




Cultural Landscapes of the Midi-Pyrénées & the Dordogne 2026

22 SEP – 7 OCT 2026

Code: 22632

Tour Leaders Romain Nugou, Adrian Mialet

Fitness Level 

Level 2 - Intermediate

For people with energetic lifestyles and very good mobility

Visit medieval towns, Templar castles, pilgrim churches, local markets, Renaissance châteaux & gardens; in Dordogne's picturesque valleys, view spectacular prehistoric cave paintings.

Overview

This tour, led by [Romain Nugou](#) and [Adrian Mialet](#), who joins us in Sarlat, travels across the great southern plain between the Pyrénées and the Massif Central, into the heavily wooded highlands of the Auvergne, and down the superb river valleys of the Lot, Tarn and Dordogne.

- Tour through one of the most scenic and dramatic regions of France, dominated by the lovely river valleys of the Lot, Tarn and Dordogne.
- Discover the unique history of the Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade through the medieval heritage of Toulouse, [Carcassonne](#) and Albi.
- Visit some of the grandest pilgrim churches at Toulouse, Moissac, Conques, Rocamadour and Périgueux, built on the great medieval pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela.
- On the Larzac plateau, explore the Templar and Hospitaller territories and their Commanderies, monastic farms supporting their war effort in the Holy Land.
- In Rodez experience the creative cuisine of Michelin-starred chef [Michel Bras](#) and discover the artistic world of [Pierre Soulages](#) 'the painter of black and light'.
- Delve into the medieval world and visit its unique frontier towns, *bastides*, such as Cordes-sur-Ciel and Monpazier; visit châteaux that were once medieval fortresses but later became majestic palaces surrounded by fine gardens.
- Visit Cro-Magnon era sites in the Vézère valley, where Homo sapiens was first identified, including the large prehistoric sculpted frieze at [Abri de Cap Blanc](#).
- See the spectacular cave paintings of the Upper Paleolithic in the caves of Rouffignac, Cougnac, Pech-Merle and Lascaux II facsimile.
- Amble through the weekly village markets and taste the famous Périgord delicacies.
- Cruise along the Dordogne River on board replicas of traditional *gabares*.
- Sample award-winning wines and enjoy lunch at [Château Carbonneau](#) near Saint-Emilion, a family-run winery with strong New Zealand ties.

Overnight Toulouse (2 nights) • Albi (3 nights) • Conques (1 night) • Saint-Jean-Lespinasse (1 night) • Sarlat (4 nights) • Montignac (3 nights) • Bordeaux (1 night)

Cultural Landscapes of the Midi-Pyrénées & the Dordogne: Introduction by ASA tour leader Romain Nugou

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90YilpbYR8E>

Testimonial

We were stunned by the beauty of this part of France. The history and the architecture blended to make it an unforgettable experience. The tour was extremely well organised and the leaders and guides had an exceptional knowledge of the area. Ralph & Chris, QLD.

Leaders



Romain Nugou

Romain holds a Masters of Arts degree in European history from the University of Toulouse. He also graduated in geography and economics. A native French speaker and an insatiable traveller, he joined ASA in 2018 and leads tours to France.

Born and raised in the mountainous region of Auvergne in Central France, Romain's passion for history blossomed early. He studied at the University of Toulouse, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in 2003, specialising in history, geography, and economic history. This foundation led him to pursue a Master of Arts in Contemporary European and Italian History, culminating in a thesis exploring the plight of Italian exiles in France during the Fascist period.

Romain's insatiable curiosity and thirst for knowledge extend beyond the confines of academia. A trilingual scholar fluent in French, English, and Spanish (with a grounding in Italian), he has travelled extensively, lived, and worked in diverse locations, including South America and New Caledonia, before settling in Melbourne, which he now calls home. Romain is a member of the Royal Australian Historical Society and the Royal Historical Society of Victoria.

Romain joined ASA in 2018 and leads a number of ASA's tours to Southern France.



Adrian Mialet

History and art history graduate (University of Toulouse) and National Guide Lecturer at the National Prehistory Museum (Les Eyzies) & the caves of Lascaux, Font de Gaume, Combarelles & Cap Blanc. Adrian has lectured for ASA's tour to the Midi Pyrénées & Dordogne since 2012.

Adrian studied history and art history at the University of Toulouse, and has a particular passion for prehistory. He also trained as a National Guide and is fluent in English, French and Spanish. He has worked for many years at the replica of the famous cave Lascaux II as well as other prehistoric sites including Cap Blanc, Font de Gaume, and Combarelles. For over ten years Adrian has led ASA tours to the Midi-Pyrénées

and Dordogne. He also leads tours for other organisations including the National Geographic, Smithsonian Travel, and the Natural History Museum of New York. Adrian has narrated a beautiful video documentary entitled *The Dordogne Valley: A Journey Through the Perigord Noir*.

Combine this tour with

Crossroads of the Caucasus: Azerbaijan, Georgia & Armenia 2026

2 SEP – 22 SEP 2026

Slovenia: Villages, Castles, Vineyards, Scenic Valleys and the Julian Alps 2026

3 SEP – 20 SEP 2026

From Belgian Art Nouveau to Dutch Modern 2026

7 OCT – 17 OCT 2026

Sicily and the Aeolian Islands 2026

9 OCT – 23 OCT 2026

Cyprus, Kos & Rhodes: Civilisations of the Eastern Mediterranean 2026

8 OCT – 25 OCT 2026



Itinerary

The following itinerary lists a range of museums, heritage properties and gardens etc. which we plan to visit. Many are accessible to the public, but some require special permission, which may only be confirmed closer to the tour's departure. The daily activities described in this itinerary may change or be rotated and/or modified in order to accommodate alterations in opening hours, flight schedules and confirmation of private visits. Participants will receive a final itinerary together with their tour documents. Meals included in the tour price are indicated in the detailed itinerary where: B=breakfast, L=lunch and D=dinner.

Toulouse - 2 nights

Day 1: Tuesday 22 September, Arrive Toulouse

- Tour commences at 2.30pm in the foyer of the Grand Hôtel de l'Opéra
- Welcome meeting
- Orientation Walk
- Basilica Saint-Sernin, Toulouse
- Welcome Dinner at Brasserie [Le Bibent](#)

Meeting Point: The tour commences at 2.30pm in the foyer of the [Grand Hôtel de l'Opéra](#) situated in the centre of Toulouse.

