

Bordeaux

Capital of Aquitaine, France, **Bordeaux** is famous for its various wines, which are considered among the best in the world. However, it is also a very nice place to visit... for other reasons. The city itself is one of the 5 biggest cities in France, with a population of about 660,000 people, including suburbs. It is a very lively place, with large student (Bordeaux Campus is the biggest in France) and foreigner communities.

Districts

Bordeaux is a historic city with many tourist attractions. The main districts are briefly presented here, which are listed according to their distance from the railway station.

- **Les Quais** -- for a nice walk on the shores of the Garonne, a ride on a ferry boat, a stunning view over the bridges of Bordeaux, or spending good time in the city's night clubs !
- **La Victoire** -- Historical monuments meet student life and bars.
- The Pedestrian Center -- If you plan on shopping, or are looking for cultural activities, Bordeaux has a lot to offer - and it starts right here.
- **Gambetta Square** -- the rich districts of Bordeaux start north - this part of the town is nicknamed "Little Paris". There are also a lot of things to visit.
- **Quinconces Square** -- A lot of things to see in this area close to the river.
- **Meriadeck** -- The administrative center of Bordeaux, with one of the biggest libraries in France.

Understand

Bordeaux is considered a very tolerant and relaxed place - no one will bother you about your political beliefs, religion, or sexual orientation. The cultural, artistic, and music scenes are very vibrant. The city was ruled by the English for a long time, that is why Bordeaux seems to have an "English flair".

People from Bordeaux sometimes feel jealous of people from Paris, and the city is often referred to as "Little Paris". This rivalry is a hot subject, so you may experience some heated arguments on the subject during your stay.

Geography

Bordeaux is a flat city, built on the banks of the **Garonne River**. It is also the largest French city in area and geographically one of the largest in Europe. The Garonne merges a dozen kilometers below the city with another river, the **Dordogne River** to form the **Gironde Estuary**, which is biggest estuary in France.

The city center is located west and south of the Garonne. To the east are a few hills - the only ones in the vicinity. These hills mark the beginning of an industrial zone and suburbs. Because it is a flat city, bicycles make excellent modes of transport, especially as the city has more than 580 km of cycle tracks. Bordeaux is among the most economically dynamic cities in France.

There are no skyscrapers in Bordeaux, just a few tall buildings due to the weakness of the subsoil, which explains its sprawl. The center of the town has retained its traditional stone mansions and smart terraces, which is probably the reason behind the city being called "Little Paris".

Modern buildings can be found to the west (administrative center) and south (university) of the city.

Get in

By plane

Bordeaux-Merignac Airport (BOD) (LFBD), is west of the city. It's a regional airport which serves mostly domestic flights, though there are international flights as well connecting Bordeaux to some European "hub" airports like Paris (Orly and Roissy), London (Gatwick), Madrid, and Amsterdam. <http://www.bordeaux.aeroport.fr/>

A express bus runs every 45 minutes to the city center, with stops on the demand. The same bus runs from Gare St. Jean to the airport with three stops:

1. . **Office de Tourisme** 12, cours du 30 juillet
2. . **Place Gambetta Arret** 50-16-13 (devant le 38 & 39)
3. . **Barriere Judaique** (devant le 9 av. de Rublique)

By train

The main train station (**Gare Saint Jean**) is located about 4km from the center of town. Several trains per day (around one every two hours) go north (to Paris, about 3 hours 30 , Angoulême, Poitiers), south (to Toulouse, Marseille, Montpellier (about 4 to 5 hours), up to Nice), and east (to Périgueux and Clermont-Ferrand).

Buses and taxis leave from in front of the station. Catch the tramway to go to the inner center.

By car

You can reach Bordeaux by car from north (taking the **A10 highway or N10**), south (taking the **A63 highway**), and east. A beltway goes around the city.

If possible, avoid driving between 8-10 AM and 4-7 PM, as the beltway is usually overcrowded.

By bus

The bus station is located just in front of the train station, in the center of the town. Eurolines provide bus service to the city. <http://www.eurolines.fr/>

If you're traveling with bikes **European Bike Express** run a route from north of Leeds, stopping through the UK to Dover and then on towards Bayonne via Bordeaux.

