

[HOME](#) » [SPONSORED](#) » [FOOD AND DRINK](#) » [BORDEAUX FOOD, WINE AND CULTURE](#)

My 48 hours in Bordeaux

Last month, Jane Parkinson embarked on a mission to immerse herself in as much of Bordeaux as possible in 48 hours, encountering superb food, wine and people

In association with



By Jane Parkinson

1:41PM GMT 21 Nov 2014

[Find out more about Bordeaux's food, wine and culture »](#)

Visiting Bordeaux is a rite of passage for anyone remotely interested in wine. But as a region that has so much to offer, just how much can you absorb in one 48-hour trip? That was my challenge last month, and this page follows my journey as I sniff out city bars, weave through underground tunnels, skim over rivers – and perhaps, most importantly, scour its world-famous vineyards and meet the people behind the wines.

Yes, every path I took on this trip led back to wine, for wine is in the very fabric of Bordeaux's history. But just as importantly, wine is the region's future, too.





Day one

Picture an autumn day so sunny that every surface twinkles in the light. This is how Bordeaux greeted me as I made my way towards the city centre, my cab flirting with the banks of the Garonne; one second past a buzzy brocante (flea market), the next past people on Segways or hopping on a sleek modern tram.

My first stop is the Bar à Vin at Maison du Vin in the heart of the city for a glass of Château de Bonhoste 2013 – a zesty white bursting with crisp grapefruit. As I supped on the appetite-whetting wine, I lay back on the red leather banquette to take in the surroundings – and as I watched the table opposite me earnestly work its way through a tasting flight of 10 glasses each, I guessed they must be students of the two-hour L'Ecole du Vin de Bordeaux course that is held upstairs each week.

Then it was off to lunch. En route I forced myself to keep my eyes firmly fixed ahead in a bid to ignore the screaming tower of deliciousness to my right – a window display of canelés, small French pastries with a soft and

tender custard centre and a dark, thick caramelised crust. While they looked incredible, I was determined not to ruin my first meal in Bordeaux.

“ Within two hours of touching down, I'd found the two distinct styles of dry Bordeaux blanc

On my way I passed a local institution, L'Entrecôte. A steak restaurant with a loyal local following for these past 20 years at least, its famous lunchtime queue was growing by the second, and is as much a tradition in Bordeaux as it is to serve those mouth-watering canelés with coffee.





The two dry Bordeaux blanc styles are often blends of two white grapes

My restaurant was diagonally opposite L'Entrecôte, on the far side of Place de la Comédie. Comptoir Cuisine is a modern bistro that is proudly positioned next to the Grand Hotel and opposite the Grand Théâtre. For me, this would normally set off tourist-trap-and-paying-over-the-odds-for-mediocre-food alarm bells. But they subsided quickly at Comptoir Cuisine when I realised just how many locals were surrounding me.

Taking the advice of my waiter Rémy (and casting a sneaky glance around at my neighbours' tables), I opted for the three-course set lunch of tuna tartare, a juicy veal chop and a pot of creamy chocolate mousse for dessert: so far, so delicious.

Pacing myself with the wine – as I knew that I had châteaux visits in the afternoon – I sipped thoughtfully on a glass of Château Reynon Blanc 2012, the wine list here having been devised by master sommelier Andreas Larson. This more weighty style had enough structure not to be overwhelmed by my food.

And there it was – within two hours of touching down, I'd already found the two distinct styles of dry Bordeaux blanc that exist; fresh and zingy from a very recent vintage and the richer, waxier style that I usually think is best when served three to four years old. Both styles are often blends of two white grapes, sauvignon blanc and sémillon, although occasionally you can also find muscadelle and/or sauvignon gris in the mix.



First port of call

Before starting my jam-packed vineyard schedule, there was just enough time to visit Citadelle de Blaye, an imposing 17th-century fortress that is a Unesco World Heritage site. Inside the walls, I toured the grounds and visited craftsmen's workshops – tanners, artists, potters. I had taken a boat from Bordeaux (bordeaux-river-cruise.com) – it seemed like the obvious thing to do, given the city's position in history as an important trading port, and it gave me a wonderful opportunity to take in a new perspective of the region before exploring its vineyards.

