



Walking tour #3

Elegant Bordeaux

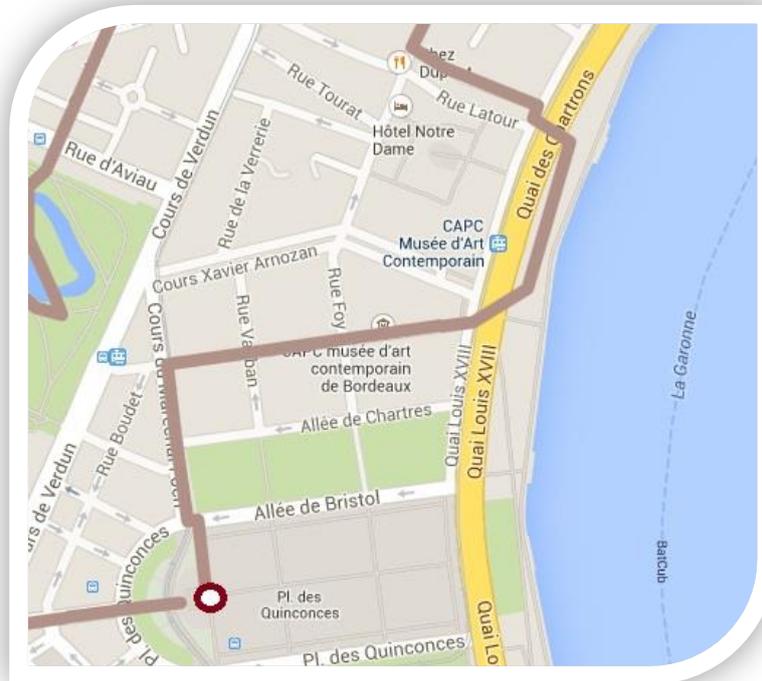
Elegant Bordeaux

The fine architecture, elegant streets, peaceful market squares and magnificent churches of the Chartrons and Saint-Seurin districts are among the most delightful sights that Bordeaux has to offer. This meandering walk will reveal a side of the city that has prospered over the centuries and continues to enjoy an affluent present. Each building, each statue and each plaque has a fascinating story to tell... as we are about to find out!

Sights

1. **Esplanade des Quinconces & Monument des Girondins**
2. **CAPC**
3. **Bourse Maritime**
4. **Slave Trade plaque**
5. **Maisons hollandaises**
6. **Église Saint-Louis**
7. **Marché des Chartrons**
8. **Statue of Liberty**
9. **Jardin Public**
10. **Fontaine d'Audège & Place Charles-Gruet**
11. **Palais Gallien**
12. **Saint-Seurin basilica**
13. **Castéja**
14. **Hôtel des Postes**
15. **Cours Clémenceau**

Sight #1: Esplanade des Quinconces & Monument des Girondins



Our walk begins on Esplanade des Quinconces, named after the sequences in which the trees on either side were originally planted (four trees forming a square with a fifth in the middle). The square is usually a peaceful sight on the main tourist trails of the city, but is sometimes the scene of funfairs, circuses, specialist markets and concerts.



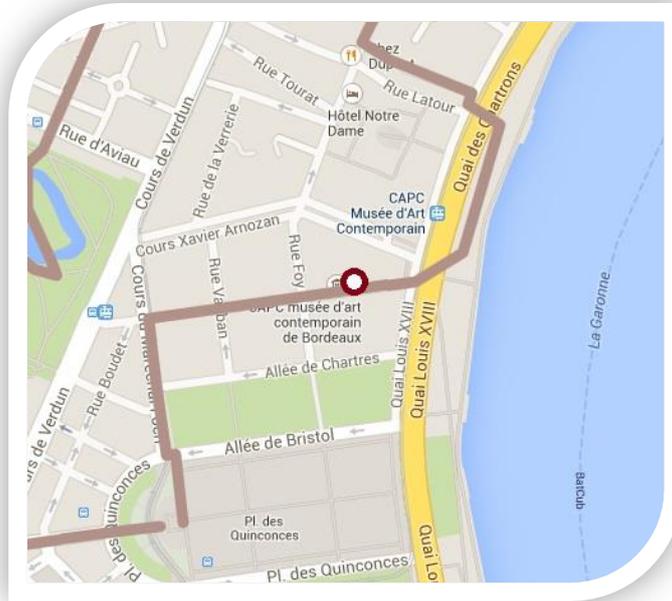
Esplanade des Quinconces took its present form in the 19th century. For more than 300 years, a fortified castle kept watch over the city here. It was demolished in 1818. At the far end of the square, overlooking the Garonne river, are two 21-metre-high rostral columns which were erected in 1829. They respectively symbolise trade and navigation.

