

# Limousin, the Dordogne & Quercy



If it's the heart and soul of France you're searching for, then look no longer. Tucked away in the country's southwestern corner, the neighbouring regions of the Limousin, Dordogne and Quercy sum up all that's best about *la belle France*. This is a land of dense oak forests, rolling green fields and rich country cooking, where historic châteaux and cobblestone villages line the river banks and wooden-hulled *gabarres* (barges) still meander along the waterways. While the rest of France seems desperate to catch up to its European neighbours, this is one corner of the country that seems perfectly content to keep things just the way they are.

Of the three areas, Limousin is the most traditional, dominated by country farms and sleepy backcountry hamlets. Known for its emerald-green countryside and famously rich food, Limousin is home to the bustling city of Limoges, the undisputed capital of French fine china.

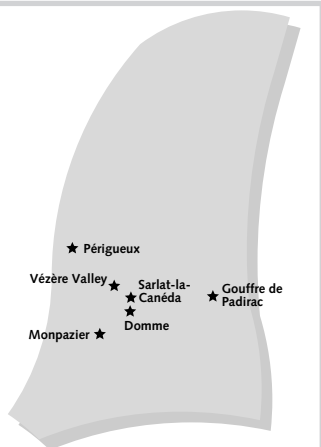
Slightly to the south, the Dordogne is best known for its history and heritage. With a bevy of dramatic monuments, from sturdy *bastides* (fortified towns) to cliff-top châteaux and medieval towns, the Dordogne is also celebrated for its astonishing prehistoric sites, including some of the most spectacular cave paintings in Europe.

Still further south is the old region of Quercy, closer in many ways to the nearby Mediterranean regions of Toulouse and Languedoc than its northern neighbours. Sliced through by the snaking River Lot, and pock-marked by limestone valleys and subterranean caverns, Quercy is home to the fairy-tale *fortresse royale* of Najac and the holy city of Rocamadour, as well as the vintage vineyards around the capital city of Cahors.

LIMOUSIN, THE DORDOGNE & QUERCY

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Marvel at the prehistoric cave paintings of the **Vézère Valley** (p630)
- Venture into the underworld at the **Gouffre de Padirac** (p647)
- Stroll around an excavated Roman villa at the **Musée Gallo-Romain Vesunna** (p622) in Périgueux
- Shop till you drop at the hectic street markets of **Sarlat-la-Canéda** (p626) and **Périgueux** (p621)
- Drink in the panoramas from the hilltop fortresses of **Monpazier** (p637) and **Domme** (p637)
- Take to the waterways aboard a traditional river **gabarre** (p636)



■ POPULATION: 1,134,959

■ AREA: 25,654 SQ KM

## Activities

### KAYAKING & CANOEING

Cruising the waterways in a self-powered canoe is one of the most memorable ways to explore the region. There are lots of operators along the Dordogne and Vézère Rivers; hire fees include compulsory life jackets (*gilets*) and an introduction to basic safety procedures (such as how to survive capsizing). Prices vary according to your chosen route – most places charge around €20 to €25 per day, including minibuss transport.

### Dordogne

**Canoë Vacances** (☎ 05 53 28 17 07; www.canoevacances.com; La Roque Gageac) Canoe and kayak trips between Carsac and Les Milandes via Vitrac, Domme, Marqueyssac and Castelnaud (trips €10 to €17).

**Canoës-Loisirs** (☎ 05 53 28 23 43; www.canoes-loisirs.com; Pont de Vitrac, Domme) Trips include Carsac–Vitrac (9km, €10), Carsac–Beynac (25km, €19), Vitrac–Castelnaud (12km, €12) and Vitrac–Beynac (16km, €15).

**Safaraid** (☎ 05 65 37 44 87; www.canoekayak-dordogne.com; Vayrac canoe/kayak per day €19/22) Based in Vayrac, this operator has various stations between Argentat and Beynac, with lots of possible routes in between, as well as a seven-day canoe safari (€197 to €312 for two people, including campsites).

### Vézère

**Canoës Vallée Vézère** (☎ 05 53 05 10 11; www.canoesvalleevezeze.com; Les Ezyzies) Trips from Les Trois Châteaux (26km, €22 to €24), Saint-Léon-sur-Vézère (19km, €16 to €18), La Saint-Christophe (13km, €14 to €16) and La Marzac (10km, €10 to €14). A 5km initiation course costs €8.

**Canoëric** (☎ 05 53 03 51 99; www.canoepereigord.com; Le Bugue) Runs day trips of between 9 and 21km to Le Bugue (€9 to €23).

### WALKING, CYCLING & HORSE RIDING

This corner of France is renowned for its natural beauty and has three *parcs naturels régionaux*: **Périgord-Limousin** (Map p608; ☎ 05 53 60 34 65; www.parc-naturel-perigord-limousin.fr) in the northwest, **Millevalches en Limousin** (☎ 05 55 67 97 90; www.pnr-millevalches.fr) in the east and **Causse de Quercy** (☎ 05 65 24 20 50; www.parc-causses-du-quercy.org) in the south.

There's fantastic walking and mountain biking in all three parks; you can pick up *balades à la journée* (day walk) leaflets and *VTT (vélo tout terrain; mountain bike)* guides from tourist offices. Serious walkers will prefer the dedicated park topoguides, which

detail major walking routes, including the GR (Grands Randonnées) trails. Many of the trails and bridleways can also be explored on horseback.

Major areas for walking include the Monts de Blond, le Massif des Monédières and Monts de Chalus in northwest Limousin, the area around Cahors (on the GR36 and the GR65) and the Lot Valley, and the classic Santiago de Compostela trail which runs through many of the region's southerly towns.

## Getting There & Around

The major transport hub is Limoges (see p613), which has regular flights to many French and UK cities. Bergerac (p639) also has budget flights to the UK. The A20 motorway heads north from Limoges to Paris and continues south to Toulouse.

As always in rural France, having your own wheels is really handy. The bus network is patchy and frustratingly geared around school timetables; most towns and small villages can be reached faster and more easily by train. A useful rail link meanders down to Toulouse from Limoges via Brive, Souillac and Cahors, and Limoges and Périgueux are both on the southwest main line from Paris.

# LIMOUSIN

The rich green fields and hummocky hills of Limousin are less well known than the

## MONKEY BUSINESS

For adrenalin junkies looking for their next fix, head for one of the **Parcours Aventures dans les Arbres** (Tree Adventure Parks). With a network of walkways, swings and bridges running between towering trees and linked with cross-country trails and obstacle courses, these woodland playgrounds are suitable for everyone from six-year-olds to septuagenarians. Eat your heart out, Tarzan...

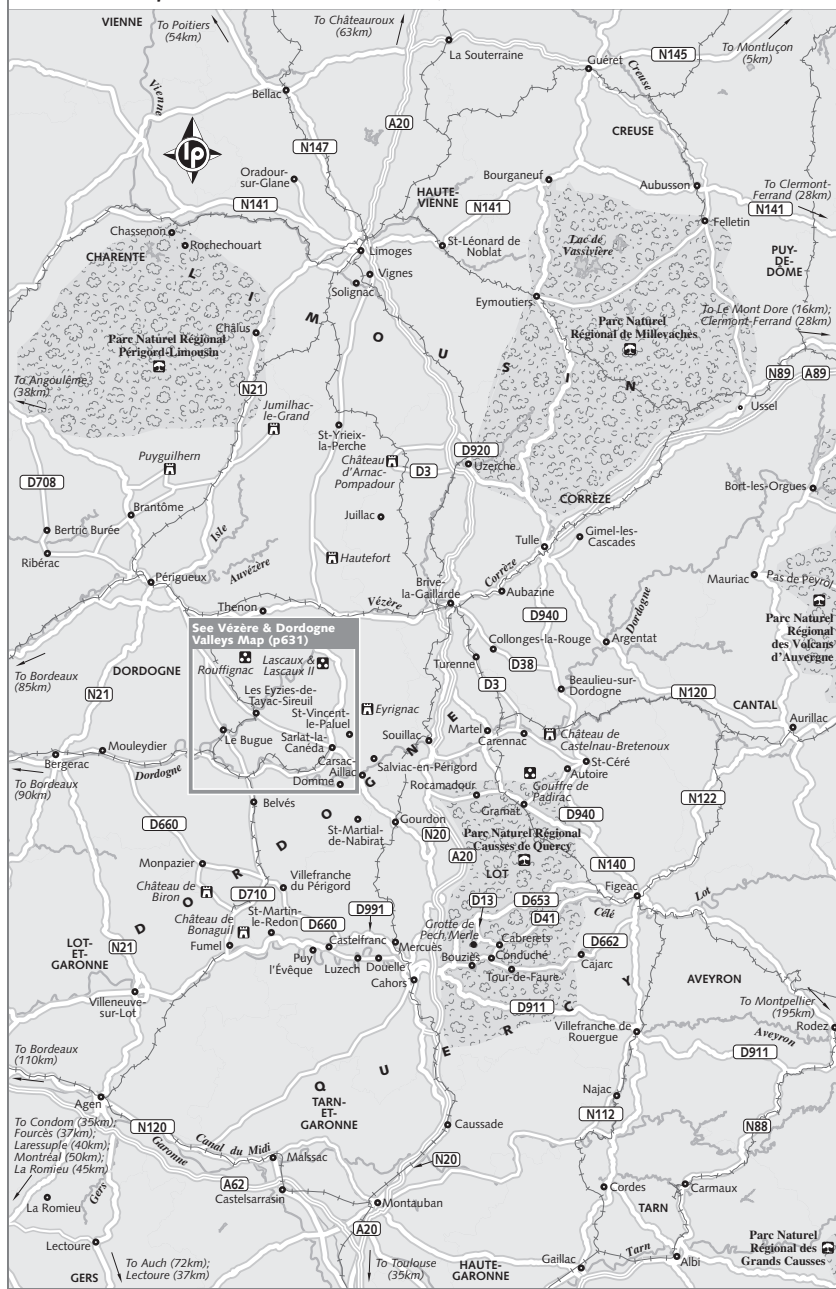
**La Forêt des Ecoreuils** (☎ 06 89 30 92 99; www.laforetdesecureuils.com; St-Vincent-le-Paluel)

**L'Appel de la Forêt** (☎ 05 53 46 35 06; www.appel-de-la-foret.com; Thenon)

**Indian Forest Périgord** (☎ 05 53 31 22 22; www.indianforestperigord.com; Carsac-Aillac)

**Parcours Aventure des Jaumâtres** (☎ 05 55 65 43 11; www.lespierresjaumatres.fr; near Guéret)

## LIMOUSIN, THE DORDOGNE & QUERCY



LIMOUSIN, THE DORDOGNE & QUERCY

See **Vézère & Dordogne Valleys Map** (p631)  
 Rauffignac  
 Lascaux & Lascaux II  
 Les Eyzies-de-Tayac-Sireuil  
 St-Vincent-le-Paluel  
 Sarlat-la-Canéda  
 Carsac-Aillac  
 Domme

**ALL ABOARD!**

For a unique view of the gloriously green Limousin, clamber aboard the carriages of the **Chemin Touristique Limousin-Périgord** (☎ 05 55 69 57 62; www.trainvapeur.com), a 1932 steam engine which that its way across fields and forests between Limoges and Ussel.

The railway runs between mid-July and mid-August; reservations are essential and can be made through the Limoges tourist office (below). There are six circuits in all. The following lines run three times a season.

**Limoges–Eymoutiers** (adult/6-12yr/under 6yr €24/10/free; 8hr) Follows the old upland railway via St-Leonard-de-Noblat.

**Limoges–Pompadour** (adult/6-12 yr/under 6yr €12/5/free; 1½hr) Includes a visit to the gardens and stables of Pompadour.

**Eymoutiers–Châteauneuf–Bujaleuf** (adult/6-12yr/under 6yr €12/5/free; 1½hr) Via the plunging Gorges de la Vienne.

Dordogne and Lot Valleys to the south, but that doesn't mean that the region is without its charms. With its quiet lanes, flower-filled villages and country markets, it's tailor-made for walkers and cyclists. It's also the perfect place to escape the summertime crowds further south, and a destination *par excellence* for fans of homely, hearty French cuisine.

Limousin is made up of three *départements*: Haute-Vienne, in the west, whose *préfecture* is the city of Limoges; the rural Creuse, in the northeast; and, in the southeast, the Corrèze, home to many of the region's most beautiful sights.

**LIMOGES**

pop 135,100

If you're a china connoisseur, you'll already be familiar with the legendary name of Limoges. For over 200 years, this elegant city has been the preferred place for the French upper crust to pick up their tableware, and though the heyday of porcelain production has long since passed, Limoges is still an excellent place to get acquainted with French china. If you fancy stocking up on some crockery, you'll find several factories still dotted around the city, as well as a clutch of medieval buildings and museums in the neighbourhood known as La Cité and in the city centre.

**Orientation**

Limoges is compact. The commercial centre radiates out from the partly pedestrianised Château quarter, bordered by the thoroughfares of av de la Liberation and bd Gambetta. The medieval quarter La Cité and the cathedral are 500m east of the centre, while

the train station is 750m northeast, past place Jourdan.

**Information****INTERNET ACCESS**

The tourist office has a free wi-fi zone.

**Point Cyber** (☎ 05 55 79 03 28; 7 av Charles de Gaulle; ☎ 9.30am-midnight Mon-Sat, 2pm-midnight Sun; per hr €2.80)

**TendanceWeb** (☎ 05 55 10 93 61; 5 bd Victor Hugo; ☎ 8am-4am Mon-Fri, 9am-6am Sat, 2pm-4am Sun; per hr €3)

**LAUNDRY**

**Laundrette** (28 rue Delescluze; ☎ 7am or 8am-9pm)

**Laundrette** (9 rue Monte à Regret; ☎ 7am or 8am-9pm)

**MONEY**

There are banks on place Jourdan and place Wilson, and the post office changes cash and has an ATM.

**POST**

**Main Post Office** (29 av de la Libération) Offers currency-exchange services and has an ATM.

**Post Office** (6 bd de Fleurus) Has an ATM.

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

**Tourist Office** (☎ 05 55 34 46 87; www.tourisme limoges.com; 12 bd de Fleurus; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat Jan-Apr, Nov & Dec) Has a free wi-fi zone and offers several guided walks around the city.

**Sights****PORCELAIN & ENAMEL**

For over three hundred years, the name of Limoges has been synonymous with *les arts du feu*: *émail* (enamel) and *porcelaine*

## LIMOGES

0 200 m  
0 0.1 miles



## INFORMATION

Laundrette.....	1	B4
Laundrette.....	2	C5
Main Post Office.....	3	B3
Point Cyber.....	4	D3
Post Office.....	5	C3
TendanceWeb.....	6	A3
Tourist Office.....	7	C4

## SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES

ADA.....	8	D2
Aquarium du Limousin.....	9	B5
Cathédrale St-Étienne.....	10	D4
Chapelle Saint-Aurélien..... (see 35)		
Chapelle de la Règle.....	11	D4
Cité des Métiers et des Arts.....	12	D4
Cour du Temple.....	13	B4
Crypt of St-Martial.....	14	B3
Église St-Michel des Lions.....	15	B4
Église St-Pierre du Queyroix.....	16	C3
Fnac.....	17	B3
Galerie du Canal.....	18	B4
Maison de la Boucherie.....	19	B4
Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation..... (see 11)		
Musée Municipal de l'Évêché.....	20	D4
Musée National Adrien Dubouché.....	21	A3
Pavillon du Verdurier.....	22	C4

## SLEEPING

Arthôtel Tendence.....	23	C1
Hôtel de la Paix.....	24	C3
Hôtel de Paris.....	25	C2
Hôtel Familia.....	26	D2
Hôtel Jeanne d'Arc.....	27	D2
Hôtel Orléans Lion d'Or.....	28	C3

## EATING

Chez Alphonse.....	29	B4
Halles Centrales.....	30	B4
La Parenthèse..... (see 13)		
Le 27.....	31	B4
Le Bistrot d'Olivier.....	(see 30)	
Le Petit Bouchon.....	(see 30)	
Les Petits Ventres.....	33	B4
Le Petit Vieux.....	34	B3

## DRINKING

Le Duc Étienne.....	35	B4
Le Tabernacle.....	36	B4
L'Amicale des Parachutistes Belges.....	37	C4

## ENTERTAINMENT

Cinéma Lido.....	38	D3
Grand Écran.....	39	A3

## TRANSPORT

Bus Station..... (see 41)		
Équival.....	40	A3
Le CIEL.....	41	D2
National-Citer.....	42	D2
SNCF boutique.....	43	A4

(porcelain). Limoges had been producing decorative enamel since at least the 12th century, but its fortunes were transformed by the discovery of kaolin near St-Yrieix-La-Perche in 1768. This china clay, a vital ingredient in porcelain manufacture, had previously been imported at huge expense from the Far East; the discovery of kaolin on home soil led to an explosion of porcelain production in Limoges in the late 18th and 19th centuries.

The **Musée National Adrien Dubouché** (☎ 05 55 33 08 50; 8bis place Winston Churchill; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €4/2.60/free; ☎ 10am-12.25pm & 2-5.40pm Wed-Mon Sep-Jun, 10am-5.40pm Wed-Mon Jul & Aug, 1st Sun of month free), founded by a wealthy cognac merchant with a penchant for porcelain, houses one of the two great china collections in France (the other is in Sèvres, near Paris). Spread over two floors, the museum concentrates on the golden age of Limoges porcelain, but you'll also find examples from rival factories such as Meissen, Royal Doulton and Worcester amongst the 12,000 pieces, which range from dinner services and hand-painted vases to porcelain clocks and delicate figurines. Foreign-language brochures and audioguides are available at the ticket desk.

Despite suffering a long decline during the early 20th century, many of the city's famous factories are still in business. The celebrated *marques* (brands) of **Haviland** (☎ 05 55 30 21 86; av du Président Kennedy; ☎ factory shop 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun, 10am-6.30pm Jul & Aug) and **Bernardaud** (☎ 05 55 10 55 91; 27 av Albert Thomas; ☎ factory shop 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-May, 9am-7pm Jun-Sep) both have small museums and factory shops, and offer guided tours (phone ahead for times or ask at the tourist office).

One of the oldest factories, **Porcelaine Royal Limoges** (☎ 05 55 33 27 30; 28 rue Donzalot; ☎ shop 10am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, plus 10am-6.30pm Sun Jul & Aug, oven 11am-6pm Mon-Sat), houses the **Four des Casseaux**, the only surviving example of the mighty brick kilns originally used to fire porcelain; standing at 19.5m high and capable of reaching temperatures of 900°C to 1400°C, it certainly puts your microwave into perspective.

Keep your eyes peeled while you wander around the city: many of Limoges' buildings and public spaces are decorated with porcelain and *émail* tiles, and a number of galleries have *émail* work on display. The **Halles Centrales** (p612) has a porcelain fresco depicting the goodies on sale in the market, while on place St-Pierre is the **Pavillon du Verdurier**,

an octagonal, porcelain-faced structure dating from 1900, now used as an art gallery. For more contemporary work, the **Galerie du Canal** (☎ 05 55 33 14 11; 15 rue du Canal; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-7pm Tue-Sat Jan-Jun & Sep-Nov, 10am-noon & 2-7pm Mon-Sat Jul, Aug & Dec) is a cooperative gallery run by local enamellers.

## CHÂTEAU QUARTER

This bustling corner of Limoges is the heart of the old city. Just off place St-Aurélien, the **rue de la Boucherie** – named after the butcher's shops that lined the street in the Middle Ages – contains many of the city's loveliest timbered houses. The **Maison de la Boucherie** (36 rue de la Boucherie; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-7pm Jul-Sep) houses a small history museum, and nearby is the tiny **Chapelle Saint-Aurélien**, dedicated to the patron saint of butchers.

A little way north is place de la Motte, home to the Halles Centrales (Covered Market) and the **Église St-Michel des Lions** (rue Adrien Dubouché), named for the two granite lions flanking the door. Built between the 14th and 16th centuries, it contains St-Martial's **relics** (including his head) and some beautiful 15th-century stained glass, but its most notable feature is the huge copper ball perched atop its 65m-high spire.

Nearby is the **Cour du Temple**, a tiny enclosed courtyard reached via an alleyway from rue du Temple. The courtyard was formerly a private garden belonging to the nearby *hôtels particuliers* (private mansions): look out for various coats-of-arms and the 16th-century stone staircase around the edge of the courtyard.

All that remains of the great pilgrimage abbey of St-Martial, founded in AD 848, is an outline on place de la République. The **Crypt of St-Martial** (☎ mid-Jun-mid-Sep) contains the tomb of Limoges' first bishop, who converted the population to Christianity. Just to the east is the moody **Église St-Pierre du Queyroix** (place St-Pierre), notable for its characteristic Limousin belfry and stained glass.

Once you've done your cultural duty, chill out at the **Aquarium du Limousin** (☎ 05 55 33 42 11; 2 bd Gambetta; adult/12-18yr/3-12yr €6.50/5/4; ☎ 10.30am-6.30pm), which houses 2500 fish in the subterranean surroundings of Limoges' old water reservoirs.