We commence with a short welcome meeting which will be followed by an orientation walk visiting the great pilgrim church of Saint-Sernin (1075-1096). After the abbey church at Cluny (destroyed during the French Revolution), Saint-Sernin was the largest Romanesque church in France. It was one of the five archetypal pilgrim churches on the pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela, the others being Sainte-Foy at Conques, Saint-Martin at Tours, Saint-Martial de Limoges, and the great cathedral at Santiago. All these churches are aisled basilicas. In each, these aisles run down either side of the nave and around the transepts and semi-circular chevet. From the chevet of each church project chapels that once displayed saints' relics. The aisles that ran right around the church allowed pilgrims to process through the building to see the relics

in these chapels without disrupting services in the chancel. Saint-Sernin was constructed from a richly coloured red brick. Its nave, the longest on the pilgrim route, leads to a crossing topped by a magnificent Gothic tiered tower and spire.

We meet again later in the afternoon for a presentation of the tour with pre-dinner drinks before enjoying our welcome dinner at Le Bibent, a historic brasserie with an opulent interior. (Overnight Toulouse) D

Day 2: Wednesday 23 September, Toulouse – Carcassonne – Toulouse

- Cité de Carcassonne: Château Comtal and Ramparts
- Basilica of St Nazaire and St Celse, Carcassonne
- Evening performance [Piano aux Jacobins](#) (subject to performance schedule)

Today we drive southwest to what was once the medieval frontier between the Kingdom of France and the Spanish kingdom of Aragón, to the walled city of Carcassonne. Before its integration into the French kingdom by Louis IX, Carcassonne was a stronghold of the Cathars, who were decimated by Simon de Montfort during the Albigensian Crusade (1209–1229). Before the Crusade, Carcassonne, like many cities in this region, had been a centre of local power, jealous of its independence from larger hegemonies. Originally a Celtic settlement, then a Roman *colonia* (Carcasum), it became a Visigothic stronghold (508) that resisted the early Franks, was taken for a time by the Iberian Muslims (725), and had become the seat of a local county that often allied itself either to the counts of Barcelona or Toulouse. Fragments of Carcassonne's Roman walls still exist, within the magnificent concentric rings of medieval ramparts defended by many towers. Louis IX founded a lower city across the River Aude from the original fortified city (1247), and even after it had lost importance as a bastion against Aragón (when the frontier moved further south) its towers and ramparts made the upper, older, city almost impregnable. During the Hundred Years' War, the Black Prince destroyed Louis IX's lower city, but could not take Carcassonne proper (1355).

Despite prosperity during the later Middle Ages as a centre of wool manufacture, Carcassonne slowly declined to provincial obscurity and its walls fell into such ruin that in the 19th century the French government considered dismantling them. Carcassonne's mayor, the antiquary Jean-Pierre Cros-Mayrevieille, and the writer Prosper Mérimée, France's first inspector of ancient monuments, protested, and the city was eventually restored in the 1850s and 1860s by the great Neo-Gothic architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc. Carcassonne's restoration became a key moment in the growth of French, and therefore world, notions of conservation and preservation. Much of France's medieval built heritage had either fallen into disrepair or had suffered depredations through countless wars and the French Revolution. Eugène Viollet-le-Duc – who also restored Notre-Dame de Paris and was then working on Saint-Sernin, Toulouse – performed the massive feat of bringing Carcassonne back to its medieval glory. Although he was criticised for giving the Carcassonne's towers steep conical pinnacles that were uncharacteristic of a southern region without heavy snowfalls, his restoration is nevertheless seen as a masterpiece, albeit with touches of Romantic fantasy.

We shall explore Carcassonne's ramparts and visit its Château Comtal (Count's citadel), the Basilica of St Nazaire and St Celse. There will be time at leisure for lunch and to allow you to further explore the city before return to Toulouse mid-afternoon.

Our day concludes with an evening performance of music in the cloister of the Jacobins church. *Piano aux Jacobins* is a piano festival, created in 1979, that takes place every year throughout the month of September in Toulouse. A renowned meeting place on the French and international music scene, *Piano aux Jacobins* invites the public every year to discover young artists and hear the great names of the piano. Alfred Brendel, Sviatoslav Richter, Aldo Ciccolini, Krystian Zimerman, Martha Argerich, Murray Perahia, and

Gonzales, among others, have played on the stage of this piano festival. (Overnight Toulouse) B

Albi - 3 nights

Day 3: Thursday 24 September, Toulouse – Moissac – Albi

- Musée des Augustins, Toulouse
- Cloister of Saint-Pierre, Moissac

This morning we explore Toulouse's town centre and visit the Musée des Augustins. The Musée des Augustins, once a grand old Augustinian priory, was used as a residence and studio by Viollet-le-Duc when he worked on the restoration of Saint-Sernin. It now holds a comprehensive collection of Romanesque and Gothic sculpture from the city's churches.

In the afternoon we depart for Albi via Moissac, visiting the church of Saint-Pierre (1100-1150), which was once a Cluniac abbey. Moissac boasts a fine trumeau (door jamb) graced by the ethereal elongated figures of St Paul and the Prophet Jeremiah. Although much of the original monastery has been destroyed, its cloister remains. It has an important corpus of sculpted panels and capitals including figures in relief whose monumentality suggests that the artist, who also worked in Saint-Sernin, Toulouse, was inspired by antique sculpture, which was to be found in abundance in Southern France. (Overnight Albi) B

Day 4: Friday 25 September, Albi

- Les Jardins du Palais de la Berbie
- Cathédrale Sainte-Cécile d'Albi
- Musée Toulouse-Lautrec
- Afternoon at leisure

We spend the full day in Albi, a city of red brick, reminiscent of Siena. It stands on the river Tarn, whose bed provided the clay for these bricks. We visit the Bishop's palace – the Palais de la Berbie – which has a fine garden and houses the Toulouse-Lautrec Museum, as well as Albi's extraordinary, fortress-cathedral, Sainte Cécile. The Toulouse-Lautrec Museum, one of the finest museums devoted to a single artist in France, incorporates early paintings by the master and some of his most important images of Parisian life. There is also a collection of his posters and a section devoted to his lithography displaying many of his lithographic stones.