Passengers normally travel from the UK to Europe http://www.bike-express.co.uk/atlantic_main.html

Get around

Bordeaux is quite a big city, however most of the interesting attractions are in the town center. It is **not** recommended anyone to use a car to get around, as it is always a hassle to park it (and car parks are expensive) and there are often traffic jams in the small, old streets of the city.

If you can, use your feet and walk. As most of the town center is a '**pedestrian area**', this is a good idea anyway. If you like sports, you can rent roller-skates or a bike (see below) or you can make your way in town using the various bus lines. A small ferry boat permits to go from the western shore of the river to the eastern shore, and vice-versa.

Three efficient tramway lines are also available (A,B and C), tickets cost 1, 30 Euros.

Bike and roller blade rental

It is possible to rent roller-skates at a small sport-shop called "Pierre Qui Roule", situated on the western side of Place Gambetta, north of the pedestrian area.

By bus

The bus network is organized around three main places, where it is possible to take buses to almost every destination in the city :

- Gare Saint-Jean (railway station, bus lines going to town center, university, and north of town, TBC agency),
- Place de la Victoire (bus lines going to town center, to the railway station, to the University, north and south-west of town,
- Place Gambetta (bus lines going to la Victoire, the railway station, west, north-west, north of town, TBC agency).
- Quinconces (TBC agency).

Tickets can be purchased on the bus, however that's expensive and you cannot change buses with the tickets bought on the bus. The best thing is to buy tickets either at the **TBC agencies** (Gare Saint-Jean, Gambetta, Quinconces), at almost any tobacconist, or at the tourist offices (Quinconces, Gare Saint-Jean).

A 10-trip ticket will cost about 10 euros. Each trip comprises up to 4 bus changes within one hour. You have also the possibility to buy tickets that will enable you to access freely the bus network for one to six days - those tickets cost from 3.75 up to 11.80 euros. Students and elderly persons can buy tickets at a reduced price.

One peculiarity of Bordeaux buses is that you can get in the bus using whatever bus door you want - use the automatic machines to perforate your ticket, thus validating your trip. Don't try to cheat — fines are high.

Avoid the buses on peak hours (8-10AM, 4-7PM), as the town center is usually totally jammed (and cars often block bus tracks), and buses are overcrowded.

By ferry

Le Bus du Fleuve, as it is called, links the western part of the city and the eastern part of the city by a small cruise on the river. It is managed by the CGFTE, and thus you can get in the boat using a standard bus ticket. The bus goes from the Southern part of Quai Richelieu, and to the Place Aristide Briand, very close to the Aquitaine Bridge (one of the must-see in Bordeaux).

By electric bus and tramway

A new tramway serves the town, crossing the Garonne via the Pont de Pierre. A distinctive feature of the tramway is that within the inner city, it has no overhead wires, although this may change due to recent issues with the ground-level power supply system. <http://www.infotbc.com/>

The electric bus, called *la navette du centre-ville*, is the only public transportation on pedestrian roads. There are no bus stops for this one: to board an electric bus, wave your hand to the driver - he will stop the bus and let you on. When you want to go out, just tell the driver.

All the maps, fares and times are on the TBC Website (in French).
<http://www.infotbc.com/>

See

Each district has a lot of things to offer:

- North of Les Quais, over the river, the **Aquitaine Bridge** is an architectural achievement unique in France.

- Do not miss the **Victory Arch** (Roman architecture), at the center of La Victoire.
- Rest for a while in the wide **Public Garden**, north of Gambetta square.
- And of course checkout the statues and the Girondins memorial on the Quinconces square.
- **Musee D'Art COontemporain** at 7, rue Ferrère. Definitely worth a visit, if you are interested in modern art. In summer 2004 there was a marvelous video installation "1 hour portrait". The exhibition is not too big, so you need maybe 1,5 hours. Tel. 33 (0)5 56 00 81 50.
- **Musee D'Aquitaine**, 20, cours Pasteur. Shows a very interesting exhibition also for children about the history of the region. Tel : 33 (0)5 56 01 51 00. The ticket costs about 4 euros.
- You can also buy daily pass(less than 1.5 euros) or weekly pass(less than 10 euros), which can be used for both Bus and Tramway.