## LA CITÉ

More fine medieval buildings can be found east of the city centre in the Cité quarter,



dominated by the sombre **Cathédrale St-Étienne**, one of the few Gothic churches south of the Loire. Built between 1273 and 1888, the cathedral's famous features include the richly decorated **Portail St-Jean**, as well as a glorious rose window and a Renaissance rood screen.

Around the cathedral is the **Jardin de l'Évêché**, Limoges' botanical garden, where you'll find both medicinal and toxic herbs. At the base of the gardens is the **Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation** (☎ 05 55 45 98 10; admission free; ☹ 2-5pm Wed-Mon mid-Sep-May, 10am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon Jun, 10am-noon & 2-6pm daily Jul-mid-Sep), temporarily housed in the **Chapelle de la Règle** during work on the municipal museum. The Limousin was a stronghold of the Resistance during WWII, and the museum has lots of intriguing material ranging from radios to weapons, diaries, letters and even a Free French aeroplane. The museum is dedicated to Georges Guingouin, a Resistance commander who subsequently became mayor of Limoges.

Near the cathedral is the **Cité des Métiers et des Arts** (☎ 05 55 32 57 84; 5 rue de la Règle; adult/child €5/2.50; ☹ 2-6pm Wed, Sat & Sun Apr-May, 2-6pm daily Jun, Sep & Oct, 10.30am-1pm & 2.30-7pm daily Jul & Aug), which showcases work by top members of France's craft guilds.

The **Musée Municipal de l'Évêché** (☎ 05 55 45 98 10; place de la Cathédrale) was undergoing a massive refurbishment program at the time of research. Temporary exhibits from the museum's huge decorative-arts collection will be still be on display during the refurbishment – ask at the tourist office.

## Sleeping

### BUDGET

**Hôtel de Paris** (☎ 05 55 77 56 96; hoteldeparis4@wanadoo.fr; 5 cours Vergniaud; d from €35) In a typical Limoges town house on Champ-de-Juillet, this solid one-starrer is quiet, clean and convenient, but it's run on a budget. The rooms are mixed, furnished with simple bathrooms, creaky old beds and well-worn furniture; the lightest rooms overlook the square in front.

**Hôtel Familia** (☎ 05 55 77 51 40; www.hotelfamilia.fr; 18 rue du Général du Bessol; s €41-53, d €47-58) This small family-run hotel is the pick of the budget places near the station. Forget decorative frills – '70s bathroom suites, easy-clean fabrics and pastel colours are the order of the day – but it's good value, especially if you get a room over the flowery back garden.

## MIDRANGE

**Hôtel de la Paix** (☎ 05 55 34 36 00; 25 place Jourdan; d €45-69, with shower & shared toilet from €41) This creaky classic is a bit faded, but it's still our favourite spot in Limoges. The ground floor is occupied by the owner's Mechanical Music Museum, stuffed with gramophones, rinky-dink record players, barrel organs and other musical oddities, while the upper corridors hide small, serviceable rooms lived up by the odd theatrical knick-knack. Chic it ain't, but it's full of charm.

**Hôtel Orléans Lion d'Or** (☎ 05 55 77 49 71; www.orleansliondor.com; 9 & 11 cours Jourdan; s €47-51, d €55-60, tr €63-68; (P)) Another solid, slightly drab hotel geared toward the business crowd, with the focus on convenience rather than character. Pastels and florals predominate, but it's convenient for both station and centre.

**Arthôtel Tendance** (☎ 05 55 77 31 72; www.arthotel.tendance.com; 37 rue Armand Barbès; s/d €59/65) Quirky hotel that plunders decorative touches from across the globe. Its *chambres de thème* include a maple-clad Canadian cabin, a Balinese room with Lombok furniture, and a Grecian room decked out in whites and sea-blues. Other choices include Africa, Egypt, Provence and Morocco, all with wi-fi and LCD TVs.

**Hôtel Jeanne d'Arc** (☎ 05 55 77 67 77; www.hotel.jannedarc-limoges.fr; 17 av du Général de Gaulle; s €62-79, d €74-92, tr €85-95; (P)) This smart hotel (originally a *relais de poste* 'post house') makes a fine base as long as you're not after anything avant-garde. The decor's classic (checks, stripes and rich colours for the fabrics; heavy drapes and hefty furniture for the rooms), while the amenities include private parking (€5) and wi-fi (€5 per hour).

## Eating

**La Parenthèse** (☎ 05 55 33 18 25; Cour du Temple, 22 rue du Consulat; teas €3-6, mains €6.60-9.80; ☹ 10am-2.30pm Mon, to 6.30pm Tue-Fri, to 7pm Sat) Forty teas and 14 coffees (served, of course, in Limoges porcelain) are served at this tearoom. For something more filling, there are home-made cakes, pastries and sweets, as well as savoury pies and gratins.

**Le Bistrot d'Olivier** (☎ 05 55 33 73 85; Halles Centrales; menus €10-15; ☹ lunch Mon-Sat) Restaurants don't get more Gallic than this tiny diner inside the Halles Centrales. It's rough-and-ready – everyone from local office workers to market traders cram themselves into the benches for the lunch-time menus – but the cooking's as authentic as it gets. If it's full, try Chez François opposite.

**Chez Alphonse** (☎ 05 55 34 34 14; 5 place de la Motte; mains €11-21; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Hearty ingredients, rich sauces and hard-core French cooking define Alphonse's Place. Here it's all about the food, not the frills; the menu's stuffed with regional dishes (including horse steak and veal head), so if you want to try traditional Limousine cuisine, this is definitely the place.

**Le Petit Bouchon** (☎ 05 55 33 35 60; 17 place de la Motte; mains from €11; ☎ lunch Tue-Sat) This scruffy little bistro opposite the market dishes up lunch-time staples in a cosy dining room decked with old posters and straw hats above the bar.

**ourpick Le 27** (☎ 05 55 32 27 27; 27 rue Haute-Vienne; mains €17-21; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Limoges' freshest, funkiest place to eat, blending contemporary decor with culinary invention. Teardrop lanterns twinkle, neon lights buzz and waistcoated waiters bustle, while the menu takes in everything from gingered guinea-fowl to 'mysterious meringue'. One whole wall is taken up by the wine selection, so you won't be short of a tippie.

**Les Petits Ventres** (☎ 05 55 34 22 90; 20 rue de la Boucherie; menus €23.50-34; ☎ dinner) In the old butchers' district, this atmospheric, wood-beamed restaurant specialises in meat-heavy classics, from *andouillettes* (tripe sausages) to *fricassée de rognons* (fried kidneys). Veggies should probably look elsewhere.

### SELF-CATERING

Limoges' covered market, the **Halles Centrales** (place de la Motte; ☎ to 1pm), is full of local-produce stalls that run the gourmet gamut from local cheese to Limousin beef. For the basics, try **Monoprix** (42 rue Jean Jaurès; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat).

### Drinking

The large student crowd keeps Limoges' night-spots ticking; you'll find most of the drinking holes around rue Charles Michels.

**L'Amicale des Parachutistes Belges** (☎ 05 55 10 12 39; 17 rue Charles Michels; ☎ 7pm-2am) Belgian beers and a buzzy gig scene are the draws at this scruffy boozier on rue Charles Michels. Soul, funk, ragga and rock acts regularly grace the stage.

**La Fourmi** (☎ 05 55 34 54 13; 3 rue de la Font Pinot; ☎ 9pm-5am Wed-Sat) The best place in town for musos, with breaking acts, alternative bands and theatrical spectacles in a twin-floored warehouse-style space. It's a bit out of town, but worth the trek.

**Le Duc Étienne** (place St-Aurélien; ☎ 2pm-1am Mon-Wed, to 2am Thu-Sat) A long-standing hangout in the medieval quarter, with a snug little bar dishing out European beers and late-night coffee to a pre-club crowd. In summer things spill onto the terrace in front of Église St-Aurélien.

**Le Tabernacle** (☎ 05 55 34 69 80; 19 rue de la Loi; ☎ 11pm-4am Wed-Thu, to 5am Fri & Sat) Part pub, part club, part grungy gig venue, this is another good place to check out Limoges' late-night music scene. Bare brick and industrial styling conjure up a lived-in vibe.

### Entertainment

Event tickets are sold at **Fnac** (☎ 08 25 02 00 20; 8 rue des Combes; ☎ 2-7pm Mon, 10am-7pm Tue-Sat).

Limoges has two cinemas – the multiplex **Grand Écran** (☎ 0 892 682 015; 9-11 place Denis Dussoubs) and the artier **Cinéma Lido** (☎ 05 36 68 20 15; 3 av du Général de Gaulle).

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

Just off the A20, **Limoges International Airport** (☎ 05 55 43 30 30; www.aeroportlimoges.com, in French) is 10km west of Limoges, with domestic connections including Paris Orly, Toulouse, Nice and Strasbourg. It's also served by British budget carriers Ryanair (London Stansted, Nottingham and Liverpool) and Flybe (Southampton), while Air France flies to Edinburgh and Manchester. There's no shuttle bus into town; a taxi takes 15 minutes and costs around €20.

#### BUS & TRAIN

Limoges is the main bus hub for the Haute-Vienne *département*, administered by **Equival** (☎ 05 55 10 10 03; www.equival.fr; 14 rue de l'Amphithéâtre; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri). The bus station is across the tracks from the train station.

The area is split into five zones, with tariffs based on how many zones you cross. Bus 12 goes to Oradour-sur-Glane (€3, 45 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday), buses 14 and 21 service Rochechouart (€4, one hour, four to six daily Monday to Saturday), and SNCF line 9 coaches travel to St-Léonard de Noblat (€4, 30 minutes, five to eight daily).

#### CAR

Hire cars from **ADA** (☎ 05 55 79 61 12; 27 av du Général de Gaulle) or **National-Citer** (☎ 05 55 77 10 10; 3 cours Bugeaud).



**TRAIN**

Completed in 1929, the stunning art-deco **Gare des Bénédictins** (☎ 08 36 35 35 35) is one of France's finest, graced by a copper dome, carved frescoes and an elegant clock tower, restored following a 1997 fire.

Destinations include Paris' Gare d'Austerlitz (€49, three hours, hourly), Périgueux (€14.30, one hour, daily), Cahors (€28.70, 2¼ hours, four daily), Brive-la-Gaillarde (€16.90, one hour, 15 to 18 daily), Tulle (€13.50, 1¼ hours, five to seven daily) and Aubusson (€13.40, 1¼ hours, three daily Monday to Saturday, one on Sunday). Tickets can be bought at the station and at the town-centre **SNCF boutique** (4 rue Othon Péconnet; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat).

**WEST OF LIMOGES****Rochechouart & Chassenon**

pop 3815

There are two reasons to visit the walled town of **Rochechouart**, 45km west of Limoges: meteorites and modern art. Rochechouart witnessed one of the most devastating impacts in Earth's history 200 million years ago when

a massive 1.5km-radius lump of intergalactic rock slammed into the Earth at 72,000km/h with the force of 14 million Hiroshima bombs. The impact site, 4km west of town, created a crater 20km wide and 6km deep, but the only visible traces are the unusual rocks, frequently used as local building material, left behind by the massive explosion. The **Éspace Météorite Paul Pellas** (☎ 05 55 03 02 70; 16 rue Jean-Parvy; adult/under 15yr €4/free; ☎ 10am-noon & 1.30-6pm Mon-Fri Jul & Aug, 2-6pm Sat & Sun Sep-Jun) explores this cosmic cataclysm through minerals, models and video displays.

A typically French blend of architectural adventure and artistic invention, the **Musée Départemental d'Art Contemporain** (☎ 05 55 03 77 91; place du Château; adult/12-16yr/under 12yr €4.60/3/free; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Mar-Sep, 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Oct-Feb), is housed in the town's refurbished château. Highlights include a collection of works by the Dadaist Raoul Hausman and sculptures by the 'German School', as well as an installation of white stones by the British artist Richard Long in a room decorated by 16th-century frescoes.

**LA VILLAGE MARTYR**

On the afternoon of 10 June, 1944, the little town of **Oradour-sur-Glane**, 21km northwest of Limoges, witnessed one of the worst Nazi war crimes committed on French soil. German lorries belonging to the SS 'Das Reich' Division surrounded the town and ordered the population on to the market square. The men were divided into groups and forced into *granges* (barns), where they were machine-gunned before the structures were set alight. Several hundred women and children were herded into the church, and the building was set on fire, along with the rest of the town. Only one woman and five men survived the massacre; 642 people, including 193 children, were killed. Chillingly, the same SS Division committed a similarly brutal act in Tulle two days earlier, in which 99 Resistance sympathisers were strung up from the town's balconies as a macabre warning to others.

Since these events, the entire **village** (admission free; ☎ 9am-7pm mid-May-mid-Sep, 9am-6pm mid-Sep-Oct & Mar-mid-May, 9am-5pm Nov-Feb) has been left untouched, complete with tram tracks, pre-war electricity lines, the blackened shells of buildings and the rusting hulks of 1930s automobiles – an evocative memorial to a once-peaceful village caught up in the brutal tide of war. At the centre of the village is an underground memorial inscribed with the victims' names; poignantly, there are also display cases collecting their recovered belongings, including watches, wallets, hairpins and a couple of children's bikes.

Entry is via the **Centre de la Mémoire** (adult/7-18yr, student & veteran €7.50/5.20), which contextualises the massacre using historical exhibitions, video displays and survivors' testimonies. Various theories have been put forward to try to explain the event – perhaps German panic following the Allied landings four days earlier, or reprisal for sabotage raids committed by the Resistance following the invasion – but it may be one of those terrible events that simply defies any rational explanation.

After the war, Oradour was rebuilt a few hundred metres west of the ruins. Several buses travel from the bus station in Limoges to Oradour-sur-Glane (€3, 30 minutes, daily except Sundays in winter). By car, take the D9 and follow signs to the *village martyr* (martyred village).

## THE LION OF THE LIMOUSIN

The spectre of Richard, Coeur de Lion (Richard the Lion-Heart), looms over the Haute-Vienne *région*. The crusading king waged several bloody campaigns here in the 12th century before meeting his end at the now-ruined keep of **Château de Chalus-Chabrol**, 40km west of Limoges, where he was mortally wounded by a crossbowman in 1199. Legend has it that once the keep was captured, Richard pardoned the crossbowman (actually a young boy), before expiring on 6 April 1199 in the arms of his mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Richard's heart was buried in Rouen (p266), his brain in the abbey of Charroux in Poitiers and his body in the Abbaye de Fontevraud (p447) beside his father, Henry II; rather unsportingly, the crossbowman was later skinned alive by Richard's captain, Mercadier.

There are several other medieval châteaux and monuments nearby that share a Lionheart connection: pick up the leaflet *Route de Richard Coeur de Lion* from local tourist offices.

About 5km from Rochechouart are the Gallo-Roman baths of **Chassenon** (☎ 05 45 89 32 21; adult/child €5/2.50; 🕒 10am-7pm Jul-mid-Sep, 2-5.30pm mid-Sep-mid-Nov & Mar-May, 10am-noon & 2-7pm Jun). Discovered in 1844 and excavated in 1958, this luxurious former way station known to the Romans as *Cassinomagnus* was an important crossroads on the *Via Agrippa*, the road that crossed France via Saintes, Périgueux, Limoges, Clermont-Ferrand and Lyon. Much of the complex (including a temple and amphitheatre) were plundered for stone, but you can still make out the baths, plunge pools and hypocausts, the Roman equivalent of underfloor heating.

## Sleeping and Eating

**our pick** **Domaine des Chapelles** (☎ 05 55 78 29 91; [www.domainedeschapelles.com](http://www.domainedeschapelles.com); Oradour-sur-Vayres; d €55-90, villas per week €390-540; 🍷 🍷) This former shepherd's barn, in open countryside near Oradour-sur-Vayres, has been transformed into a swish, sexy hideaway. In five impeccably finished rooms, walk-in showers, hi-fi and cappuccino-and-cream colour schemes sit alongside exposed stone, rustic tiles and private terraces. For utter privacy, try the self-contained villas, which have designer kitchens, wood-burning stoves, heated pool and even a rental quad bike. The country restaurant (mains €15 to €25) is also superb (check out the funky sheep murals!). Wheelchair access available.

**La Météorite** (☎ 05 55 02 86 80; [www.hotel-la-meteorite.fr](http://www.hotel-la-meteorite.fr); 1 place Marquet; d €55-85) A sweet little hotel in Rochechouart with a touch of quirky flair. The seven rooms are all cosy and different, from apple-green doubles to more spacious suites with pine headboards, rustic brick and original beams.

## Getting There & Away

There are buses to Rochechouart from Limoges (see p613).

## EAST OF LIMOGES Guéret & Bourgneuf

pop (Guéret) 15,000 / pop (Bourganeuf) 3500

The busy town of **Guéret** grew up around a 12th-century monastery and the 15th-century Château de Moneyroux, now the administrative HQ for the *conseil général* of the Creuse *département*, of which Guéret is capital. Guéret itself isn't that exciting, but it's a handy base for exploring nearby attractions, including the fascinating wolf sanctuary at **Le Parc Animalier des Monts de Guéret** (☎ 05 55 81 23 23; [www.loups-chabrieres.com](http://www.loups-chabrieres.com); adult/4-12yr €7.50/6; 🕒 10am-8pm May-mid-Sep, 1.30-6pm Feb-Apr & mid-Sep-Nov), where black and grey wolves roam free across a 12-hectare park, and the **Labyrinthe Géant** (Giant Maze; ☎ 05 55 41 01 97; 🕒 10am-8pm Fri-Wed, plus 10am-10pm Thu Jul & Aug, 2-7pm weekends only Easter-Jun & Sep-Nov), where you can get well and truly lost in the middle of one of France's largest mazes, 3km from Guéret.

The bourgeois town of **Bourganeuf** is also worth a stroll, especially for its atmospheric old town; its main claim to fame came in 1886, when it became one of the first places in France to be connected to mains electricity. The **Musée de l'Électrification, de l'Eau et de la Lumière** (☎ 05 55 64 26 26; rte de la Cascade; 10am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug; €4) explores this electrifying event.

South of Bourgneuf, the Limousin is at its lushest and loveliest, especially around **Plateau de Millevaches** and the glassy **Lac de Vassivière** ([www.vassiviere.com](http://www.vassiviere.com)), a popular spot for water sports and afternoon picnics.

## Sleeping & Eating

**La Ferme de la Gorce** (☎ 05 55 41 11 55; fermedelagorce@wanadoo.fr; 86 av du Limousin, Guéret; d from €60; (P)) A mile from Guéret, this charming farm-stay is a reassuringly rustic base, with plenty of wood and solid stone in the low-ceilinged bedrooms, and friendly hosts who are full of info on the surrounding area.

**our pick** **Abbaye du Palais** (☎ 05 55 64 02 64; www.abbayedupalais.com; d from €65, ste €85-150, cottages per week €550-1450; (P)) Between Bourgneuf and Guéret, this bewitching B&B is one of the loveliest places in the Creuse: a former Cistercian abbey turned cosy family home, run by a Dutch couple. Cats, dogs, rabbits and kids charge around the grounds, where you'll find the ruins of a chapel, a monks' dorm and a pet farm. Inside the grand house are three doubles and four suites filled with antiques, tapestries and fireplaces, and outside there are self-contained *gîtes* (cottages for rent) in refurbished outbuildings. There's even a 'cookery clinic' if you fancy polishing up your knife skills.

**Le Moulin Noyé** (☎ 05 55 52 81 44; www.moulin-noyé.com; Glénic; mains around €25) This backcountry restaurant a mile northwest of Guéret is a fave of local gourmets and restaurant guides, so you can be assured of a slap-up feed. The restaurant's focus is on local produce, from lake fish to hearty slabs of Limousin beef, and the dining room overlooks wooded countryside above the Creuse river. The enticing upstairs rooms are all named after composers.

## Aubusson pop 4250

Along with pottery and porcelain, the northern Limousin is famous for its **tapestries**, which once adorned the walls of aristocratic houses from London to the Loire Valley. The small town of **Aubusson**, 90km east of Limoges, was once the clacking centre of French carpet production, rivalled only by the Gobelins factories in Paris. Characterised by their vivid colours, fine detail and exquisite craftsmanship, Aubusson's tapestries were true works of art and took pride of place in many of the country's grandest châteaux. Following the French Revolution, the industry suffered a steady decline before being revived after WWII by inventive new designers such as Jean Lurçat and Sylvaine Dubuisson.

Today, there are around 20 tapestry workshops in Aubusson and nearby Felletin (10km

south). The **tourist office** (☎ 05 55 66 32 12; rue Vieille; tourisme.aubusson@wanadoo.fr; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Jun & Sep), in Aubusson, arranges visits to local tapestry *ateliers* (workshops), and can supply you with a list of local galleries and showrooms.

Recent work is displayed at the **Exposition Tapisseries d'Aubusson-Felletin** (☎ 05 55 66 32 12; Grande Rue; admission €3; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Jun & Sep, 9am-6pm daily Jul & Aug), inside Aubusson's town hall.