As late as the 12th century, the County of Toulouse was independent of the French crown. Its cities were wealthy and their merchants criticised the corruption of the Church. Many were Cathars, a name derived from the Greek word for 'pure'. Cathars believed in the strict separation of good and evil in the world. They were divided into two groups: ordinary believers who worked in thriving cities like Albi and Toulouse, and 'perfecti' who separated themselves from the world, living lives of exemplary abstinence, which contrasted awkwardly with abuses within the Church. The French crown mounted the Albigensian Crusade (c.1208-1244) to destroy the Cathar 'heresy'. Its hidden motive was to conquer the independent south and incorporate it into the French realm. The population of Albi was slaughtered and Bishop Bernard de Castanet (1240-1317) constructed the new Cathedral of Sainte-Cécile (1282-1330; porch 1519-1535) using riches confiscated from the Cathars. The building, with huge, smooth defensive walls and curved tower buttresses (so that stones hurled by siege machines would glance off them) was designed like a fortress to remind the Albigensians of the authority of the Church whose dogmas they had questioned.

The rest of the afternoon will be at leisure to explore this beautiful city for yourself. (Overnight Albi) B

Day 5: Saturday 26 September, Albi – Sainte-Eulalie de Cernon – La Cavalerie – La Couvertoirade – Millau Viaduct – Albi

- Templar and Hospitaller Circuit on the Larzac Plateau
- Sainte-Eulalie de Cernon: the headquarters of a local Templar *commanderie*
- Templar and Hospitaller villages of La Cavalerie and La Couvertoirade
- Millau Viaduct (time permitting)

The south of France was enriched by Mediterranean trade and pilgrimage to Santiago, but it was also a highly contested region, where the forces of the French and Spanish kingdoms, local potentates such as the Counts of Toulouse and Carcassonne, and religious groups like the Cathars, all vied for power. Another force in this region was the Knight Templar, originally dedicated to the succour of pilgrims in Jerusalem, which had been transformed during the Crusades into an aristocratic, military order. Many myths have been spun around the Templars, most of which, such as their involvement in occult practices, are apocryphal. They nevertheless constituted a powerful force in medieval Europe, amassing vast wealth that raised the jealousy of kings. The Templars, like the Knights Hospitaller (later Knights of Malta) attracted charitable donations, including vast tracts of land. Among their many activities was banking, and Philip IV (1268-1314), who was heavily indebted to them, had many arrested, tortured to produce false confessions, and burned at the stake as heretics. He also forced Pope Clement V to disband the Order in 1312.

We spend today exploring Templar territories in the Larzac region to the east of Albi, visiting Sainte-Eulalie de Cernon, their regional headquarters (*commanderie*), and their stunningly picturesque fortified village of La Couvertoirade. Sainte-Eulalie de Cernon occupies a deep valley between ridges of the Larzac. It is the best-preserved Templar commandery in France, having been established by the Order in 1159, and then taken over by the Hospitallers when Philip IV eliminated the Templars. La Couvertoirade, in a wildly beautiful setting, deep in the Larzac on the edge of the Cévennes National Park, was a Templar stronghold until the fall of the Order, when it also was taken over by the Knights Hospitaller who built the village's curtain wall between 1439 and 1450. This wall still stands, and within it are a church, a small château, and a number of lovely old houses.

We shall also have lunch at a small restaurant in La Cavalerie, another fortified Larzac Templar site, halfway between Sainte-Eulalie de Cernon and La Couvertoirade.

We return to Albi in the late afternoon and, time permitting, make a brief stop to view the Millau Viaduct, a cable-stayed road-bridge that spans the valley of the river Tarn. Designed by the French structural engineer Michel Virlogeux and British architect Norman Foster, it is one of the tallest bridges in the world. (Overnight Albi) BL

Conques - 1 night

Day 6: Sunday 27 September, Albi – Cordes-sur-Ciel – Rodez – Conques

- Bastide of Cordes-sur-Ciel
- Lunch at Café Bras
- Musée Pierre Soulages, Rodez

Today we drive north to the secluded town of Conques through the region of the Aveyron Gorges. Bastides played a vital role in the emergence of France after the Dark Ages and the consolidation of royal power after the Albigensian Crusade. They also figured in the ensuing territorial struggle with the Plantagenets of England, the Hundred Years' War. A bastide was a fortified village or town, usually of regular plan, in which the rural population was forced to reside so it could be defended as well as exploited by the crown or a feudal lord. Both the Plantagenet and French monarchies built bastides. Before the advent of these very particular communities, the landscape of this heavily forested, under-populated region had only tiny, scattered, isolated settlements, abbeys, or the strongholds of the local nobility. The bastides were therefore the 'frontier towns' or 'colonies' of the Middle Ages, which tamed the land. Although an ideal bastide has a grid plan centring on an arcaded market square, they in fact took many forms that depended upon topography, microclimate, and available building materials. The plan of Cordes, the very earliest bastide, does not conform to type. Its organic plan accommodated the urban fabric to the steep bluff upon which it was located. Its domestic architecture is distinctive to the region. Originally, its limited agricultural domain would have been surrounded by forest, for Cordes was founded in virgin territory.

We then head west to Rodez, today's prefecture of the Aveyron department, where we shall enjoy lunch at Café Bras. Michel Bras is a 3-star Michelin chef whose restaurant in Laguiole was classed several times among the 10 best restaurants in the world. His cooking style is described as creative and is often associated with fresh herbs and edible flowers. He launched this brasserie in 2014 inside the Musée Soulages.

Following this delicious lunch, we visit the Musée Soulages. [Pierre Soulages](#) was a French painter, printmaker, and sculptor born in Rodez. He was arguably the most famous French artist of the second half of the 20th century. His works are held by leading museums around the world, including the one we visit today. Soulages is known as "the painter of black", owing to his interest in the colour as both a colour and a non-colour. He saw light as a work material; the striations of the black surface of his paintings enable him to reflect light, allowing the black to come out of darkness and into brightness, thus becoming a luminous colour. Soulages produced 104 stained-glass windows for the Romanesque Abbey Church of Sainte-Foy in Conques from 1987 to 1994, which we will see tomorrow.

