

discover

Sharing our love for France's spectacular waterways



Bordeaux

Fruitful orchards, picturesque villages, buzzing cities,
designer shopping and world renowned wines

Barging in Bordeaux

YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE PERFECT CANAL CRUISE

- **Why choose Bordeaux**
- **Canal de Garonne**
- **Produce, cuisine & wine**
- **Top spots**
- **When to go**
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Would it be the wine, or the climate, or the fruitful orchards, or the picturesque villages? Aquitaine, bordered by the Pyrenees and the Atlantic in the southwest of France, has it all.

The stunning city of Bordeaux, the regional capital and second only to Paris, lies on the crescent-shaped banks of the river Garonne, forever associated with some of the best wines in the world. Just to whet your appetite, it has the biggest shopping area in Europe, around the Rue St Catherine, and the stunning old quarter has UNESCO World Heritage status.

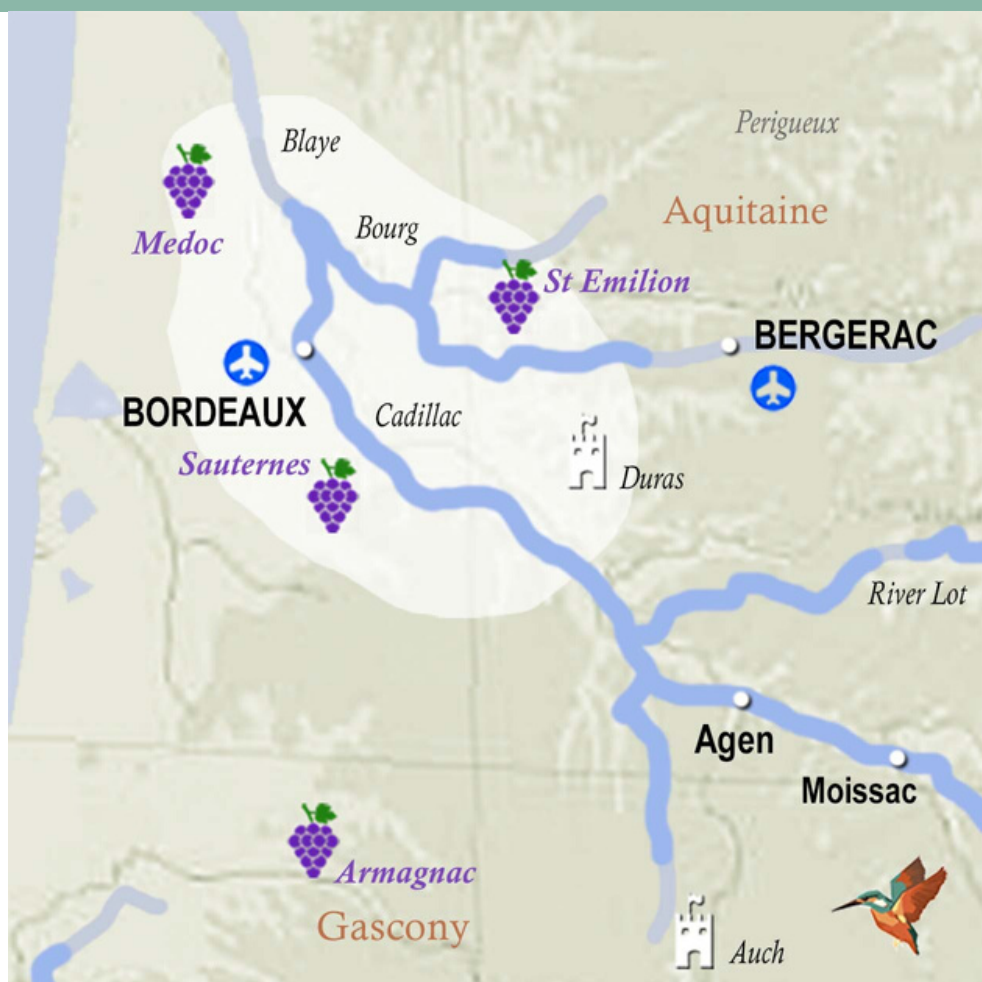
Ruth & the team



THE CANAL DE GARONNE

The Canal de Garonne could be described as the little sister of the Canal du Midi and together they have recently been re-classified as the Canal des Deux Mers. It is possible to start at Sète on the Mediterranean coast and navigate all the way to Bordeaux on the Atlantic Coast.

The Canal de Garonne picks up where the Midi finishes, in the 'Rose City' of Toulouse, and was completed in 1856. There are 193 kilometres, 53 locks and 83 bridges along its length (and that doesn't include the Canal du Montech, a small spur which branches down to Montauban, birthplace of the painter Georges Ingres).



Why visit?

