



Médoc, Southern France: Drink it All In



Sweeping views down to the sea at Château Tour Castillon in the Médoc, Southern France. Michael Higgins photos.

Seaside Beauty, Top Notch Vineyards Put Médoc on the Map

Bordeaux is one of the most famous wine regions in France and is the center of the universe for the grape varieties loved all over the world (Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, etc.). I traveled throughout Bordeaux during six trips of 21 weeks exploring this beautiful region in order to write my book [*Exploring Wine Regions – Bordeaux France*](#).

North of the city of Bordeaux is the **Médoc Wine Region**, so famous for the Grand Cru Classé wineries of the likes of Chateau Mouton Rothschild and Chateau Margaux. The northernmost tip of the Médoc is wild, off-the-beaten-path, and offers a unique experience suited perfectly for the nomad traveler.

This northern tip of the Médoc is where the Gironde Estuary meets the Atlantic Ocean. The wineries are located along the estuary and the beaches offer quiet getaways and numerous clothing optional beaches and communities. This is the informal part of Bordeaux to have no plans and to roam as you wish. It is ever so casual.



Cows in the wilds of the Medoc

The Médoc Wilds

If you want to get away from it all, this northernmost Médoc Appellation is the countryside farthest from the city. The châteaux are spread apart from each other and the vineyards are less dense than those wineries further south. This is the land of serenity. A peaceful intermingling of vineyards with other types of agriculture and animals. This is what I call **The Wilds of The Médoc.**

On my way to a winery, I found myself peacefully off a country road, entranced by cows, in this painting-like setting of the grassy meadow. I almost forgot about wine. It's that kind of place. So remote. Ever entrancing.

Only almost. The wineries here make excellent wine and have unique and interesting histories. I will share three of them with you to explore.



Inspecting the vines at Château Tour Castillon in Medoc.



The original fortress tower of Château Castera

Château Castera

This winery is a great place to spend the day. So much history here and the entire property has been restored to historic perfection with a mix in modern art to arouse your attention and enlighten your senses.

Dating back as far as 900AD, records show that the Lords of Castera built the church of Saint-Germain. Today the little chapel stands beautifully in restored grandeur on the Castera grounds. In 1121, a recorded deed shows the ownership and reference to the castle described as a fortress defending the area.

The tours here are extensive, educational and interesting. Their Discovery Tour takes you through the history of the Médoc and this ancient estate. You will learn about viticulture, winemaking, and barrel aging, all critical to producing wine. Plus, of course, a tasting of their delicious wines.

Their Heritage Tour adds the history of the most famous owners and includes a special private tour of the tower displaying the château's valuable archives.

Their Premium Tour also includes the two aforementioned tours, plus barrel tasting with the cellar master, followed by a vertical tasting of several vintages. The last two tours require reservations and are well worth it.



Inside the ancient thick stone walls of the Chateau Castera in Medoc

Château Tour Castillon

This property comes from a long lineage of nobility. Ownership has been associated with lords, kings, governors, knights, and admirals as far back as the 11th century.

The château name comes from the Castillon site of many battles where the British defended Bordeaux from France and Spain. Not just a strategic location for battle along the Gironde Estuary, it has forever gained the reputation for magnificent terroir.

In modern history, Theobal Peyruse purchased the property in 1914 and it has remained in the Peyruse family ever since. Today great-great-grandson and daughter, Sébastien and Laure, continue the tradition of this great property.

This is a very casual place where you can get to know the owners who conduct the tours that are personal and insightful. There is more than just vineyards here, a huge garden of sunflowers and alfalfa fields, and more.

Not just tastings here. They have created numerous unique and creative moments for you to remember at their property.

Guided walks in the vineyard, tastings in the barrel cellar, music and wine evenings, and hot air balloon rides, and more.

Château Saint-Christoly

This is seven generations of the same family owning and running this château. It is unique that no other person or family has been involved with this winery. It all started in 1850 when Pierre Moreau, the blacksmith of Saint-Christoly, bought some vines and named the vineyard after the village as his cellar was in this charming village.

Château Saint-Christoly is immediately behind the historic church, Église de Saint-Christoly-Médoc in the center of the tiny village of just 200 people. In 1924, they won their first gold medal in Paris. In 1932, they obtained the quality certification as a Cru Bourgeois wine.

The cellar room has an art exhibit on the walls and a very interesting Historic Postcard Exhibit on the barrel ends. Fourth-generation Joseph Pinet served in the war and sent postcards to his sister every day. They have an archive of 400 postcards they rotate in the cellar.

Joseph wrote his sister about the places where he was stationed and the different people that he met along the way. He also wrote her about being in a boat while German submarines launched bombs around him as he watched the boats sink. Joseph survived the traumatic war. Three weeks later, he died from a mosquito bite.



Sumtous accommodations at La Maison du Douanier

La Maison du Douanier

So quiet. So remote. So nice to get away from it all in this very relaxing B&B in this vastly remote wine region. Only four rooms and an amazing restaurant in this historic building renovated with a hip modern interior. The rooms are light, bright, and clean. Each room is named after Médoc appellations.

The owners are very talented and welcoming guys. They have injected a wonderful passion into this property, inside and out, from infrastructure to hospitality, making this a fabulous and complete getaway. Located on the shores of the estuary down the street from Château Saint-Christoly.



Cuisine at La Maison du Douanier



Sailing from Port Médoc

The Médoc Harbor and Beaches

As we reach the northern tip of the Médoc where the Gironde Estuary and the Atlantic Ocean meet, there is a beautiful area known as Le Verdon-Sur-Mer. On this peninsula, you will find four ports and three lighthouses.

