

Travels with Anzie – Bits and Pieces II

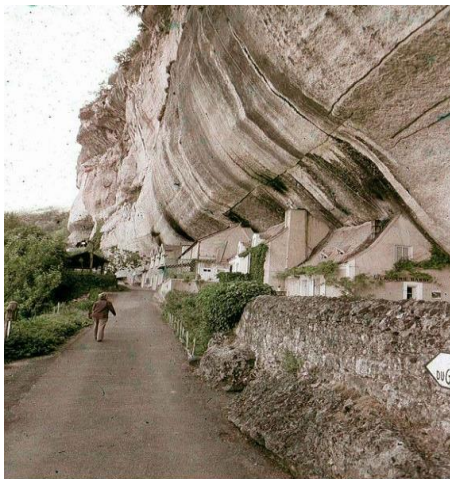
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Exploring the Perigord: We're north of Bordeaux in the land of truffles, paté de foie gras, caves and castles. Truffles I have no interest in. At one time I took a serious look at growing them. I talked to a gentleman in the Carolinas who was selling filbert trees onto the roots of which he had attached truffle spores. It would take seven years before I could harvest my first truffle. Not owning a pig or a dog, I had visions of training Anzie, with her highly developed olfactory sense, to find and harvest the black gold. Then the gentleman gave me the bad news: the climate in which I lived was too cold and, therefore inhospitable to the raising of truffles. Ah well! So, we started a B&B instead.

Now, foie gras. That's a different story. We've become infatuated with it. Every restaurant serves the same two items, among others: paté de foie gras and duck. Anzie and I start every meal – except breakfast, of course – sharing a plate of foie gras. It melts in your mouth! It can be either duck or goose. Our taste buds aren't cultivated enough to tell the difference. I also banish from my mind those images of geese being force-fed. Still, maybe they don't mind. I've never heard them complain.

Caves. The Perigord region is riddled with them. We're staying in the pretty little town of **Brantome**, which is touted as the "Venice of the Perigord". The river Dronne splits and flows around the old medieval city, making it an island. Just across the street from our hotel, the "**Hostellerie du Perigord Vert**", the buildings are built right into a limestone cliff. We ate at a pizza restaurant last nite that was carved out of the rock – the ceilings, walls and, I'm sure the floors beneath the tile, were all rough-hewn rock. We stayed in Brantome in 2006 in a B&B that clung to the rockface. We parked our car in a cave. The famous caves of **Lascaux** are located not far from here.

During our travels along the Dordogne, we came across cliff faces that were riddled with caves. At points we drove beneath cliff overhangs so low that, had we been in a truck, we would have crunched the roof. Signs advertised tours of grottoes of stalactites, stalagmites and "Troglodite mementoes"



So, why did we return to Brantome? It's another charming, picturesque town about which we had great memories. I had visions of us canoeing down the river on a warm, sunny day. Sad to say, we've only had one of those; and we were exploring by car that day. Our basic purpose for this trip was to explore "The Most Beautiful Villages of France". We didn't realize until we arrived that the majority of those are located a 1 ½ hour south of Brantome.

Don't get me wrong. There's plenty to do and see in and around Brantome. We discovered one of the "Most Beautiful Villages of France", as designated by the National Department of Tourism, just north of town: **St. Jean de Coly**. We ate a wonderful lunch at **Restaurant St. Jean**. We were served by an empathetic lady and her ten-year-old daughter. We ate amazing salads, which included gossamer-thin crepe cups of veggies, mushrooms, salmon et al. Lucky we arrived early. The place was full by the time we left. It was Mayday, a holiday in France. After lunch we did a walk-about tour of the town. Since we were in the two-hour lunch period, we were the only persons about. The XIth century church, St Jean Baptist, made me feel comfortable in thanking my Higher Power for all my blessings. The Gallo-Roman bridge over the river Coly dominated the pastoral scene. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/gU4bmCvTXXp4EKR7>

So far we've never had a bad meal in Brantome. **Les Dames Galantes** features mussels, omelets, snails as well as other plates that looked delicious on neighboring tables. The proximity of the sidewalk tables served as a fertile platform for conversation. Our next table featured a couple from Holland. He was Catholic; she was an Israeli. We got her started on Netenyahu. Her harangue lasted a good 15 minutes. Her description of N. bore a close resemblance to our description of Trump. The Dutchman taught me how to eat mussels using two adjoining mussel shells as a pincer.