SCENERY & CLIMATE

- **Fruitful climate**
- **Changing scenery**
- **Flavourful history**
- **Local produce & cuisine**
- **World renowned wines**

The countryside around Bordeaux is full of sandy pine forests packed with atmosphere. As you progress eastwards, the scenery changes and the famous vineyards give way to orchards producing apples, pears and particularly Entep lums, against a backdrop of rolling hills of the lushest green – it's a benign landscape, with a climate to match.

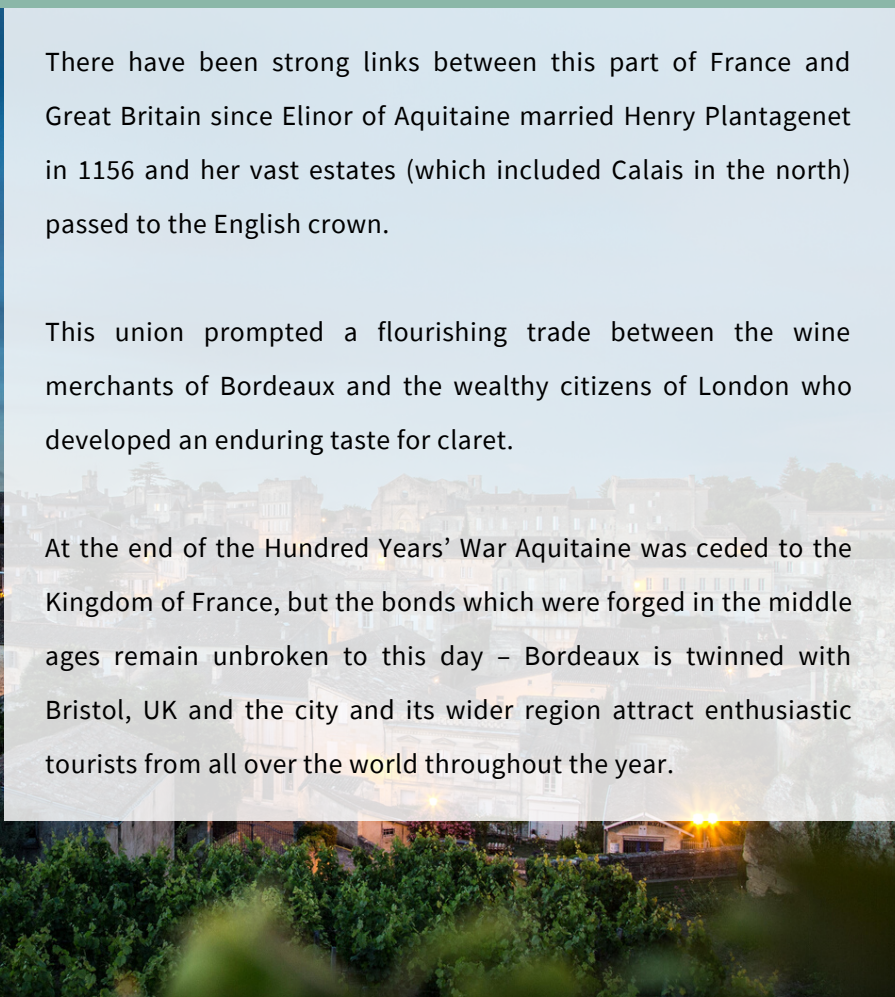
Because of its coastal location Aquitaine benefits from the Gulf Stream, giving it mild winters and summer temperatures which average 25° with 2,200 sunshine hours a year, so you're bound to catch a few rays while you're there.

FLAVOURFUL HISTORY

There have been strong links between this part of France and Great Britain since Elinor of Aquitaine married Henry Plantagenet in 1156 and her vast estates (which included Calais in the north) passed to the English crown.

This union prompted a flourishing trade between the wine merchants of Bordeaux and the wealthy citizens of London who developed an enduring taste for claret.

At the end of the Hundred Years' War Aquitaine was ceded to the Kingdom of France, but the bonds which were forged in the middle ages remain unbroken to this day – Bordeaux is twinned with Bristol, UK and the city and its wider region attract enthusiastic tourists from all over the world throughout the year.



FRESH INGREDIENTS. GOURMET CUISINE.

It's easy to detect some Spanish influence in Aquitaine cuisine: the cooking is spicy with an emphasis on seafood. Local specialities include eel alevins with garlic and parsley, lamprey a la Bordelaise (simmered in red wine) as well as foie gras, milk-fed lamb and asparagus.

Do try some Canneles, a distinctive sponge cake made with aged rum and vanilla. Bordeaux was once a major port for rum and spices from the Caribbean, a link that's still evident in the menus around the region.

If you like fossicking in French markets, we recommend the Marché du Capucins in Bordeaux which is open every morning, except Monday, offering a shortcut to gastronomic heaven.