At the near end is the spectacular “Monument aux Girondins”, which pays homage to the Girondins political group who were overpowered and executed by their rivals the Jacobins in the slipstream of the French Revolution.

The creator, Alphonse Dumilâtre, spent eight years designing the monument, which was completed in 1902. Its centerpiece is a 43-metre column which is topped off by a winged lady made out of bronze. Freedom is symbolised by the broken chain in her right hand.

During the Second World War, much of the monument disappeared from view and it was thought it had been melted down to be turned into weaponry. However, when the war was over, it was found in Angers, central France. It was returned to its original spot in 1986.

Sight #2: CAPC



CAPC (Centre d'Arts Plastiques Contemporains) is a world-class modern art museum exhibiting 1,000 works by 140 artists including Sol LeWitt, Daniel Buren, Claude Viallat, Richard Long and Mario Merz. Temporary exhibitions are held in the impressive central concourse.



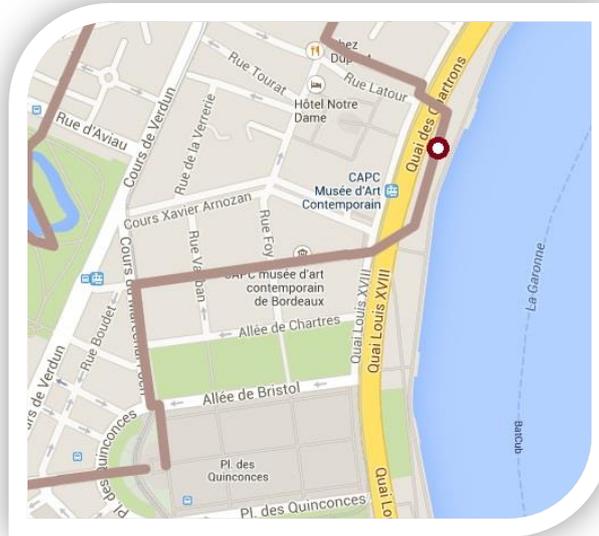
The building is just as stunning as the exhibits it showcases. It was previously a warehouse, Entrepôt Lâiné, and used for the storage of sugar, coffee, cocoa, spices and cotton. The engineer responsible for the original stone, brick and wooden structure, Claude Deschamps, is also the man behind the Pont de Pierre, the oldest bridge in central Bordeaux. His designs sought to deliver a functional building where nothing was used to mask the raw building materials. The warehouse took two years to build and was completed in 1824.

In the early 1970s, there were plans to demolish the now-disused warehouse, but overwhelming public support resulted in it being granted listed status. It was purchased by the city of Bordeaux in 1973, becoming home to the museum which officially became a municipal establishment ten years later.

Its full transformation from warehouse to museum was the work of architects Jean Pistre, Denis Valode and designer Andrée Putman. Work was carried out over several phases up until 1990.

The museum is open 11AM-6PM, 11AM-8PM on Wednesdays, closed on Mondays and public holidays. Admission to the permanent exhibits is free of charge. Prices vary for temporary exhibitions.

Sight #4: Slave Trade plaque



It is from this quay that ships set sail between 1672 and 1837, on the first legs of 508 triangular slave trade voyages resulting in 150,000 Africans being deported to the Americas.

Bordeaux was not alone. In France the city of Nantes organised 1,744 expeditions, and the ports of La Rochelle and Le Havre were on a par with Bordeaux.