Three lighthouses stand at the point of this peninsula. **Cordouan Lighthouse** is the active lighthouse of this main entrance to Bordeaux. From April to November, it is open to the public as the last remaining offshore lighthouse in the world open for visits. Tours depart through Port-Médoc (a yacht harbor home to beautiful luxury boats) across from Restaurant Le Belem. Also, **Grave Lighthouse** is a maritime museum to visit. Saint-Nicolas Lighthouse marks the entrance to Saint-Nicolas beach.

Port-Médoc is also where you can enjoy all kinds of water sports. Stand-up paddleboards for rent and classes for all levels. Jet skis and flyboards, sightseeing boats and fishing excursions, sailboats, and powerboats of many sizes can be rented, with or without a skipper.



Dinner of Flying Fish Wing at Restaurant Le Belem in Port Médoc

Restaurant Le Belem

Restaurant Le Belem is a beautiful way to spend the afternoon, enjoying a wonderful lunch, sipping delicious Médoc wines, overlooking the yacht harbor, and taking in the warm tranquil sunny day as the sailboats quietly sail along. This husband/wife team here spoils you with personality and excellent service (Bruno) and lots of delicious treats from the kitchen (Stéphanie). Open every day for lunch and dinner.



Smoked Salmon Salad at Le Belem

Soulac-sur-Mer

Soulac-sur-Mer is a cute little oceanside village of just 2,700 people in this northern Atlantic Médoc beach region. It has tiny little streets lined with interesting architecture and expansive sandy beaches. There are several good restaurants to check out and B&Bs to experience the local flavor of the area.



Quaint Walking Village of Soulac-sur-Mer

There are street art shows in the summer. Bicycle lovers (rentals available) will love the well-developed paths that run north and south along the coast and inland into the forest.

The Little Tourist Train is a must ride – a slow-paced, mini railway that runs 7 km from Soulac-sur-Mer along the beaches and through the forest to the Cordouan Lighthouse at the tip of the peninsula. Also, **The Museum of Art & Archeology** has over 300 works to see.



Le Petite Tourist Train enters the forest



Enjoying the sun naturally at Euronat resort in Medoc

Naked In the sun in Médoc

The French love being naked outdoors in the sun. In fact, there are 2.6 million active nudists in France. And France attracts another 3.5 million visitors from around the world to their 500+ officially authorized nude destinations. The Médoc has the oldest and largest of the naked resorts.

Along the northern coast of the Médoc, there are two very large naturist resorts. Beyond your imagination huge! **CHM Montelivit**, the world's first naturist resort, is 175 hectares (432 acres) with homes, cabins, mobile homes, campsites... and, get this, more than 10,000 people are there during the peak season of July and August.

Euronat is the world's largest resort with 335 hectares (828 acres) of homes, cabins, campsites, shopping center, also with 10,000 people at the resort during peak season. When I was there in September, I was told it was quiet with only 3,000 people.

Euronat has more than two miles of spacious beach to enjoy nude sunbathing, playing in the water, swimming or just strolling along their wide sandy beaches feeling the salty breeze and warm sun on your body. A natural and liberating experience.



Lac d' Hourtin in Médoc

Lac d'Hourton

Lake Hourtin is the largest freshwater lake in France (21.88 sq. miles). It is surrounded by a beautiful dense forest, the Médoc Regional Nature Park. Between the lake and the ocean, on the northwestern shore, are 8.3 sq. miles of sand dunes and marshland known as the **Dunes et Marais d'Hourtin**, which has been designated as a nature reserve. There are roads, hiking trails, and 60 miles of well-planned bicycle paths surrounding most parts of the lake.

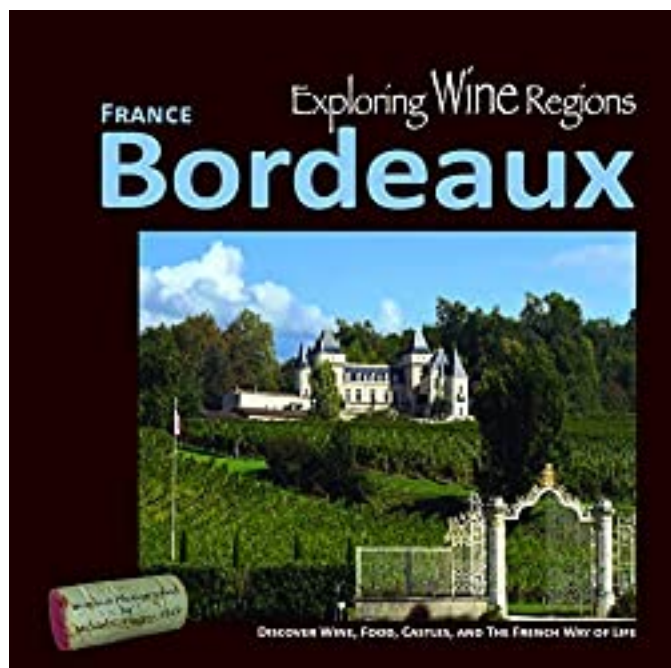
Magical Nomad Experiences

Wander aimlessly. Or stop purposely. Either way, you are in the wilds of the Médoc, their remote wine region, sunny beaches and casual places to stop and go as you roam. This is truly a unique part of the Bordeaux area.

It is a special place you will never forget. Maybe never leave. Well, of course, you will. There is so much more to see and do in Bordeaux, and beyond.



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