For a historical overview, head to the **Musée Départemental de la Tapisserie** (☎ 05 55 83 08 30; av des Lissiers; adult/child €4/2.50; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Mon Jun & Sep, 9.30am-6pm Jul & Aug), which houses wonderful examples of both antique and modern tapestries produced in Aubusson. The **Maison de Tapisier** (☎ 05 55 66 32 12; rue Vieille; adult/12-18yr/under 12yr €5/3/free; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, plus 10am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm Sun Easter-Sep), in a 16th-century mansion in the middle of Aubusson, is also worth a visit: various exhibits recreate the atmosphere of a 17th-century weaver's workshop, with tools, original furniture and (of course) plenty of vintage tapestries.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Villa Adonis** (☎ 05 55 66 46 00; www.villa-adonis.com; 14 av de la République; d €52; (P)) From the funky watch-battery keys to the flat-screen TVs, power showers and stripped-back colour schemes, this excellent hotel on Aubusson's outskirts has an edge of big-city style. All rooms overlook a lovely garden, and the buffet breakfast includes fresh fruit jams and proper espresso.

**L'Hôtel de France** (☎ 05 55 66 10 22; www.aubussonlefrance.com; 6 rue des Déportés; d €59-95) Former post house turned upmarket Logis de France with 23 plush rooms – some modern, some old-fashioned and frilly, some tucked into the attic with sloping ceilings and roof beams. The restaurant's the best in town, with a smorgasbord of Limousine dishes served to the tune of a tinkling lounge piano.

## SOUTH OF LIMOGES

### Solignac pop 1350

In the thickly wooded Briance valley, 10km south of Limoges, the tiny medieval village of Solignac was a major stop on the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela. Its

## LIVE LIKE A KING

For the aristocratic high life, how about a night or three in a fairy-tale château?

**Château de Castel-Novel** (☎ 05 55 85 09 03; www.castelnovel.com; Varetz; d €108-340; 🏠 📍 📅 📞) Immortalised by the French author Colette, who based herself here while writing *Le Blé en Herbe* and *Chéri*, this château 10km north of Brive-la-Gaillarde is a beauty. Topped by turrets, gables and slate tiles, filled with idiosyncratic rooms (including a turret room and Colette's Louis XVI apartment), and surrounded by sweeping lawns and an 18th-century orangery, it's no wonder Madame Colette found it inspiring.

**our pick** **Château les Merles** (☎ 05 53 63 13 42; www.lesmerles.com; Tuilières; d €120-180, ste €220-290; 🏠 📍 📅 📞) Despite its 19th-century neoclassical facade, this eye-popping hotel is a study in modish minimalism: black-and-white sofas, slate-grey throws and monochrome colour schemes run throughout the rooms, most of which would look more at home in downtown Paris than the deep Dordogne. It's got wit, style and sexiness in spades: tripod floor lamps, gilt-framed mirrors, just-so objets d'art and an utterly ravishing fusion restaurant to boot. 'Boutique' just doesn't do it justice.

**Château Ribagnac** (☎ 05 55 39 77 91; www.chateauribagnac.com; St Martin-Terressus; r €220-265; 📍) This aristocratic estate 25 minutes west of Limoges is owned by two British ex-lawyers, whose struggles to renovate the château were documented in the fly-on-the-wall UK TV series *No Going Back*. Despite the ups and downs, it's a real palace, with rooms ranging from a chandelier-lit grand suite to a super romantic honeymoon suite complete with its own balcony.

11th-century church is a Romanesque wonder, renowned for its 14m-wide domed roof. The stalls in the nave are decorated with carved wooden sculptures of human heads, fantastical animals and a monk mooning the world, and the columns depict human figures being devoured by dragons.

Five kilometres southeast are the ruins of the **Château de Chalucet**, a 12th-century keep occupied by the English during the Hundred Years War. The ruins make a fine picnic spot, with valley views from the tumbledown keep. Nearby in Le Vigen, the **Parc Zoologique du Reynou** (☎ 05 55 00 40 00; www.parczooreynou.com; adult/3-12yr €10.50/7.50; 🕒 10am-8pm Apr-Sep, 10am-7pm Wed, Sat & Sun Oct-Mar, last entry 2 hr before closing) is a 35-hectare safari park established on land once owned by the Haviland dynasty. Its exotic denizens include wolves, giraffes, wildebeest, snowy owls and a pair of breeding tigers.

**Hôtel Le St-Eloi** (☎ 05 55 00 44 52; www.promenades-gourmandes.com; 66 av St-Eloi; d €55-85) is about the only place to stay nearby, with 15 sunny rooms inside a shuttered building opposite the church. The ones with jacuzzis and terraces are fantastic value, and half board is available at the **restaurant** (mains €16-22; 🍴 lunch & dinner, closed Sun evening).

Three or four buses daily (except Sunday) link Limoges with Solignac (€3, 25 minutes) and Le Vigen (€3, 35 minutes). The Solignac-

Le Vigen train station is linked to Limoges (€3, 10 minutes) and Uzerche (€9.60, 40 minutes) by several trains daily.

## Arnac-Pompadour pop 1280

The village of Arnac-Pompadour revolves around its **château**, notorious for its association with the mistress of Louis XV, Madame de Pompadour (born Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson). Having been presented the château in 1745, the *madame* actually stayed here, but she also helped develop Arnac into one of France's foremost *haras* (stud farms) – hence the village's local moniker, *Cité de Cheval* (*cheval* is French for 'horse'). Renowned for its Anglo-Arab pedigrees, Arnac-Pompadour became an Haras National in 1872. You can arrange visits to the château, the *écuries des étalons* (stallions' stables) and the *jumenterie de la rivière* (mares' stable) by contacting **Les Trois Tours** (☎ 05 55 98 51 10; www.les3tours-pompadour.com) at the château, or asking at the **tourist office** (☎ 05 55 98 55 47; www.pompadour.net; 🕒 9.30am-6pm daily Jul & Aug, 9.30am-noon & 1.30-6pm daily May & Jun & Sep, 10am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr). There are regular race meetings, as well as a grand horse show on 15 August and a whole day dedicated to the humble *âne* (donkey) on 14 July.

Arnac-Pompadour is about 60km south of Limoges, from where there are daily trains

(€10.30, 1¼ hours, six to eight daily Monday to Saturday).

## Uzerche

pop 3500

The walled town of Uzerche, teetering on a promontory above the rushing Vézère River, is one of the Limousin's most appealing hill-top hamlets. The village's main attraction is its medieval architecture, including the **Porte Bécharie**, one of the nine original gates that granted access to the village in the 14th century, and the 15th- and 16th-century **maisons à tourelles** (turret houses), whose spiky turrets jut out from the walls like witches' hats. From the main gate Uzerche's single street leads uphill to the **Église St-Pierre**, a fortified church with one of the oldest crypts in the Limousin, dating from the 11th century. In front of the church there's a fine panorama over the river valley from place de la Lunade, which takes its name from a pagan summer solstice (now rejigged as a Christian procession).

The **tourist office** (☎ 05 55 73 15 71; www.pays-uzerche.com; place de la Libération; ☹ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-noon & 2-6pm daily late Jun & early Sep, 10am-noon Mon-Fri mid-Sep-mid-Jun) is near the church, and sells work by local artists (including patchwork teddy bears and handmade pottery).

## SLEEPING & EATING

There are only a couple of hotels in Uzerche, the best of which is **Hôtel Jean Teyssier** (☎ 05 55 73 10 05; www.hotel-teyssier.com; rue du Pont-Turgot; d€54-78; ♻), pleasantly placed below the village beside the river. Despite its well-worn exterior, inside you'll find a comfortable modern hotel: the 14 rooms are fresh and well furnished (expect magnolia walls and country-style fabrics), and downstairs there's a restaurant serving Limousin staples (mains €16 to €25), with a panoramic dining room overlooking the river.

The other choice is **Hôtel Ambroise** (☎ 05 55 73 28 60; hotelambroise@orange.fr; av Charles de Gaulle; d€35-65; ☹ closed Nov) with snug, old-fashioned rooms (some with river views) and a pleasant **restaurant** (menus €15-31) beside the hotel gardens.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Uzerche is linked to Limoges, 56km to the north, by train (€9.60, 40 minutes, six to eight daily). The train station is 2km north of the old city along the N20.

## BRIVE-LA-GAILLARDE

pop 49,900

The main commercial and administrative centre for the Corrèze *département* is Brive-la-Gaillarde, best known for its rugby team (currently coached by former national player Olivier Magne) and hectic weekly markets, which burst into life every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday on the central place du 14 Juillet. Apart from the market, the town's short on sights, but it's a good base for exploring the Corrèze.

The **tourist office** (☎ 05 55 24 08 80; www.brive-tourisme.com; place du 14 Juillet; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 3-7pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) is housed in a former water tower, locally known as the *phare* (lighthouse), overlooking the market square.

## Sights & Activities

The town's main museum is the **Musée Labenche** (☎ 50 55 18 17 70; www.musee-labenche.com; 26bis, bd Jules-Ferry; adult/child €4.70/2.50; ☹ 10am-6.30pm Wed-Mon Apr-Oct, 1.30-6pm Wed-Mon Nov-Mar) with exhibits exploring local history and archeology, as well as a unique collection of 17th-century English tapestries and a piano that once belonged to Debussy.

The **Maison Denoix** (☎ 05 55 74 34 27; 9bd du Maréchal-Lyautey; admission free; ☹ 9am-noon & 2.30-7pm Tue-Sat Sep-Jun, Mon-Sat Jul & Aug) is a traditional distillery that since 1839 has been producing the favourite local tipple of the Corrèze, *l'eau de noix* (walnut liqueur), alongside more adventurous concoctions such as chocolate liqueur, quince liqueur and curaçao. You can wander around the old copper cauldrons and stills, or take a guided tour at 2.30pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays in July and August. There's also a well-stocked shop where you can sample the wares.

The Romanesque **Collegiale St-Martin**, in the heart of town, dates from the 11th century, but it's taken a battering over the centuries: the only original parts are the transept and a few decorated columns depicting fabulous beasts and Biblical scenes.

## Sleeping and Eating

**Hôtel Andrea** (☎ 05 67 73 29 93; www.landrea.fr; 39 av Jean-Jaurès; d€35-55) A decent budget choice near the station, offering cheap and cheery rooms above a café-bar. The budget price buys dated bathrooms, tiny TVs and a bit of street noise, but the cheerful interior keeps things bright and welcoming.

**Hôtel du Chapon Fin** (☎ 05 55 74 23 40; www.chaponfin-brive.com; 1 place de Lattre-de-Tassigny; s/d/tr from



## TULLE ACCORDIONS

Whether its Édith Piaf, Johnny Hallyday or Parisian hip-hop, France has always been fiercely proud of its musical heritage, and there's nothing more Gallic than the sound of an **accordion** pumping out a few traditional tunes from a street corner. Ask any accordion aficionado where the world's finest instruments are made, and chances are they'll all give you the same answer: the industrial town of **Tulle**, 28km northeast of Brive. A single accordion consists of between 3500 and 6800 parts and requires up to 200 hours' labour, so mass production has never been an option. The very best instruments can fetch a staggering €9000.

Tulle's celebrated **Maugein factory** (☎ 05 55 20 08 89; rte de Brive; 🕒 8am-noon & 2-5.30pm Mon-Thu) is one of the town's oldest accordion makers, and guided visits are free by reservation. You can see the craftspeople at work, browse the accordion museum, and maybe even pick up an instrument for yourself.

If you're in town in mid-September, check out the **Nuits de Nacre**, an annual four-day street music festival in which the accordion, of course, takes centre stage.

€53/63/78; 📺) The rooms in this smart white-shuttered hotel are all spick-and-span and contemporary, although the colour schemes are occasionally eye-searing – ask for one overlooking the park. Free wi-fi.

**La Truffe Noire** (☎ 05 55 92 45 00; www.la-truffe-noire.com; 22 bd Anatole-France; d €110-130) By far the town's top spot, this grand old girl has 30 rooms decked out in stylish fashion: beige and cream fabrics, flat-screen TVs, big beds and the odd beam or two. The rooms are swish, but the restaurant's even better: expect rich Limousin food with a price tag to match (mains €15 to €30).

## Getting There and Away

Brive is a major rail and bus junction – there are regular trains to all the main regional towns, including Limoges (€16.90, one hour, 15 to 18 daily), Périgueux (€11.50, 50 minutes, six to eight daily) and Cahors (€14.90, one hour, eight to 10 daily). For trains to Sarlat (€8.70, 1¼ to 1½ hours, three to five daily), you'll need to change at Souillac. The **bus station** (☎ 05 55 17 91 19; place du 14 Juillet; 🕒 8.15am-noon & 2-6.15pm Mon-Sat) is next to the tourist office.

The **train station** (av Jean Jaurès) is 1.3km from the town centre and the tourist office, and can be reached via most buses heading south out of town.

## EAST OF BRIVE Gimel-les-Cascades

This tiny, typically Corrèzien village is one of the region's prettiest, with a huddle of slate roofs, flower-filled balconies and higgledy-piggledy cottages gathered along the banks of a rushing brook. In summer it can feel far from peaceful, though, especially once the day trippers

and coach tours roll in. But visit out of season and you might well have it all to yourself. It's a place to wander the lanes, drink in the atmosphere, and stroll along the banks of the river. The three crashing **Cascades**, after which the village is named, are reached via a riverside path at the foot of the village. The local church also contains a beautiful enamelled reliquary known as the **Châsse de St-Étienne**, made in the 12th century by Limoges craftsmen.

Other nearby sights include the remains of the Cistercian **Abbaye d'Aubazine** (☎ 05 55 84 61 12; 🕒 guided visits 10.30am, 3pm & 4pm Jul & Aug, rest of year by appointment) and the **Étang de Ruffaud**, a glassy pond that offers a refreshing dip and a shady place for a picnic.

Gimel's seasonal **tourist office** (☎ 05 55 21 44 32; www.gimellescascades.fr; 🕒 10am-6pm Jul & Aug) is 50m up the hill from the church.

The **Hostellerie de la Vallée** (☎ 05 55 21 40 60; hostellerie\_de\_la\_vallee@hotmail.com; d €53-56.50; 🕒 Mar-Dec) makes for a sweet stopover, with nine small, pleasant rooms tucked around the corridors of an old stone cottage in the heart of the village. The restaurant is a down-home treat, too, with an old-fashioned dining room and plenty of hearty dishes including rabbit and beef stew.

## SOUTH OF BRIVE

Rolling countryside and green pastures unfold south of Brive to the banks of the Dordogne and the border with northern Quercy (p647).

## Turenne pop 770

Rising up from a solitary spur of rock, the hilltop village of Turenne is an arresting sight:

honey-coloured stone cottages and wonky houses are stacked up like dominoes beneath the towering **château** (☎ 05 55 85 90 66; www.chateau-turenne.com; adult/10-18yr/under 10yr €3.80/2.60/free; ☎ 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-noon & 2-6pm Apr-Jun, 2-5pm Sun or by reservation Sep-Mar), built to protect the feudal seat of the Vicomtes de Turenne. The castle's most upstanding feature is the Tour de César, an arrow-straight tower which provides heart-melting views of the surrounding countryside. Apart from a few ramparts and a 14th-century guard room, the rest of the castle and lordly lodgings have crumbled away, and are now occupied by an ornamental garden.

The **tourist office** (☎ 05 55 85 94 38; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Jul & Aug, 10am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep) is at the base of the village, and runs guided visits (adult/child under 12 years costs €4/free) as well as night-time costumed promenades in summer.

From Brive, there are usually three daily buses from Monday to Saturday (35 minutes); if you're catching a train (€3, 15 minutes), you'll arrive at **Turenne Gare**, 3km southeast of the village, and will have to make your way on foot.

## Collonges-la-Rouge

pop 50

Red by name, red by nature, Collonges-la-Rouge is one of the classic postcard villages of the Corrèze, with its skyline of conical turrets, rickety rooftops and rust-coloured houses. The part-Romanesque **church**, constructed from the 11th to the 15th centuries on an 8th-century Benedictine priory, was an important resting place on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. In a stirring show of ecclesiastical unity, during the late 16th century local Protestants held prayers in the southern nave and their Catholic neighbours prayed in the northern nave. Nearby, the slate roof of the ancient **covered market** shelters an ancient baker's oven.

The **tourist office** (☎ 05 55 25 47 57; www.ot-pays-de-collonges-la-rouge.fr; ☎ 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) is next to the town hall on the village's 'main' road, off the D38.

**Jeanne Maison d'Hôtes** (☎ 05 55 25 42 31; www.jeanne-maisonhotels.com; rind breakfast €90) is a grandiose B&B in a towering 15th-century *maison bourgeoise* on the village's edge that is a real home away from home. The five rooms all have quirky fixtures and antique furniture, from writing desks

and decorative screens to chaises longues and latticed windows (our favourite is the chimney room, with its own enormous inglenook fireplace). The home-cooked dinners are a delight too – and a steal at €32 with wine.

**Relais du Quercy** (☎ 05 55 25 40 31; www.relais-duquercy.com.fr; Meyssac; d €52-65; ☎ P) is a mile or so down the road in the village of Meyssac. It is a jaunty little hotel, complete with slate roof, brick facade and backyard swimming pool. The rooms are comfy and cosy, if unremarkable. The nicest look out over the rear terrace, but all have TVs with Canal+, spick-and-span bathrooms and soft beds.

Collonges is linked by bus with Brive, 18km to the northwest along the D38 (€4, 30 minutes, four to six daily on weekdays and one on Saturday).

## Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne

pop 1300

Peacefully perched on a curve of the Dordogne near northern Quercy, and hemmed in by lush woods and fields, Beaulieu (literally, beautiful place) fully deserves its name. Like Collonges, the town was once an important stop for Compostela pilgrims, and the beautifully preserved medieval quarter is one of the region's finest: a network of curving lanes lined with timber-framed houses and smart mansions, many dating from the 14th and 15th centuries.

The **tourist office** (☎ 05 55 91 09 94; www.beaulieu-sur-dordogne.fr; place Marbot; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2.30-7pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm Oct-Mar) is on the main square.

Beaulieu's most celebrated feature is the **Abbatiale St-Pierre**, a 12th-century Romanesque abbey church with a wonderful **tympanum** (c 1130) depicting scenes from the Last Judgment including dancing apostles and resurrected sinners. Nearby is the **Faubourg de la Chapelle**, a neighbourhood of 17th- and 18th-century houses, and the **Chapelle des Pénitents**, built to accommodate pious parishioners – access to the abbey church was strictly reserved for monks and paying pilgrims.

Beaulieu's biggest event is the **Fête de la Fraise** (Strawberry Festival) held to mark the harvest in mid-May. Strawberry-focussed events fill the town's streets, including strawberry auctions, strawberry parades and the eating of a gargantuan strawberry tart to close the festival in style.

**SLEEPING & EATING**

**Auberge de Jeunesse** (☎ 05 55 91 13 82; www.fuaj.org /aj/beaulieu; place du Monturu; dm €11.60-15.20; ☹ Apr-Oct) Parts of this quirky little hostel date from the 15th century, and it certainly looks vintage: latticed windows and a miniature turret decorate the exterior, while inside you'll find a cosy chimney-side lounge, well-stocked kitchen and dinky four-bed rooms, all with private bathrooms.

**Camping des Îles** (☎ 05 55 91 02 65; www.camping-des-iles.net; per person €11.90-18.90; ☹ Apr-Oct) This shady campsite is on an island sandwiched between two branches of the Dordogne. Its three-star facilities include tennis courts and a children's play area.

**Auberge Les Charmilles** (☎ 05 55 91 29 29; www.auberge-charmilles.com; 20 bd Rodolphe de Turenne; d from €60) Beaulieu's strawberry fetish continues at the Charmilles, where the rooms of the *maison bourgeoise* are named after different types of the summer berry. The decor's fresh and fruity, with puffy bedspreads, summery bathrooms, wooden floors and wi-fi. The best rooms overlook garden and river. The restaurant specialises in traditional duck and meat dishes (menus €19 to €45), and there's a waterside terrace for summer suppers.

**Le Château de Doux** (☎ 05 55 91 94 00; www.chateauadoux.com; Altillac; s €63-66, d €69-71; ☹ P) Just across the river from Beaulieu is this age-old beauty, a hilltop château turned country hotel surrounded by 3 hectares of private park. All the château trappings are present and correct – sweeping staircase, vaulted lobby, wooden rafters, creaky corridors – and the 21 rooms are fittingly Olde Worlde.

**Manoir de Beaulieu** (☎ 05 55 91 01 34; www.manoirdebeaulieu.com; 4 place du Champ-de-Mars; s €65-85, d €75-155; P) Half old-fashioned auberge, half modern pamper-pad, this smart village-centre hotel is a find. The rooms mix the best of old and new – stripped wood floors, glass sinks and digital TVs meet solid furniture, velvet armchairs, and the odd cartwheel or reclaimed desk. It's pricey and posh, but a super place to splash, and the courtyard restaurant is superb (mains €17 to €42).

Beaulieu's market is on Wednesday and Saturday mornings, and there are grocery stores on place Marbot, near the tourist office.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

Beaulieu is 70km east of Sarlat-la-Canéda and 47km northeast of Gouffre de Padirac (p647).

From Monday to Saturday, there are buses linking Beaulieu with Brive (€6.50, one hour, one to three daily).