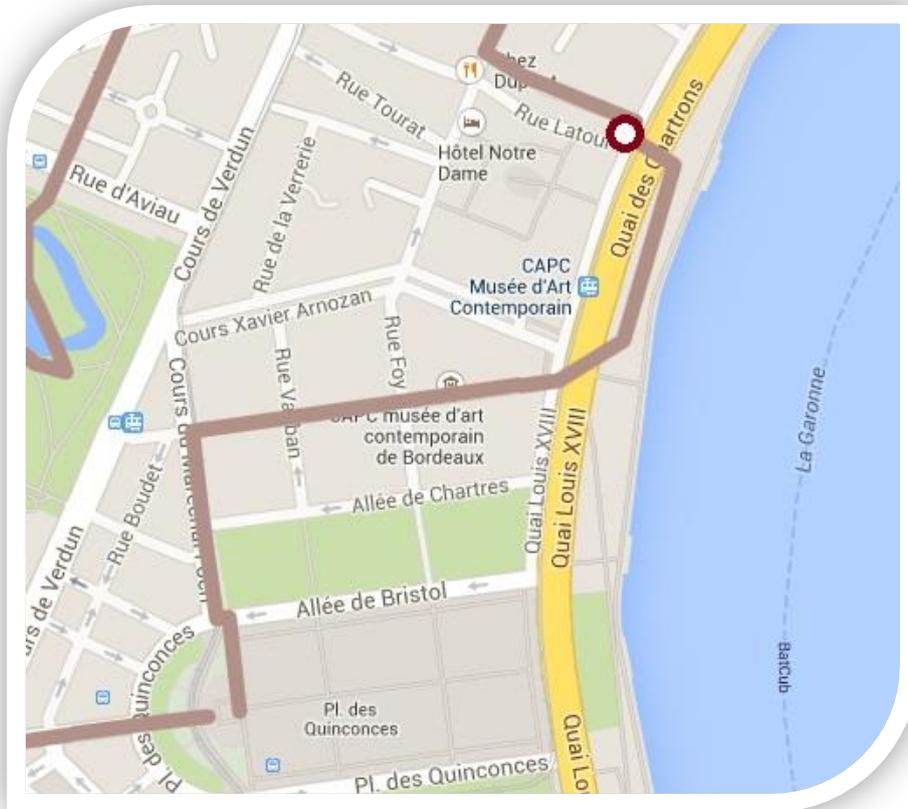
Before the triangular voyages began (they peaked in the 1780s), boats departing from Bordeaux conducted two-way commerce with the Caribbean. With the onset of triangular trade, vessels would leave on their outward passage loaded with wine, foodstuffs, cloth, arms and trinkets which, upon arrival on the eastern coast of Africa, would be exchanged for slaves. The middle passage would follow, with the slaves being ferried in inhumane conditions to the colonies, mainly Saint-Domingue. Death rates on board the boats were between 10 and 20 per cent.

Upon arrival, the slaves would be sold or auctioned off and work on plantations where the average life expectancy was five to six years. The boats would embark on their return passage to Bordeaux carrying sugar, cocoa, tobacco, cotton and other produce, making a substantial contribution to the city's wealth.

Until the 1990s, this chapter in the city's history was more often than not glossed over. But Bordeaux has begun to come to terms with its past, hence this plaque, a permanent exhibition at the *Musée d'Aquitaine* and a statue of Toussaint Louverture, the architect of the independence of Haiti, on the riverbank opposite.



Sight #5: Maisons Hollandaises



Here we have two twin houses which, in terms of their shape and design, are unlike any other in Bordeaux. For obvious architectural reasons, they are known as the “maisons hollandaises”, the Dutch houses, and were built around 1680.

At the time, the Dutch were major importers of Bordeaux goods, particularly wine, and a large community of Flemish traders had moved to the city, mainly in the Chartrons district where we now find ourselves.

