



- Sleeps 8 in 4 bedrooms
- 2 Bathrooms
- Gas central heating
- Woodburner
- Barbeque
- River 3 miles
- Cycling/walking
- Wireless broadband
- Fruit trees and vines
- Pergola
- Terrace
- Forest
- Wildlife
- Bar in village

## **Les Vignasses**

### **Saint Julien de Bourdeilles**

A converted stone-built barn near Brantôme in the Dordogne département of South-West France.

Saint Julien-de-Bourdeilles is a small village of about 100 people set in the hills above the Dronne valley in the north of the Dordogne département. The Dordogne, also known as the Périgord, is part of the south-west region of Aquitaine. Looking at a map of France, if you go down the west coast to Bordeaux and “in a bit”, you should find Périgueux, the “county town” of the Dordogne. We are about 18 miles to the north. St Julien is around 3 miles from Bourdeilles and 5 miles from Brantôme. Brantôme is a delightful small town set on an island in the river Dronne and is described in at least one guide book as ‘one of the most attractive small towns in France’. Bourdeilles also features prominently in guidebooks and has a very fine chateau.

Our house is a converted barn on the southern outskirts of the village and is built of stone under a canal (or Roman) tile roof. We found the date of 17 septembre 1756 carved on a rafter. A friend and I bought the redundant barn in 1989 for our families to share (we have since bought his share) and we tried to convert it sympathetically, with the emphasis on comfort and practicality rather than luxury. The building is around 45 feet by 30 and we have converted about half of it for accommodation, leaving the rest for canoes, bicycles, etc. Downstairs is a large, simply but comfortably-furnished room that serves as kitchen, dining and sitting room, and also a shower room with toilet and washbasin. Upstairs are four bedrooms (one with a 5ft double, 2 with twin beds and a small room with bunk beds) and a bathroom with toilet and bidet.

Outside, there is a terrace along the front of the sitting room (which is ideal for playing boules) with a pergola over one end. Wisteria covers the pergola in the summer, meaning you should always be able to find some shade, and the house stays comfortably cool in the hottest weather (keep the shutters and windows closed). There is a selection of outdoor furniture and a barbecue.

For heating in the winter, there is a very efficient woodburning stove with a supply of dry hardwood, as well as full gas central heating with the boiler also supplying hot water. There is a gas cooker, a coffee maker, a fridge with freezer compartment, a telephone and a hi-fi system. We also have a telephone, a dishwasher, a washing machine and an iron and a microwave. There is a 26-inch LCD television with a Humax digibox/recorder for UK television and radio along with a digibox for French TV. The speed of the wireless broadband network has recently increased (but it's certainly not super-fast). There are duvets as well as plenty of blankets and pillows but we do not provide bed linen or towels. There should be plenty of the normal crockery, cutlery, etc., a kettle and a teapot and a supply of basic foodstuffs. We use the house ourselves for several months a year and there is everything there that we need. I can supply an approximate inventory if you wish.

The first thing people seem to notice when they arrive is the peace and quiet. The house faces south-west and looks out over our meadow and then woods. Looking towards the south and west (the natural outlook from the house) no buildings of any sort can be seen. Depending on the season there are masses of wild flowers, animals and butterflies. Lizards scamper up the outside walls and deer, wild boar and red squirrels have been seen from the sitting room windows. We have a bit more than an acre of land, which we keep under control with our neighbour's help. A public footpath runs beside our land and goes through the woods. The local roads are very quiet and ideal for cycling (if you don't mind the hills) or walking. There is also a vast network of footpaths and lanes, including one of the long distance routes (GR36, which runs from the Channel to the Pyrenees) just outside the village. Some of the local paths are way-marked into circular walks..