## THE DORDOGNE

Rich food, heady history and rolling countryside sum up the delightful Dordogne. Long a favourite place of escape for second-homing Brits and French families on *les grandes vacances*, it remains one of the most popular parts of France. During the Hundred Years War the Dordogne marked the frontier between French and English forces, and the area is sometimes known as the 'Land of 1001 Châteaux' thanks to its abundance of historic castles. But the castle-builders weren't the first to settle on the riverbanks; Cro-Magnon man was here long before, and the Vézère Valley has the most spectacular series of prehistoric cave paintings anywhere in Europe, including the astonishing Grotte de Lascaux (p634) near Montignac.

Strictly speaking, the Dordogne is a *département*, not a region: this area is better known to the French as the Périgord. It's been divided into four colour-coded areas for easy navigation: Périgord Blanc (white) after the limestone hills around the capital city, Périgueux; Périgord Pourpre (purple) for the wine-growing regions around Bergerac; Périgord Vert (green) for the forested regions of the northwest; and Périgord Noir (black) for the dark oak forests around the Vézère Valley and Sarlat-la-Canéda.

### PÉRIGUEUX

pop 29,600

There's been a settlement on the site of present-day Périgueux for over 2000 years. Initially occupied by Gallic tribes, and later developed by the Romans into the city of Vesunna, Périgueux is still the biggest (and busiest) city of the Dordogne *département*, with a bustling commercial centre and a bevy of bars, restaurants and shops. But despite its big-city facade, history still seeps through the cracks: Roman remains, including a ruined temple and a luxurious provincial villa discovered in 1959, can be found in the suburb of La Cité, while medieval buildings and Renaissance mansions are dotted around the rabbit-warren city centre.

### Orientation

The medieval and Renaissance old city, known as Puy St-Front, is on the hillside between the

River Isle (to the east), bd Michel Montaigne and place Francheville (to the west). West of place Francheville is La Cité, where you'll find most of the city's Roman remains. The train station is 1km northwest of the old city.

## Information

### EMERGENCY

**Hôtel de Police** (police station; ☎ 05 53 06 44 44; place du Président Roosevelt; 🕒 24hr) Across from 20 rue du 4 Septembre.

### LAUNDRY

**Laundrette** (place Hoche; 🕒 8am-8pm)

**Laundrette** (18 rue des Mobiles de Coulmiers; 🕒 8am-9pm)

**Laundrette** (61 rue Gambetta; 🕒 8am-9pm, to 8pm Sat)

### MONEY

There are several banks on place Bugeaud.

### POST

**Post Office** (1 rue du 4 Septembre) Offers money exchange.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Espace Tourisme Périgord** (☎ 05 53 35 50 24; 25 rue du Président Wilson; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Provides information on the Dordogne *département*.

**Tourist Office** (☎ 05 53 53 10 63; www.tourisme-perigueux.fr; 26 place Francheville; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat mid-Sep-mid-Jun)

## Sights

### PUY ST-FRONT

Périgueux' most distinctive landmark is the **Cathédrale St-Front** (place de la Clautre; admission free; 🕒 8am-12.30pm & 2.30-7.30pm), notable for its five Byzantine bump-studded domes (inspired by either St Mark's Basilica in Venice or the church of the Holy Apostles of Constantinople, depending on whom you ask). Built in the 12th century, and heavily restored by Abadie (the architect of Sacré Cœur, p157), the interior is laid out in a Greek cross, with the soaring domes supported by svelte arches. The carillon sounds the same on the hour chime as Big Ben. The best views of the cathedral are from **Pont des Barris**, which crosses the River Isle to the east.

Périgueux' medieval quarter is north of the cathedral, where the city's broad boulevards give way to a tangle of cobblestone streets lined with haphazard houses: the best

examples are along **rue du Plantier**, **rue de la Sagesse** and **rue de la Miséricorde**. **Rue Limogeanne** has graceful Renaissance buildings at Nos 3 and 12, and the elaborately carved **Maison du Pâtissier** is at the end of rue Éguillerie. Most impressive of all is the **Hôtel d'Abzac de Ladouze** (16 rue Auberge), which was a fortified merchant's house in the 15th century.

Of the 28 towers that formed Puy St-Front's medieval fortifications, only the 15th-century **Tour Mataguerre**, a stout, round bastion next to the tourist office, now remains. The tourist office supplies a street map detailing the city's other architectural sites.

The **Musée du Périgord** (☎ 05 53 06 40 70; 22 cours Tourny; adult/student/under 18yr €4/2/free; 🕒 10.30am-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 1-6pm Sat) houses archeological finds, including some fine Roman mosaics and unique examples of prehistoric scrimshaw.

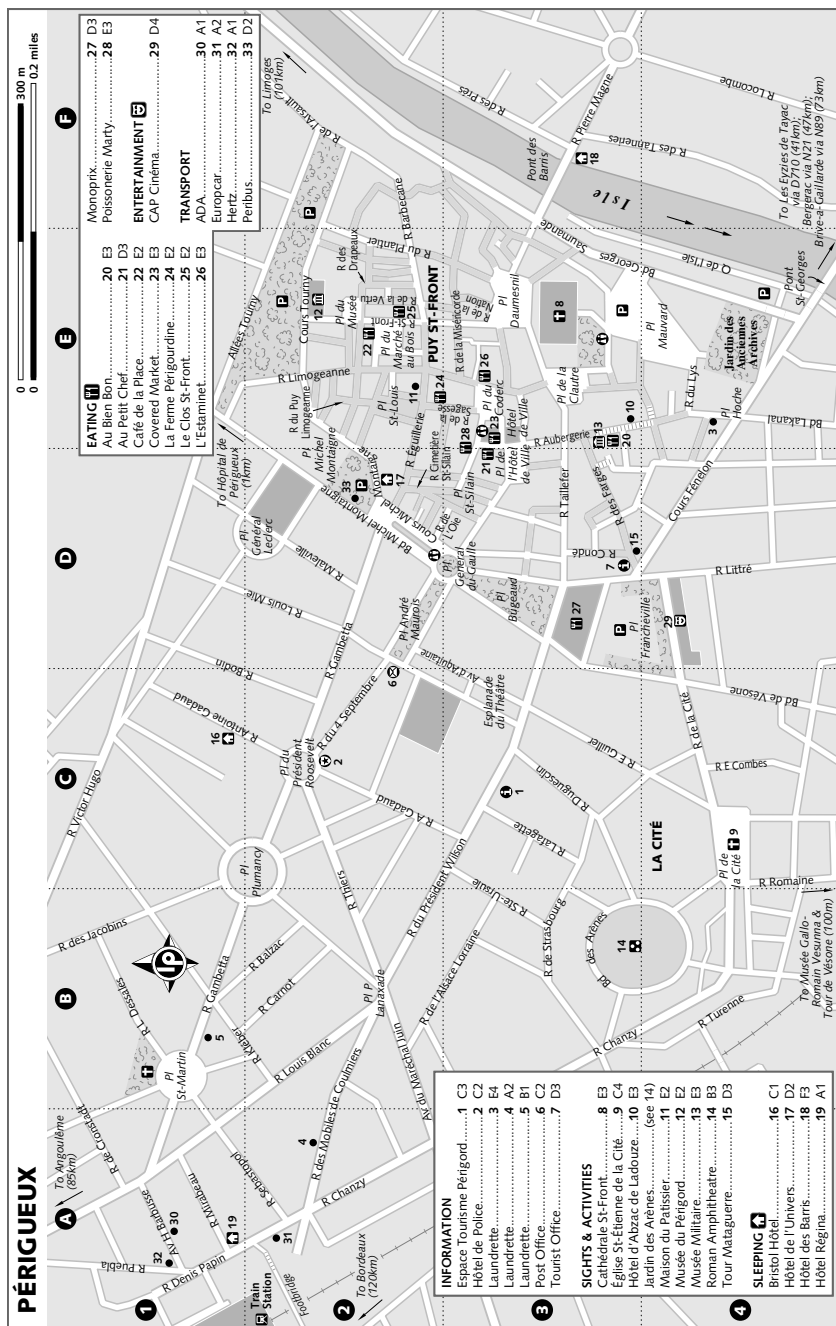
The **Musée Militaire** (☎ 05 53 53 47 36; 32 rue des Farges; adult/child €4/free; 🕒 1-6pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, 2-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-Dec, 2-6pm Wed & Sat Jan-Mar) has an eclectic collection of swords, firearms, uniforms and insignia dating from the Middle Ages until WWII, with sections devoted to WWI and the French Resistance.

### LA CITÉ

Périgueux (or Vesunna, to give it its Roman name) was among the most important cities in Roman Gaul, but the only remains of this once-thriving outpost are in **La Cité**, west of the city centre. The **Tour de Vésone**, the last remaining section of a massive Gallo-Roman temple dedicated to the Gaulish goddess Vesunna, is just south of the **Église St-Etienne de la Cité** (place de la Cité), which served as Périgueux' cathedral until 1669.

To the north are the ruins of the city's **Roman amphitheatre**, designed to hold over 30,000 baying spectators and one of the largest such structures in Gaul: today only a few creeper-covered arches remain, and its gladiatorial arena is occupied by a peaceful park, the **Jardins des Arènes**.

Just west of the Tour de Vésone is the **Musée Gallo-Romain Vesunna** (☎ 05 53 53 00 92; www.semitour.com; rue Claude Bernard; adult/6-12yr €5.70/3.70; 🕒 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Jun & Sep-Nov, 10am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun Dec-Mar), constructed by renowned French architect Jean Nouvel above a 1st-century Roman villa uncovered in 1959. Light floods in through the glass-and-steel structure, and walkways circumnavigate the excavated villa; it's still





possible to make out the central fountain, supporting pillars and the underfloor hypocaust system, as well as original mosaic murals, jewellery, pottery and even a water pump.

## Tours

The tourist office runs a range of French-language guided tours around the old city, including a **Gallo-Roman tour** (adult/12-18yr €5/3.80; ☎ 10.30 Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, 3pm Mon, Wed & Fri Oct-May) and a walk around the **Medieval-Renaissance Quarter** (adult/12-18yr €5/3.80; ☎ 3pm daily Jun-Sep, 3pm Tue, Thu & Sat Oct-May). There are other guided tours and night-time walks throughout the year: ask for details.

## Sleeping

**Hôtel des Barris** (☎ 05 53 53 04 05; 2 rue Pierre-Magne; www.hoteldesbarris.com; s/d/tr €44/50/56) Beside the broad River Isle, this Logis de France is a great option as long as you can bag a river-view room (the ones by the main road can be hideously noisy). Simple decor and a cute waterside make this the best-value hotel in Périgueux.

**Hôtel de Unifers** (☎ 05 53 53 34 79; www.hotelrestaurantunivers.fr; 18 cours Michel Montaigne; d from €49; ☎ Feb-Dec) You won't get more central than the Unifers, perched above Le Cercle, a swanky little wine-bar and brasserie in old Périgueux. Nine fresh, unfussy rooms, most redecorated with soothing shades and the odd rustic curio, are dotted round the upstairs floors; the street-side ones are the quietest. Wi-fi's available.

**Hôtel Régina** (☎ 05 53 08 40 44; comfort.perigueux@wanadoo.fr; 14 rue Denis Papin; d €53-60) For something functional and handy for the station, this venerable old hotel fits the bill. You'll have to forgo the luxuries – a bed, wardrobe and digital TV are about all you'll get in the peach-and-mustard rooms – but it's clean, modern, and there's a generous buffet breakfast.

**Bristol Hôtel** (☎ 05 53 08 75 90; www.bristolfrance.com; 37-39 rue Antoine Gaudaud; s €58-67, d €64-76; ☎ P) Look past the weird Lego-brick facade, and you'll find pleasant rooms and a central location at the Bristol. Despite the boxy exterior, the decor's traditional, with wooden furniture, rich shades of orange, peach and red, and extras including LCD TVs, free wi-fi and free parking.

## Eating

**Au Bien Bon** (☎ 05 53 09 69 91; 15 rue des Places; lunch menus €10-14, dinner menus €22; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Fri

& Sat) Checked tablecloths, chalkboard menus and chipped floor tiles set the down-home tone at this rustic place, which makes a fine spot for traditional Périgord cooking – *confit de canard* (duck leg, cured and poached in its own fat), *omelette aux cèpes* (omelette with porcini mushrooms) or full-blown *tête de veau* (vealer's head).

**Café de la Place** (☎ 05 53 08 21 11; 7 place du Marché au Bois; mains €11-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) You can almost feel the Frenchness at this marvellous streetside café on place du Marché au Bois, with its spinning ceiling fans, shiny brass fittings and smoke-burnished wooden bar. It's really a place to sit and watch the city spin by over a *petit café*, but there are brasserie standards if you're peckish.

**L'Estaminet** (☎ 05 53 06 11 38; 2 Impasse Limogeanne; menus €15, €18.50 & €25) Hidden in a medieval courtyard, this intimate bistro takes its culinary cue from the daily produce available at the nearby market, so you could find anything from fresh sea bass to rump steak on the menu, all served with a Périgordine twist.

**Au Petit Chef** (☎ 05 53 53 16 03; 5 place du Coderc; mains €12-18; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Forget razor-sharp napkins and snooty waiters – the only thing that matters at this kitsch little bistro is the nosh. All the ingredients come straight from the covered market opposite, so you're guaranteed fresh flavours and authentic *plats régionaux*. It's popular at lunchtime, especially on market days, so pitch up early.

**ourpick Le Clos St-Front** (☎ 05 53 46 78 58; 12 rue St-Front; mains €15-25; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Set around a lime-shaded garden beside a 16th-century *hôtel particulier*, this ravishing restaurant is rightly touted as the city's *grande table*. It's a delight from start to finish: chef and owner Patrick Feuga has a reputation for his imaginative versions of traditional dishes, which range from goose breast with cardamom sauce to sashimi Bream and 'hot-and-cold' caramel soufflé. Unfortunately it's far from a well-kept secret – the buzzy courtyard patio is *the* place to eat out in summer, so you'll need military precision to bag a table.

## SELF-CATERING

Périgueux' chaotic **street markets** explode into action on Wednesday and Saturday, taking over place de la Clautre, place de la Mairie and place du Coderc (where you'll also find the covered market, to 1.30pm daily). Liveliest of all are the **Marchés de Gras**, when local

delicacies such as truffles, wild mushrooms and foie gras are sold on place St-Louis from mid-November to mid-March.

There are lots of *charcuteries* (butcher shops) and *fromageries* (cheese shops) in the old city; try **La Ferme Périgourdine** (☎ 05 53 08 41 22; 9 rue Limogeanne; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sat) for cheese or **Poissonerie Marty** (☎ 05 53 03 45 62; 11 rue des Chaines; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) for fish. There's also a city-centre **Monoprix** (☎ 8.30am-8pm Mon-Sat; place Bugeaud).

## Entertainment

The 10-screen **CAP Cinéma** (☎ 08 92 68 01 21; place Francheville) screens mainly new-release films, some in *version originale* (nondubbed).

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

The main local operator is **Peribus** (☎ 05 53 53 30 37; place Michel Montaigne; ☎ 9.45am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.45pm Mon-Fri). Single fares around town cost €1.25.

For buses further afield, contact **Trans Périgord** (☎ 05 53 02 20 85; 33 rue St-Front). There are 10 regular lines, with a flat fee of €2/1 per adult/child. Destinations include Sarlat (Line 7A; 1½ hours, two daily Monday to Friday), Montignac (Line 7B; one hour 40 minutes, one daily Monday to Friday) and Bergerac (70 minutes, six daily Monday to Friday).

### CAR

All the rental agencies are around the station, including **Europcar** (☎ 05 53 08 15 72; 7 rue Denis Papin), **ADA** (☎ 05 53 05 40 28; 4 av H Barbusse) and **Hertz** (☎ 05 53 54 61 80; cnr rue Puebla & av H Barbusse 1).

### TRAIN

The **train station** (rue Denis Papin) is served by buses 1, 4 and 5. Direct services run to Bordeaux (€18, one hour 20 minutes, hourly), Limoges (€14.30, one hour, hourly) and Brive-la-Gaillarde (€11.30, one hour, hourly). Fewer trains run on Sunday.

From Limoges there are connections to Paris Austerlitz (€55.90 to €70.50, four to five hours). To get to Sarlat-la-Canéda (€13.20, around three daily) you have to change at Le Buisson.

## BRANTÔME

pop 2122

Often dubbed the 'Venice of the Périgord' thanks to its five medieval bridges and elegant riverfront architecture, **Brantôme** hugs a

comely curve in the River Dronne 27km north of Périgueux. Surrounded by grassy parks and willow-filled woodland, it's a glorious spot to while away an afternoon or embark on a pleasure cruise.

Brantôme's most illustrious landmark is the former **Benedictine Abbey**, built and rebuilt from the 11th to 18th centuries and now occupied by the Hôtel de Ville. Next door is the Gothic **abbey church** and Brantôme's **tourist office** (☎ 05 53 05 80 63; ot.brantome@wanadoo.fr; ☎ 10am-7pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Wed-Mon mid-Sep-mid-Jun), which runs daily guided tours around Brantôme's main sights for €6/3 per adult/child.

Behind the modern-day abbey and the tourist office are the remains of Brantôme's original abbey, known as the **Parcours Troglodytique** (☎ 10am-7pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Wed-Mon mid-Sep-mid-Jun), cut from the rock face by industrious monks in the 8th century. Its most famous feature is a 15th-century rock frieze supposedly depicting the Last Judgement. Of more interest is the abbey's 11th-century Romanesque **docher** (belltower), allegedly the oldest (and arguably most beautiful) in France.

Cruise boats run from the banks of the river in front of the abbey, including **Promenade en Bateau** (☎ 05 53 04 74 71; adult/child €7/5) and **L'Arche de Noë** (☎ 06 10 81 20 05; adult/child €7/5). Cruises last about 50 minutes and depart hourly in season.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Maison Fleurie** (☎ 05 53 53 17 04; www.maison-fleurie.net; 54 rue Gambetta; d €45-85) Behind the wrought-iron doors of this smart stone house are five spick-and-span B&B rooms, furnished in impeccably good taste by the expat British owners, and a sunny interior courtyard filled with geraniums and petunias.

**Hostellerie du Périgord** (☎ 05 53 05 70 58; www.hotel-hpv.fr; 7 av André Maurois; d €48-55, tr €72; ☎ P) Creepers cover the outside of this old roadside inn, arranged around a private courtyard set back from the main road and riverfront. The rooms are pleasant in an everyday kind of way, all with wi-fi, stout beds, plain bathrooms and a choice of courtyard or pool views. Southwest wines and *cuisine de terroir* (country cuisine) make the restaurant popular for Sunday lunch (*menus* €17 to €39, mains €11 to €27).

**ourpick** **Hostellerie les Griffons** (☎ 05 53 45 45 35; [www.griffons.fr](http://www.griffons.fr); Bourdeilles; d €85-135; 📍 📍) Fantastically atmospheric hotel-cum-chambre d'hôte (B&B) in a converted mill with views of the river through its blue-shuttered windows. The rooms are an enticing jumble of medieval fireplaces, head-scraping beams and porthole windows – ask for No 6, with its ceiling of muddled crossbeams, or No 2, with stone hearth and town views. The hotel is in the nearby town of Bourdeilles, about 9km southwest of Brantôme along the D78.

## Getting There & Away

Brantôme is 27km north of Périgueux along the D939. There is a very early morning bus to Périgueux (line 1AB; 50 minutes) which returns in the evening around 6pm except on Wednesday, when it returns at around 1pm. There's no bus station – buses leave from various streetside stops around town.

## SARLAT-LA-CANÉDA

pop 10,000

A picturesque tangle of honey-coloured buildings, alleyways and secret squares make up Sarlat-la-Canéda, one of the unmissable villages of the Dordogne. Ringed by forested hill-tops and boasting some of the best-preserved medieval architecture in France, Sarlat makes a charming launch pad for exploring the Périgord Noir and the Vézère Valley. But be warned – it's also one of region's most popular tourist spots, and you may find it almost impossible to appreciate the town's charms among the summer throngs.

## Orientation

The heart-shaped Cité Médiévale (Medieval Town) is bisected by the rue de la République (La Traverse). The train station is around 2km from the Cité Médiévale, which is centred on place de la Liberté, rue de la Liberté and place du Peyrou.

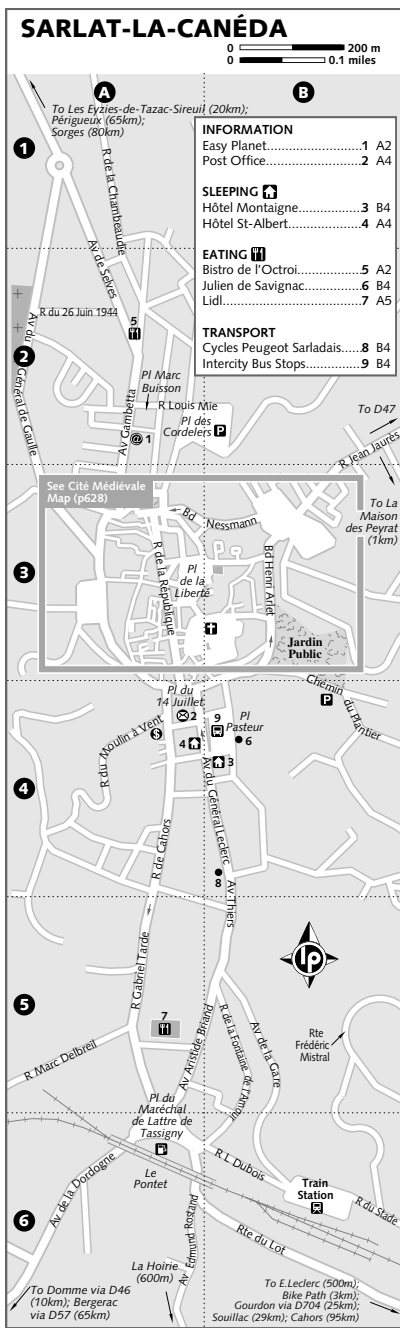
## Information

There are several banks along rue de la République, all with ATMs.