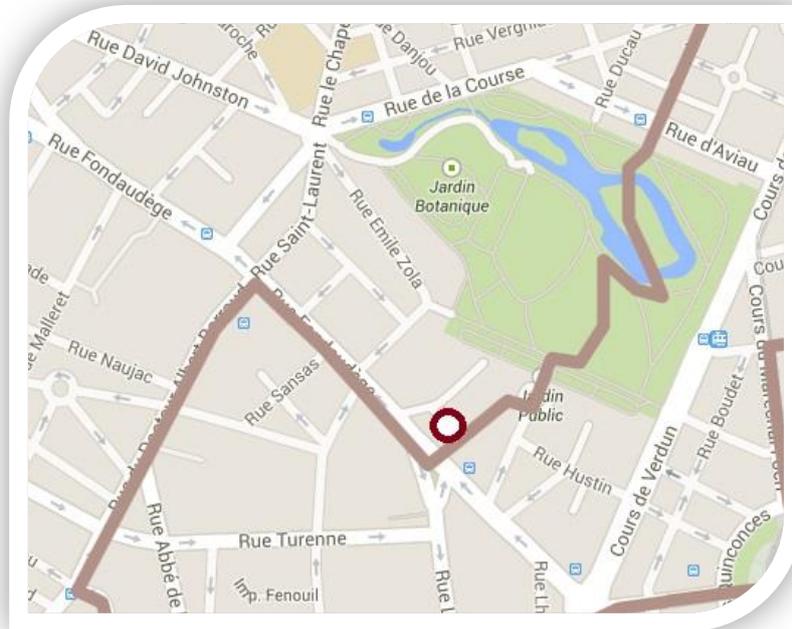


For many years it was believed that these houses were built by Dutch traders who elected to remain in the city, but it later emerged that the man behind their construction was a bourgeois merchant from Bordeaux named Hilaire Renu.

The two houses were threatened with destruction during the 18th century but survived, partly because number 29 became home to the “Bureau des Fermes”, or customs office.

They continue to prevail and have been officially listed as historic heritage since April 1990, so we will be able to admire details such as the sculpted lions' heads and diamond-shaped stained glass window panels for many years to come!

Sight #10: Fontaine d'Audège & Place Charles-Gruet



In a tiny side-street before arriving on Rue Fondaudège, a monumental stele marks the spot where a plentiful and long-valuable source, la Fontaine d'Audège, provided the area with clean and fresh water.

For many years the water was channelled throughout the city, supplying tanneries as early as the 15th century and fountains in other neighbourhoods by the 17th century. It is also thought that in earlier times the source was a vital water supply for spectators at the nearby Palais Gallien amphitheatre (which is our next stop).

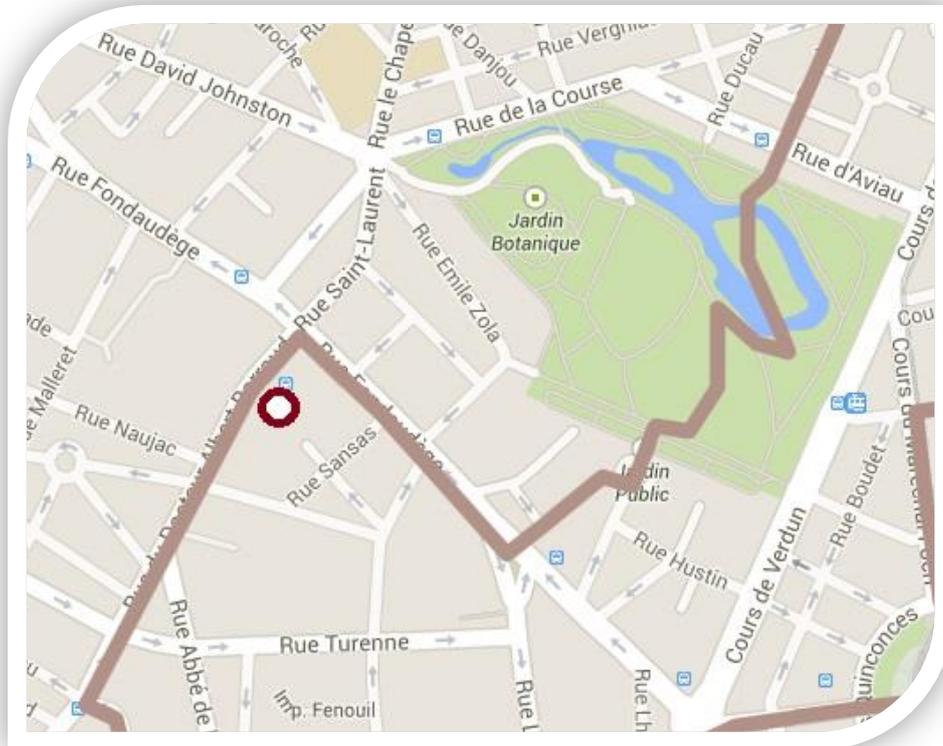


As the area grew busier, walls were constructed around the source to prevent dirt and soil from contaminating the water. In 1827, as the inscription records, the small structure that can be seen today was built to further preserve and protect the fountain system that had been installed on the site of the source itself.

By crossing the main road that runs nearby, Rue Fondaudège, the name of which pays homage to the Fontaine d'Audège, a decorative Renaissance-style fountain can be seen. Designed by local architect Louis Garros, it has been in position since 1866 and its waterworks were originally fed by the Audège source, which is personified by the nymph-like figure that was sculpted by one Louis Coëffard de Mazerolles.