The area is a favourite with French as well as foreign tourists and there is plenty to do, especially in the summer. Some French friends who live in the north of France and had never visited the Dordogne came to stay with us. For the first time in many years we became tourists and again realised how lucky we were to have found a house in such a wonderful place. Once you have explored Bourdeilles with its château (well worth a visit) and Brantôme (the 'Venice of the Périgord) you are still spoilt for choice. In the immediate vicinity, apart from the wonderful scenery and delightful towns and villages, there are several châteaux that can be visited and the "Grotte de Villars" with its prehistoric cave paintings; there is a very good visitors' centre and guides. If you don't fancy canoeing you can take a boat trip on the Dronne from Brantôme and get a different perspective of the town. Slightly further afield, but within easy reach for day trips are the Dordogne river itself with spectacular views from places like Domme and the perfection of Sarlat (in fact, Sarlat seems a bit too perfect to us - we prefer Brantôme!). This is the area that most people think of as the Dordogne, and it can get very crowded in the summer. The famous caves at Lascaux (or at least the "copies" - they've had to close the originals) are only some of a great number of truly spectacular caves not too far away.

Although you'll see lots of small vineyards around us, they are all for private consumption and you have to go down towards Bergerac or Saint Emilion (about an hour) to find serious wine country. Cognac is a similar distance to the north east.

For family outings, there are things like a freshwater aquarium, reconstructed mediaeval villages and the Futuroscope moving image theme park just north of Poitiers (you may have passed it on your way south). I've only been once, and some time ago, but it was very impressive.

Mostly we just wander around on bike, foot or canoe and relax!

The weather, although not 100% reliable, is generally much warmer than England. Summer is longer, spring starts earlier and autumn lasts longer.

A French family has renovated the house about 50 yards closer to the village. They are very helpful and friendly and seem to enjoy having a variety of neighbours, although they will keep themselves to themselves unless approached. They do not speak any English but the wife, Claudine, speaks a lot of French! Her husband Hervé (or usually Claudine herself) cuts our grass.

Local facilities: there is now a bar just outside St Julien (700 metres). The nearest shops and more bars and restaurants are in Bourdeilles (5km), where there is a swimming pool and tennis courts (July and August). We prefer to swim in the river at Lisle (13km) where there is an organised 'beach' with a roped-off area for toddlers and a lifeguard in July and August. Brantôme has a full range of shops and a market on Friday as well as an ever-growing number of restaurants, some of them excellent. The Dronne is ideal for (mostly) fairly gentle canoeing and visitors are welcome to use the two canoes in the barn at their own risk. It is also full of fish and you can buy a licence to try your luck. We have a range of bicycles (three adult solos, a couple of children's bikes and a tandem (with instructions) which visitors are welcome to use at their own risk - there are some very steep hills. Please look after them (mend punctures, etc.)! It is wonderful cycling (and walking) country and you are allowed to walk up the hills.

There is a bewildering variety of routes and means of transport for getting to France. We have tried most of them. St Julien is about 480 miles from Calais and about 350 from Caen. Driving times are around 8 hours from Calais via Paris or Rouen using the toll motorways (péages) and 6 hours from Caen. I can supply suggested routes that seem to work, including how to get round Paris avoiding the dreaded Boulevard Périphérique and a free route via Rouen that takes a bit longer. We normally go via Rouen.

Please ask if you have any queries. I have an information sheet that may be useful if you don't know France very well.

We let the house on an informal basis, hoping to cover the running costs so that we can enjoy it ourselves. There is certainly no maid service and the plates don't match. We like to think that visitors will leave the house at least as clean and tidy as they find it. All downstairs floors are tiled and all upstairs floors are varnished wood, meaning that cleaning is very easy. We also hope people will replace any everyday things they lose, break or finish.

Prices per week for 2017

July / August	£525
May / June / September	£475
April / October / Christmas and New Year	£400
Other	£350

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<http://www.chriscollins.co.uk>

## GETTING TO THE DORDOGNE

There is a bewildering variety of ways of taking a car to France, and we have tried most of them. The following may not be up to date and are my own opinions; you may well have different ideas or experiences.

I suggest the following maps:

General of France: Michelin No. 989 (red) of the whole of France. You may also find No. 911 (blue) useful. This is the route-planning map with journey times, etc.

Local of the Dordogne: possibly the most useful is the Michelin 4024 “Départementales” map of the Dordogne or the IGN equivalent.

I’ll deal with crossing the channel first, starting at the western end.