Do

There are a lot of things to see here in Bordeaux, but also a lot of things to do by yourself!

- Have a walk in the Sainte-Catherine street in the Pedestrian Center.
- Consider crossing the bridges or taking the ferry boat over the river (see Les Quais).
- If you're interested, you can go night-clubbing or bar-storming in Les Quais or La Victoire.
- If you need an Internet Café, go to 23, cours Pasteur. The "Cyberstation" is a well equipped Internet café nearby the city centre. Tel.: 05 56 01 15 15
- Watch the ducks in the big public park north of the center and visit the botanic garden.

Sports

Football (soccer) is a very popular sport in Bordeaux, as the F.C. Girondins, the football club, is one of the best in France (avoid talking football in the city, it's another sensitive subject). Tickets for almost every game are easy to come by and can be purchased before the match at the ticket office 'Place Johnstone' at the South West corner of the stadium or on the evening of the game at the turnstiles. Games against main rivals Marseille will sell out well in advance as will the fixtures against PSG, Lyon and usually St Etienne so don't travel without a ticket for one of these games. Expect to pay anything between 9 euros for the Virages Nord and Sud (behind the goals) to a maximum of 80 euros for the exclusive Presidential Suite. The Virage Sud is an amazing experience for any football fan but be warned that everyone stands up on the seats, your view may be restricted by an impressive array of flags and they have a habit of lighting flares frequently during the match. Despite the locals being extremely loud and passionate in their support there are very few safety problems helped partially by the small numbers of traveling fans. In the past few season there have been some clashes against supporters of Marseille and PSG

but the vast majority of games end peacefully with both sets of fans mixing on the tram back to the city.

If you are a sport-lover, Bordeaux is a very nice city for practicing roller-skating (or roller-blading) and other "skating sports".

Other sports that enjoy some support in Bordeaux include ice hockey, handball and rugby. The two Bordeaux rugby clubs Stade Bordelais and Begles merged in 2006 to form Union CABBG. The club plays in the second tier of Frances national leagues and usually plays its home games and Stade Andre Moga in the suburb of Begles. Tickets for the seated stands are 10 euros.

Taste wine

The area around Bordeaux is the most well know and respected wine producing regions in the world, head out of town to visit the wineries and learn about and taste the local product that has made this region known the world over. The some of the best and most famous are:

- *Chateau Petrus*
- *Château Lafite-Rothschild*
- *Château Mouton Rothschild (Pauillac)*
- *Château Margaux*
- *Chateau Ausone*
- *Château Cheval Blanc*

This all comes to a head during the annual summer wine festivals this year held in tandem with the "bordeaux-fete-le-fleuve" celebrating the river, land, and international community.

Learn

In Bordeaux, you can learn about pretty everything you want - to learn a bit about French culture, consider visiting cinemas such as Utopia or going to the city library in Meriadeck.

If you're interested in wine, don't hesitate to visit wine resellers north of Gambetta or Les Quinconces.

The University, located a few kilometers south of town offers a wide variety of courses, from science to humanities, from beginner classes to high-level research. The laboratories are among the best in France. It is possible to take French courses there in the summer, with Erasmus students. The DEFLE (Department for the study of French as a foreign language) is attached to Université Michel de Montaigne - Bordeaux III. It offers both semester and vacation courses in French for foreign students.

Buy

Bordeaux has made its wealth out of trade, and the local economic system relies much on shops and trading halls. The **Pedestrian Center** is basically full of shops of all kinds, from clothes to art, craftworks, food and wine... If you're looking for luxury items, try to go to **Gambetta square** and in the surroundings.

Bordeaux is the capital of wine, so buying some wine can be a good idea... Local pastries, such as "cannelés", are worth buying too, if you're close to the end of your trip (buy them just before you go, they should be good for two days after you buy them).

If you're into clothing fashion, you will find several shops to buy very nice and trendy clothes (and they are less expensive than in Paris).

And if culture interests you, don't hesitate to buy some local music - Bordeaux groups are really cool! There are also a lot of artists who sell stunning artworks.

