

# CULTURAL PIECE

(EN)

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL MOVEMENT OF THE FRENCH CITY AND WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN IN BORDEAUX.



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By Bruna Da Silva Santos

When we think about France, many things come to mind: the cheese, the baguette, and the white and blue stripes that we assume colour the streets of many French metropolitan cities. These are just a few of the many things that make France—the stereotypes we see in movies and shows that pique our curiosity about the country. One thing is for sure: once you visit France, you will be lost in its beauty, whether by the seaside or in a boutique in Paris. France fascinates people with its rich culture and always makes you want to come back for more, to see a new city or wonder in the streets of Paris.

And it's not by luck; it's by design. France is one of the countries in the world that spends more funds on culture. In 2022, the budget for cultural activities exceeded 4 billion euros. Preserving, preventing, expanding and exporting French culture seems to be a priority for the French government, and this investment is showcased in the way the rest of the world reacts to French culture, with Paris being the most visited European city in 2023.

Whether acknowledged or not, France holds a special place in people's hearts, reflecting the cultural investment of the country and their pride in all things French.

However, in recent years, Bordeaux, the wine city of France and the old port city has gained attention worldwide because of its charming personality and French attitude.

With a simple online search, it's easy to find out what to do in Bordeaux. Millions of articles will tell you what to do, what to visit and the rich history of the city; however, Bordeaux is much more than that; it's the perfect blend of modernity and tradition, an embrace between its immigrant culture and the celebration of French culture. And even if it's all historical sights, such as the Grand Théâtre, the Pont de Pierre and the Basilica of Saint Michelle, the region has much more to offer. So whether you would rather stay in a bar drinking fine Bordeaux wine or stroll down a market on a sunny Sunday morning, Bordeaux offers a variety of cultural and dynamic activities for both visitors and residents alike that will make sure to make you fall in love with the city.

- **A Brief History of Bordeaux**

Bordeaux is a city in the southwest of France, known for its wine production (the second largest in the world) and its old buildings and monuments scattered around the city. Reports of the city date back to Celtic and Roman times, when people first started to settle around the famous Garonne River. During mediaeval times, Bordeaux became an important trade city, and at the same time, wine production started under British rule. In the next century, Bordeaux lived a golden age by experiencing a cultural and economic renaissance. During this period, iconic architectural landmarks like the Place de la Bourse and the Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux were established, showcasing the city's artistic and cultural richness. The growth of the city came to an end due to the phylloxera crisis, which destroyed most vineyards across Europe and led to an economic crisis in wine regions all across Europe.

In 1855, Bordeaux achieved global acclaim as a premier wine capital following the introduction of the Bordeaux Wine Official Classification of 1855, a milestone that distinguished the region's top châteaux and solidified its prestigious status in the wine world.

Today, Bordeaux continues to thrive, quickly becoming one of the most populated cities in France, with big economic growth and business prosperity that attracts foreigners and French people alike. The Bordeaux wine region is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, highlighting the global significance of its wine industry. This recognition attracts millions of visitors to explore the historic wine châteaux, taste the renowned wines, and immerse themselves in the city's medieval streets and rich heritage.

- **The Bordeaux culture**

Although not the most popular French city, Bordeaux has always been important, from both an economic point of view and as a historical and artistic landmark. Even if the city's culture is deeply intertwined with its wine heritage, a lot of important French artists were born in Bordeaux and mention the wine city in their work. From famous painters like Rose Bonheur and Odilon Redon to singers and actresses like Serge Lama and Yvonne Valle, to more recently dancer and choreographer Benjamin Millepied and famous model Anh Duong, all these people represent Bordeaux culture and are a symbol of the artistic power that the city carries.

In Bordeaux, wine is more than a drink; it's a cultural cornerstone that permeates daily social interactions, reflecting a lifestyle where wine plays a central role in social gatherings and community connections. It's present everywhere you go in the city and it shapes the residents' daily social lives. Similar to how the British frequent pubs, Bordelais individuals can often be found in cafés savouring a glass of wine, embodying a quintessentially French social ritual. Maybe it's the wine, maybe it's the aura of Bordelais people or the architecture, but in Bordeaux, you will find the elegant ambience that is so stereotypically French, and you will love it because if there's something about Bordeaux, it is that from the moment you land until the last time you see the city, you will feel like you belong there and you want to be there.

The ambience of the city, the riverside and the street cafes take you in and charm you over. It starts slowly and if it feels like falling asleep,. First the streets, then the wine, then the food and then the people. Soon enough, you will realise that Bordeaux won you over and you will never want to leave. And in return, the city's culture will embrace you and your heritage because, in the city, there's always space for one more, for more culture, for more energy, for more nightlife, for more wine and more people. Bordeaux embraces its multicultural identity through events like the Bordeaux Wine Festival and the Bordeaux International Independent Film Festival, showcasing a harmonious blend of French and immigrant cultures that enrich daily life in the city.