### Plymouth – Roscoff (Brittany Ferries)

I have never used this route but it is convenient if you live in the West Country.

Portsmouth/Poole – St Malo/Cherbourg/Caen/Le Havre (Brittany Ferries/Condor Ferries/DFDS). These are all long crossings (about 9 hours to St Malo 5 or 6 to the other ports) using proper ships with good facilities. Some people like night crossings (I don’t – I can’t sleep) to break up a long journey. The best road on the French side is from Caen (which is about 350 miles and 7 hours, followed by Le Havre. I’ve only been to Cherbourg once and remember the road as being particularly frustrating, and have never been to St Malo. On the English side, Portsmouth is very convenient to get to (A3 – not M3) with a motorway virtually to the dock entrance. I can supply routes from Caen and Le Havre. Brittany Ferries have the best food.

### Newhaven – Dieppe (DFDS)

Newhaven is not very convenient to get to, but I believe the road from Dieppe to Rouen is now good. I have a route from Rouen onward.

### Dover – Calais (ferry) DFDS, P&O

The fastest ferry route (from 75 minutes). Dover is easy to get to (M20 or A2/M2) and on the French side the motorway starts in the docks. Competition is very fierce and good deals abound. MyFerryLink seems to have taken over from Sea France.

There are also various fast ferries using this route, but I know nothing about them.

### Dover – Dunkerque (ferry)

DFDS (was Norfolk line). Mostly aimed at freight but takes some cars (300 passengers – no coaches/foot passengers and so is very civilised). Good value. Two hour crossing, good access at Dunkerque onto the motorway but unfortunately Dunkerque is the wrong side of Calais.

### Eurotunnel (the channel tunnel)

Access on both sides is unbeatable (direct off the M20 in England and direct onto the A16 in France). I have used it many times (about 50 returns) and almost always it is about an hour quicker than the ferry. To us the greatest virtue is the lack of fuss, but if you only cross the channel once a year, I can understand the (potential) romance of watching the white cliffs of Dover. More expensive than ferries but you don’t get seasick. Our record is motorway to motorway in about 50 minutes. We once spent 18 happy hours in Dover waiting for a ferry.

## ROUTES

St Julien is just under 500 miles from Calais and about 350 from Caen. There is now motorway practically the whole way from Calais to Poitiers and then dual carriageway as far as Angoulême (about 30 miles from St Julien) and it normally takes us between 8 and 9 hours. The journey time from Caen/Ouistreham is about 6 hours.

Basically, there are three possible routes from Calais:

1. Via Paris. This takes us about 8 hours including very short stops. There are various alternatives for getting round Paris, all of which are motorway and all of which avoid the dreaded Boulevard Périphérique. The drawback is that most of the motorway is toll.
2. Via Rouen. This takes us between 8 and 9 hours including shortish stops. There is motorway all the way to Poitiers, apart from Rouen itself (which is the only slightly stressful part of the journey). There is an alternative from Rouen via Chartres and Limoges which saves some tolls.
3. The free route via Rouen. There are some long sections of free motorway (Abbeville to Rouen and Vierzon to Limoges) and dual carriageways but also some long stretches of two-way roads (particularly Boulogne to Abbeville and Rouen to Vierzon).

Toll charges, distances and times (toll prices in early 2016):

	Tolls (€)	Distance	Time
From Calais via Rouen/Le Mans/Poitiers	55 €	492 miles	8:00
From Calais via Rouen/Chartres/Limoges	19.90	490	8.55
From Calais via Paris/Angoulême	65.80	495	7.55
From Calais via Paris and Limoges	41.10	480	7.45
Free route from Calais via Rouen	0	485	11.00

If we are in a hurry we usually use the first route as we find it the least stressful but now I am retired we usually break the journey near Rouen or Chartres and take the free route. What we save in tolls pays for a night in a hotel.

I have detailed instructions for these routes.

Whichever way you go, it is a long way and if you are not used to driving long distances, you may consider breaking the journey. One strategy is to cross the channel in the afternoon or evening and then stay the night in a Formule 1 hotel in France. These are very cheap (about 30 € per room for 2/3 people) and we find them perfectly adequate for an overnight stop. I don't think I'd like to spend a holiday in one.