**Easy Planet** (Map p626; ☎ 05 53 31 22 37; av Gambetta; 🕒 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, & 2-7pm Sun) Internet access is €3 per hour.

**Post Office** (Map p626; place du 14 Juillet) Currency exchange.

**Tourist Office** (Map p628; ☎ 05 53 31 45 45; [www.ot-sarlat-perigord.fr](http://www.ot-sarlat-perigord.fr); rue Tourny; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Sat,



10am-noon Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-noon & 2-7pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) Fantastically efficient; ask for the free walking tour around the medieval town.

## Sights & Activities

Part of the fun of wandering around Sarlat is getting well and truly lost in the network of twisting alleyways and back streets. **Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau** (Map p628) or the area around **Le Présidial** (p628) both make good starting points, but for the grandest buildings and *hôtels particuliers* you'll want to explore **rue des Consuls**. Look out for the medieval fountain, tucked away down steps at the rear of a mossy grotto.

Whichever street you take, sooner or later you'll end up at the **Cathédrale St-Sacerdos** (Map p628) on place du Peyrou, once part of Sarlat's Cluniac abbey. The original abbey church was built in the 1100s, redeveloped in the early 1500s and remodelled again in the 1700s, so it's a real mix of styles. The belfry and western facade are the oldest parts of the building, while the nave, organ and interior chapels are later additions.

Opposite the cathedral is the 16th-century timber-framed **Maison de la Boétie** (Map p628), birthplace of the writer Étienne de la Boétie (1530–63), a close friend of the French essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533–92).

Two medieval courtyards, the **Cour des Fontaines** and the **Cour des Chanoines** (Map p628), can be reached via an alleyway off rue Tourny. Duck down the passage from Cour des Chanoines to the **Chapelle des Pénitents Bleus** (Map p628), a Romanesque chapel that provided the architectural inspiration for the cathedral.

Nearby is the **Jardin des Enfeus** (Map p628), Sarlat's first cemetery, and the rocket-shaped **Lanterne des Morts** (Lantern of the Dead; Map p628), built to honour a visit by St Bernard, one of the founders of the Cistercian order, in 1147.

## Sleeping

Hotel rooms in Sarlat in summer are like gold dust, and budget rooms are thin on the ground at any time. Shoestringers should ask at the tourist office about *chambres d'hôtes*.

**Hôtel Les Récollets** (Map p628; ☎ 05 53 31 36 00; www.hotel-recollets-sarlat.com; 4 rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau; d €43-69) Lost in the medieval maze of the old town, the Récollets is a budget beauty. Nineteen topsy-turvy rooms and a charming vaulted breakfast room are rammed in around the medieval *maison*. Our favourites

are 305 and 308, with exposed brick and king-size beds.

**Hôtel La Couleuvrine** (Map p628; ☎ 05 53 59 27 80; www.la-couleuvrine.com; 1 place de la Bouquerie; d €52-80) Gables, chimneys and red-tile rooftops adorn this rambling hotel, which originally formed part of Sarlat's city wall. It's old, odd and endearingly musty. Strange-shaped rooms are sandwiched between solid stone and wooden rafters, and for maximum quirk factor there are a couple of rooms in the hotel's turret.

**La Maison des Peyrat** (off Map p626; ☎ 05 53 59 00 32; www.maisondespeyrat.com; le Lac de la Plane; r €53-95; ♿ (P)) Various used as a plague hospital, nuns' rest-home and hunting retreat, this sweet 10-room hotel is a total sanctuary, peacefully positioned on a hilltop 1.5km from Sarlat. The 11 shuttered rooms are cool and uncluttered, with touches of country-tinged charisma; the best overlook the courtyard gardens and the countryside beyond.

**Hôtel Montaigne** (Map p626; ☎ 05 53 31 93 88; www.hotelmontaigne.fr; 2 place Pasteur; d €54-64; (P)) Popular with the coach-tour crowd, this imposing stone-front hotel lacks the intimacy of some of Sarlat's hotels, but it's cheaper than most. The modern rooms, all with private bathrooms and cosy decor, aren't massively exciting, but the buffet brekkie is great. There's also a handy car park in front of the hotel, and wi-fi, too.

**Hôtel St-Albert** (Map p626; ☎ 05 53 31 55 55; www.hotel-saintalbert.eu; place Pasteur; r from €60) Pared back, stylish hotel with the barest of boutique touches: minimal clutter, chocolate-and-cream tones and posh bath goodies make it feel closer to a metropolitan crash pad than an old-town *auberge*. Free wi-fi.

**La Hoirie** (Map p626; ☎ 05 53 59 05 62; www.lahoirie.com; La Giragne; d €89-138; ♿ (P)) This turreted 18th-century lodge, surrounded by a huge private garden, makes a delightful escape from the hectic hum of downtown Sarlat. The rooms (named after local sights) have a trace of Cistercian simplicity, finished in soothing tones and local stone.

**Villa des Consuls** (Map p628; ☎ 05 53 31 90 05; www.villaconsuls.com; 3 rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau; d €69-89, apt €110-162; ♿ (P)) Despite its Renaissance exterior, the four huge rooms and three self-catering apartments here are modern through and through. Some have wood floors, tall windows, sofas and original beams; others are tucked into the attic with split-level staircases, nook-and-cranney windows and lofty ceilings. At this price, it's a steal.





duck and foie gras dominate the menu, and the wine list is super (especially for Sarlat and Cahors vintages). But it's the romantic courtyard setting that steals the show. A complete *coup de cœur*.

### SELF-CATERING

Practically every other shop in Sarlat is stocked with local goodies, from duck *confit* to walnut cake, but the best place for supplies is the **Marché Couvert** (Map p628; ☎ 8.30am-2pm Sat-Thu, 8.30am-8pm Fri mid-Apr–mid-Nov, 8.30am-1pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat mid-Nov–mid-Apr) inside the converted Église Ste-Marie, with lots of stalls supplied by local producers. Other good shops include **Distillerie du Périgord** (Map p628; ☎ 05 53 59 20 57; place de la Liberté) for local liqueurs, and **Julien de Savignac** (Map p626; ☎ 05 53 31 29 20; place du Pasteur) for wine.

For the full-blown French market experience, you absolutely mustn't miss Sarlat's chaotic **Saturday market** (place de la Liberté & rue de la République), which takes over the streets around the cathedral from 8am. Depending on the season, delicacies on offer include foie gras, mushrooms, duck- and goose-based products, and even the holy *truffe noir* (black truffle). A smaller **fruit and vegetable market** (☎ 8.30am-1pm) is held on Wednesday mornings on place de la Liberté.

Out-of-town supermarkets include **E.Lederc** (off Map p626; ☎ 05 53 31 35 35; rte de Souillac; ☎ Mon-Sat

9am-8pm) and **Lidl** (Map p626; av Aristide Briand; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat).

### Drinking

Sarlat's drinking scene is pretty limited – about the only option apart from the cafés is **Le Pub** (Map p628; ☎ 05 53 59 57 98; 1 passage de Gérard du Barry; ☎ from 7pm), which is especially popular in summer, when the enclosed courtyard springs to life with alfresco drinkers. Closing times vary widely according to the season.

### Getting There & Away

Useful bus destinations are Périgueux (bus 7A; 1½ hours, two daily) via Montignac (30 minutes), which leaves from place Pasteur, and Souillac (bus 6; 40 minutes, four or five Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday), which travels to and from the train station. Tickets cost a flat rate of €2.

Rather inconveniently, Sarlat's **train station** (Map p626; ☎ 05 53 59 00 21) is 1.3km south of the old city along av de la Gare. Destinations include Périgueux (via Le Buisson; €13.20, 1¾ hours, three daily), Les Eyziez (change at Le Buisson; €8.20, 50 minutes to 2½ hours depending on connections, three daily) and Bergerac (€10.70, 2½ hours, six daily).

### Getting Around

Bikes can be rented for around €10 per day from **Cycles Peugeot Sarladais** (Map p626; ☎ 05 53

## LES DIAMANTS NOIRS

From walnuts to strawberries, *cèpe* (porcini) mushrooms, foie gras and *chanterelles*, the Dordogne is famous for its gourmet goodies. But for true culinary connoisseurs there's only one ingredient that matters, and that's the *diamant noir* – otherwise known as the black truffle.

A subterranean fungi that grows naturally in chalky soils (often around the roots of oak and hazelnut trees), this mysterious little mushroom is notoriously capricious; a good truffle spot one year can be inexplicably bare the next, which has made farming them on any kind of serious scale practically impossible. The art of truffle-hunting is a closely guarded secret; it's a matter of luck, judgment and hard-earned experience, and serious truffle hunters often employ specially trained dogs (and sometimes even pigs) to help them in the search. But it's not simply a matter of culinary perfection – truffles are seriously big business, with a vintage crop fetching as much as €850 a kilogram.

The height of truffle season is between December and March, when special truffle markets are held around the Dordogne, including Périgueux (p621), Sarlat (p626) and most notably Sorges (locally championed as France's truffle capital). For more background on this flavoursome fungi, the **Ecomusée de la Truffe** (☎ 05 53 05 90 11; www.truffe-sorges.org; Le Bourg, Sorges; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Jul & Aug, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sun Sep-Jun) in Sorges has lots of truffle-themed exhibits and might even be able to help you hook up with a truffle hunt in season...

As for the best way to eat them – well, those in the know say that the best way to savour the taste is in a plain omelette or simply on a slice of fresh crusty bread. Whether the truffle deserves its culinary reputation is something only your tastebuds can tell you...

28 51 87; 36 av Thiers) and **Cydeo** (Map p628; ☎ 05-53-31-90-05; 3 rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau).

Parking is free along bd Nessmann, bd Voltaire and bd Henri Arlet. Cars are banned in Cité Médiévale from June to September, and rue de la République is pedestrianised in July and August.

## PREHISTORIC SITES & THE VÈZÈRE VALLEY

Flanked by limestone cliffs, subterranean caverns and ancient woodland, the Vézère Valley is world famous for its incredible collection of prehistoric paintings – the highest concentration of Stone Age art found in Europe. The many underground caves around the Vézère provided shelter for Cro-Magnon man, and the area is littered with prehistoric monuments such as the Lascaux caves near Montignac (p634), the Abri du Cap Blanc (p632) and the Grotte de Rouffignac (p632).

Most of the key sites are between Le Bugue and Montignac, 25km to the northeast. If you're driving, the best bases are Les Eyzies (below), and Sarlat-la-Canéda (p626). Most of the valley's sites are closed in winter, and the otherworldly atmosphere is pretty much shattered by the summer crowds, so spring and autumn are definitely the best times to visit.

### Getting Around

Public transport is limited, with few trains and even fewer buses. You can get to most towns fairly easily, but there's usually no way of getting to the caves themselves. Cycling is an option, and hire bikes are often available from campsites, tourist offices or rental outlets, but as always in rural France, having your own car makes things easier.

### Les Eyzies-de-Tayac-Sireuil

pop 850

At the heart of the Vézère Valley, Les Eyzies makes a fairly uninspiring introduction to the wonders of the Vézère. Touristy and a little tatty, the town caters for the massive influx of tourists who descend on the valley every summer, and judging by the endless postcard sellers, cafés and souvenir shops lining the street, business must be brisk. Despite the town's commercial gloss, it's a useful base with some pleasant hotels and campsites, and an excellent museum of prehistory.

## INFORMATION

**Librairie de la Préhistoire** (☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Mar-Nov, 8.30am-7pm Jun-Aug, 8.30am-noon Dec-Feb) Sells IGN maps and topoguides.

**Tourist Office** (☎ 05 53 06 97 05; www.leseyzies.com; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 2-6pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Sun Sep-Jun, closed Sun Oct-Apr) Has a small internet kiosk where you can check email for €1.50 for 15 minutes.

## SIGHTS

The **Musée National de Préhistoire** (National Museum of Prehistory; ☎ 05 53 06 45 45; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €5/3.50/free, 1st Sun of month free; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-6pm Wed-Mon Jun & Sep, 9.30am-noon & 2-5.30pm Wed-Mon Oct-May) provides a fine prehistory primer (providing your French is good). Inside a marvellous modern building underneath the cliffs, it houses the most comprehensive collection of prehistoric finds in France. Highlights include a huge gallery of Stone Age tools, weapons and jewellery, and skeletons from some of the animals that once roamed the Vézère (including bison, woolly rhinoceros, giant deer and cave bears), as well as a collection of carved reliefs on the 1st floor – look out for an amazing frieze of horses and a bison licking its flank. Much of the jewellery is fashioned from bone, antlers and seashells, and intricately marked with chevrons, dots, dashes and other designs.

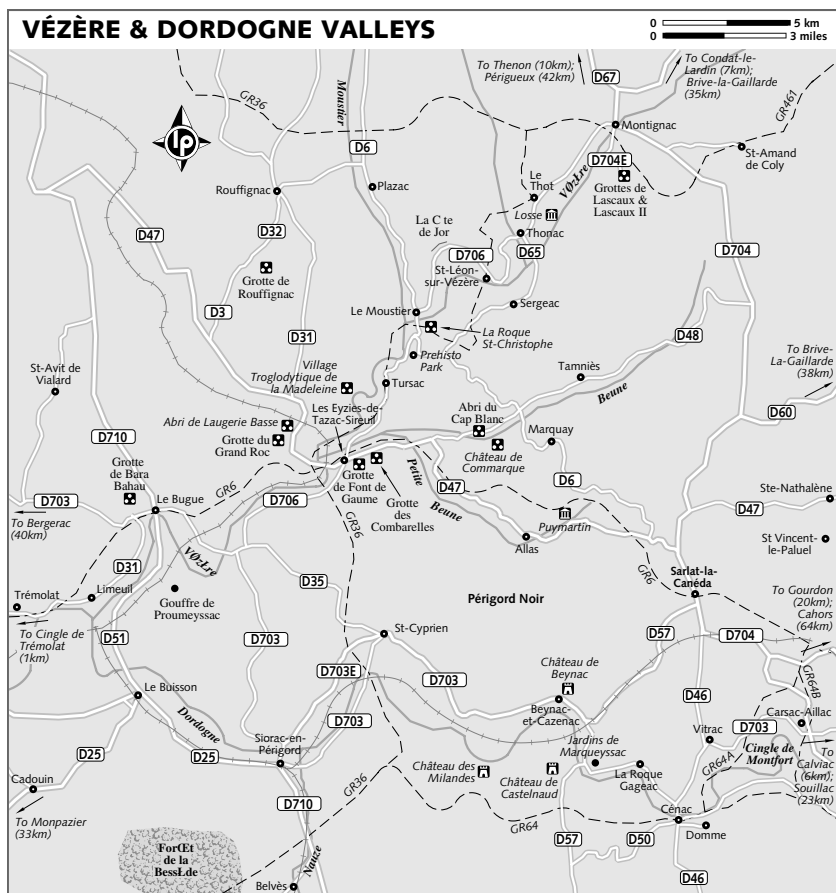
About 250m north of the museum is the **Abri Pataud** (☎ 05 53 06 92 46; www.semitour.com; adult/6-12yr/under 6yr €5.80/3.80/free; ☎ 10am-7pm Jul-Sep, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun), a Cro-Magnon *abri* (shelter) inhabited over a period of 15,000 years starting some 37,000 years ago; bones and other excavated artefacts are on display. The ibex carved into the ceiling dates from about 19,000 BC. The admission price includes a one-hour guided tour in French (and some English if you're lucky).

## SLEEPING & EATING

Les Eyzies has lots of campsites, but they get heavily oversubscribed so reserve well ahead.

**Camping La Rivière** (☎ 05 53 06 97 14; www.la-riviereleseyzies.com; per person €8.40-12.85; ☎ ☎) The nearest campsite to Les Eyzies is a stroll west of town and pleasantly plonked beside the river. Great facilities – including a restaurant, bar, laundry and on-site grocery – ensure it's packed in high season.

**Camping Le Vézère Périgord** (☎ 05 53 06 96 31; www.levézereperigord.com; route de Montignac, Tursac; per person €9-13; ☎) This tranquil, forested site 6km north



of Les Eyzies is popular with holidaying families. There's a swimming pool, tennis courts, ping pong, trampolines and even a pizzeria, as well as mountain-bike and kayak hire.

**Hôtel des Roches** (☎ 05 53 06 96 59; [www.roches-les-eyzies.com](http://www.roches-les-eyzies.com); s €71-75, d €84.80-101.60; ☞ Apr-Nov; 🚗) For a modern feel, try this smart hotel, chunkily constructed from the area's pale stone and decorated in simple pastoral style. The rear rooms overlook the garden and swimming pool, but you'll have to pay for the privilege.

**Hostellerie du Passeur** (☎ 05 53 06 97 13; [www.hostellerie-du-passeur.com](http://www.hostellerie-du-passeur.com); place de la Mairie; d €87.50-108; ☞ Feb-Oct) This ivy-clad hotel is in the middle of Les Eyzies, overlooking the meandering Vézère. It's traditional in style, with rooms divided into 'Charme', 'Elegance'

and 'Prestige' – the better rooms are worth the cash, with valley views, flash TVs and deep, luxurious beds.

**Hôtel des Glycines** (☎ 05 53 06 97 07; [www.les-glycines-dordogne.com](http://www.les-glycines-dordogne.com); Les Eyzies; d €86-232; (P) ) Les Eyzies' old post house has been converted into this pricey pumper-pad, with four categories of plush rooms ranging from cream-and-check 'Classics' to full-blown private suites, complete with private terrace and garden outlook. (Avoid the 'courtyard rooms' if you can, which overlook the main road out of Les Eyzies). Prince Charles once stayed here, so it can't be too shabby.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Les Eyzies is on the D47, 21km west of Sarlat. The **train station** (☎ 05 53 06 97 22; ☞ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri,

noon-6pm Sat & Sun) is 700m north of town, with connections to Périgueux (€6.90, 30 minutes, 10 daily) and Sarlat (change at Le Buisson; €8.20, 50 minutes to 2½ hours depending on connections, three daily).

### Grotte de Font de Gaume

This fascinating **cave** (☎ 05 53 06 86 00; www.lesyzies.com/grottes-ornees; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €6.50/4.50/free; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm mid-May–mid-Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm mid-Sep–mid-May) 1km northeast of Les Eyzies on the D47 contains the only original ‘polychrome’ (as opposed to single-colour) paintings still open to the public. While not quite as ornate as Lascaux, Font de Gaume is still an astounding testament to the breadth and complexity of prehistoric art. About 14,000 years ago, the prehistoric artists created the gallery of over 230 figures, including bison, reindeer, horses, mammoths, bears and wolves, although only about 25 are on permanent display. Look out for the famous ‘Chapelle des Bisons’, a scene of courting reindeer and several stunningly realised horses, several caught in mid-movement.

Font de Gaume is such a rare and valuable site that there is talk of the cave being closed for its own protection. Visitor numbers are already limited to 200 per day: it’s worth reserving a few days ahead, and a week or two in advance from July to September. Reservations can be made by phone or online. The 45-minute guided tours are generally in French; if you want an English tour, ask about availability at the time of booking.

### Grotte des Combarelles

The narrow cave of **Combarelles**, discovered in 1901 about 1.5km east of Font de Gaume, is renowned for its animal engravings, many of which cleverly use the natural contours of the rock to sculpt the animals’ forms: the most impressive examples are delicately drawn mammoths, horses and reindeer, as well as a fantastic mountain lion that seems to leap from the rock face. One wall seems to have been used as a kind of prehistoric sketchpad, with many animals and geometric symbols superimposed on one another.

The six- to eight-person group tours last about an hour, and can be reserved through the Font de Gaume ticket office. Opening hours and admission costs are the same for both sites.

### Abri du Cap Blanc

While most of the Vézère’s caves contain a combination of engravings and paintings, the rock shelter of **Abri du Cap Blanc** (☎ 05 53 06 86 00; adult/under 18yr €6.50/free; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Sun-Fri mid-May–mid-Sep, 9.30am-12.30 & 2-5.30pm Sun-Fri mid-Sep–mid-May) unusually contains carved sculptures that were hollowed out, shaped and refined using simple flint tools some 14,000 years ago. The sculpture gallery of horses, bison and deer occupies about 40m of the natural shelter, peacefully situated about 7km east of Les Eyzies.