We then drive north to Conques, one of France's greatest treasures. Tonight, we stay in a delightful small hotel occupying a late medieval house next to Conques' famous church. (Overnight Conques) BLD

[Saint-Jean-Lespinasse - 1 night](#)

Day 7: Monday 28 September, Conques – Montal – Saint-Jean-Lespinasse

- Benedictine Abbey of Sainte-Foy, Conques
- Abbey Museum and its Treasury, Conques
- Château de Montal

Conques owes its fame to the Benedictine Abbey of Sainte-Foy (1031-1090). It has a fine east-end with radiating chapels, a narrow, high nave with galleries, and a well-preserved coloured portal depicting the *Last Judgement* in vividly descriptive detail. The abbey was first founded in 866 in a lonely, thickly wooded region of the Dordogne. It became an important station on the medieval pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela from Le Puy because of the extraordinary popularity of the saint, martyred in 330 AD, whose relics were brought here in five centuries later. The adolescent girl Sainte Foy, like Saint George, was of obscure origins, but later became so popular that monuments to her were founded throughout Britain, continental Europe and the Near East. Her strange reliquary, fashioned in the form of an enthroned monarch, is the only surviving example of a form popular in the 11th century. It is housed in Conques'

Abbey Museum, which holds one of Europe's best-preserved collections of medieval pilgrim art.

We shall spend the morning visiting the abbey church and the museum of Conques, and wandering through the small town viewing its lovely small houses.

In the afternoon, we shall drive west. We visit the Château de Montal whose powerful towers and picturesque profile give it the aspect of a fortress. Built in 1523-4, it is, however, a Renaissance palace similar to the great châteaux of the Loire, and the rich decoration of its stately façades reflects a political stability unknown earlier, when bastides were used to tame this part of France and when French and English armies fought each other for control of it. Of particular note are Montal's portrait sculptures of Robert de Balsac, his wife Antoinette de Castelnau, and members of their family that grace the upper storeys of the courtyard façade. Within, the château has a magnificent central staircase and beautiful fittings, such as great ornamental fireplaces. After touring the château and its gardens, we walk to our hotel, the Hôtel des Trois Soleils de Montal is overlooking the Bave Valley outside the village of Saint-Jean-Lespinasse. The hotel is noted for its fine cuisine and we shall dine here tonight. (Overnight Saint-Jean-Lespinasse) BD

Sarlat - 4 nights

Day 8: Tuesday 29 September, Saint-Jean-Lespinasse – Autoire – Loubressac – Carennac – Rocamadour – Sarlat

- Village of Autoire
- Village of Loubressac
- Carennac Church & Cloister
- Clifftop village of Rocamadour and its sanctuary

Today we explore two villages close to St Céré and then turn west along the valley of the Dordogne. Our route takes us through the heart of an ancient agricultural region with numerous beautiful châteaux, villages, and Romanesque pilgrim churches. We start our journey, travelling through Autoire, located at the head of the Gorge d'Autoire, a chasm running south from the Dordogne to the nearby village of Loubressac where we break for a picnic lunch.

Near Loubressac, the Bave meets the Dordogne, whose south bank we follow to Carennac. Here we stop to view the medieval tympanum over the doorway of the church. Carved tympana, often with graphic depictions of the *Last Judgement*, were a feature of Romanesque churches, presenting the faithful entering the shrine with awesome visions of Christ or terrifying views of eternal punishments meted out to sinners. You will be able to compare Carennac's *Last Judgement* with those you have seen at Moissac and Conques and will see how each has a very different style compared to its counterparts.

From here we continue on to Sarlat-la-Canéda. On the way, we stop in the clifftop village of Rocamadour. Nestled in a gorge above a tributary of the river Dordogne, this village is known for its historical monuments and its sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which for centuries has attracted pilgrims from many countries, among them kings, bishops, and nobles. Accessed via the Grand Escalier staircase, it includes the Chapelle Notre-Dame, with its Black Madonna statue, and the Romanesque-Gothic Basilica of St-Sauveur. If you pay attention, you will see, embedded in the rock, a sword identified by the monks with the famous *Durandal*, the sword of Roland, the legendary paladin and partially historical officer of Charlemagne in French epic literature. Roland did depart with his troops from Rocamadour to cross the Pyrenees, dying at the Battle of Roncevaux in 778, but the monks probably invented the story as a means of propaganda. (Overnight Sarlat) BL

Day 9: Wednesday 30 September, Sarlat – Les Eyzies de Tayac – Rouffignac – Sarlat

- Musée National de la Préhistoire, Les Eyzies
- Abri Pataud, Les Eyzies
- Prehistoric cave of Rouffignac

Adrian joins us today for the rest of the tour.

For over a century the Dordogne has been celebrated for its magnificent painted caves from the Late Pleistocene, what archaeologists call Late Paleolithic (40,000-10,000 BC). At this time humans were sufficiently technologically advanced to survive the extreme cold of the Last Ice Age in this region, and to hunt the huge herds of animals that roamed it. For 25,000 years in this region of limestone plateaux and verdant valleys, humans decorated caves with engravings, sculptures and paintings, depicting all kinds of animals in extraordinary, vividly naturalistic detail. Around 10,000 BC the climate ameliorated and the magnificent cave decorations cease, possibly because the great herds of bison, deer and other animals that man had hunted – and depicted – moved further north to new pastures that had been freed from the retreating ice cover.

This morning we visit the Musée National de la Préhistoire at Les Eyzies-de-Tayac. It is situated in a restored château on a terrace overlooking a plain on which vast herds of reindeer and other beasts would have roamed in the Late Stone Age. The château, in fact, is located on the site of a Prehistoric settlement chosen, no doubt, for the excellent view it provided those scanning the plain for game. The museum holds, among other exhibits, an amazing collection of artefacts such as beautifully sculpted reliefs of animals.

Following lunch in Les Eyzies-de-Tayac, we visit the excavation site of Abri Pataud, the only prehistoric site in the Dordogne to have been converted into a museum. It is situated 15 metres above the river Vézère at the foot of an imposing cliff that dominates the village.

Our last visit today is Rouffignac, a vast prehistoric cave which includes ten kilometres of galleries, two of which were frequented by Cro-Magnon artists. An electrical train takes us through. It's also exceptional for its more than 150 depictions of mammoths. This is linear art: animals and signs outlined in manganese dioxide, or finely engraved, or finger-drawn where the wall's surface is soft enough. The simplicity and accuracy of line here reveal the artist's talent and expertise more in this cave, perhaps, than anywhere else. The Great Ceiling, one kilometre from the entrance, offers the viewer an unforgettable whirl of mammoths, bison, and ibex. (Overnight Sarlat) B

Day 10: Thursday 1 October, Sarlat – Monpazier – Sarlat

- Bastide town of Monpazier & Thursday Market
- Orientation walk of Sarlat-la-Canéda
- Late afternoon at leisure

This morning we drive to the bastide of Monpazier, nominated one of 'plus beaux villages de France'. It is not only the best-preserved bastide in the Dordogne, but is also considered the most typical example of a bastide in the entire south-west of France. King Edward I of England founded Monpazier in 1284 with the help of Pierre de Gontaut, Lord of Biron, and it was only during the reign of King Charles V of France (1366-1380) that it was taken by the French. In 1574 the Huguenot captain, Geoffroi de Vivans, took control of Monpazier and in 1594 it became a centre of the Peasant's Revolt.