First up was a charming property called Château Peybon-homme Les Tours, run by brother-and-sister team Rachel Hubert-Galand and Guillaume Hubert. In Rachel I was greeted by a fifth-generation winemaker who makes a white T-shirt and jeans combination look effortlessly stylish.

Chatting at length and with some passion about her love of biodynamic viticulture (she and Guillaume converted to this philosophical approach in 1997) she told me that biodynamics had helped to ensure consistency. She believes this has not only smoothed out any variations between the conditions of different years but has also produced lower yields (meaning fewer grapes), both of which unquestionably make for better-quality fruit and therefore wine.

“ *The Quintessence de Peybonhomme was made purely with cabernet sauvignon – it was like neat blackcurrant cordial* ”



Jane Parkinson and Rachel Hubert of Château Peybon-homme Les Tours

While Guillaume was busy looking after a truckload of merlot that had just come from the vineyards, Rachel let me taste some of the (still very sugary, and therefore delicious) grape juice from this year's harvest. She then poured me a modern wine called L'Atypic 2012. I say "modern" because it did not adhere to the typical red grape blend in this part of the world, that of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and often cabernet franc. Rachel's more classic red blend, the Château Peybonhomme de Tours 2012, was full of red fruit, while her most expensive red, Quintessence de Peybonhomme, was made purely with cabernet sauvignon and you could tell. It was like neat blackcurrant cordial. They definitely have one eye on modernising their wines, but as she pours La Rose de Peybonhomme 2013 she tells me it is 100 per cent cabernet franc. "At least this year it is anyway. It depends on the year. Some years it could be a cabernet sauvignon blend, others something different," she says, which struck me as an impressively relaxed and holistic approach to her work.



A new approach

My next stop, in Saint-Caprais-de-Blaye, was Château de Tourtes (Vignobles Raguenot), headed by two go-getting sisters, Emmanuelle and Marie-Pierre. They tell me they're preparing to host a party for 300 at the winery. "It's a celebration of harvest," says Marie-Pierre.

"We did it last year and people kept telling us we must do it again, and we're happy to."

The sisters took over from their parents in 1997 and seem to have reimagined Bordeaux winemaking, reflected in their planting carmenère (one of Bordeaux's lesser-known red grapes) five years ago.

"We were so impressed with its quality, we made a wine out of it," says Marie-Pierre, talking about the Château des Tourtes Le K des Tourtes. After listening to the gurgling waterfall sounds from the barrels as the white fermented at Château des Tourtes, I was keen to see its Cuvée Prestige Blanc 2012.

“ Option paralysis is a problem – Bordeaux is teeming with excellent bars offering light bites

Made completely from sauvignon blanc, this had been produced in brand-new oak barrels so the wood flavour had seeped into the wine, making it nutty and waxy, but it had also turned the fruit flavour more tropical. Next, we compared its two rosés, one a classic light floral pink, the other a claret, which is significantly darker in colour and richer in fruitiness (though still dry).

From Blaye I headed to La Villa d'Ô in Saint-Loubès, a boutique hotel in the middle of nowhere – or the middle of vines – where I'd be staying.

Dinner was at Le Coq Sauvage on the banks of the Dordogne. Dark tapenade was followed by smoked salmon with brioche, then lamb. Naturally it made sense to complement the meal with some local wines. The salmon was a great fit with the lemon-flavoured Château Bois Malot 2013, and for the lamb, the Château Reignac 2006 was an on-the-money match – its berry fruit developed just enough to give it a smokey richness that could handle the autumnal flavours on my plate. For dessert, the poached pear was too classic to resist and disappeared in a flash.



Gathering the crop by hand still predominates in many of the Bordeaux vineyards



Day two

Château du Seuil

After a delicious breakfast of sugar-coated brioche and freshly squeezed orange juice at La Villa d'Ô, I paid a visit to the celebrated medieval town of Saint-Émilion to be an unabashed tourist for a few hours as I visited the underground church.

Cutting back through Entre-Deux-Mers until I arrived in Graves I called at Château de Seuil. Here I met Nicola Allison, a friendly, straight-talking former doctor who took over from her Welsh parents 14 years ago with her Kiwi husband Sean.

Since then, Nicola and Sean have been intent on converting their vineyards to organic. Why? "It's becoming more important for the consumer. Plus if you're nuking the place (with chemicals) it might look pristine, but the vines are dead inside."

Yet above all else for Nicola, "if you have organic certification it validates the good work you're doing in the vineyard".