### Grotte du Grand Roc

A short drive northwest of Les Eyzies along the D47 is the **Grand Roc Cave** (☎ 05 53 06 92 70; www.grandroc.com; adult/under 12yr €7/3.50; 🕒 9.30am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm Feb-Jun & Sep-Dec), decorated by an array of glittering stalactites and stalagmites, and the rock shelter of **Abri de Laugerie Basse** (adult/child €6/3; 🕒 same as Grand Roc), originally occupied by Cro-Magnon people and used until recent times as a natural shelter. Joint tickets cost €9.50/4.50 per adult/child.

### Grotte de Rouffignac

**Rouffignac** (☎ 05 53 05 41 71; www.grottederouffignac.fr; adult/child €6.20/3.90; tours in French 🕒 9-11.30am & 2-6pm Jul & Aug, 10-11.30am & 2-5pm Mar-Jun & Sep-Oct) is one of the most complex and rewarding caves to see in the Dordogne. Hidden in woodland 15km north of Les Eyzies, this massive cavern plunges 10km into the earth through a mind-boggling maze of tunnels and sub-shafts – luckily, you’ll visit aboard a somewhat ramshackle electric train, so there’s no chance of getting lost.

Rouffignac is sometimes known as the ‘Cave of 100 Mammoths’ and with good reason: you’ll see many painted pachyderms on your trip into the underworld, including a frieze of 10 mammoths in procession, one of the largest cave paintings ever discovered. At the end of the tour the train grinds to a halt and you stumble out into a hidden gallery where the entire ceiling is covered in mammoths, ibex, enormous horses, and even a few rhinoceros – some intricately painted, others reduced to simple strokes and lines. Keep your eyes peeled for scratches and hollows on the cave floor, left behind by the long-extinct cave bears who once shared this cave with our prehistoric ancestors. Certainly beats a cat...

## PREHISTORY 101

If you're visiting the cave paintings around the Vézère and Lot, it helps to know a little about the prehistoric artists who created them. Most of the valley's cave paintings date from the end of the last ice age, between 20,000 BC and 10,000 BC, and were painted by Cro-Magnon people – descendants of the first *homo erectus* settlers who arrived in Europe from North Africa between 700,000 BC and 100,000 BC. These early humans were an entirely separate species from the shorter, burlier Neanderthals who lived in Europe around the same time, and died out suddenly around 35,000 BC.

Until around 20,000 BC much of Northern Europe was still covered by vast glaciers and ice sheets: Cro-Magnon people lived a loose hunter-gatherer lifestyle, using natural caves as temporary hunting shelters while they followed the migration routes of their prey (including woolly mammoths, woolly rhinoceros, reindeer and aurochs, an ancestor of the modern cow).

The first cave art appears in the so-called Gravettian period, consisting of abstract engravings or paintings of female genitalia or 'Venus' figures and developing into complex animal figures and friezes such as those at **Lascaux** (p634), **Rouffignac** (opposite) and **Font de Gaume** (opposite), which date from around 15,000 BC to 10,000 BC. Curiously, the artwork in more recent caves is often less sophisticated than the ones at Lascaux, suggesting that different tribes had differing traditions and levels of artistry, but also indicating that Lascaux seems to have held an unusual significance for its painters.

Using flint tools for engraving, natural fibre brushes, pads or sponges for painting, and paints derived from minerals such as magnesium and charcoal (black), ochre (red/yellow) and iron (red), the prehistoric painters worked by the light of primitive oil torches. Usually they painted the animals they hunted, but occasionally they also left hand tracings, or depicted abstract figures and scenes (such as the celebrated picture of an injured hunter and bull in Lascaux). As well as the paintings, Cro-Magnon artists also created jewellery from shells, bones and antlers, and scrimshaw decorated with animal scenes and geometric patterns, examples of which can be seen at the **Museum of Prehistory** p630, in Les Eyzies.

It's interesting to note the things they chose not to draw – there are no landscapes, trees, rivers, skies or rocks in any of the Vézère's caves, only animals – suggesting that the cave paintings had some kind of ritual or shamanic significance, possibly as shrines or magical sanctuaries. Most mysterious of all are the strange geometric shapes common to all the caves. Although many theories have been put forward to explain them, ranging from primitive writing to magic markers, in truth no one has the faintest idea what these weird signs signified to our Cro-Magnon cousins.

The paintings seem to have come to an abrupt halt around 10,000 BC, around the same time the last ice sheets disappeared and humans settled down to a more fixed lifestyle of farming and agriculture.

## Village de la Madeleine

Cro-Magnons weren't the only ones to use the Vézère's caves for shelter. As in the Loire, many of the area's caves were used for storage, defence or protection as recently as the Middle Ages. **Le Village Troglodytique de la Madeleine** (Cave Village; ☎ 05 53 46 36 88; adult/child €5.50/3.50; 🕒 10am-7.30pm Jul & Aug, 10am-7pm May-June & Sep, 10am-6pm Mar, Apr, Oct & Nov) is a good example: carved out from the cliff face above the winding Vézère River, the lower level was occupied by prehistoric people 10,000 to 14,000 years ago, while the upper level was used as a fortified village by medieval settlers. Though largely ruined, you can still visit the Ste-Madeleine chapel (after which the Magdalenian era is named),

but most of the archeological artefacts are at the Musée National de Préhistoire in Les Eyzies (p630).

## La Roque St-Christophe

This 900m-long series of terraces and **caves** (☎ 05 53 50 70 45; www.roke-st-christophe.com; adult/12-16yr/5-11yr €7/4/3; 🕒 10am-8pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6.30pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-6pm Feb, Mar & Oct–mid-Nov, 2-5pm mid-Nov–Jan) sits on a sheer cliff face 80m above the Vézère. Thanks to its commanding position high above the valley, the cave complex makes a practically unassailable stronghold, and it's been employed as a natural fortress for almost 50 millennia – initially by Mousterian (Neanderthal) people 50,000 years ago,



followed by successive generations until the 16th century. The sweeping views are stunning, though the caverns themselves are largely empty and some of the plastic reconstructions are decidedly lame.

La Roque St-Christophe is on the D706, 9km northeast of Les Eyzies.

## Le Thot

In an effort to bring the prehistoric age to life, the museum and animal park at **Le Thot** (☎ 05 53 50 70 44; [www.semitour.com](http://www.semitour.com); adult/6-12yr €5.80/3.80, joint ticket with Lascaux €11.50/7.80; 🕒 9am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-noon & 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun Sep-Jun, closed Jan) places displays about Cro-Magnon life alongside real-life beasts depicted by our prehistoric forebears, including reindeer, stags, horses, ibex and European bison. The kids even get to try their hand at a spot of cave painting.

## Montignac

pop 3101

The riverside town of Montignac, 25km northeast of Les Eyzies, is most famous for its proximity to the Grottes de Lascaux, which are hidden away on the thickly wooded hill-tops a couple of miles from town. Huddled along both banks of the Vézère, Montignac is a peaceful, attractive place and makes a less hectic base than Les Eyzies or Sarlat. The old city and commercial centre is on the river's right bank, but you'll find most of the hotels on the left bank around place Tourny.

### INFORMATION

There are three banks near the tourist office.

**Post Office** (place Tourny) Offers currency exchange.

**Tourist Office** (☎ 05 53 51 82 60; [www.bienvenue-montignac.com](http://www.bienvenue-montignac.com); place Bertrand de Born; 🕒 9am-7pm Jul-mid-Sep, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & mid-Sep-Oct, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar) Around 200m west of place Tourny, next to the 14th-century Église St-Georges le Prieuré.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Hôtel de la Grotte** (☎ 05 53 51 80 48; [www.hoteldela-grotte.fr](http://www.hoteldela-grotte.fr); place Tourny; d €30-75; 📍) Small, sweet and chichi, this unpretentious country *auberge* makes a charming stop as long as you don't mind frilly bedspreads and floral wallpaper. The gingerbread rooms themselves are a little poky (especially the attic ones, huddled in around the roof beams), but they're reasonably priced and quite comfortable.

**Hotel le Lascaux** (☎ 05 53 51 82 81; [www.hotel-le-lascaux.fr](http://www.hotel-le-lascaux.fr); 109 av Jean-Jaurès; d €45-64; 📍) Candy-cane awnings and climbing ivy decorate the front of this family-owned place on the main road to Lascaux from Montignac. It's relaxed and unfussy, with snug, simple rooms, some with striped wallpaper and wooden beds, others more on the drab side. Bag one with a view on to the tree-shaded back garden and you'll be a very happy camper.

**La Roseraie** (☎ 05 53 50 53 92; [www.laroseraie-hotel.com](http://www.laroseraie-hotel.com); 11 place des Armes; r €80-170; 📍) The name gives the game away: the highlight of this lovely mansion-cum-hotel is the gorgeous rose garden behind the house, set around box-edged grounds and a palm-tinged pool. Inside the house are rococo rooms in various shades of damask pink and sunflower yellow, all with solid furniture, sparkling bathrooms and those essential garden views. Truffles, chestnuts, pork and guinea-fowl find their way on to the seasonal menu (*menus* from €21), and on warm summer nights the canopy-shaded terrace is the only place to be.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Montignac is on the 7A and 7B bus routes between Périgueux (€2, 1½ hours, one or two daily) and Sarlat (€2, 35 minutes, one or two daily). Buses stop on place Tourny.

## Grotte de Lascaux

France's most famous prehistoric cave paintings are to be found at the **Grotte de Lascaux**, 2km southeast of Montignac. Discovered in 1940 by four teenage boys who were out searching for their lost dog, Lascaux contains a vast network of chambers and galleries adorned with some of the most extraordinary and complex prehistoric paintings ever found.

Far from the comparatively crude etchings of some of the Vézère's other caves, Lascaux' paintings are renowned for their astonishing artistry: the 600-strong menagerie of animal figures are depicted in Technicolor shades of red, black, yellow and brown, and range from reindeer, aurochs, mammoths and horses to a monumental 5.5m-long bull, the largest cave drawing ever found. Lascaux is sometimes referred to as the prehistoric equivalent of the Sistine Chapel, and it's a fitting comparison: after a visit in 1940, Picasso allegedly muttered, 'We have invented nothing.'

### LOCAL VOICES: PHILIPPE CAMBA, CAVE GUIDE AT LASCAUX

Officially I'm a teacher by profession but I've always been fascinated by prehistory. I originally studied eco-biology and palaeontology, and for the last three years I've been combining teaching in the winter with my work as a cave guide in the summer.

In the summer season we can have up to 2000 visitors a day at Lascaux, and take up to six tours each. I do tours in English and French. The most amusing ones are the tours for Japanese and Chinese visitors, who usually bring along their own tour guide to do the translation but don't always know all the right words – so over the last few years I've learned all the names of the colours, animals and the different body parts in Japanese. It helps a lot!

Lascaux is a unique place, with over 2000 of the finest polychrome paintings ever discovered, as well as the largest cave painting ever found. It's amazing to think that these paintings were all done in one go – they never used sketches or drafts because they couldn't rub out their mistakes. They were real artists, who understood perspective, colour and form. In their own way, Lascaux' paintings are just as complex as those of Picasso or van Gogh. For me, the best scenes are the ones that show the animals in mid-movement. They're like prehistoric movies.

Sadly, I've never been able to see the original paintings, which were closed for good in 2000. It's a real shame, but I hope one day I might get the chance. You never know!

Carbon dating has shown that the paintings are between 15,000 and 17,000 years old. But despite endless discussion and academic study, no one really knows why the prehistoric painters devoted so much time and effort to their creation, or why this particular site seems to have been so important to them.

The original cave was opened to visitors in 1948, and public interest was unsurprisingly massive. But within a few years it became apparent that human breath and body heat was causing irreparable damage to the paintings, and they were closed just 15 years later in 1963. (More recently a mysterious white fungus has caused new concerns about the paintings' safety).

In response to public demand, a replica of the most famous sections of the original cave was meticulously recreated a few hundred metres away – a massive undertaking that required the skills of some 20 artists and took over 11 years. **Lascaux II** (☎ 05 53 51 95 03; www.semitour.com; adult/6-12yr €8.30/5.30, joint ticket with Le Tot €11.50/7.80; ☎ 9am-8pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-6.30pm Sep & Apr-Jun, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Oct-mid-Nov, 10am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm mid-Nov-Mar) was opened in 1983, and although the idea sounds rather contrived, the reproductions are enormously moving – especially when the lights are turned off and the paintings seem to spring to life in the light of a flickering torch.

As one of France's most famous sites, the caves can get extremely busy in the height of summer, so it's definitely worth visiting

outside July and August if you can. There are several guided tours every hour. Ask at the ticket office about the availability of tours in English, Spanish, German and Japanese.

Reservations aren't strictly necessary, but it's worth booking ahead just in case. From April to October, tickets are sold *only* in Montignac (next to the tourist office).

### Domme pop 1030

Commanding an unparalleled view across the surrounding countryside from a dizzying outcrop above the Dordogne, the fortified village of **Domme** is one of the area's best preserved *bastides* and still retains most of its 13th-century ramparts and three original gateways. Approached via a tortuous switch-back road from the valley below, it's the perfect defensive stronghold – a fact certainly not lost on Philippe III of France, who founded the town in 1281 as a stronghold against the English. The town's imposing cliff-top position is best appreciated from the **esplanade du Belvédère** and the adjacent **promenade de la Barre**, which both offer panoramic views across the valley.

Honeycombing the stone underneath the village is a series of large caves, known as the **grottes naturelles à concrétions** (adult/student/5-14yr incl museum €6.50/5.50/4; ☎ 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-noon & 2-6pm Sep-Dec & Feb-Jun), decorated with some of the most ornate stalactites and stalagmites in the Dordogne. A lift whisks you back

up at the end of the 30-minute tour. Tickets are available from the **tourist office** (☎ 05 53 31 71 00; place de la Halle; ☎ 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-noon & 2-6pm Feb-Jun & Sep-mid-Nov, 2-5pm Mon-Fri mid-Nov-Dec, closed Jan), opposite the entrance to the caves.

Across the square from the tourist office, the **Musée d'Arts et Traditions Populaires** (adult/student/child €3/2.50/2, free with cave ticket; ☎ Apr-Sep) has nine rooms of artefacts, including clothing, toys and tools, mainly from the 19th century. Domme is about 18km south of Sarlat along the D46.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Le Nouvel Hôtel** (☎ 05 53 28 38 67; domme-nouvel-hotel@wanadoo.fr; 1 Grand Rue; d from €50) Up to date it certainly ain't, but this pocket-size *auberge* on the corner of the main square still has plenty of old-fashioned appeal. The 17 rooms are small and country-cosy: think scuffed wooden furniture, rough stone walls and well-worn rugs, and you won't be far wrong.

**La Guérinière** (☎ 05 53 29 91 97; www.la-gueriniere-dordogne.com; Cénac et St-Julien; d €54-79, q €94-129; P) Surrounded by its own 15-acre grounds, this wonderful *chambre d'hôte* offers five rooms and two self-contained cottages just along the D46 near Domme. The rooms are all named after flowers and finished with impeccably good taste: our faves are Mimosa, with its sloping roof and chinoiserie wardrobe, and the super-size Blue room.

**L'Esplanade** (☎ 05 53 28 31 41; rue du Pont-Carral; www.esplanade-perigord.com; d low season €77-128, high season €85-150) This place is an absolute spoil from start to finish. Teetering on the edge of the village ramparts, it's a traditional family-owned hotel with a twist of designer chic: four-poster beds, antique desks and upholstered armchairs fill the elegant rooms,

some of which have balconies with mind-boggling valley views. Downstairs there's a top-notch restaurant (*menus* €42 to €78) with a to-die-for terrace overlooking the esplanade du Belvédère.

## Château de Castelnaud

The **Château de Castelnaud** (☎ 05 53 31 30 00; www.castelnaud.com; adult/10-17yr €7.60/3.80; ☎ 9am-8pm Jul & Aug, 10am-7pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-6pm Feb, Mar & Oct-mid-Nov, 2-5pm mid-Nov-Jan) certainly fits the blueprint for the quintessential castle. Its massive ramparts and metre-thick walls are topped by crenellations and sturdy towers from where you can see right across the Dordogne Valley to Castelnaud's arch-rival, the Château de Beynac (opposite). Inside the castle is a **museum of medieval warfare**, displaying daggers, spiked halberds and huge trebuchets. If you fancy seeing them in action, mock battles are staged throughout July and August, and there's a nightly guided tour (€9.60/5 for an adult/child) conducted by Jeanette, the castle's costumed cook. Castelnaud is 11km west of Domme along the D50 and D57.

## La Roque Gageac

The jumble of amber buildings of La Roque Gageac, crammed into the cliff above a hairpin curve in the River Dordogne, has earned it official recognition as one of France's *beaux villages* (beautiful villages). It's certainly an entrancing spot, with a warren of meandering lanes leading up to the **Jardin Exotique** (Exotic Garden), the **church**, and the dramatic **Fort Troglodyte** (☎ 05 53 31 61 94; adult/child €4/2; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, Mon-Fri Apr-mid-Nov), where a series of defensive positions constructed by medieval engineers have been carved out from the overhanging cliffs.

## MESSING ABOUT ON THE RIVER

One of the most atmospheric ways to explore the region's scenery is aboard a **gabarre**, a flat-bottomed, wooden boat used to transport freight up and down the rivers of the Périgord and Lot Valley. *Gabarres* were once a common sight in this part of France, but they had practically died out by the early 20th century, eclipsed by the rise of the railway and the all-conquering automobile. But these days they've been reinvented as river-going pleasure-vessels, and you can hop aboard for a tranquil cruise in several places, including the small village of La Roque Gageac.

**Gabarres Caminade** (☎ 05 53 29 40 95; vecchio@tiscali.fr; La Roque Gageac)

**Gabarres de Bergerac** (☎ 05 53 24 58 80; perigord.gabarres@worldonline.fr; Bergerac)

**Gabarres de Beynac** (☎ 05 53 28 51 15; www.gabarre-beynac.com; St-Martial de Nabirat) Ten kilometres south of Domme on the D46.

**Gabarres Norbert** (☎ 05 53 29 40 44; www.norbert.fr; La Roque Gageac)

Several canoe companies are based in the town, including **Canoe Dordogne** (☎ 05 53 29 58 50; contact@canoe-dordogne.fr; Le Bourg; ☞ 9am-7pm) next to the car park, which offers self-guided canoe trips of between one and five hours from various points upriver of La Roque Gageac, as well as guided trips in an eight to 10 person canoe.

Just out of town, **Canoe Vacances** (☎ 05 53 28 17 07; www.canoevacances.com; La Peyssièrre; ☞ 9am-7pm) offers three itineraries from La Roque Gageac to Les Milandes (€10, 9km), from Carsac to La Roque Gageac (€12, 16km) and Carsac to Les Milandes (€17, 25km). There's a choice of two- to four-person canoes or single kayaks, and minibus trips are included in the price. Adventurous types can even try out a spot of canyoning (from €4 to €7).

Down below, the quay also serves as a launch point for short **river cruises** aboard a traditional *gabarre* (see boxed text, opposite).

La Roque Gageac sits on a curve in the Dordogne 15km south of Sarlat, via the D46 and D703.

### Château de Beynac

Looming ominously from atop a limestone bluff, the 12th-century **Beynac Château** (☎ 05 53 29 50 40; adult/5-11yr €7/3; ☞ 10am-6pm Mar-Sep, 10am-dusk Oct-Feb) commands a panoramic position above the Dordogne, making it a key defensive position during the Hundred Years War. Apart from a brief interlude under Richard the Lionheart, Beynac remained fiercely loyal to the French monarchy, often placing it at odds with the English-controlled stronghold of nearby Castelnaud. Protected by 200m cliffs, a double wall and double moat, it presented a formidable proposition for any would-be attackers, but in fact Beynac saw little direct action; frontal assaults were far too costly in terms of money and manpower, and the châteaux of the Dordogne were defeated more often through machiavellian intrigue than brute force.

The château's main points of interest are the Romanesque keep, a grand Salle des États (State Room) and frescoed chapel, and the 16th- and 17th-century apartments built to lodge the castle barons. From the battlements, there's a dizzying view along the Dordogne to the château of Marqueyssac. Below the castle, a steep trail leads to the village of **Beynac-et-Cazenac**, 150m below on the river bank (and the D703).

From mid-March to mid-November, one-hour guided tours (in French) take place every half-hour.

### Château des Milandes

This 15th-century **château** (☎ 05 53 59 31 21; www.milandes.com; adult/4-15yr €8/5.50; ☞ 9.30am-7.30pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6.30pm May, Jun, Sep & Oct) is less famous for its architecture than its former owner: the African-American dancer, singer and music-hall star Josephine Baker (1906-75), who took the Parisian cultural scene by storm in the 1920s with her raunchy performances at the Folies Bergères and La Revue Nègre. Baker was notorious for her outrageous fashion sense and eccentric habits – her most famous stage outfit consisted of nothing but a string of pearls and a skirt of bananas, and she often liked to walk her pet cheetah, Chiquita, on a lead around Paris, terrifying her fellow pedestrians.

Having made a fortune on the stage in the 1920s and early 1930s, Baker purchased the castle in 1936 and lived here until 1958. She was awarded the Croix de Guerre and the Legion of Honour for her work with the French Resistance during WWII, and was later active in the US civil-rights movement, but she is best remembered for her 'Rainbow Tribe' – 12 children from around the world adopted as 'an experiment in brotherhood' (Brangelina, take note).

