

THE WALKING PARTY

ITINERARY FOR A WEEK OF FRENCH COOKING

Distance: 20km Walking: easy afternoons



This is not a cooking course. It is just for you to have fun in the week cooking with four different French chefs and Diana and James. There is much hands on cooking to do and demonstrations to watch, all with the freshest of vegetables and farmyard meats and all taking place in the gastronomic heart of France. You will touch on haute cuisine and nouvelle cuisine and learn for instance how to work with simple base food like crème brûlée and mousse and turn them into totally different and exotic dishes by the simplest of ways. There is little walking to do. It is really just to work up an appetite.

Day 1 After flying in to Toulouse airport you will be met in the afternoon by James and Diana and driven to a beautiful chateau sitting nestled around a central courtyard in the woods and, vineyards of the Dordogne. Diana and James will be your hosts. You will spend the next three nights in the comfort of French chateau life. All bedrooms have bathrooms en suite. There is a swimming pool though this may be closed in October!

Day 2 We drive to a local market in the town of Issigeac to pick up some fresh produce to cook with Pascale in the chateau kitchen, Pascale will show us just why French cuisine is one of the best in the world. Chopping, slicing, sewing, wrapping and using her very best savoir faire with the fresh local produce, she will prepare the evenings dinner with us. We will also prepare lunch at the same time. Lunch will be at the chateau. In the afternoon we will visit a vineyard in a beautiful landscape to taste and buy some beautiful dry semillon white. We will drink this on our first night. It is my favourite white!

Day 3 A quick picnic preparation in the chateau kitchen before we set off on foot for a walk to a famous vineyard to see just how well they make wines here in the *appellation* of Saussignac. Fabulous red, white and sweet white come from this domaine. It is owned by Patricia Atkinson and if you want to see how she set it all up then do refer to our reading list. We then return to the chateau to prepare a good picnic to eat in the courtyard. We will walk to Saussignac before returning to the chateau. A visit to Chateau Terre Vielle for those interested. We will have a tour of the vineyard and a wine tasting. Pecharmant red is very

close to Bordeaux in grape variety and we will see the extraordinary collection of pre-historic flint chip tools that have been collected over the years from the vineyard. It shows that this has to be the oldest vineyard in France! Dinner will be in Bergerac at a favourite restaurant of ours. It is a delightful old style restaurant with a wonderful maitre d'hôte and a great reputation in the area for its excellent fish. *Walk: 5km*

Day 4 We set off after breakfast by car to get to the world famous caves at Lascaux. These are exceptional and though only a exact (down to the last millimetre) life size copy they are riveting and awe inspiring. We then continue by car to Sarlat for the one of the great and prestigious food markets of France. Famed for its gastronomy you will be presented with tables of *confits*, goose, duck, *foie gras* and wines as well as fruit and vegetables. It is also probably the most beautiful town of the Dordogne and on the list to be included as a World Heritage site. Its deep yellow stone and *lauzes*-roofed Renaissance merchants houses clutter the cobbled streets. In the afternoon we will drive to the Chateau of Castelnaud, a towering Arthurian style castle that towers above the river. After visiting this castle we drive to the famous gardens of Marqueyssac. These gardens rest along a ridge dominating the river Dordogne and date back to the seventeenth century. As well as its unique position, it contains some of the most extraordinary asymmetrical topiary. From here you see the most fabulous Dordognais scenery of towering castles and small river ports. After your walk around the gardens we will drive to the Quercy region of France. You will stay in a beautifully restored Quercy Manor House where you will spend our last four nights. All bedrooms with bathrooms en suite.

Day 5 After breakfast and a short circuitous walk, our chef and host, Bernard will be showing us how, from the simple base of a *crème brûlée* for example, you can have such diversity of presentation and of flavours. A chance to see a master chef at work. Local flavourings of lavender and saffron will be used as well as many others to help put his theory into effect. The results of this meeting will be sampled in the evening at dinner. We drive then to Château Figeac, a fifteenth century château belonging to one of the oldest families of the region where we will enjoy one of Diana's sumptuous picnics. After a long and leisurely lunch we will visit a small unknown frescoed church. Then return to the manor house.

Walk: 3km

Day 6 After breakfast we drive to Prayssac for a charming market before continuing to Lario, the home of James and Diana. Here we will talk about the versatility of the *magret*. This is the breast of the fatted duck and is an excellent and tender 'cut' of meat. We will show you some of the different ways it is enjoyed here in South West France. Lunch will be on the terrace with the *magret* and assorted salads and wines. In the afternoon we will walk to a small former local lavender distillery and see how this ancient culture existed here. There were many distilleries in the Quercy once upon a time but now only three remain. We then return to the manor house. *Walk: 6km*



Day 7 Charles de Gaulle said that France had three hundred and sixty five different cheeses and how on earth was he expected to govern a country with so many different cheeses. Well we will look this morning at several of these wonders and what wines and breads compliment their flavours. Goat, ewe and cow from smelly to mild will all come under scrutiny. Firstly though Madame Lasfargues will come and help us cook cheese soufflés for lunch on the terrace looking down to the distant hilltop bastide of Lauzerte. In the afternoon we will take a walk to gain an appetite for the evenings' dinner and then return to Lario for the last demonstration of the week. This is quite a theatrical affair and Christiane will be there to show us how the local pastry 'Pastis' is made. After this we return to the manor house for the farewell dinner. *6km*

Day 8 Return to Toulouse airport.



Note: The itinerary is subject to change according to local conditions. All mileages shown are approximate.