Despite the ravages of the Hundred Years' War and the Wars of Religion, Monpazier has remained

remarkably unchanged for 700 years. Monpazier's urban core is perfectly quadrilateral in overall layout, its symmetrical, gridded plan covering an area of 400 x 220 metres. The town's grid is crossed by four transverse streets, which divide it into rectangular precincts. Medieval and 17th-century houses surround the central Place des Cornières; originally, all of Monpazier's houses were exactly the same size and separated from one another by narrow side alleys or androns to prevent the spread of fire. The ground floor of those surrounding the square form a continuous arcade, a feature typical of bastides, also seen in northern Italy and in Spanish cities and towns. Monpazier's old market hall is intact; its 16th-century timber roof frame is supported by wooden pillars that rest on stone blocks. St Dominique's Church was built in the 13th century and added to later. Its nave, with ribbed vaults, leads to a polygonal chevet. Monpazier's 13th-century Chapter House, situated behind the church, once served as the tithe barn for stocking harvest produce requisitioned as taxes. This tithe house, as well as the town's highly organised plan and characteristic architecture, all speak physically of the fact that bastides were created from scratch as centres of power and commerce by princes.

Our visit to Montpazier is timed to coincide with the Thursday market. Walnuts are a local speciality and taste wonderfully fresh. You may wish to try the local walnut bread and tarts!

In the afternoon we take a leisurely stroll of Sarlat-la-Canéda which will include a visit to the mysterious Lanterne des Morts and the cathedral, and time to view its golden stone buildings. Sarlat-la-Canéda was largely a ruinous town until purposefully restored by the French government in the 20th century to act as a cultural focus for the Périgord Noir region. The remainder of the day is at leisure. (Overnight Sarlat) B

Day 11: Friday 2 October, Sarlat – Grottes de Cougnac – Cabrerets– Pech-Merle – Sarlat

- Grottes de Cougnac
- Lunch at Hotel des Grottes, Cabrerets
- Centre de Préhistoire du Pech-Merle

This morning we drive to two fascinating caves at the Grottes de Cougnac, one of which is important for its geology and the other for its fine paintings. You will see mammoth, ibex, human figures and three megaloceros (reindeer with huge antlers). Many of the painted forms take advantage of the natural shapes of the cave wall that may possibly even have suggested them. Some of the stalagmites and stalactites in the cave were deliberately broken at the time the paintings were executed. This suggests that the paintings were to be viewed from the other side of the chamber.

After lunch at Hotel des Grottes, a charming restaurant located by the river Célé in the small village of Cabrerets, we drive to Pech-Merle, where we visit a marvellous cave, with painted black outlines of aurochs, mammoth and spotted horses. The art here has been assigned to three distinct phases. To the earliest belong images of circles, dots and the outlines of hands; this phase also includes the 'spotted horses'. The second phase includes figures made by finger-tracings on the ceiling as well as 40 black outline drawings. The last phase includes engravings, the most famous of which is a bear's head. In the late afternoon we return to Sarlat, where the evening is at leisure. (Overnight Sarlat) BL

Montignac - 3 nights

Day 12: Saturday 3 October, Sarlat – Vézac – Beynac-Cazenac – Montignac

- Market Day at Sarlat-la-Canéda
- Jardins de Marqueyssac, Vézac
- Barge excursion along the Dordogne River

- Village of Beynac-Cazenac

Saturday is market day in Sarlat-la-Canéda, which rivals Conques in the beauty of its medieval streetscapes. Our leisurely morning stroll will include participation in the market where you will be able to purchase ingredients for your picnic lunch in the gardens of Marqueyssac.

The Dordogne south of Sarlat-la-Canéda is littered with exquisite châteaux, bastides and churches. Our drive to the Château de Marqueyssac allows us to immerse ourselves in this landscape. Marqueyssac has extraordinary 'hanging gardens', named because of their position on a craggy promontory with breathtaking views over the surrounding valley. The château was founded in the late 17th century and has remained in the family ever since. In the 18th and 19th centuries a vast number of box trees, which lend themselves so well to topiary, were planted. Marqueyssac's boxwood folly, along with a great variety of oaks, hornbeams, lime trees, Judas trees, viburnum, plantain, elms and cypresses, shares this inimitable setting with vegetable and flower gardens, fine cliff-top bastions, sinuous paths, and a grand *allée* derived from one family member's fond memories of Italy.

We next drive to Beynac-Cazenac, a village which has managed to retain its medieval charm. The Château de Beynac, one of the great castles of the Périgord, dominates the north bank of the Dordogne River from a precipitous height and is defended on the north side by double walls. Crouching beneath its limestone cliff is a small village, once the home of poet Paul Eluard. During the Hundred Years' War, the Dordogne River frequently marked the border between French and English territories: the fortress at Beynac, then in French hands was faced on the opposite bank of the river by the Château de Castelnaud held by the English.

We shall enjoy a cruise along the Dordogne River on board replicas of traditional *gabarrs* (the Dordogne's traditional flat-bottomed boats), passing some of the valley's most beautiful castles along the way, and a local guide will provide a commentary on various aspects relating to the river, its history and its environment.

Following some time at leisure in the village of Beynac-Cazenac to wander through its narrow paved streets, we continue to Montignac where we shall reside for the next 3 nights. (Overnight Montignac) BD

Day 13: Sunday 4 October, Montignac – Lascaux – St-Léon-sur-Vézère – Thonac – Montignac

- Walking tour of Montignac
- Lascaux Caves II
- St-Léon-sur-Vézère
- Château de Losse, Thonac

Montignac is dominated by a tall tower, the vestige of a fortress that was once the home of the counts of Périgord. Until recently a sleepy backwater, Montignac was transformed when the Lascaux caves were discovered. It is now a thriving small town with attractive medieval streets and houses, a 17th-century priory church and a local folk museum. We begin our day with a short walking tour of the town.

