also an ideal spot for canoeing. Surrounded by pine forests, there's plenty to explore. Paddle to one of the islands and spend the afternoon lazing on one of the sandy beaches. □