For some reason, the journey home always seems easier.

## **GPS**

The exact location of the house is: Lat: 45.358819 N Long: 0.587513 E

Or Lat: 45° 21' 31.79" N Long: 0.35' 14.86" E (depending on how your GPS is set up).

## **Other means of transport:**

Train: ([www.raileurope.co.uk](http://www.raileurope.co.uk)) Eurostar/TGV (High Speed Train) to Angoulême (about a 45 minute drive from St Julien) takes about 6 hours from London and I'm told is very civilised. You can change either at Lille or Paris (which means getting across the city). There are various car hire companies very close to Angoulême station. There is even a bus from Angoulême to Brantôme that meets an evening train from Paris 4 days a week.

**You can also fly** with Ryanair, City Jet or Flybe from Stansted, Gatwick, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, Inverness, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Southampton, Bristol, East Midlands, and Exeter to Poitiers, Limoges, Brive or Bergerac (all about 1.5 to 2 hours from the house).

You can even arrive by **bike** - several people have! I took 6 days from Caen, but others have done it more quickly.

## A Brief Introduction to France

This is not meant to be patronising. Neither to you (who may know more about France than I do) nor to the French. Some part of may be useful.

### Documents

For you:

You will each need a passport. It's also a good idea to get a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)(from a post office), which entitles you to the same public health-care benefits as a native in any EU country. You may want to take out additional insurance.

A driving licence for everyone who will drive. Drivers must be 18.

For your car:

All policies now include basic third-party cover for Europe but it's a good idea to check your cover for France to make sure it is comprehensive.

Registration document - if it's not in your name you should have a letter of authorisation from the registered keeper.

MOT certificate if relevant.

You may consider breakdown insurance. Some companies (Norwich Union Direct for one) include European breakdown cover as standard in comprehensive policies.

You should keep these documents (including your passport and driving licence) with you in the car at all times - French police are keen on spot-checks and you have to show your documents there and then. In theory you should have your passport with you at all times.

### Cars and driving

The Bison Futé (literally “crafty bison”) website ([www.bison-fute.equipement.gouv.fr](http://www.bison-fute.equipement.gouv.fr)) has lots of French road information, including a chart of the periods when the roads are expected to be congested. A good bit of it is in English.

**GB sticker** - still compulsory if you're car hasn't got a GB on the number plates.

**Headlamps** - the French have joined the rest of the world and yellow headlights have almost died out. On most cars you still need to mask off the part of the dipped beam designed to light up our left-hand road edges and hedges. This dazzles oncoming continental drivers who are driving where the hedge should be. You can buy kits for this, or use insulating tape if you know where to put it (a knowledge of optical physics helps - the headlamp glass is a lens and reverses everything). The latest headlamp designs probably need the proper kit.

Spare bulbs - it is a requirement to carry a spare set. You can be fined if you cannot change a blown bulb.

Hi-viz waistcoat. The driver (only) must have access to a hi-viz waistcoat without getting out of the car.

All vehicles must carry a warning triangle.

Breathalyser. The requirements say that you should carry 2 breathalysers. Disposable ones are fine and are available on eBay for less than £3. You will no doubt be able to buy them on the ferries at a rather higher price! Remarkably, although not carrying a breathalyser is an offence there is no sanction - all the police can do is remind you of the law!).

And something that I have just discovered: if you wear glasses you should have a spare pair with you.

**Children under 10 years old** are not allowed in the front seat (unless all the rear seats are occupied by children under 10 or they are in a "back to the road" seat)).



The built-up area **speed limit** is 50kph (about 30mph). This is signalled by the town/village sign as you enter and the same sign crossed out as you leave. Other speed limits (except where marked differently): ordinary roads: 90kph (56mph), dual carriageways: 110kph (69mph), motorways (usually 130kph (80mph) – some sections are 110kph. All speed limits are reduced by 10kph when it is raining except motorways (which become 110kph) and 50kph (which stays the same). In bad visibility (under 50m) there is an overall speed limit of 50kph.