Next, we will visit the facsimile of the world famous painted caves, Lascaux II, the original having long since been closed to the public. This is the most famous and spectacular of all decorated caves, best-known perhaps for its 600 paintings of aurochs, horses, deer and a variety of signs; there are also almost 1500 engravings in the cave. Although we cannot visit the original, it is important to see this facsimile in order to gauge the quality of this pinnacle of cave art.

We then drive along the Vézère Valley for a visit to the picturesque village of St-Léon-sur-Vézère. Here we

may view a number of houses which still retain their traditional *lauze* (stone) roofing, and the Romanesque Church of Saint-Léonce which features some fine frescoes.

This afternoon we visit the Château de Losse. This castle owes its position, inhabited continuously since prehistory, to its strategic command of the valley. In the 13th century a Flemish family, the Loss, fortified the cliff above the river. Like so many French châteaux, it was transformed from a fortress to a country palace during the Renaissance. This was affected by Jean II de Loss who was one of François I's pages and tutor to Henry IV. We shall visit the elegant Renaissance building and its large formal garden, all with magnificent views of the valley. (Overnight Montignac) BL

Day 14: Monday 5 October, Montignac – Marquay – Eyrignac – St-Amand-de-Coly – Montignac

- Abri de Cap Blanc, Marquay
- Les Jardins du Manoir d'Eyrignac
- Saint-Amand-de-Coly: Fortified Church

This morning we head to the small village of Marquay to explore the Abri de Cap Blanc, a rock shelter that presents a large prehistoric sculpted frieze. Considered to be one of the best examples of Palaeolithic sculpture, the frieze is 13 meters long and includes carvings of horses, bison and deer.

Then we drive through lovely, often dramatic, countryside to Eyrignac, where Patrick Sermadiras de Pouzels de Lile has restored a formal 18th-century garden, a rarity in Périgord. Here, box, hornbeam and yew are clipped with an almost obsessive exactness to produce verdant architectural forms aligned along three vistas. Strong perspectives of sharply formed leafy structures are orchestrated in subtle tonal contrasts – between the fresh green of lawns, the glossy leaves of the box, the slightly translucent foliage of the hornbeam and the matt, almost black needles of the yew.

We enjoy lunch at the gardens' terrace restaurant before driving to the picturesque village of Saint-Amand-de-Coly, which has an interesting 12th-century fortified church. The small walled village of Saint-Armand-de-Coly grew up around an Augustinian monastery first mentioned in a document of 1048. A monk from the Catalan monastery of Ripoll, later bishop of Vich, who made a journey around the monasteries of Périgord, wrote the 1048 text. He recorded that the monastery had grown up around the tomb of Saint-Armand, a young Limousine noble who came here as a hermit in the middle of the 6th century from the community of Genouillac (Terrasson). Saint Armand preached to the local population, and when he died was made a saint. The day of his death was fixed as 25th June. A small town grew up around the monastery, whose houses like the monastery itself, were constructed of Sarlaise stone, with typical *lauze* roofs. Little remains of the monastery and the high defensive walls that protected it and the town, but the magnificent early 12th-century fortified church remains. (Overnight Montignac) BLD

Bordeaux - 1 night

Day 15: Tuesday 6 October, Montignac – Périgueux – Pessac-sur-Dordogne – Bordeaux

- Walking tour of *Vesunna*, the Gallo-Roman town of Périgueux
- Pilgrim cathedral of Saint-Front, Périgueux
- Farewell Lunch and wine tasting at Château Carbonneau, Pessac-sur-Dordogne

Today we drive to Bordeaux via one of France's most important medieval pilgrimage centres, Périgueux. We start with a walking tour of *Vesunna*, the antique town, founded around 16 B.C. when the province of *Gallia Aquitania* was established by Augustus, the first Roman Emperor. It became the capital of the

Petrucos' territory, which was approximately the equivalent of modern-day Dordogne. The architecture and urban planning of this new town were to be the expression of Roman order promoting a new way of life. Around 40 B.C., the town already had a forum and the amphitheatre was under construction. The temple, known today as the 'Tour de Vésone' soaring in the museum's park, dates back to the beginning of the 2nd century.

The Cathedral of Saint-Front, although very heavily restored in the 19th century, nevertheless is particularly interesting for its medieval domes. The use of domes to roof churches in this region resembles that at St Mark's, Venice. It is typical of the ecclesiastical architecture of the Byzantine Empire rather than Western Europe. Saint-Front is actually composed of two earlier churches, separated by a high medieval bell tower.

We sample wines and eat lunch at one of the region's wineries, Château Carbonneau, located between Saint-Emilion and Bergerac. This winery is a corner of New Zealand in the Sainte-Foy appellation, which is between Castillon and Bergerac. Now on the third generation of New Zealand owners (with a French husband however), and a New Zealand winemaker, they produce elegant red, rosé and white wines that reflect the exceptional terroir of the Sainte-Foy Côtes de Bordeaux Appellation. The 100-hectare plus estate is also a working farm, with cattle, forest and some beautiful Bernese mountain dogs. (Overnight Bordeaux) BL

Day 16: Wednesday 7 October, Bordeaux. Tour Ends.

- Tour concludes in the morning
- At leisure/Check out

Our tour ends in Bordeaux after breakfast. In the morning you will be required to check out of the hotel. Please contact ASA if you require assistance with a transfer to Bordeaux Airport. B

Accommodation

ASA has selected 3- and 4-star hotels that are themselves historical buildings and/or are located in historical centres. All hotels provide rooms with en suite bathroom.