The château houses a museum of artefacts relating to the great Ms Baker, and her famous tunes tinkle out from the speaker system as you stroll around the rooms. Oddly, there are also daily displays by the château's birds of prey between May and October. There are bilingual guided tours every hour or so – ask ahead if you're after one in English.

### MONPAZIER

pop 560

Picturesquely poised on a hilltop 45km from Sarlat, Monpazier is the best-preserved *bastide* town in southwest France. Founded in 1284 by a representative of Edward I (king of England and duke of Aquitaine), Monpazier had a turbulent time during the Wars of Religion and the Peasant Revolts of the 16th century, but despite numerous assaults and campaigns, the town has survived remarkably intact. From the town's three gateways, Monpazier's grid-straight streets lead to the arcaded market square, **place des Cornières**

(place Centrale), surrounded by a motley collection of stone houses that reflect centuries of building and rebuilding. In one corner is an old *lavoir* (washing place), once used for washing clothes. Thursday is market day, as it has been since the Middle Ages.

The **tourist office** (☎ 05 53 22 68 59; www.pays-des-bastides.com, in French; place des Cornières; ☎ 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 2.30-6.30pm Sun Sep-Jun) is in the southeastern corner of the square.

There are several excellent campsites around Monpazier, including the four-star **Moulin de David** (☎ 05 53 22 65 25; www.moulin-de-david.com; campsite €16-25; ☎ May-Aug), halfway between Monpazier and Biron in a quiet valley with 160 shady sites.

**Hotel de France** (☎ 05 53 22 60 06; www.hotelde-francemonpazier.fr; 21 rue Saint Jacques; d €40-70; ☎ Apr-Oct) Parts of this yellow-brick *auberge* date back centuries (the central staircase was built in the 1400s), so it certainly feels historic. There are wooden furnishings, old rugs and flowery wallpaper in the rooms, a solid country restaurant, and small shuttered windows overlooking the town's rooftops.

**Hotel Edward 1er** (☎ 05 53 22 44 00; www.hotel-edward1er.com; 5 rue St-Pierre; d €64-116, ste €102-178; ☎) This tower-topped château-cum-mansion is perfect for wannabe lords of the manor. Rooms get more luxurious the more you pay: top-of-the-line suites have a choice of jacuzzi or Turkish bath, and views of surrounding hills. It feels slightly dated considering the price tag, but on the upside there's wi-fi and satellite TV throughout and the Dutch owners are full of beans.

**Bistrot 2** (☎ 05 53 22 60 64; Monpazier; mains €13; ☎ lunch Sun-Fri, dinner Tue-Thu & Sat) Modern bistro in a square stone-front inn, opposite one of the medieval gateways. Minimalist dishes, contemporary flavours and metropolitan style reinvent traditional Périgord staples, and the fine outside terrace is perfect for Sunday lunch or twilight suppers.

## BERGERAC

pop 27,000

Rich vineyards and flat fields surround the solidly bourgeois town of Bergerac, capital of the Périgord Pourpre, one of the largest wine-growing areas of the Aquitaine. The town's main claim to fame is the dramatist and satirist Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac (1619-55), whose romantic exploits (and oversize nose)

have inspired everyone from Molière to Steve Martin. Despite the legend (largely invented by the 19th-century playwright Edmond Rostand), Cyrano's connection with the town is pretty tenuous – he's thought to have only stayed here a few nights at most. Bergerac's cobbled old town and medieval harbour are worth exploring, though, and it's a handy stopover between Périgueux (47km to the northeast) and Bordeaux (93km to the west).

The **tourist office** (☎ 05 53 57 03 11; www.bergerac-tourisme.com; 97 rue Neuve d'Argenson; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-1pm & 2-7pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9.30am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) has lots of information on local wine-tasting.

The prettiest parts of Bergerac's old town are the **place de la Mirpe**, with its tree-shaded square and timber houses, and **place Pelissière**, where a jaunty statue of Cyrano de Bergerac looks up at the nearby church.

The town's museums are dedicated to Bergerac's twin vices: wine and tobacco. The musty **Musée du Vin et de la Batellerie** (Wine and Shipping Museum; ☎ 05 53 57 80 92; place de la Mirpe; adult/child €2.50/1.50; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-noon Sat) has displays of vintage wine-making equipment and scale models of local river boats, while the **Musée du Tabac** (☎ 05 53 63 04 13; 10 rue de l'Ancien Port; adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Fri year-round, 2-6pm Sat & Sun Mar-Nov, 2-6pm Mon Jul & Aug) collects lots of ornate pipes and tobacco-centred artefacts inside the 17th-century Maison Peyrardé.

Bergerac's vintages can be sampled at the **Maison des Vins** (☎ 05 53 63 57 55; admission free; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, Tue-Sat Oct-Apr), which offers tasting sessions and sells wines produced by local châteaux.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel du Commerce** (☎ 05 53 27 30 50; 36 place Gambetta; d €39-55) This modern, lemon-coloured hotel is in a relaxed spot on place Gambetta, with functional if rather characterless rooms, all with free wi-fi, contemporary furnishings and up-to-date bathrooms.

**La Bourbonnière** (☎ 05 23 56 23 99; 15 place de la Mirpe; d €60) There are several sweet *chambres d'hôtes* around place de la Mirpe; this former riverboatman's cottage is one of the prettiest, with a couple of pocket-size rooms tucked around its wonky corridors, and chocolate-box windows peeking on to the shady square.

**Le Logis Plantagenet** (☎ 05 53 57 15 99; 5 rue du Grand Moulin; www.legisplantagenet.com; d €90) A more



## CASTLE COUNTRY

While not quite in the same league as the Loire Valley, the châteaux of the Dordogne and Quercy are still well worth exploring. Here are some of our favourites:

**Biron** (Map p608; ☎ 05 53 63 13 39; adult/child €5.70/3.70; 🗓 Feb-Dec) This much-filmed château, 8km south of Monpazier, is a glorious mishmash of styles, having been fiddled with by eight centuries of successive heirs. Finally the castle was flooded in the early 1900s to pay for the extravagant lifestyle of a particularly irresponsible son.

**Hautefort** (Map p608; ☎ 05 53 50 51 23; www.chateau-hautefort.com; adult/child €8.50/4; 🗓 9.30am-7pm daily Jun-Sep, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Apr & May, 2-6pm weekends & holidays Mar & Oct-mid-Nov, closed mid-Nov-Feb) An imposing neoclassical château 40km east of Périgueux set around a central square and surrounded by formal gardens and flower terraces.

**Jumilhac-le-Grand** (Map p608; ☎ 05 53 52 42 97; château adult/child €6/4, château and gardens €7.50/5.50; 🗓 10am-7pm daily Jun-Sep, 2-6pm Oct-Easter, 2-5pm Sun or by reservation Easter-May) This spiky-turreted, slate-topped château, 50km northeast of Périgueux, is renowned for its formal gardens and lavish rooms. Guides dressed in period costume conduct night-time tours in summer.

**Losse** (Map p631; ☎ 05 53 50 80 08; www.chateaudelosse.com; adult/child €7.50/3; 🗓 noon-7pm Jun-Aug, noon-6pm May & Sep) This château 5km southwest of Montignac features an original 15th-century moat and battlements, plus grandly furnished rooms filled with antique tapestries and furniture.

**Puymartin** (Map p631; ☎ 05 53 59 29 97; adult/child €7/3.50; 🗓 10am-6.30pm daily Aug, 10am-noon & 2-6.30pm July, 10am-noon & 2-6pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 2-5.30pm Oct-mid-Nov, mornings by reservation) A partly furnished château 8km northwest of Sarlat, it's best known for its elegant interior and the mysterious Dame Blanche, whose restless spirit is said to haunt the château corridors.

upmarket B&B, with soft-coloured decor, polished floors and swanky fabrics in a timber-fronted building in the old city, and a communal kitchen or flowery back garden for breakfast.

**Château Les Farcies du Pech'** (☎ 05 53 82 48 31; www.chambre-hote-bergerac.com; Hameau de Pécharmant; 📍) If you don't mind staying a little out of Bergerac, this château-winery-B&B (complete with its own brace of vintages) is a delight, with five rooms all finished in the same scrubbed-up style: patterned rugs, colour-washed walls, hardwood floors and the odd patch of original stonework. The French brekkie, served in the wood-beamed kitchen, is a treat.

**L'Enfance de Lard** (☎ 05 53 57 52 88; place Pélassière; menus from €30; 🗓 dinner Wed-Mon) Reached via a rickety staircase, this tiny 1st-floor restaurant only has six tables, but if you secure a seat you'll be treated to Bergerac's most comforting cooking. The carefully crafted menu only features a few dishes, hand-picked according to the season – grilled pigeon, perhaps, or rabbit with mustard – but here it's all about quality, not quantity.

## Getting There & Away

Bergerac is on the regional train line between Bordeaux (€14.30, 1½ hours, hourly) and Sarlat (€10.70, 1½ hours, every two hours); for other destinations change at Le Buisson. The

airport, 4km southeast of town, is served by budget flights from Paris (Air France). There are also seasonal flights to Bristol, Stansted, East Midlands and Liverpool (Ryanair), and to Birmingham, Exeter, Leeds, Southampton and Gatwick (Flybe).

## QUERCY

Southeast of the Dordogne *département* lies the warm, unmistakably southern region of Quercy, many of whose residents still speak Occitan (Provençal), as well as French with a heavy southern accent. The dry limestone plateau in the northeast is covered with oak trees and riddled with canyons carved by the serpentine River Lot. The main city of Cahors is surrounded by some of the region's finest vineyards.

## CAHORS

pop 21,432

Sheltered in a U-shape *boucle* (curve) in the River Lot, the bustling city of Cahors has the feel of a sunbaked Mediterranean town, a reminder that the southern region of Languedoc lies just to the south. Pastel-coloured buildings line the shady squares of the old medieval quarter, criss-crossed by a labyrinth of alleyways and cul-de-sacs, while around the edge of the old town run the hectic



## INFORMATION

- Cyber informatique..... 1 D3
- Laundrette..... 2 E4
- Laundrette..... 3 D3
- Les Docks..... 4 B4
- Post Office..... 5 C4
- Tourist Office..... 6 D4

## SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES

- Cathédrale St-Étienne..... 7 D3
- Cloître..... 8 E3
- Fontaine des Chartreux..... 9 A5
- Mechanical Clock..... 10 E4
- Musée de la Résistance..... 11 C1
- Musée Henri Martin..... 12 C3
- Tour du Pape Jean XXII..... 13 D1

## SLEEPING

- Auberge de Jeunesse..... 14 C3
- Grand Hôtel Terminus..... 15 B2
- Hôtel Jean XXII (see 13)
- Hôtel de la Paix..... 16 D3

## EATING

- L'Ô à la Bouche..... 17 E4
- Le Balandra..... (see 15)
- Le Lamparo..... 18 D4
- Le Marché..... 19 D3
- Le Saint Urçisse..... 20 E4
- Les 2 Hâtes..... 21 D4
- Marché Couvert..... 22 D4
- Spar..... 23 C2

## ENTERTAINMENT

- Les Docks..... (see 4)

## TRANSPORT

- Avis..... 24 B2
- Hertz..... 25 B2
- SINCF Bus Stops..... 26 C1



boulevards of the modern city and the medieval quays. Known for its delicious wines and a famous three-towered bridge, the Pont du Valentré, Cahors is an ideal base for exploring the Lot.

## Orientation

Slicing through the centre of Cahors, and neatly dividing the old and new city, is bd Léon Gambetta (named after the French statesman who was born in Cahors in 1838). The modern city lies to the west, while Vieux Cahors (Old Cahors) is to the east. At Gambetta's northern end is place Général de Gaulle, essentially a giant car park; about 500m to the south is place François Mitterrand and the tourist office, currently the focus of a major municipal redevelopment project.

## Information

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Cyber Informatique** (☎ 05 65 53 66 98; place Clément Marot; per hr €2; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 2-8pm Sun)

**Les Docks** (430 allées des Soupirs; per hr €3; ☎ 2-6pm & 8-10pm Tue, 2-6pm Wed, Fri & Sat) Free wi-fi or fixed computers in Cahors' buzzy arts centre.

### LAUNDRY

**Laundrette** (place de la Libération; ☎ 7am-9pm)

**Laundrette** (208 rue Georges Clémenceau; ☎ 7am-9pm)

### MONEY

There are several high-street banks along bd Léon Gambetta, open either Tuesday to Saturday or Monday to Friday.

### POST

**Post Office** (257 rue Président Wilson)

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tourist Office** (☎ 05 65 53 20 65; officetourisme@mairie-cahors.fr; place François Mitterrand; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun)

**Comité Départemental du Tourisme** (☎ 05 65 35 07 09; www.tourisme-lot.com; 1st fl, 107 quai Eugène Cavaignac; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Mon-Thu, to 5.30pm Fri) Provides information on the Lot département.

## Sights & Activities

Cahors is ringed on three sides by the quays, which once harboured the city's river-going traffic, but are now mostly used by cyclists, rollerbladers and afternoon strollers. On the west side of Cahors is the **Pont Valentré**, one

of France's finest medieval bridges, consisting of six arches and three tall towers, two of which have projecting parapets designed to allow defenders to drop missiles on attackers below. The main body of the bridge was built in the 14th century and the towers were added later. The bridge was built as part of the town's defences, not to carry traffic.

On the bank opposite the bridge, the natural spring known as the **Fontaine des Chartreux**, dedicated to the city's Gallo-Roman goddess Divona, still supplies the city's drinking water. Many Roman coins have been found here, and the subterranean cavern has been explored to 137m.

In the Middle Ages, Cahors was a prosperous commercial centre, and the old city is densely packed with timber-fronted houses and galleried mansions (many of which are marked on the *Itinéraires à Travers la Ville* leaflet from the tourist office) built by the city's medieval merchants.

The Romanesque **Cathédrale St-Étienne** (admission free), consecrated in 1119, is similar in style to the Cathédrale St-Front in Périgueux (p622), with an airy nave topped by two cupolas (at 18m wide, the largest in France). Some of the frescoes are 14th century, but the side chapels and carvings in the **doître** (doister; ☞ Jun-Sep) mainly date from the Flamboyant Gothic period in the 16th century. On the cathedral's north facade is a carved tympanum depicting Christ surrounded by fluttering angels and pious saints; while not quite as ambitious as the one in Beaulieu (p620), it's still impressive.

Near the cathedral at place St-Urcisse, there's a weird **mechanical clock** (1997) that looks like something out of Tim Burton's sketchbook.

At the top of the old city is the **Tour du Pape Jean XXII** (1-3 bd Léon Gambetta), the town's tallest building at 34m high, and originally part of a 14th-century mansion belonging to Jacques Duèse (later Pope John XXII), who constructed the Pont Valentré and founded Cahors' university. The building is not open to the public.

Cahors' only museums are the **Musée Henri Martin** (Musée Municipal; ☎ 05 65 30 15 13; 792 rue Émile Zola; adult/6-18yr/under 6yr €3/1.50/free; ☞ 11am-6pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 2-6pm Sun), with works by the Cahors-born pointillist painter Henri Martin (1893-1972), and the little **Musée de la Résistance** (☎ 05 65 22 14 25; place Général de Gaulle; admission free;

☞ 2-6pm), which explores the city's experiences during WWII.

## Sleeping

**Auberge de Jeunesse** (☎ 05 65 35 64 71; fjt46@wanadoo.fr; 20 rue Frédéric Suisse; dm €12.10-15.70; ☞ 9am-12.30pm & 2-7pm; ☑) Cahors' youth hostel is friendly and functional, with 50 beds in four- to 10-bed dorms housed in an old city convent.

**Hôtel Jean XXII** (☎ 05 65 35 07 66; www.hotel-jeanxxii.com; 2 rue Edmond-Albè; s/d/tr €44/53/57; reception ☞ 4.40-8pm) Huddled next to the Tour Jean XXII, this excellent little hotel mixes plenty of original stone, potted plants and well-worn wood with a flash of metropolitan minimalism. The rooms are plain and smart, keeping clutter to a minimum. Most have muted colours and flat-screen TVs, and there's a reading area on the 1st floor where you can chill out in leather armchairs.

**Hôtel de la Paix** (☎ 05 65 35 03 40; www.hotel-delapaixcahors.com; 30 place St-Maurice; s €48, d €54-70) Housed in a pale-pink tenement, this friendly hotel has the best location in the old town. It's dingy in places, but most rooms have been recently spruced up in cheery stripes and pastels and the best have corner tubs and balconies overlooking place St-Maurice. Reception is up the alleyway from the Blue Angel, a streetside *salon de thé* (tearoom) perfect for sticky treats.

**Grand Hôtel Terminus** (☎ 05 65 53 32 00; www.balandre.com; 5 av Charles de Freycinet; d €70-100, ste €130-160; ☒) Built around 1920, Cahors' original station hotel is still a top spot. Most of the rooms are large and quite comfortable, with hefty radiators, roll-top baths and king-size beds, although the decor's starting to look a little dated and the suites are seriously overpriced.

## TREETOP SLEEPS

**Château de Gauthie** (☎ 05 53 27 30 33; www.chateaugauthie.com; Monmarves; d €90-100;

☑ P) This château B&B is a family-friendly wonder, with five delightful knick-knack-filled rooms, all with wood floors, parkland views and a choice of wooden or cast-iron beds. But if you're looking for a truly unusual night's sleep, ask for the wooden tree house, accessed via its own spiral staircase and arranged around the trunk of a soaring oak tree. Note that credit cards are not accepted.

## THE GOOD LIFE

If you're looking to get back to the land, take some tips from the owners of **Tondes** (☎ 05 63 94 52 13; Castelsagrat; d €47; (P)), a pair of expat Brits who upped sticks for rural France to set up an eco-friendly, sustainable, 100% organic farm. All the eggs, milk, yoghurt and organic vegetables are produced on the farm, and even the bread's home-baked, so you couldn't really ask for a greener place to stay. The simple B&B rooms are decked out with country fabrics, walk-in showers and rustic decor, and if you fancy trying your hand at a spot of milking or vegetable tending, the owners will be only too happy to oblige. It's about 56km southwest of Cahors.

## Eating

**Les 2 Pâtes** (bd Leon Gambetta; pastas €5-8) For a quick lunchtime fix, this Italianate takeaway is a great bet. Pick a panini, a sandwich or a pasta-and-sauce combo and it's served up pronto (the ice-cream sundaes are good, too). You can either eat on the move or sit in on the streetside terrace.

**Le Lamparo** (☎ 05 65 35 25 93; 76 rue Georges Clémenceau; menus €15.60-21.80; ☎ lunch & dinner) Uncomplicated Italian cuisine packs in the punters at the Lamparo, where you'll find the usual wood-fired pizzas, pastas and meat-based staples served in a Med-style dining room. The waiters might come across as Mafia rejects, but the food's decent enough.

**Le Saint Ursisse** (☎ 05 65 35 06 06; place St-Ursisse; mains €19.50-25.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Homespun cooking à la grand-mère, served in a cosy kitchen-style dining room or a walled courtyard filled with fairy lights and bird-song. It's popular for its *picadors brochettes* (kebabs), which come with duck, chicken, prawns or lamb.

**L'O à la Bouche** (☎ 05 65 35 65 69; 134 rue St-Ursisse; menus €19.50-26.50; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Things are more sophisticated across the street at the Michelin-rated O, where 'cuisine creative' is the watchword and classic ingredients are given a fresh spin by the Belgian-born chef, such as cod in a peanut crust and a gorgeous 'tout coco' chocolate pudding.

**Le Marché** (☎ 05 65 35 27 27; place Jean-Jacques Chapon; menus €25-35; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) Fusion food in funky surroundings is the order of the day at the Market. Puce-and-cream arm-chairs, razor-edge wood and slate walls set the designer tone, and the menu's just as swish, swinging from roast tarragon beef to lemonscented sea bass.

**Le Balandre** (☎ 05 65 53 32 00; www.balandre.com; 5 av Charles de Freycinet; menus €42-60; ☎ lunch & dinner) If it's posh and pricey you want, then Le Balandre is the place. The long-standing gourmet restaura-

tant at the Grand Hotel Terminus commands a devoted following, especially for timeless slices of foie gras and *confit de canard*. Expect chandeliers, sparkling glasses and napkins you could cut your finger on.

## SELF-CATERING

Top place for supplies is the **Marché Couvert** (place des Halles; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sat, 9am-noon Sun), usually referred to as Les Halles. The twice-weekly open-air market takes place on nearby place Chapon on Wednesdays and Saturdays. For emergencies there's a **Spar** (place Général de Gaulle; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 3-7.30pm Mon-Sat).

## Entertainment

**Les Docks** (☎ 05 65 22 36 38; 430 allées des Soupîrs) is a former warehouse turned cultural centre, with regular gigs, theatre, films and a multimedia café.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

The tourist office has a booklet of bus timetables, *Les Bus du Lot*, but most routes are geared around school-term times, making buses a frustrating way of getting around. Destinations from Cahors include Figeac (line 16; 80 minutes, four to six daily), via Bouziès (30 minutes), and Villefranche-de-Rouergue (line 1 or 2; one daily).

