

Incredible Bordeaux

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Incredible Bordeaux

Follow Bill and his wife Helen on the French roads visiting France with their France Rail Pass

The area around Bordeaux and Saint Emilion has everything a wine lover could want: the right mixture of s

- [PARIS MONTPARNASSE - BORDEAUX](#)
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PARIS MONTPARNASSE - BORDEAUX

3H00 by TGV

□ 23 trains per day*



I think you could get out of the train in [Bordeaux](#)'s pretty [Gare Saint-Jean](#) and ask the sidewalk sweeper for advice on a nice red wine to go with a ham sandwich. You would get a knowledgeable response, probably causing the lady selling newspapers nearby to disagree and propose alternatives. This is wine country since the first century, when the Roman occupants decided to grow their own and export directly to their colonies in England.

Bordeaux is one of those towns Helen and I could visit dozens of times. My brother's son Jamie told me it has a great reputation for young people and we should check out the nightclubs, but Helen and I are more into leisurely dinners and good conversation than hot music and dancing with strangers.

We came here again because our wine merchant in Michigan had once run a marathon in Bordeaux where the runners dress in costume and drink a glass in each chateau to which they wobble. Larry can't stop talking about it. We didn't have our running shoes with us, but we did want to take a couple wine stories of our own back to him.

We had arrived on a Tuesday, dropped our luggage at the hotel next to the station, and jumped on the Tramway C headed for the Camille Goddard stop, which was just a short walk from the [Wine and Wine Trade Museum](#) (Musée du Vin et du Négocce de Bordeaux). On the way, we found the [Au pétrin Moissagais](#), a bakery that uses a wood oven built in 1765 when Louis XV was king and specializes in local breads. We had lunched lightly in the train, but I couldn't help entering, breathing in the wonderful perfume of baking bread, and buying a *pain au chocolat* for each of us.

The museum was a great place to start this wine and gastronomy tour. Between the displays and the people there, we learned why the British call Bordeaux wines "claret" (when the area was an English dukedom in the 12th Century, wine from a mixture of white and red grape juice was "clear"). Why the left bank of the Gironde estuary and Garonne river is a natural for the great Graves wines (*graves* are round stones, gravel and sand washed down from the Pyrenees by the Garonne river, so the soil is naturally well drained and perfect for *cabernet sauvignon* grapes). Why the right bank is different (chalky soil that was an ancient sea-bed, especially good to merlot grapes).

We couldn't get a table at any of the five Michelin starred restaurants in Bordeaux for tonight, although for tomorrow we got lucky with reservations for the *Le Gabriel* on the place de la Bourse. So for tonight, we decided to have fun. After the Museum, we went to the C.U.V., a cave with energetic ideas. On the weekend, they take people shopping at the market nearby and then do a wine tasting that goes with what they bought. For us, we had a Grand Bordeaux tasting, from 7-9 p.m., with five prestigious *grands crus* from the different Bordeaux regions served with five dishes that went with them. The atmosphere was young, modern and enthusiastic.

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The next day we took a half-day tour with the Tourism Office, to the Graves/Sauterne region. Like the trip we had made once to Saint Emilion with the Tourist Office, there was a bilingual guide, a minivan, and several tastings. Romans planted the first Bordeaux vineyards here 2000 years ago. Incredible. Sault Ste. Marie, the oldest town in Michigan, is 370 years old.

We returned in plenty of time to get dressed for our dinner at *Le Gabriel*. There is a bistro upstairs, and the main restaurant down, where we chose the *menu dégustation*, which is a great way to taste what the chef is proud of that day: an appetizer, entrée (the first plate in the French style, not the main plate as entrée is called in America) a fish course, a meat course, cheese plate, a pre-dessert and a dessert. Wines with two courses, decaf coffee after. Whew.

NOT TO BE MISSED

- [The Quinconces Esplanade, one of the biggest in Europe in a town centre.](#)

- [The quayside facades, the promenade, riverside walks and dance halls.](#)

- [The Grand Theatre](#) , [Palais Rohan](#) and [Palais de la Bourse](#)

- [Squares in Old Bordeaux with their craft shops and outdoor cafés.](#)

- [The St Michel district and its flea market.](#)
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- [Vineyard tours in the heart of Médoc, Saint-Emilion, Graves, Sauternes etc…](#)
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|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Gastronomic specialities | les préys | (eel-like fish) / | Canelés | (little cakes) |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------|

France Rail Pass'partner:

- Tourist Office: Bordeaux Tourist Office
- Restaurants: La Table Calvet, Le Pavillon des Boulevards
- Wine Cellar and tasting session: La Winery, La Cure gourmande
- Accommodation: My Suite Village (Saint jean d'Ilac), Citadines

[+ ALL OUR PARTNERS](#)

BORDEAUX - SAINT EMILION

^o
36 mn by regional train
^{trains}
11 trains per day*



Thursday morning we took the train to the simple station at [Saint-Emilion](#). The village is charming, and the very name stirs up memories of nice red wines of the past. The Tourist Office here had found us a nice bed-and-breakfast inside the walled city. In France you walk. That is one reason why people here are thinner than in the States.

At 2 p.m. we met some other people at the Tourism Office for a short minibus tour of the St. Emilion vineyards, and a wine tasting of course. Later we took a tour of the [Saint-Emilion church](#) that had been carved into the chalk hill. The guide spoke French, but Helen filled me in with what she read in the guidebook, that it was made in the 11th Century, probably after the return of the first Crusade.

Saint Emilion has a restaurant with two Michelin stars, *The Hostellerie de Plaisance*, but for us it was time for a return to normal life. At *Le Clos du Roi* we each had an *entrée, plat* and *café*.

The next day was gray, so we decided to leave early for Paris. There were a number of connections possible. We went back to Bordeaux Saint-Jean where we had a couple hours around lunch time before catching our three-hour TGV back to Paris Montparnasse.

NOT TO BE MISSED

- [Guided tours of vineyards and estates](#)
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- Exceptional troglodyte monuments including the monolithic church hollowed out of the chalky

- Fortified town

- Narrow streets dating back to Roman times

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SAINT EMILION - PARIS MONTPARNASSE

[®]
3H31 by regional train and TGV via Bordeaux or Libourne
_{ES}
*4 trains per day**

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** (2011 frequency)*