The **drink-drive** limit is lower than Britain's (but measured in a different way). Don't forget that French police can (and do) stop you as they think fit. A neighbour was stopped and breathalysed at 5 in the afternoon near Bourdeilles.

**Priorité à droite (Give way to the right):** a source of confusion and accidents - there are still occasions on which you have to give way to the right, but they are less frequent than they used to be. It has now been abolished on most of the larger roads around our house.

There are no problems on motorways, dual carriageways and main roads, where joining traffic gives way as in England (you may find traffic on the main road less willing to let you in).

You still give way to the right:

1] on the Boulevard Périphérique around Paris (another good reason to avoid it). Joining traffic just hurtles into the inside lane - keep one lane out until just before you want to turn off.

2] on a very few roundabouts in towns (at least according to French friends).

3] on other roads, except where you see a yellow diamond (which is cancelled by a crossed-out diamond) or a crossroads sign where your road is shown as much bigger than the crossing road. The yellow diamond removes *priorité à droite* on the whole road (until cancelled); the crossroads sign only applies to the single junction.

Most problems occur on minor roads - typically tractors pulling out from the right without any warning. They do have right of way.

You soon get used to **driving on the right**, the main problem being seeing past the car in front to overtake. It pays to have a good relationship with your front seat passenger and to make sure you don't have any embarrassing misunderstandings. Things are much easier on dual carriageways. If you choose the motorway route via Paris it is about 6 hours from Calais before you come to the first single carriageway road. Be extra careful when pulling away after stopping for a while. It's very easy to set off on the wrong side of the road if there's no traffic within sight. Keep to the right! And also be careful for the first few days back in England.

You may initially find some **direction signs** confusing - beware of signs which might look as if they mean (for example) Tours is to the left, when in fact it means straight on.

There is (in theory) a French law that states you must leave a **2 second gap** between you and the vehicle in front. It remains to be seen if anyone will take any notice of it and if the police will enforce it, but the maximum fine is 750 Euros.

### Autoroutes

Generally speaking, French motorways are very civilised. Unless you are unlucky, traffic densities are much lower than in England (apart from around Paris) and most people drive sensibly. The speed limit is normally 130kph (about 80mph) and 110kph when it's raining. With some exceptions, notably around Paris and other large cities, you do of course have to pay for the privilege of using them and fuel is much more expensive than in supermarkets. The toll system works like this. Some miles after joining the motorway at Calais you go



through a toll barrier (Péage) where you collect a 'ticket' from a machine at the barrier. At the end of the toll section you go through another barrier where you say 'Bonjour madame/monsieur' to the attendant, hand over your ticket and your credit card (Visa/Mastercard 'Carte Bleue'). You don't need to sign. You can also pay by cash! Don't forget 'Merci' and 'Au revoir'. There are also more and more automatic booths (marked "CB" [for Carte Bancaire]) where you put your toll ticket in the slot (there's an arrow on the ticket) and then your credit/debit card.

There are two sorts of stopping areas. 'Aires de repos' are rest areas which have toilets (which may be of the 'footprint' variety but are increasingly civilised), picnic tables and sometimes a children's play area. Very civilised. 'Aires de service' have fuel, cafés, restaurants etc. as well as toilets.

Both types of stopping area are much more frequent than in England.

### **Fuel**

Petrol is now about the same price in France as in England; Diesel is a bit cheaper. The cheapest place to buy fuel is at a hypermarket, the most expensive is on motorways, with ordinary garages coming somewhere in between. The difference can be around 40p per gallon. Credit cards (Visa/Mastercard, collectively known as "cartes bleues") are almost universally accepted. At large service stations you often serve yourself and then drive through a booth to pay. If you have a Diesel car, and you're counting the pennies, it can save several pounds to arrive in France with a nearly empty tank and fill up in France at the nearest hypermarket. In Calais, if you take the motorway from the ferry terminal as if for Paris, take the exit for Calais-centre and follow the signs to the centre; you'll come to the Continent hypermarket on the left. If you use the tunnel, there's a service station underneath the Carrefour hypermarket in the Cité Europe shopping centre next to the tunnel exit (take the first exit on the right as you are leaving the terminal and follow the 24/24 signs with a petrol pump logo). Most supermarkets have 24-hour credit card pumps that work with British credit cards. Ordinary petrol stations are being driven out of business and becoming quite rare. Don't rely on finding one every few miles (especially on Sundays).