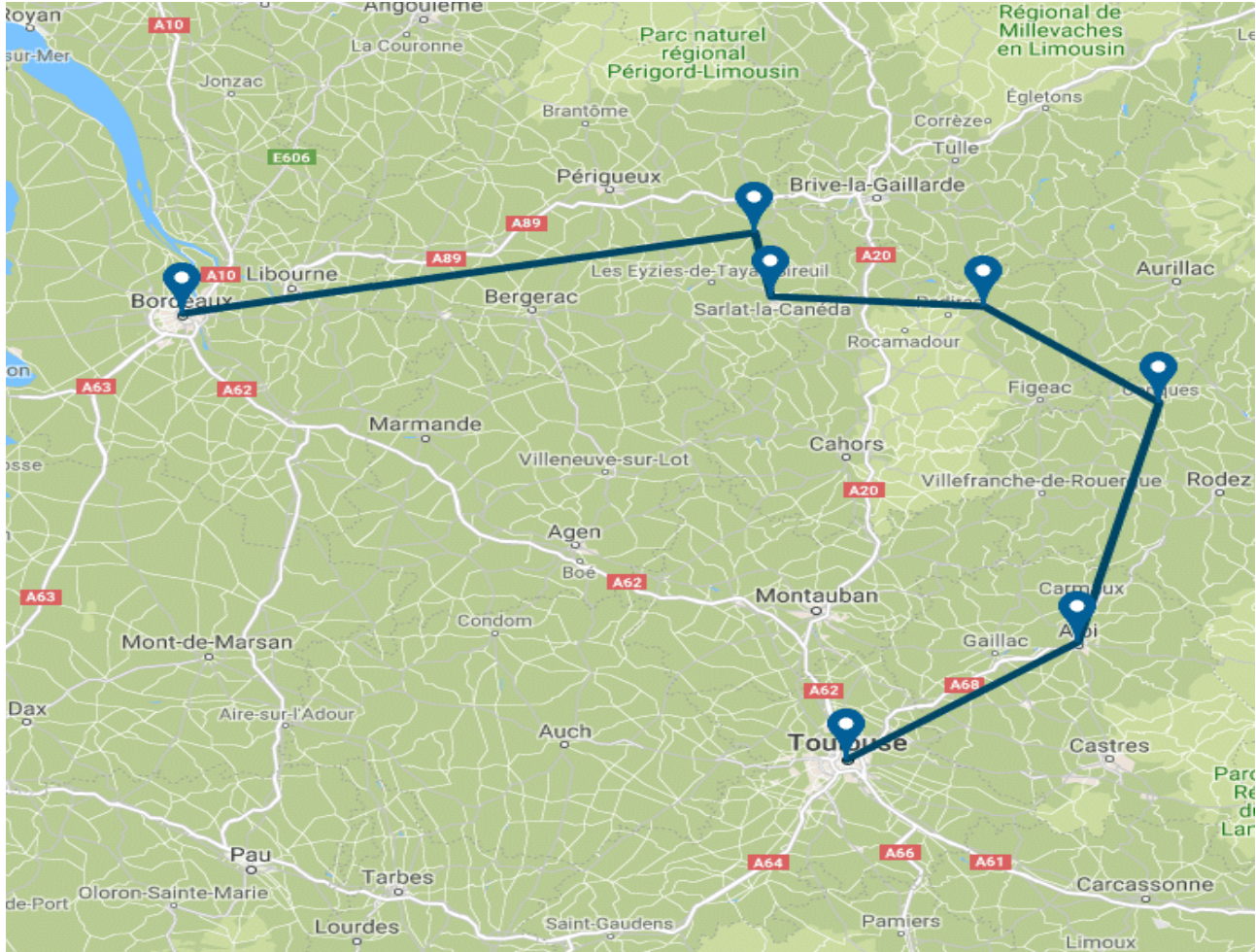
- Toulouse (2 nights): [4-star Grand Hôtel de L'Opéra](#) – a charming 4-star hotel housed in a beautifully restored 17th-century convent, located in the heart of Toulouse, opposite the theatre.
- Albi (3 nights): [4-star Mercure Albi Bastides](#) – housed in a former 18th-century flour mill, located on the banks of the Tarn. The hotel features a restaurant and terrace overlooking the river.
- Conques (1 night): [3-star Hôtel Sainte-Foy](#) – housed in a beautiful 17th-century residence located in the village centre, opposite Conques' abbey church.
- Saint-Jean-Lespinasse (1 night): [3-star Les Trois Soleils de Montal](#) – a modern hotel set in a four-hectare park, located near the Château of Montal.
- Sarlat (4 nights): [4-star Hôtel Plaza Madeleine](#) – a charming hotel in the heart of the historical centre of Sarlat.
- Montignac (3 nights): [3-star Hôtel La Roseraie](#) – housed in a 19th-century mansion by the river Vézère, surrounded by a centennial rose garden.
- Bordeaux (1 night): [4-star Hôtel de Sèze Bordeaux](#) – located in the heart of Bordeaux at the corner of the Allées de Tourny and rue de Sèze, in a beautiful 18th-century building.

Note: Hotels are subject to change, in which case a hotel of similar standard will be provided.

Single Supplement

Payment of this supplement will ensure accommodation in a single occupancy throughout the tour. In all hotels on this tour, this will be a double/twin room for single occupancy, except for 1 night in Conques, where, due to the size of the hotel, standard single rooms may be provided. The number of rooms available for single use is extremely limited. People wishing to take this supplement are therefore advised to book well in advance.

Tour Map



Tour Price & Inclusions

AUD \$TBA Land Content Only – Early-Bird Special: Book before 30 September 2025

AUD \$TBA Land Content Only

AUD \$TBA Single Supplement

Tour Price (Land Content Only) includes:

- Accommodation in twin-share rooms with private facilities in 3- and 4-star hotels
- Meals as indicated in the tour itinerary, where: B=breakfast, L=lunch & D=dinner
- Drinks at welcome and farewell meals. Other meals may not have drinks included.
- Transportation by air-conditioned coach
- Porterage of one piece of luggage per person at hotels where available (not at airports)
- Lecture and site-visit program
- Entrance fees
- Tour handbook
- Use of audio headsets during site visits
- Tips for the coach driver, local guides and restaurants for included meals

Tour Price (Land Content Only) does not include:

- Airfare: Australia-Toulouse, Bordeaux-Australia
- Personal spending money
- Airport-hotel transfers
- Luggage in excess of 20kg (44lbs)
- Travel insurance



Fitness Criteria & Practical Information

Fitness Level 

Level 2 - Intermediate

For people with energetic lifestyles and very good mobility

You must be able to:

- manage at least five to six hours of physical activity per day with ease.
- walk at a regular to moderate pace on flat or undulating terrain; a few days include steep ascents/descents to hilltop towns.
- negotiate challenging historic sites with several flights of stairs eg ramparts of Carcassonne.
- negotiate challenging prehistoric caves which may include poor lighting, steep and uneven stairs, narrow paths, uneven terrain and wet surfaces.
- manage your own luggage at some hotels.