Eat

As mentioned before, Bordeaux is known for its red wine, and has also a lot of local pastries that you cannot find elsewhere in France (if not in the world). The canneleés are only the most known example of such a pastry.

Gastronomy has a very important place in the city, which is full of restaurants of all kinds. French restaurants provide dishes from almost every part of the country, and there are a lot of Asian, African or Arabian restaurants.

Drink

Bordeaux is lively during the day, and is still lively during the night. If you're looking for a bar, whether to hang out with friends or to enjoy a retransmission of a local football match, head for La Victoire, as most of the pubs and bars of the town are here. Virtually, all the shops in the surroundings of this area are bars, and you'll be likely to find one suiting your needs.

If you prefer dancing or clubbing, most of the night-clubs are on the Quais, close to the train station. From rock to disco, dance to techno, you also have a lot of choice.

One piece of advice regarding as well bars and clubs: the entrance is free (most of the time), but *do not get there drunk*. The crew won't let you in (and anyway drinks inside are not so expensive...).

Contact

Bordeaux is covered by the three major telecommunication operators in France : France Telecom (Orange), Bouygues, and SFR. If you have a GSM cell phone with an international subscription, you should be able to give calls from anywhere in the city. It is also possible to find phone cabins, but some have been removed recently due to their decreased usage.

As for Internet access, there are a few cybercafes in the pedestrian center, which are not expensive (from 2 to 4 euros per hour).

Stay safe

Bordeaux is not a city known for insecurity, and if you respect some simple rules, you shouldn't have any problems.

- Beware of pickpockets, mostly in crowded buses and in the pedestrian streets. Do not leave any luggage out of view—it might disappear. If you're taking the bus with a backpack, it's better putting it at your feet instead of keeping it on your back.
- Do not go clubbing/in bars alone at night. If you have a meeting with friends, meet outside the bar/club—anyway it's easier to get inside when you're a pack.
- As another general rule, do *not* accept drinks offered by people you don't know well—some people might try to drug you and abuse you afterwards. *This is serious advice*, as there were several cases reported. Take drinks directly at the counter or from the waiter.

Get out

There are a lot of interesting things to see close to Bordeaux.

- **North:** The Medoc region, where some of the famous Bordeaux wines are produced (Margaux, La Tour, Laffit-Roschild etc . . .) A lot of wine producers organize visits of their installations, with tastings of their products.
- **West:** To the west, you will end up at the Atlantic Ocean, with over 150 mile of golden sand beaches accompanied by a sea of unspoilt pine forests; there are a lot of very nice-looking little towns close to the sea, including Arcachon, sea-side town, noted for oyster production. The Hourtins' Lake, the biggest non-salt water lake in France, is located there. In summer, it's a paradise to go swimming or cycling in the pine-tree woods of that area. Near Arcachon is the biggest sand dune in Europe. Very interesting especially when you travel with small children.
- **East:** Here you will find Saint Emilion, well known vineyard surrounding the village of the same name. It is inscribed on the [UNESCO World Heritage List](#). In

addition, *Entre-deux-Mers* area is the area located between the Garonne river and the Dordogne river. It has a large variety of typical wineries and old castles, such as Chateau de Curton, Chateau de Camarsac and others.

- **South:** Lying south is the Graves region, oldest vineyard of Bordeaux, stretching along the Garonne river. This area is the most interesting for historical tourism, with many beautiful towns and historical monuments open to the public. Towns: Bazas, Saint Macaire, Uzeste, Cadillac. Castles: chateau de Roquetaillade, Villandraut, Malle, Fargues, Cazeneuve . . .

To reach those places, you can use either the regional railways (TER) or inter-city bus lines (which often go where trains do not). By car, all these areas are less than an hour from Bordeaux.

The whole region is covered with well organized bike or walking trails which let you discover the countryside.

For more info see: www.wikipedia.org

by Wikitravel user Episteme. Based on work by Timo Laine, David and Jack Dann, Wikitravel user(s) ELTdG, The Yeti and Andjui, Anonymous user(s) of Wikitravel and others. Content is available under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 1.0.