



Take a stroll

Charming scenery and beautiful vistas



Paola Westbeek is charmed by a village rich in food, wine and historical treasures in the peaceful Pays du Dropt



Above: A view of the village and the imposing Château de Duras

Right: Enjoy a stroll along Rue César Jauffret

When asked where her writing career started, Marguerite

Duras, née Donnadiou, once spoke of the “huge, empty lands” where “people lived from fruit wine, prunes, tobacco and artichokes.” She was referring to the area around Duras in Lot-et-Garonne. Marguerite’s father had purchased a beautiful manor house in Pardailan in 1921, just 10 minutes east of the village that inspired her pen name. Her first novel, *Les Impudents* (1943), draws heavily on her time there. Though today only ruins of the house remain, it’s easy to see why Duras and its surroundings left such a big impression on the renowned author.

Enchanting château

The late-August sun bathes the hillsides in golden light as I drive past the familiar landscape of vineyards, towering sunflowers, prune trees and old stone houses. There’s a soothing serenity to the winding roads leading to the castle proudly perched in the distance, my *coup de foudre* when I first discovered Duras in 2009.

The château, built between the 12th and 18th century, is the village’s main attraction. In the 14th century, it served as a fortress and later became an aristocratic residence for the Dufort-Duras family. Partially destroyed in 1792, it was purchased by the town in 1969 and completely renovated. I was captivated by its rustic elegance, even before I had the chance to set foot inside or explore Duras, which was destined to become my favourite French village.

This is my 12th summer visiting, and as usual, my first stop is the castle. I’ve come to know its 30 rooms like the back of my hand, but the view from the rounded tower never gets old. Via the dauntingly narrow, winding staircase, I make my way to the top and am rewarded with the most spectacular vistas over the surrounding Dropt Valley and towards Place Jean Bousquet and Place du 11 Novembre. These streets are home to a small but good selection of cafés and restaurants where you can stop for a glass of local wine and everything from a crêpe or sandwich to a three-course meal with regional specialities. ▶



PHOTOS: LEROY FRANCIS / HEMIS.FR, HANS WESTBEEK



Above: The entrance to the Château de Duras



Above: The Église Sainte-Marie-Madeleine

Food, wine and history

Duras became part of the Bergerac wine region in 2014, yet quality wines have been produced there since the 12th century. The town holds an annual wine festival in early August, but should you miss it (as I have this time), the Maison des Vins is just a few minutes down the road from the castle.

After a glass of Château Molhière's fragrant rosé at wine bar Chai et Rasade, I walk towards the arcaded passageways built during the Hundred Years' War and head down Rue César Jauffret where I stop at Église Sainte-Marie-Madeleine. Originally

built as a Protestant church in 1611, it became Catholic in 1685. I admire the trompe l'oeil paintings by Giovanni Carlo Masutti and briefly pause to revel in the cool darkness of the church, a much-needed respite from the hot afternoon sun.

Leaving the church, I feel small as I stroll under the imposing 12th-century Tour d'Horloge – the only remaining gate of the once-fortified village of Duras – and turn the corner to Rue Paul Persil. I'm reserving a table at Le Don Camillo for dinner tonight. There's no better way to kick off my holiday than with Chantal and Julie's warm hospitality. What a joy to be back! ❤️

IN THE AREA



On Sunday mornings, drive 40 minutes east to medieval Issigeac for one of the region's most colourful and folkloric markets. Wander through the storybook streets lined with half-timbered houses and fill your basket with local goat's cheeses, duck charcuterie, wine and seasonal fruits and vegetables. After your market round, stop for a drink and a bit of people-watching at La P'tite Treille, an idyllic brasserie with a terrace shaded by grapevines.

Visiting between early July and early September? Be sure to have Sunday lunch at the *marché des producteurs* held in the tiny village of Soumensac,

located just a 15-minute drive east. It's the perfect place to gather with friends and enjoy fresh produce prepared on the spot by regional producers.

Speaking of wine, to learn more about the Bergerac-Duras *appellations*, head to Bergerac, 45 minutes to the north-east. After sampling regional wines at Quai Cyrano's terrace overlooking the Dordogne river, hop on a *gabarre* (the traditional flat-bottomed boat) to learn more about the history of the town and admire the river's flora and fauna.

In the mood to dig your toes in the sand, catch some waves or slurp some oysters? Lacanau and Arcachon are only a two-hour drive west.



Above: La P'tite Treille in Issigeac

Francophile

TOURIST INFORMATION:

tourismeduras.com

Département: Lot-et-Garonne (47)

GETTING THERE

From Aéroport Bergerac Dordogne Périgord, it's a 40-minute drive south-west to Duras. From Aéroport de Bordeaux-Mérignac, Duras is 1hr 15 minutes east.

WHERE TO STAY

Labarthe B&B and Gîte

Tel: (FR) 5 53 89 77 58

hideawayfrance.co.uk

Gracious hosts Jeanette and Richard Hyde welcome guests to their B&B boasting four rooms with comfortable beds, en suite shower rooms and a shared three-acre

garden. The spacious and tastefully decorated gîte has a private terrace. All guests can use the 13.5m x 6m swimming pool. Rooms from €78 per night. Gîte rates from €530 per week, also available for long-term lets out of season.

WHERE TO EAT

Le Don Camillo

4 Rue Paul Persil

Tel: (FR) 5 53 83 76 00

Try gourmet burgers, pizzas and regional duck specialities with modestly priced local

wines at the pretty tree-shaded terrace. Must-try: the 'Pizza du Chef' with *magret* and *gésiers*: €15.95.

WHERE TO VISIT

Centre-Musée Marguerite Duras

1 Rue du Couvent

Tel: (FR) 6 72 76 27 69

Learn about the life and oeuvre of Marguerite Duras through exhibitions, films and conferences. Open by appointment from May to July and from 3pm to 6.30pm from July to September.

Le Comptoir de Marguerite

13 Rue Paul Persil

Tel: (FR) 5 53 84 43 87

Not named after the famed writer, but after the owner's grandmother, this friendly *épicerie fine* carries a wide selection of French delicacies and regional products.