Heading eastwards along the Canal de Garonne, Agen is an essential foodie stop, evidenced by top British chef Rick Stein calling in there for his television series *French Odyssey* to cook up a storm in La Grande Brasserie, housed in (of all unlikely places) the local railway station. It's also home of the famous Agen prune, exported worldwide.



DON'T FORGET THE WINE

Over 700 million bottles of Bordeaux wine are produced annually – quite a statistic – under the auspices of 54 different appellations, with Graves dominating upstream of Bordeaux and Malbec dominating downstream. The vast majority of wine produced is red, although the sweet white Sauternes wine is much admired and the sparkling white Crémant de Bordeaux is popular too.

Left Bank – the Médoc has been producing wine since the Roman age and these days there are 8 appellations growing mostly Cabernet Sauvignon grapes on the left bank where Premier Cru wines sell for as much as 1000\$ per bottle, with châteaux such as Lafitte Rothschild, Margaux and Mouton Rothschild commanding dizzyingly high prices. Many of the estates are massive, with over 100 hectares set to vines.

Right Bank – a larger and more diverse area, famous names here include Pomerol and St Emilion and the dominant grapes are Merlot and Cabernet Franc. In contrast to the left bank growers, wines from the right bank are produced from estates of around five hectares.

It's perfectly OK for you to turn up at the château gates yourself for a tasting but if you fancy some guiding expertise, then a number of companies run wine tours out of Bordeaux, including Bordovino, who even offer vineyard tours by bike.



Top spots to stop

CANAL DE GARONNE

- **Agen**
- **Bordeaux**
- **Buzet**
- **Mas d'Agenais**
- **Moissac**
- **Montech**
- **Toulouse**

Agen

There's an amazing approach to the town, by means of an aqueduct, which carries the Canal de Garonne across the river of the same name.

As well as the Rick Stein association and more opportunities to buy prunes than you ever thought you'd need, what we like best about the town is its market, which is held in the centre (check out the pretty fountain and the amply proportioned sculptures by Jean Louis Toutain) on Wednesdays and Sundays.



CANAL DE GARONNE

Bordeaux

Bordeaux is a buzzing city that with its well preserved noble façades and sweeping riverside promenade is, as declared Queen Elizabeth II on her last visit, the 'essence of elegance'. Now with an excellent tram system to scoot you around, discovering the treasures of the city is easier than ever. Don't miss...

Le Bus de l'Art Contemporain – on the first Sunday of every month (excluding July and August), the Modern Art Bus whisks you around the city to show you all that is hip and happening in terms of contemporary art, with the chance to visit new exhibitions and meet with different collectives of artists in their own ateliers. Your guide will be a cultural ambassador with inside knowledge of exactly what it is that makes this creative city tick. The tour takes between 2 and 3 hours and costs around 5 euros per person.



The Maison du Vin in the city centre offers a comprehensive introduction to the great wines of the area and you can sample a glass of Haute Medoc, Lalande de Pomerol or Saint-Julien in the most sophisticated surroundings. A visit to some of the prestigious vineyards themselves is hard to beat. Saint Emilion is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site and this beautiful town and its environs has been known for its vineyards since Roman times.



CANAL DE GARONNE

Buzet

Close enough to some of the Bordeaux appellations to have the benefits of the climate and terroir, but without the Bordeaux price tag, the village of Buzet is a magnet for lovers of fine red wine. Every year in early July they hold a festival to celebrate the latest vintages and there are some excellent bargains on offer. Buzet is also an important navigational centre as it sits at the junction of the very pretty River Baise and was the sometime point of access for boats wanting to cross on to the River Lot.



Mas d'Agenais

It's a sleepy little village and one you might easily overlook, but if you're an art lover this is THE place for you. Admire the elegant little suspension bridge across the Garonne, then make your way through the medieval streets, take in the ancient timbered Halle de Blé (the market place) and then wander into the Church de St Vincent.

Hanging on the wall close to the altar is a portrait of Christ on the Cross painted by the Dutch master Rembrandt in 1631 when he was only 25. The picture was part of a series originally commissioned by Prince Frederick Henry of Orange. It passed through a number of different owners and in 1805 was given to the church in lieu of taxes, before disappearing into obscurity. In the middle of the 20th century rumours surfaced that there was a masterpiece by Rembrandt in the village and eventually it was authenticated in 1962. Now it hangs in the most unassuming little church imaginable, but it is a thing of radiance to behold.

CANAL DE GARONNE

Moissac

One of the way stations on the route to Santiago to Compostella, Moissac is worthy of a pilgrimage in its own right. The port is a great place to explore and it is also possible to lock down onto the River Tarn and tie up to pontoons which offer magnificent views both upstream and down. The Abbey Saint Pierre located in a wonderful position in a square in the centre of the town, with enticing cafés dotted about, and has UNESCO World Heritage Status - the Romanesque architecture will take your breath away.