### **People and culture**

The French always greet each other (and therefore you) by saying 'Bonjour monsieur/madame' and 'Au revoir monsieur/madame' as you leave. They'll think you are very odd if you don't do the same. This applies in shops and at supermarket checkouts. In small shops it's good manners to say 'Bonjour messieurs-dames' to the world at large as you enter. If it's more than a chance encounter in the street, people shake hands and if they know each other fairly well they'll kiss (men don't normally kiss each other). A peck on each cheek in our part of the world. Children expect to be kissed. Don't be surprised if the mechanic working on your car offers a (clean) elbow to be shaken.

### **Language**

The traditional French attitude to foreign languages is even more conservative than our own - French should be quite good enough for the whole world. It seems only as a last resort that people with quite good English will use it. Almost all of us have some words of French lost in the further recesses of our memory. It's surprising how much can be dredged up when required, and is well worth the effort. Very few words can go a long way when backed up with mime (and a smile).

### **Cafés and restaurants**

In bars and cafés you sit down and wait to be served. Normally you pay for all your drinks as you leave but increasingly you may be expected to pay for each round. All bars have toilets. A

white coffee seems to be 'un café au lait' in the morning and 'un café crème' (or just 'un crème') later on. Draught beer is 'un pression' or 'un demi'. If you ask for 'une bière' you may get a bottle. Drinks are most expensive sitting out on the terrace, cheapest standing inside at the bar.

In restaurants, there will normally be a choice of menu (it has to be displayed outside) and once you have chosen a menu you'll get all the courses (unless you choose 'à la carte'). Main courses are often not served with a vegetable as in England (except probably for chips) but there may be a separate salad course. Cheese comes before dessert and without biscuits. Most cheaper restaurants have good house wine by the 'pichet' (jug). Water and bread will be provided. French restaurants have still mostly not got the hang of vegetarians but should be able to supply omelettes or salads. Tips are normally optional - 'service compris' seems to really mean service included. And a note about breakfast: at home the French normally eat their breakfast straight off the table - no plate. Maybe that's why they don't have porridge!

### **Currency**

Try the travel/motoring section on

<http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/travel/cheap-travel-money>

Changing money can be a source of grave frustration and unnecessary expense. If you are only going to one country in the Eurozone, this still applies.

You will obviously need some Euros, but there is a bewildering range of ways to get them.

Make your own decision - the following are my opinions:

**Exchanging cash:** always seems to me to be an expensive way of doing it. Not too bad in England maybe, but avoid changing cash on ferries/tunnel or in France. Be very careful about commission charges - they are in addition to the advertised exchange rate. If you think about it, the bank in Brantome really doesn't want your £20 notes - they are just a nuisance.

**Credit/debit cards:** in my opinion the best bet if you have the right one (see the moneysavingexpert.com site above). We take just enough cash with us for small purchases (picnic food etc.) and visit the first handy cash machine. These are very common. In supermarkets and towns (look for "Libre service bancaire", or ask for "un distributeur de billets"). The modern machines even recognise that your card is British and talk to you in English. It also means you can get money out as and when you need it and won't return to England with wedges of Euros you'll have to change back again at vast expense. Don't forget your PIN. Credit cards (Visa/Mastercard credit or debit cards are known collectively as "Cartes Bleues") are accepted very widely by almost all commercial organisations - shops (except the smallest), service stations, motorway toll booths, restaurants etc. Smaller shops often only accept credit cards for amounts over the equivalent of about 10€. You really only need cash for buying things like bread, for drinks in bars, or at the market. Diners/American Express cards are less widely accepted.

Finally, despite the stereotypes we are fed by certain sections of the British media we have come across very few rude or abrupt French people. We have come across many acts of true kindness, and trust that you will find the same.