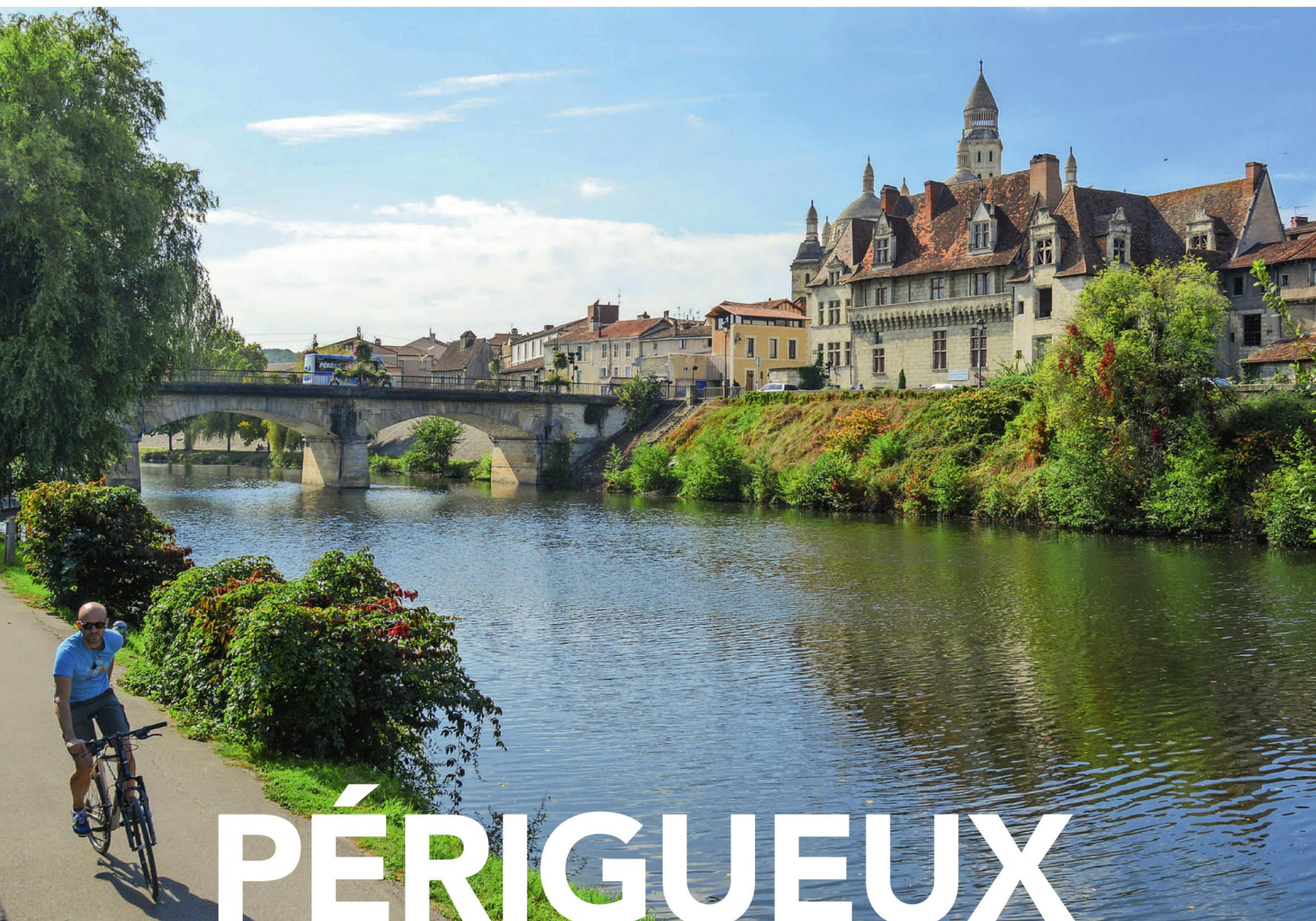


Le weekend

Short but sweet city breaks



PÉRIGUEUX

Paola Westbeek spends a short break in the Dordogne capital, filled with history and tempting treats

Périgueux, Dordogne's attractive capital, has a history that goes back more than 2,000 years and can readily be experienced as you make your way across town. To the west, impressive ruins attest to its Gallo-Roman origins, while to the east half-timbered houses and Renaissance mansions mingle with monuments in the *vieille ville*. There's plenty to make you pause and linger, whether it's

the ancient arches of a Roman amphitheatre, a charming boutique on a picturesque corner or a chalkboard menu tempting you with the region's finest cuisine.

Back in time

It's not even 9am and there's a balminess in the air announcing the start of another hot summer day. Armed with a wide-brimmed hat and a bottle of iced water, I set out for a morning

of sightseeing in the oldest part of Périgueux, Vesunna. The area was settled by the Gallic tribe Petrocorii and became a thriving Roman town in 16BC, with everything from mighty temples and a forum to lavish villas. Though mostly a peaceful residential neighbourhood these days, there are several highlights that should be explored before heading on to the bustling town centre.