- **Where to start in the city?**

Let's say the day is... 11th or 12th of September (completely normal days) and you just arrive in Bordeaux. You ask yourself, 'Okay, now where do I start?'. This question can be quite overwhelming; after all, you are starting a new life in a new city and you feel quite lost. Bordeaux is a rich cultural city that allows its visitors to explore more than just French culture due to its profound heritage. Here are some tips for the beginning of a journey in Bordeaux. Start by exploring the historic centre of the city, part of the Unesco World Heritage Site, and get lost in the 18th-century architecture and in the small, labyrinthine streets that almost take you back in time. Take a day trip to vineyards around the city, visit Médoc and Saint-Émilion to learn more about the art of winemaking and partake in wine tasting in the thousands of châteaux in the region. If you don't feel like leaving the city centre, you can always visit La Cité du Vin, a modern building dedicated to viticulture, art, science and history, while having one of the most beautiful views of the city.

For foodies, Bordeaux is filled with culinary delights from all around the world and numerous markets with food for all tastes. The biggest staples of Bordelais cuisine are duck confit, oysters and canelés. With restaurants all over the city offering these traditional foods, the problem would be choosing. That being said, the most important thing to keep in mind is chocolatine, not pain au chocolate.

- **Watch out in Bordeaux.**

### **Cultural Activities**

As mentioned earlier, the French government strongly supports the arts, which is evident in Bordeaux's vibrant cultural scene offering a wide range of activities for both visitors and locals. Explore guided street tours in Bordeaux. Visit the Grand Theatre of the city, with news productions and plays regularly. The city offers some museums and galleries, such as Le musée des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux and many others, such as installations housed within the industrial confines of the Base Sous-Marine.

- **Spaces and communities**

Neighbourhoods like Saint-Michel and Darwin Ecosystem each bring a unique charm to Bordeaux, with Saint-Michel offering a bohemian atmosphere and Darwin fostering a sense of community and creativity among its diverse residents. The most important one is Saint-Michelle. With a bohemian-like charm, the multicultural neighbourhood invites everyone to their party. The Darwin Ecosystem represents Bordeaux's alternative scene with numerous events; it's home for creatives, entrepreneurs and activists. Darwin, located in a reclaimed military barracks, is a dynamic space that hosts a variety of events, including art exhibitions, workshops, and sustainable living initiatives. It fosters a sense of community and collaboration among its diverse inhabitants. Last but not least, La Guinguette Chez Alriq, in Garonne, provides a nostalgic space for the bygone era, where you can find locals dancing, dining and revelling in the spirit of joie de vivre.

- **Parties and festivals**

From the Bordeaux Wine Festival along the riverbanks to the Bordeaux Electro Festival for electronic music enthusiasts, the city's cultural calendar brims with vibrant celebrations like the African Music and Dance Festival, showcasing the diversity and liveliness of Bordeaux's cultural scene. The Bordeaux Wine Festival is held by the riverbanks and transforms the city by celebrating the very thing the city is famous for wine. The festival has wine tastings and gourmet delights to go with it, accompanied by live concerts. For electronic music lovers, there's also the Bordeaux Electro Festival. Throughout the year, Bordeaux celebrates the culture of the people who live in the city and the global influence they bring with them. Examples of the city's multiculturalism include the African Music and Dance Festival and the Bordeaux International Independent Film Festival.

### **The Secrets of Bordeaux**

Within the city, there are also many secret artistic activities. Bordeaux is much more than its wine culture and French lifestyle.

There are hidden gems within the city worth knowing, such as La Grosse Cloche, a mediaeval gate in the heart of the city. This mediaeval wonder is a sign of the times within the city.

On the outskirts of the city, explore Quartier de Chartrons, a small district full of history and culture. Once famous for its wine merchants, now it's home to wonderful, peaceful views and amazing art scenes. As previously mentioned, Bordeaux is also a port city. Visit Les Bassins à Flot, a waterfront district with a lot of maritime heritage.

Located in the city centre, Parc Bordelais offers a peaceful oasis with activities like yoga for beginners, ideal for those seeking tranquillity amidst the bustling city. In the Bordeaux Bacalan neighbourhood, you will find Les Halles de Bacalan, a wonderful food market filled with traditional food and global cuisine as well.

**Night Life:** 'Central do Brasil' is a great centre for celebrating Mediterranean, South American and African cultures, with a big focus on Brazilian culture. They do have the best caipirinhas in Bordeaux.

**Music:** As a (former) Londoner, I feel a very strong connection with punk music. As such, I found an organisation called 'Punk Fluid'; they do punk concerts all around Bordeaux with small bands at reasonable prices.

**Coffee Place:** Located by River Cafe 750, this is a Korean-owned business with some of the best cakes and coffee you will ever have (promise), inspired by a typical Korean café.

**Cinema:** It may seem redundant but I don't think a Bordeaux experience would be complete without going to the cinema in Utopia. In the heart of the city, the cinema allows movie lovers to have an unforgettable experience.

**Vintage Stores:** For fashion lovers, 2nd hand and vintage stores are all the range in Bordeaux; you have the big ones such as Emaus, whoever I would advise you to walk around Saint-Michelle (my favourite part of town), visit all the local vintage shops and have some lunch at Marché des Capucins, a day well spent.

**Painting:** If you plan to stay in Bordeaux and want to participate in an activity that will also allow you to meet new people with the same interests, I would suggest pottery or painting, as there are a lot of spaces in Bordeaux for these creative outlets. My favourite place is L'atelier 144, Anne Cazcarra, with daily classes at the end of the day and an amazing teacher, Anne Cazcarra.

**Museums:** At last, Bordeaux doesn't have many museums or art galleries; however, the CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, is my favourite; besides the normal art exhibitions, the museum also hosts various artistic events at night and during the week.