### CAR

Car-hire firms include **Avis** (☎ 05 65 30 13 10; place de la Gare) and **Hertz** (☎ 05 65 35 34 69; 385 rue Anatole France), opposite the train station.

Parking is free along the river and at place Charles de Gaulle.

### TRAIN

Cahors' **train station** (place Jouinot Gambetta, aka place de la Gare) is on the main line to Paris' Gare d'Austerlitz (€63.80, five hours, eight



to 10 daily) via Brive-la-Gaillarde (€16.90, one hour), Limoges (€28.70, two hours), and Souillac (€12.30, 40 minutes), from where there are coaches to Sarlat (€15, three hours, two daily).

## EAST OF CAHORS

The narrow, winding and wonderfully scenic D662 (signposted 'Vallée du Lot') tracks the banks of the River Lot eastwards from Cahors towards Figeac, passing through the peaceful towns of Bouziès and Conduché and the gravity-defying hillside village of St-Cirq Lapopie.

### Grotte de Pech Merle

Discovered in 1922, the 1200m-long **Pech Merle Cave** (☎ 05 65 31 27 05; www.pechmerle.com; adult/5-18yr mid-Jun-mid-Sep €7.50/4.50, mid-Sep-mid-Jun €6/3.80; ☹ 9.30-noon & 1.30-5pm Easter-Nov) is perched high on the hills above the riverside town of Les Cabrerets, 30km northeast of Cahors. One of the few decorated caves to be discovered around the Lot Valley, Pech Merle makes an intriguing comparison to those in the Vézère, with several wonderful galleries of mammoths, cows, bison and dappled horses, as well as some unique hand tracings, fingerprints and human figures. But the most memorable part of the cave is saved till last – a beautifully preserved adolescent footprint, clearly imprinted into the muddy clay floor.

Entry is by guided tour (usually in French, but some have an English translation); the time of your visit will be imprinted on your ticket. Reserve well ahead in July and August, as visitor numbers are limited to 700 per day.

### St-Cirq Lapopie

pop 50

Teetering at the crest of a sheer cliff high above the River Lot, the minuscule village of St-Cirq Lapopie is one of the most popular places in the Lot, and with good reason. With a muddle of terracotta-roof villages and ramshackle streets tumbling down the steep hillside, it's a gorgeous place to stroll and admire the panoramic valley views, but be warned – if it's peace and tranquillity you're looking for, you won't find it in high summer.

The **tourist office** (☎ 05 65 31 29 06; saint-cirq.lapopie@wanadoo.fr; ☹ 10am-1pm & 2-7.30pm daily Jun-Sep, closed Sun Apr, May & Oct, closed Sun & Mon Nov-Mar) is in the village hall. Nearby is the early-16th-century **Gothic church** and the steep path up to

the ruined **château** at the summit of the village, where you'll be rewarded with a jaw-dropping panorama across the Lot Valley.

Many of the village's houses have been converted into artists studios producing pottery, craftwork and jewellery. There's a small town museum, the **Maison de la Fourdonne** (☎ 05 65 31 21 51; adult/under 10yr €1.50/1, free with car-park ticket; ☹ 2.30-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Nov), housing a collection of old postcards, pots and archaeological artefacts, while the **Musée Rignault** (admission €2; ☹ 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Apr-Oct, to 7pm Jul & Aug) has a delightful garden and an eclectic collection of French furniture and African and Chinese art.

There are some good campsites near St-Cirq, including the riverside **La Plage** (☎ 05 65 30 29 51; www.campingplage.com; sites per person €5.50-8, plus €5.10; ☹ Apr-Nov) on the left bank of the Lot, and **La Truffière** (☎ 05 65 30 20 22; http://camping-truffiere.com; Le Causse; sites €5.50-8, plus per person €5.10), 3km from St-Cirq along the D42.

St-Cirq's hotels are seriously oversubscribed (and mostly overpriced), but if you want to stay, the **Auberge de Sombrial** (☎ 05 65 31 26 08; www.lesombrial.com; d €50-78) is a gorgeous option, with seven cosy doubles and a titchy attic room peppered around the red-roofed house, opposite the tourist office.

Even better is the homely **Hôtel de La Pelissaria** (☎ 05 65 31 25 14; http://perso.wanadoo.fr/hoteldelapellissaria; r €79-156; ☹ Apr-Oct; ☎), at the bottom of the steep main street in a lovingly restored 16th-century house filled to the rafters with curios, antiques and objets d'art. All the rooms are endearingly different: some have cast-iron beds and hefty roof beams, others stained glass and exposed brickwork, and there are a few dotted around the garden in converted outbuildings.

The **Gourmet Quercynois** (☎ 05 65 31 21 20; menus €19.90-36.80; ☹ lunch & dinner) is the village's top table, a charmingly chaotic place with a menu of biblical proportions ranging from *nougat de porc* to country *cassoulet* (stew). The tables are packed in tight, but you can always escape to the little patio to catch the evening rays. The in-house deli sells local spoils, including *cèpe* (porcini) mushrooms, gingerbread and chestnut cake.

St-Cirq is 25km east of Cahors and 44km southwest of Figeac. The main car park (€3) is at the top of the village. There's also a free one further down from where a path leads up to St-Cirq's main street. The No 16 bus

between Cahors and Figeac (see p643) stops at Tour-de-Faure; from here, it's a lung-busting 3km uphill walk to the village.

## Figeac

pop 9500

The riverside town of Figeac, 70km north-east of Cahors, has a rough-and-ready charm that comes as a refreshing change after many of the primped and prettified towns of the Dordogne and Lot. Traffic buzzes along the river boulevards and the old town has an appealingly lived-in feel, with shady streets lined with ramshackle medieval and Renaissance houses, many with open-air galleries on the top floor (once used for drying leather). History fills the streets of Figeac: founded by Benedictine monks, and later an important medieval trading post and pilgrim's stop-over, the town's most recent claim to fame is as the birthplace, in 1790, of Jean-François Champollion, the brilliant linguist who deciphered the Rosetta Stone.

### INFORMATION

**Allô Laverie** (☎ 6am-10pm) This laundrette is next to the tourist office.

**Post Office** (8 av Fernand Pezet) Offers currency exchange.

**Tourist Office** (☎ 05 65 34 06 25; www.tourisme-figeac.com; place Vival; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Jul & Aug, 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm Sun Sep-Jun)

### SIGHTS

The historic centre of Figeac is place Vival, where the tourist office occupies the ground floor of an arcaded 13th-century building, part of Figeac's lost abbey. Upstairs the **Musée du Vieux Figeac** (adult/child €2/1; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Jul & Aug, 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm Sun May, Jun & Sep, 10am-noon & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) has a collection of antique clocks, coins, minerals and a propeller blade made by a local aerospace firm.

For a guide to the town's medieval and Renaissance architecture, pick up the leaflet *Les Clefs de la Ville* from the tourist office. **Rue de Balène** and **rue Caviale** have the best examples of 14th- and 15th-century houses, many with wooden galleries, timber frames and original stone carvings, while **rue de Colomb** has several fine *hôtels particuliers* dating from the Renaissance.

The lively Saturday morning market still takes place under the 19th-century cast-iron

arcade on place Carnot, while on place Champollion you'll find the lavishly restored **Musée Champollion** (☎ 05 65 50 31 08; rue des Frères Champollion; adult/child €4/2; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10.30am-12.30 & 2-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Jun & Sep, 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar), named after the Figeac-born Egyptologist and linguist Jean-François Champollion (1790-1832), whose efforts in deciphering the Rosetta Stone provided the key for cracking Egyptian hieroglyphics. The museum is now devoted to the history of writing, with exhibits ranging from illustrated medieval manuscripts to Chinese writing tools.

Behind the museum on **place des Écritures** is a huge replica of the Rosetta tablets, created by the artist Joseph Kosuth in 1990.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Hôtel des Bains** (☎ 05 65 34 10 89; www.hoteldesbains.fr; 1 rue Griffoul; d €45-68) Sailing along by the riverside like a salmon-pink pleasure vessel, this dainty family-owned hotel makes a cheap, cheery stopover in Figeac. Formerly a public bathhouse (hence the name), the hotel's 19 rooms are small and low-key, decked out in crisp whites and sunny pastels; the choicest ones have balconies overlooking the river.

**Hostellerie de l'Europe** (☎ 05 65 34 10 16; www.hostelleriedeleurope.com; 51 allée Victor Hugo; r €45-65; ☎) An efficient Inter Hotel just behind the river on one of the town's main exit roads. Behind the crimson-shuttered facade you'll find up-to-date rooms with spacious bathrooms, functional fixtures and wi-fi throughout, although most are short on character. The frilly hotel restaurant, La Table de Marinette (mains €15 to €20), is a good bet for old-fashioned Quercy dishes; Marinette takes the orders herself before bustling off to the kitchen to supervise the cooking.

**Hôtel-Café Champollion** (☎ 05 65 34 04 37; fax 05 65 34 61 69; 3 place Champollion; mains from €10-16; ☎ lunch & dinner) This cool and contemporary café-bar, decked out in zingy colours and modern art is as popular for a morning café as a late-night *bière à la pression* (draught beer). The lunchtime salads are also really good. Rooms (from €50 to €70) are available upstairs, but the late-night noise can be taxing.

**Brasserie 5** (☎ 05 65 50 10 81; place Champollion; menus €17-24; ☎ dinner Wed-Mon) This ritzy new restaurant is dripping with designer style, with plenty of dark wood, plate-glass windows and rich colour schemes for that bou-

tique feel. Thankfully it's not a case of style over substance: the food's the best in Figeac, with inventive variations on classic dishes such as roasted sea bream and *carpaccio de boeuf*.

For self-caterers there's an **E Lederc Express** (☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 3-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm & 2.30-7.30pm Sat) on the corner of rue 11 Novembre, but the choicest ingredients can be found at the Saturday morning market on place Carnot.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

The most useful trains from Figeac are west to Cahors (€11.40, one hour 40 minutes, four to six daily Monday to Saturday) via Tourde-Faure; south to Villefranche de Rouergue (€6.40, 35 minutes, six to eight daily) and Najac (€8.70, 50 minutes, six to eight daily); and north to Brive-la-Gaillarde (€12.90, 80 minutes, six daily).

### Villefranche de Rouergue

pop 12,300

Villefranche's origins as a *bastide* town are barely recognisable beneath the main roads, refurbished buildings and busy shopping streets, but at the centre of the timber-framed old town is the arcaded **place Notre Dame** – a typical example of a *bastide* square – which still hosts the lively Thursday-morning market. Nearby is the square-pillared 15th-century **Collégiale Notre Dame**, with its never-completed bell tower and choir stalls, ornamented with a menagerie of comical and cheeky figures.

A few blocks to the southwest, the **Musée Urbain Cabrol** (☎ 05 65 45 44 37; rue de la Fontaine; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-6.30pm Tue-Sat Jul & Aug, 2-6pm Tue-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep) has an eclectic collection of religious art, local folk art and 19th-century medical equipment. The **fountain** out front, decorated with 14th-century carvings, gushes from a natural spring.

The **tourist office** (☎ 05 65 45 13 18; www.villefranche.com; promenade du Guiraudet; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat May-Oct, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri Nov-Apr) is next to the town hall.

Villefranche's hotels are patchy. The best value and most central is **L'Univers** (☎ 05 65 45 15 63; 2 place de la République; d €55-58), a decent Logis de France with passable rooms – all furnished in similar style with '80s furniture and dated bathrooms. Get one with a river balcony if you can.

A more luxurious option is **Le Relais de Farrou** (☎ 05 65 45 18 11; www.relaisdefarrou.com; rte de Figeac; s €52-69.50, d €63.50-86.50, ste €95-115; 🍷), a ruthlessly modernised *relais de poste* 4km from town with a smorgasbord of upmarket facilities: tennis courts, minigolf, secluded gardens and even a helipad (just in case you brought your chopper).

Buses from Villefranche are erratic due to the school-centred timetable, but there are regular trains to Figeac (€6.30, 40 minutes, every two hours) and Najac (€3.20, 15 minutes, every two hours).

### Najac

pop 250

If you were searching for a film set for Camelot, Najac would unquestionably be it. Jutting out from a hilltop above a hairpin curve in the River Aveyron, the town's medieval castle, the **Fortresse Royal** (☎ 05 65 29 71 65; admission €3.75; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Jun, 10am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Apr, May & Sep), looks like it's fallen from the pages of a fairy tale: slender towers and fluttering flags rise from the crenellated ramparts, surrounded on every side by dizzying *falaises* (cliffs) dropping to the valley floor below. A masterpiece of medieval military planning, and practically unassailable thanks to its hilltop position, Najac was a key stronghold during the Middle Ages, and was hotly contested by everyone from English warlords to the powerful Counts of Toulouse. The castle's medieval architecture is beautifully preserved, and the view from the central keep is unsurprisingly superb.

The castle is reached via a steep 1.2km cobbled street from **place du Faubourg**, a beguiling central square surrounded by a hotchpotch of timber-framed houses, some from the 13th century. Beyond the castle is the austere Gothic **Église St-Jean**, constructed and financed by local villagers on the orders of the Inquisition as punishment for their heretical tendencies. The **tourist office** (☎ 05 65 29 72 05; otsi.najac@wanadoo.fr; place du Faubourg; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Sat, longer in Jul & Aug) is on the south-east side of the square.

The town's best place to stay is **Oustal del Barry** (☎ 05 65 29 74 32; www.oustaldelbarry.com; place du Faubourg; d €53.50-75; ☎ late Mar-mid-Nov), a wonderfully worn and rustic *auberge*, with haphazard rooms filled with trinkets and solid furniture to match its venerable timber-framed facade. Its country **restaurant** (menus €23.50-43; ☎ lunch &

dinner daily, closed lunch Mon & Tue Oct-Jun) is renowned for miles around for its traditional dishes and southwest cuisine.

Simple little **La Salamandre** (☎ 05 65 29 74 09; rue du Barriou; mains around €15; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed dinner Wed Dec & Jan) is worth a visit for its local dishes and a wonderful panoramic terrace overlooking the castle.

Trains run regularly to Figeac (€8.50, 50 minutes, two to four daily).

## WEST OF CAHORS

Downstream from Cahors, the lower River Lot twists its way through the rich **vineyards** of the Cahors Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) region, passing the dams at **Luzech**, whose medieval section sits at the base of a donjon, and **Castelfranc**, with a dramatic suspension bridge. Sights in this region are few and far between – this is working land first and foremost, and the landscape becomes increasingly industrial the further west you travel from Puy l'Évêque. Along the river's right bank, the D9 affords superb views of the vines and the river's many hairpin curves.

### Château de Bonaguil

This imposing feudal **fortress** (☎ 05 53 71 90 33; www.bonaguil.org; Fumel; adult/7-16yr/under 7yr €6/3.50/free; ☎ 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Jun & Sep, 10.30am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Apr-May & Oct, 10.30am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Feb-Mar, 10.30am-12.30pm & 2-5pm weekends & school holidays Nov, 2-5pm weekends & school holidays Dec & Jan) is a fine example of late-15th-century military architecture, featuring the artful integration of cliffs, outcrops, towers, bastions, loopholes, machicolations and crenellations. It's about 15km west of Puy l'Évêque (and on the GR36 footpath). Optional guided tours (1½ hours) are given in English three times daily in July and August, with the last one about an hour before closing time.

About 5km to the southeast is the attractive village of **St-Martin-le-Redon**, in a quiet little valley along the River Thèze (and just off the D673).

### Rocamadour pop 630

A favourite image for many a postcard and tourist brochure, the cliffside silhouette of Rocamadour is one of the Lot's most dramatic sights. This celebrated pilgrimage spot, 59km north of Cahors and 51km east of Sarlat, looks like something out of *The Da Vinci Code*, with

a cluster of chapel steeples and pale stone houses clamped to a vertical cliffside beneath the ramparts of a 14th-century château. Famed for the miraculous powers of its Vierge Noire (Black Madonna), Rocamadour drew a steady stream of pilgrims and worshippers from across Europe in the Middle Ages, and the tourist traffic is still going strong several centuries on.

Rocamadour is split into two parts: the **Cité** (old city) and the largely modern and touristy suburb of L'Hospitalet, perched on the plateau above the cliff. Unless you're parking your car or visiting the tourist office, L'Hospitalet is of limited interest, although kids might enjoy the stalactites and stalagmites of the **Grotte des Merveilles** (☎ 05 65 33 67 92; admission adult/5-11yr €6/4, ☎ 9.30am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-noon & 2-6pm Sep-Nov & Apr-Jun).

Access to the Cité itself is from the ramparts of Rocamadour's **château** (€2.50), 1.5km from L'Hospitalet. You can either follow the switch-back staircase down to the old town (which the pious once climbed on their knees) or take the lazy option and ride on a cable car for €4/2.50 one way/return. Halfway down the cliff are the **Sanctuaires**, a series of 12th- to 14th-century chapels containing the city's most prized relics, including the spooky Vierge Noire in the **Chapelle Notre Dame**. More steps lead from the Sanctuaires down to Rocamadour's main commercial thoroughfare, the **Grande Rue**, crammed (just as in the pilgrims' day) with souvenir shops and touristy restaurants. One of the city's original medieval gateways can be seen at the street's far end.

You'd be better off giving the overpriced hotels and restaurants around Rocamadour a wide berth – prices for even the dingiest room skyrocket in summer, and most hotels are booked out well in advance by coach parties.

### Gouffre de Padirac

The sparkling subterranean caverns of the **Gouffre de Padirac** (☎ 05 65 33 64 56; www.gouffre-de-padirac.com; adult/4-12yr €8.70/5.50; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Jul, 8.30am-6.30pm Aug, 10am-5pm Sep-mid-Nov, 9.30am-5.30pm mid-Mar-Jun) are among the most breathtaking in France. Discovered in 1889, the cave's navigable river, 103m below ground level, is reached through a 75m-deep, 33m-wide chasm. Boat pilots ferry visitors along 1km of the subterranean waterway, visiting a series of glorious floodlit caverns en route, including the soaring **Salle de Grand Dôme** and

the **Lac des Grands Gours**, a glittering 27m-wide subterranean lake. The cave is 15km northeast of Rocamadour.

### Château de Castelnaud-Bretenoux

Not to be confused with the Château de Castelnaud (p636), Castelnaud-Bretenoux (☎ 05 65 10 98 00; adult/18-25yr/under 18yr €6.50/4.50/free; 🕒 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm May & Jun, 10am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Sep-Apr) was originally constructed in the 12th century and saw heavy action during the Hundred Years War, before being redeveloped in the Middle Ages following the advent of new forms of artillery. The castle is laid out around a roughly triangular courtyard, with stout towers linked by ramparts and bulwarks. Most of the rooms open to visitors date from the 17th and 18th centuries, when the castle was mainly used as a residential home rather than a defensive fortress. Having fallen into disrepair in the 19th century, the castle was refurbished by a Parisian opera singer, Jean Mouliérat, before being gifted to the state in 1932. The castle is about 5km south of Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne along the D940.

### Carennac

pop 370

A jumble of amber houses and brick cottages make up tiny Carennac, beautifully nestled on the left bank of the Dordogne. The village's main landmark is the 16th-century **Château du Doyen**, which now houses a heritage centre, **L'Espace Patrimoine** (☎ 05 65 33 81 36; patrimoine-vallee-dordogne@wanadoo.fr; admission free; 🕒 10am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Fri Apr-Jun, Tue-Sun Jul-Sep), showcasing

the art and history of the region. Above is the square **Tour de Télémaque**, named after the hero of Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, written here in 1699.

Just inside the castle gateway is the **priory** and the Romanesque **Église St-Pierre**, with another remarkable Romanesque tympanum of Christ in majesty, similar in style to those in Cahors (p641) and Beaulieu (p620). Just off the **doître** (adult/child €2.50/0.80), which was heavily damaged in the Revolution, is a remarkable, late-15th-century **Mise au Tombeau** (Statue of the Entombment), once vividly painted. The church's opening hours are the same as those of the **tourist office** (☎ 05 65 10 97 01; ot.intercom.carennac@wanadoo.fr; 🕒 10am-7pm mid-Jun-Sep, 10am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 2-6pm Sun Oct-mid-Jun) next door.

**La Petite Vigne** (☎ 05 65 50 23 84; www.lapetitevigne-carennac.com; d €65), a boutique B&B on the edge of the village, is a real find. Crisp cotton sheets, pine furniture, designer wallpaper and carefully chosen colour accents distinguish the gleaming rooms, all lodged inside a solid shuttered house. There's a back garden for breakfast or home-cooked summer suppers (mains €12 to €20), served Friday to Sunday.

**Hôtel Fenelon** (☎ 05 65 10 96 46; www.hotel-fenelon.com; s €48-56, d €52-66; 🍷) has flower-filled hanging baskets and stripy awnings that evoke the feel of an Alsatian summer house. The rooms are fairly unremarkable (think pink-tiled bathrooms, flowery bedspreads and sunflower-coloured walls), but the pricier ones have top-notch views over the river and the tree-covered Île Calypso. Half-board at the downstairs restaurant is particularly good value (menus €22.50, €31 and €41).

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