PHOTOS: ALBAN GILBERT PHOTOGRAPHE/CRTNA, MY CLOUD/CRTNA



My first stop is the Vesunna Musée Gallo-Romain, home to a villa unearthed during an excavation in 1959. The museum's glass walls not only add allure to the modern building designed by leading architect Jean Nouvel, but they also provide a glimpse at the historic monument inside. After viewing the collection of artefacts, I take a moment to stand before the ruins of the aristocratic dwelling and can't

Above left: Périgueux overlooks the River Isle

Top right: The magnificent rooftop of the Cathédrale Saint-Front

Above right: Explore the city's Gallo-Roman remains at the Vesunna Museum

help but feel small. I can only imagine how awe-inspiring it must have been at the height of its glory back in the first century. Before continuing my trip through Périgueux's Gallo-Roman past, I stop to admire the neighbouring Tour de Vésone, the imposing vestiges of a circular tower dedicated to the town's eponymous goddess.

From here, it's only a five-minute walk north to Jardin des Arènes, once the site of a

majestic Roman amphitheatre. Only a few arches and walls remain in this lush green oasis, where I find the perfect spot to enjoy a sandwich on a shady bench.

Saintly space

I continue my tour through Périgueux's history by crossing Boulevard Michel Montaigne and heading east into the 'newer' part of town, Puy-Saint-Front, named after the saint ▶

who evangelised Périgord in the 4th century. The area flourished as an independent city during the early Middle Ages, ultimately joining Vesunna in 1240 and becoming the Périgueux we know today.

Saint Front went on to become the first bishop of Périgueux and gave his name to the town's most renowned monument, its sprawling five-domed cathedral which dominates Place de la Clautre. A Unesco site since 1998, Cathédrale Saint-Front dates to the 12th century and lies on the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela. With its stunning Baroque altar and Romanesque bell tower it is well worth a visit, yet I am also fascinated by the



Above:
Tour de Vésone

Below left:
Tour Mataguerre

Below right:
Place Saint-Louis
with Maison du
Pâtissier nearby

beauty that surrounds it. No less than 28 historic monuments can be found within a 20-hectare radius around the cathedral. Rue Auburgerie, just a two-minute stroll north, is lined with medieval houses such as the 16th-century Hôtel d'Abzac de

la Douze. Another must-see is Tour Mataguerre, a round tower dating to the 15th century and the only remaining structure of the walls that once protected the city.

Walking towards Rue Limogeanne, I notice a slight change, both in architecture and atmosphere. Here, the townscape is characterised by stately Renaissance mansions built with white limestone found in the region's chalky soils. Starting in the 16th century, wealthy merchants settled on this street, bringing prosperity to Périgueux with their varied wares. Today, it still attracts plenty of curious shoppers, especially those who like to eat well.



PHOTOS: ALBAN GILBERT PHOTOGRAPHE/CRINA

Gourmet delicacies

Dordogne is synonymous with excellent food and drink, so it makes sense that its capital is nothing short of a wonderland of speciality shops. On Rue Limogeanne I am lured into everything from *fromageries* to *boulangeries* and wonder how I can resist buying more than I can ever manage to take back home. La Ferme Périgourdine at number nine is a visual feast, both in ambience and offerings. Wood-beamed ceilings and thick, arched stone walls add charm to this culinary boutique which specialises in cheese but also carries artisanal jams, crackers, tapenades and other delicacies. Opposite the shop at number 10 is La Grange du

Périgord where you can buy the region's emblematic duck and geese specialties as well as fine wines and armagnacs. At number 14, Boucherie Chavier is a carnivore's paradise with rustic sausages and pâtés, hams that look like they came straight from a medieval masterpiece and beautifully marbled *côtes de boeuf*. I purchase a thick slice of *pâté en croûte de canard* and head back to my apartment, which happens to be just a few doors down, for a quiet *apéro* before hitting the town again. I've made reservations at Jour de Marché, right around the corner on Rue Eguillerie. It isn't just history that awaits you at every turn in Périgueux, but also temptation! ♥



Above: Foodie heaven at Périgueux's market

Francofile

Discover more than 2,000 years of fascinating history in the Dordogne capital



TOURIST INFORMATION:

Tel: 0033 (0)5 53 53 10 63

tourisme-grandperigueux.fr

Département: Dordogne (24)

GETTING THERE

The city is easily accessible from three airports: Bergerac (45mins), Bordeaux (1hr30mins) and Brive-la-Gaillarde (1hr).

GETTING AROUND

Grand Périgueux Pass

Enjoy free entrance to many top city attractions as well as those in neighbouring villages, among them the Ecomusée de la Truffe in Sorges. Passes available for four, six and eight visits, starting at €18. Available at the tourist office.

WHERE TO STAY

Apparts Limogeanne

Tel: 0033 (0)7 69 61 02 83
apparts-limogeanne.com
Bright, comfortable apartments in the centre of town, within close proximity to bars and restaurants. From €104 per night.

WHERE TO EAT

Jour de Marché

28 Rue Eguillerie
Tel: 0033 (0)5 24 13 16 79
Situated on a lively square full of restaurants and directly opposite Maison du Pâtissier, a 15th-century monument with an

impressive carved facade. The three-course lunch menu, which usually features regional specialties, is always plentiful and well prepared. €16.

Fournil de la Cité

11 Place de la Cité
Tel: 0033 (0)5 53 53 41 03
In the mood for a quick sandwich to enjoy in between plenty of sightseeing? Make sure to buy a *jambon-beurre* at this friendly bakery located between the Vesunna Musée Gallo-Romain and Jardin des Arènes.

WHERE TO VISIT

Check out the Wednesday and Saturday market held outside the cathedral, spilling onto the neighbouring streets. From November to March, you can buy the region's best truffles and fresh foie gras at the *marché au gras/marché aux truffes*.

