

March 2026 by Beth Kelley



English arches expressing the spirit of the 19th Century at the Eyrignac Gardens: star jasmine covers the arches, which stand in borders carpeted in white periwinkle.

My husband's retirement has come when we are still fairly fit and eager for active vacations, so we planned an E-bike tour of southwest France this year. [Discover France](#) planned a 7-day schedule of biking along the Dordogne river, and visiting some beautiful villages while our luggage was ferried from hotel to hotel. We stayed in Bergerac, Les Eyzies, and Sarlat in the early springtime and had perfect sunny and cool weather. (At the end of this article, I will make some suggestions if you are traveling with children on spring break.)

Two private gardens were well worth visiting: [Eyrignac and Its Gardens](#) and [Les Jardins de Marqueyssac](#). Both are primarily landscape gardens, so the fact that we were there so early in the flowering season did not detract from the beauty of the gardens. They are both set up high on the plateau above the river valley, refreshed by breezes and bright sunlight.



“The French Garden” at *Eyrignac*



Les Jardins de Marqueyssac are planted with over 150,000 boxwood plants, all hand-pruned with precision.

Eyrignac is a short bike ride from Sarlat and is open every day of the year. Seven springs keep the 300 topiary, the Hornbeam allee, the white rose garden, and many other French-style garden rooms watered. The same family has lived here for 500 years, though the gardens were designed in the 1960s by then-patriarch Gilles Sermadiras, a Parisian furniture designer. “My father wanted to recreate the gardens in the spirit of the 18th century. He was guided by his own vision and searched the grounds for traces of the former gardens; low walls, stairs, former ponds, etc. He personally drew up the plans for the garden he had so often imagined, and which was a reflection of his own character,” says the current owner, Patrick Sermadiras. Gilles planted the magnificent gardens in just three years.



17th-century Artaban Manor



Boxwoods carefully trimmed



Rustic stained glass in the family chapel



The Chinese Pagoda, installed to be a place of meditation



An alley of hornbeams



Bench overlooking the valley

300 Yews, Box, Hornbeam and Cypress trees are expertly hand clipped by six full-time gardeners using the traditional methods—working with shears, cords and plumb lines. The manor house is from the 17th century, built with the beautiful honey-colored small stones of the region, and I was charmed by a small chapel still used by the family for special ceremonies. A scavenger hunt kept a young family occupied while we were there wandering into the Lover's Room, the Topiary Farmyard, and over to the Chinese Pagoda. *Eryignac* is a fine way to spend a few hours on a sunny day.



This is the White Garden at *Eyignac*, very formal and serene.

Les Jardins de Marqueyssac, suspended 420 feet above the Dordogne river near La Roque Gageac, is jaw-dropping. Hand-pruned into interlocking spheres and cubes, their boxwoods are stunning as you began a 35-minute walk from the panoramic view at the entrance through an Allee, a Rotonde, an Esplanade, and

Cascades to the Belvedere, a Michelin-starred viewpoint atop the cliffs.



Texture on the hillside

Out and About in Dordogne, France



The view of the nearby town from the Belvedere



The chateau



A picnic area near an esplanade

We watched a video inside the chateau that showed the meticulous trimming methods for the boxwoods. The gardeners use hand shears, plumb lines, and a good eye to keep the spheres perfect. Wooden frames are specially made for the “Chaos de buis”, a hillside topiary made to look like giant tumbling blocks. [Click here for a page devoted to boxwood care on their website.](#)



"Chaos de buis" at *Marqueyssac*, boxwoods meant to look like blocks falling down the hill.

While we walked through the gardens, we were surprised by delightful displays of artwork in the woods, large climbing apparatuses for children to enjoy, and lots of birdsong. Starting in June, the gardens are illuminated by candles one night a week. What drama!



A treehouse



Poster-size reproduction of local art

Travelling with the kids:

Both of these gardens would be appealing to school-age children, giving them plenty of room to explore and be delighted. This region of France also has castles! We spent hours at Beynac, home to Richard the Lion-Hearted and Eleanor of Aquitaine. (The audio guide is an excellent guide to medieval history.) From the ramparts of Beynac one can see four other castle sites along the Dordogne river, as it was the border between England and France at the time. One of those castles was once at the Marqueyssac gardens, high on the cliffs, before it was demolished in war.

All this is to say that a Spring Break trip with the kids to the Dordogne might be very fun.