Fitness Levels

Please also view the fitness criteria required for our tours, graded from Level 1 to Level 3, at www.asatours.com.au/fitness-level/

All ASA tours are active programs suitable for people with a good level of mental and physical fitness and good mobility. They are not suitable for people who lack stamina, have difficulty walking at the group's pace or who have mobility issues. An unavoidable aspect of every tour is the need to manage walking, stair-climbing and standing for long periods of time.

It is a condition of travel that all participants agree to accept ASA's directions in relation to their suitability to participate in activities undertaken on the tour, and that ASA retains the sole discretion to direct a tour participant to refrain from a particular activity on part of the tour. Before enrolling on an ASA tour please read the fitness requirements carefully.

Booking Conditions

Making a Tentative Reservation before the tour price has been published

ASA INTENTION TO TRAVEL APPLICATION FORM

Some ASA tours fill almost immediately. Don't miss out! You can register your 'Intention to Travel' by completing this application and returning this to ASA with a AUD \$200.00 per person deposit. Once the tour price has been published, the itinerary and ASA Reservation Application Form will be sent to you. From the time you receive the itinerary you will have two weeks to either:

- Send us a completed ASA Reservation Application Form together with an additional deposit of AUD \$800.00 per person. On receipt of this Reservation Application and deposit, ASA will process your booking and if approved, send you a tour confirmation. At this time your deposit of AUD \$1000.00 is subject to the tour's Booking Conditions.

Or

- CANCEL your Intention to Travel in writing. ASA will refund your AUD \$200.00 per person deposit, less a \$66.00 service fee (including GST).



Intention to Travel Application

TOUR NAME _____

TOUR DATES _____

Booking before the tour price is available

Some ASA tours fill almost immediately. Don't miss out! You can register your 'Intention to Travel' by completing this application and returning this to ASA with a AUD\$200.00 per person deposit. Once the tour price has been published, the itinerary and ASA Reservation Application Form will be sent to you. From the time you receive the itinerary you will have two weeks to either:

- Send us a completed ASA Reservation Application Form together with an additional deposit of AUD\$800.00 per person applicable for International tours OR AUD\$300.00 per person applicable for Australian tours. On receipt of this Reservation Application and deposit, ASA will process your booking and if approved, send you a tour confirmation. At this time your full deposit is subject to the tour's Booking Conditions.

OR

- Cancel your Intention to Travel in writing. ASA will refund your AUD\$200.00 per person deposit, less a \$66.00 service fee (including GST).

Applicant Details (as in passport)

TITLE Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Ms ☐ Miss ☐ Dr ☐ Other _____

FIRST NAME _____ Preferred FIRST NAME _____

MIDDLE NAME _____ SURNAME _____

POSTAL ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ COUNTRY _____ POSTCODE _____

TEL. (AH) () _____ TEL. (BH) () _____ Mobile Tel: _____

EMAIL address _____

Date of birth ____ / ____ / ____ GENDER Male ☐ Female ☐

Tour Accommodation (rooming preferences)

I/we would like: ☐ a twin-bedded room ☐ a double-bedded room ☐ a room for sole occupancy

I am travelling: ☐ on my own ☐ with a friend/family member Travel Companion _____

Meals

☐ I do not have any specific dietary requests

Please **X** the box if you **CAN NOT** eat any of the following:

☐ fish ☐ poultry ☐ red meat ☐ dairy products

☐ eggs ☐ pork ☐ nuts

☐ Other _____

Correspondence

Your preferred method of correspondence ☐ Postal Mail ☐ Email Address _____

Participation Criteria

To participate in an ASA tour, you must be reasonably fit, in good health and able to participate in all activities without assistance from Tour Leaders or other tour members. If you require assistance, a fit and able travel companion must undertake to accompany and assist you with all tasks for the duration of the whole tour.

ASA's ability to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate your specific needs, your health and safety and the health and safety of other tour members, is of paramount importance to us. For this reason the ASA Reservation Application includes a Medical Information section. As a general guideline, you must be able to accomplish each of these activities *without assistance or support*:-

- walk & stand unassisted for at least 2-3 hours a day in hot, humid conditions
- walk confidently on and over uneven surfaces
- climb at least 3 flights of stairs
- embark and disembark from ferries, buses and trains
- walk up and down steep slopes
- walk at a steady pace and no less than 1 km every 15 - 20 minutes
- organise, manage and carry your own luggage
- follow and remember tour instructions
- meet punctually at designated times and places
- administer your own medication.

Applicant's Signature _____

Dated _____

Tour / Course Name

Name of Traveller 1 _____

Name of Traveller 2 _____

I have enclosed a payment to the value of \$ _____ (including CC or bank fee if applicable) for this tour

Payment by (please indicate): ☐ Cheque ☐ Direct Debit (see below) ☐ Credit Card (see below)

International Payments

Welcome to our international travellers! If you are making a payment and do not have an Australian bank account/credit card, we can only accept payment as follows:

- via credit card with the applicable fee - the credit card company/bank will set the exchange rate
- via bank transfer; please give your surname and tour code (eg. Smith 21705) as a reference and ask your bank to allow for all charges.

Bank cheques or personal cheques will not be accepted.

By Cheque (accept Australian cheques only)

Please make cheques payable to *Australians Studying Abroad*

Direct Deposit or Internet Banking

You will need to:

1. Provide your bank with ASA's bank details (see below) and the amount you wish to transfer OR make a direct deposit through any ANZ branch
2. Include any fees levied by the banks
3. Provide a reference number (Mobile or last name recommended).
4. Complete section below, including confirmation no. (given when transaction completed).

Australians Studying Abroad bank details

Bank ANZ
Branch 420 St Kilda Road, Melbourne Vic
Swift Code ANZBAU3M
BSB 013-423
Account No 3472-32759

Bank confirmation No. _____

Reference used: Mobile or last name recommended

Date Money Transferred _____

Credit Card Payment

Credit card fees apply: Mastercard, Visa & American Express 2%

Please debit my: ☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa ☐ American Express

I authorise ASA to debit my credit card for the amount due plus the applicable fee as above

Credit Card Number _____

Expiry Date _____

Security Code (CVC) _____

Bank the Card is linked to (eg. NAB or ANZ) _____

Cardholders Name _____

Cardholders Billing Address _____

Postcode _____

State _____

Country _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Cardholders Signature _____

AUSTRALIANS STUDYING ABROAD

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