Suddenly we had neighbors on the other side who had moved their table out of the rain. Anni and Paul live in Brittany. We explained that we planned to visit Brittany in early June, at the end of our vacation. That generated a great conversation. ; Anni taught Primary school. Paul is a retired language professor. Paul now spends his time putting on shows wherein he dramatizes Breton stories, dressed in Breton costume. At the end of our dinner they invited us to stay with them in Brittany. We accepted. We were all staying at the Hostellerie, so we walked back together.

Another restaurant, **Cote Riviere**, located alongside the river, turned out to be a gem. Great food, ambiance. Amazing Beef Tartar – raw hamberger with spices. Even Anzie loved it.

La Strada is the Italian restaurant that is carved out of rock. I loved my white pizza with Parma ham and lots of cheese. Anzie described her lasagna as "OK".

Stalking the Most Beautiful Villages

The Dordogne River is the artery that feeds the MBV's. The castles/chateaus usually command a highpoint. They hark back to feudal times when a "siegneurie", or lord, oversaw the serfs and the working of the surrounding farmland. These chateaus are massive – 50-60 rooms. We weren't able to visit all the MBV's in the area. Here are those we did visit:

Beynac: Rising from the Dordogne like a multi-tiered wedding cake, with the castle on the top. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/usJi4wkEdE8dBcxq7>

La Roque-Gageac: Just up the river from Beynac. Overhanging rock cliffs seem to shelter the town and the castle. Several caves are carved into the rock faces. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/x4n8CmVTGgkWVgHx8>

Domme: Situated high on a cliff overlooking the Dordogne River. Founded as a stronghold in 1281 by [Philip the Bold](#) following his campaign along the Dordogne river, Domme obtained the privilege of minting its own currency.

In 1307, the [Knight Templars](#) were imprisoned in Domme during the trial against them, The belvedere offers a commanding view of the surrounding countryside. Many restaurants, including the Belvedere Brasserie, which offers, good food with a view, <https://photos.app.goo.gl/SKgddwPwQo3vhh8x6>

Castlenaud La Chapelle: This is a fortress/castle. Built in the 12th century, it perches on a high rock with an impressive view of the river and the surrounding countryside. This castle's claim to fame is its collection of medieval armaments: catapults, trebuchets(a type of catapult) and assorted other weapons. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/sUpEnJWygEp18Dqv5>

How to Make Walnut Oil:

Nearby Castlenaud is the **Ecomusée de la Noix**. It's a walnut farm where they make walnut oil. So what? That's what I thought until I sampled it. The walnutty flavor can add that "je ne sais quoi" that will enhance your cuisine. As part of a tour you view a film on the manufacturing process, as well as how to convert an ancient dead walnut tree into a work of art. The film is well done. It caused me to remember way back when someone in the vicinity of Elmira, NY sold a mature walnut tree for \$500. Back then the wood was used to make anything from gunstocks to dashboards for Rolls Royces.

In the process, they still depend on workers to crack and empty the shells. Yet they also use machines to harvest as well as shell the nuts. The de-shelled nuts are ground into a mash. The mash is then placed between filter cloths, and then into a press, which is heated to a certain temperature. The oil comes out very clear.

The used mash is compressed into blocks, which are sold to farmers as feed for the animals. I broke off a piece. It tasted fine.

By the way, while on the farm we came upon a petrified prehistoric walnut. The size is amazing! Made us wonder what the squirrels looked like back then.

The walnut farm site: <http://www.ecomuseedelanoix.fr/>

Our photos: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/64zUnVwmFTV7sG6R9>

Back to the Most Beautiful Villages

Sarlat is probably the most famous MBV in the area. Its full name is Sarlat-la-Canéda. The architecture is captivating. Throughout the region the honey-colored stone conveys a warm aura that is all-pervasive.



The pedestrian-only Rue de la Republique runs through the medieval part of town with a maze of narrow streets running off it. It's fun getting lost; the town is small enough that you'll always find your way. The church of St. Sacerdot is a harmonious mix of old and new. Sarlat has the highest density of Historic Monuments of any city in France.

Sarlat photos <https://photos.app.goo.gl/XbjqKogTTxqnNQAT6>

The downside of this fame is the multitude of tourists who crowd the city no matter the time of year. This tourism in turn results in a plethora of shops selling foie gras, truffle oil, walnut-based products and kitchy items, like T-shirts and souvenirs. If you can get beyond that, the architecture and monuments are well worth the visit.

On the way back to Brantome we decided to follow the Dordogne. Near the town of Eysies we passed by houses that were built right into the rock. At another place was a walkway built inside the rockface. Then we drove beneath a rock overhang. Signs advertising Grotto Tours dotted the roadside.

A la prochaine,

Chuck & Anzie