First I tasted the grape juice that was slowly turning into wine – in other words, straight from the fermenting tanks – before tasting the finished liquid. The Château de Seuil Graves Blanc 2013 (Graves is just a more specific geographic location than Bordeaux) was fresh, nutty and chewy. Nicola also dug deep into her cellar and produced a bottle of her top white wine from the 2006 vintage: eight years old and stunning, like liquid apple tart and custard. It just goes to show how well Bordeaux's best white wines can age.

I ended the tasting with a hit of sweetness thanks to her dessert wine with a taste of nut brittle, Château de Seuil Cérons 2012. Not that I was lacking food, but I did start to daydream about a little slice of blue cheese to go with it. Like all the sweet wines of Bordeaux, the grapes here had been infected with noble rot, a (good) phenomenon caused by the botrytis mould, which dehydrates the berries, boosting the sugar content.

Lunch was up next, which I enjoyed at Les Sources de Caudalie spa and resort, run by the same family that owns Château Smith Haut Lafitte.



Tuck in: Les Sources de Caudalie lunch

The restaurant, Rouge, is part of its recent expansion and, while it might feel blasphemous to say it, the concept here is essentially French tapas, with extra Mediterranean magic thrown in (food fanatics they may be, but not even the French can lay claim to burrata and pesto, surely?).

Less than 10 minutes away in Pessac-Léognan, Patrick Jestin greeted me at a sun-drenched Château La Garde. After a quick tour of his vineyards in the car (“some of the highest in the region”) he took me to meet winemaker Frédéric Bonnaffous, who was entirely affable despite being in the throes of the 2014 vintage. Here I was spoilt with a tasting of all the company’s sibling châteaux in Bordeaux, because there are several under the CVBG-Dourthe umbrella.



Field of vision: Jane Parkinson with Patrick Jestin at Château La Garde

Included was red La Terrasse de La Garde 2012, as well as wine from a château we had passed earlier in the day as we sped through the Entre-Deux-Mers, Château Pey La Tour 2009 in Salleboeuf. This was a blend of merlot and cabernet sauvignon with two per cent of petit verdot, one of Bordeaux’s lesser planted red grapes, and although it contributed only a tiny proportion, you could really taste its effect on the wine with its extra-rich tannins and spice.

As Frédéric drew yet more wines, he explained how the different parcels of the vineyard are fermented separately to ensure the unique terroir of each piece of land is captured at its absolute truest.

A vintage tale

My final château visit of the weekend was to Château Carbonnieux, a classified growth Bordeaux property, where we met the owner. Philibert Perrin is a man with many stories to share – my favourite being how Carbonnieux used to be shipped to Turkey (where alcohol was forbidden) labelled as l’eau de Carbonnieux to get past the authorities – the genius role reversal of turning wine into water.

Here I was also treated to the wines of its sister property in Pessac-Léognan, Lafont Menaut Blanc 2013, which included a pure sauvignon blanc that had been part-oaked. It was fresh and light on its feet with citrus flavours, with an undercurrent of richness from the barrels. The Château Tour Léognan’s 2013 red was also delicious with plum and fig-flavoured fruit.



The Pessac-Léognan château is an embodiment of the Bordeaux wine tradition

Back in the city, there was just time for a sneaky bite to eat before the late-night flight back to London. Be warned that option paralysis is a problem you will encounter in Bordeaux for this sort of thing: the city is teeming with excellent bars offering light bites. I went a bit bohemian on this occasion and visited [Le Wine Bar](#), run by a talkative Venetian called Giancarlo, and it was tempting to go off-piste. But I wanted one final flourish of authentic Bordeaux so chose a glass of [Château Ferran Blanc](#) to accompany my cheese and charcuterie platter.

Heading through the city to the airport, I looked longingly through the windows of bars I could have visited, such as [Belle Campagne](#) or the romantic [Heureux Comme Alexandre](#), earmarking them for the next time I'm in town.

On the flight home I reflected happily that my wine wish list was complete: crisp whites, richer whites, dry and light rosés, dry and dark rosés, modern reds, classic reds and dessert wines – I felt completely fulfilled. It really is possible to “do” Bordeaux in 48 hours, as long as you don't mind an itinerary packed with delicious food, great people and excellent everyday Bordeaux wines. I know I certainly didn't.