Montech

A quiet little village at the head of the 11 km waterway which links the Canal de Garonne to the River Tarn. If sleepy French waterways are your thing, it's well worth a detour and a day in Montauban at the end of the Montech canal is time well spent. The main square made from pink bricks is jaw-droppingly lovely, the former bishop's palace hosts an exhibition on the life and works of local painter Georges Ingres and there's a toy museum, if you have kids in tow.

CANAL DE GARONNE

Toulouse

The Canal de Garonne finishes in one of France's most celebrated cities: Toulouse. The city hums with life while retaining a sense of its rich history. There are architectural masterpieces galore – the Basilica de St Sernin has UNESCO World Heritage Status (although you may well be blasé about these by now, having seen so many stunning sites along the way). The shopping is sublime, offering everything from major fashion houses to chic independent boutiques, there are pavement cafés, narrow winding streets and wide squares, hidden renaissance staircases and twenty-first century graffiti - it really is a city to get drunk on.

TOULOUSE TOP TIP...

Treat yourself to an Amorino ice cream (16 Place de la Capitole) where each cornet is lovingly fashioned into the shape of a flower, complete with petals made from fruit. Because you're worth it.

TOP TIP...

Visit the Halle de la Machine situated on the runway used by the old aeropostal service, a colossal exhibition of theatrical machinery with fantastical minotaurs, and spiders the size of a block of flats. It's like a computer game come to life.

How to cruise?

HOTEL BARGE ~ SELF DRIVE ~ RIVER CRUISE

Hotel barging

Luxury barges are large, sedate and beautifully converted from vessels that used to carry cargoes of wine or wheat. Fully crewed, they offer all-inclusive cruises for those wishing to enjoy the finer things in life. With just a handful of cabins, they offer a unique experience to share with a handful of fellow guests or you can take a whole boat charter for your own party. You'll enjoy gourmet food, fine wines and a tailor-made itinerary if you charter one – then all you need do is relax and experience the ultimate in luxury afloat. Hotel barge Saint Louis offers 4* luxury, while the Rosa offers utter comfort in 3* style.

Self drive boat hire

There are three operators with an excellent range of boats to choose from, so you are sure to find the ideal vessel to suit the size of your party (couples, families and groups of friends) and your budget. Whether you're an experienced sailor or a complete novice, the canal is easy to navigate with friendly lock-keepers on hand to help.

Completely free to travel at your own pace, you can stop wherever you please. Stock up at local fresh-food markets, discover charming cafés and restaurants on the way. At every turn you'll find mesmerising sites to see, fascinating history to explore and superb local wine to savour.

River cruises

The Dordogne and the Tarn rivers both flow into the mighty Garonne and its confluence with the Atlantic is called the Gironde estuary. It's fiercely tidal and hire-boats are not allowed in these waters, but it's deep and protected and its crescent bend at Bordeaux provides safe moorings for large commercial vessels and passenger ships.

Pick up a cruise here for excursions to Cadillac and Sauternes, Blaye and Medoc, Libourne and St Emilion, as well as a sparkling cruise out past the troglodyte dwellings and stilted fishing huts of the wider estuary reaches. Visit famous vineyards and historic chateaux and discover all the glories of Bordeaux, France's second city.



When to go?

ALL THE SEASONS

Spring and autumn are our favourite times on the Garonne, out of the main holiday season when you feel as if you have the whole canal to yourself, but each season brings its own particular delights and a golden evening in July or August can be hard to beat. You might want to arrange your trip around a local festival...

Moissac - Fête des Marins

The Fête des Marins takes place at the feast of Pentecost and is a thanksgiving for the lives of sailors who had to face the challenges of Aquitaine's great rivers in days gone by. Tiny children dressed fetchingly as sailors give out gifts of bread, and the Queen of the Festival is crowned and her barge sailed down to the Tarn, where wreaths are laid on the water.

Lauzerte - Festival Les Nuits

If you're cruising the Canal de Garonne in August, check out the weekly night festivals in Lauzerte, set on a hill top 40 kilometres north east of the waterway and designated one of the most beautiful villages in France. It's a bit of a schlep, but well worth it as there are bands playing and street food available in one of the most perfect settings imaginable.



What next?

CALL THE TEAM TO GET STARTED

If you're ready to explore Burgundy, then we're here to help (yes, we're literally here in France, too).

With years of experience of both luxury hotel barging and self-drive boat hire on this unique waterway, we're perfectly placed to find you your ideal cruise vacation.


Just contact Ruth and the team to get started.


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French Waterways

Cruising Inspiration and Information