Now though the water from the Fontaine d'Audège is diverted in the opposite direction, towards the Jardin Public. If you admired the large pond there (possibly from one of the ornate bridges), you will have been looking at water which originated here...

Sight #11: Palais Gallien



By viewing the ruins of the Palais Gallien, we are travelling some 2,000 years back in time. This Gallo-Roman amphitheatre was built in the 2nd or 3rd century and its wooden stands could hold 15,000 spectators (some say up to 22,000).

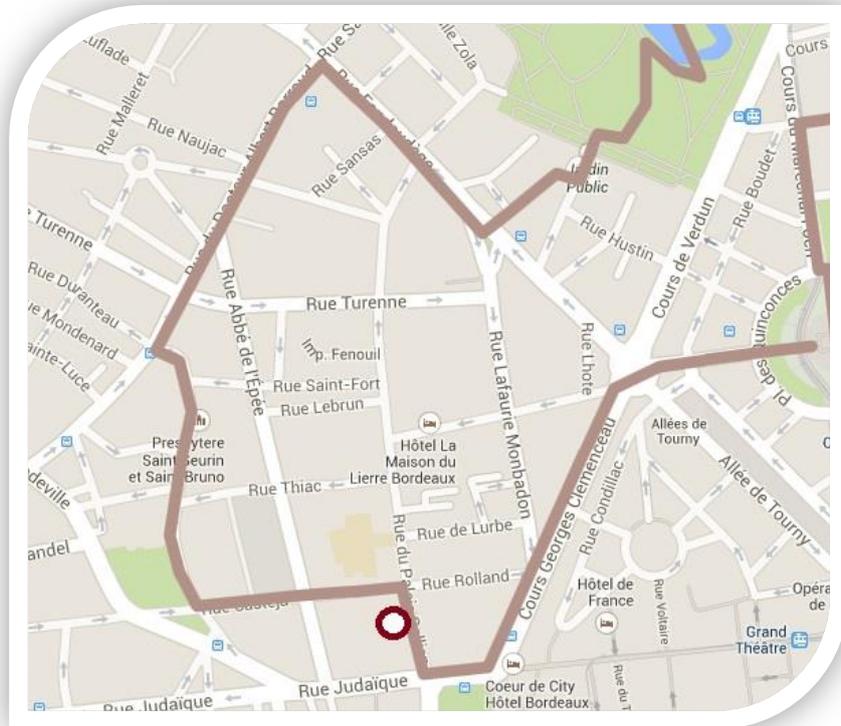
At the time it would have been located outside the city, which has made substantial headway in the intervening years! Experts have established that the arena section measured 70 by 47 metres. On the outside, the structure was 132 metres long, 111 metres wide and 25 metres tall.



Much of the coliseum survived until the time of the French Revolution (1789), prior to which it was a haven for criminals and prostitutes, then a rubbish tip! But huge sections were dismantled to make space for new residential buildings, some of which recycled materials from the coliseum itself! In 1800, authorities stepped in before the remaining western wing was also torn down and in 1911 the ruins were officially listed as national heritage.

Legend has it that for many years it was believed that the place had been built by 8th-century King Charlemagne for his wife Galiène, hence the name it has been given. It was from the 16th century onwards that historians identified it as being much older than that.

Sight #14: Hôtel des Postes



In the 18th century, a seminary was built on this spot and was a seat of theological learning until 1791 when, post-Revolution, the building became State property and, after some stopgap occupations, welcomed the “Hôtel des Monnaies”, minting money and printing stamps.



In 1892, the building was redesigned and rebuilt to the designs of Parisian architect Jean Bousard, and became the “Hôtel des Postes” although most people came to know it as the “Grand Poste”, in reference to its status as the city’s main post office. The building stood apart from the more traditional architecture of the surrounding buildings through its use of “exotic eclecticism”; this included sculpted sphinxes and a bas-relief of a Roman emperor in a horse-drawn carriage above the main entrance, all of which caused many a mystified look from passers-by.

More was to follow with the addition of a massive metal cage-like structure on the roof onto which converged all the city’s telephone cables. Under the guidance of architect Justin Tussau, this was removed in 1924, replaced by the upper floors which can still be seen today. Some of the more exotic façade features were also dismantled, resulting in a more modest art deco feel.

In 1988 the building was given another facelift ahead of the postal services moving to a more modern and functional facility in the Mériadeck quarter. In 2004 the building was sold to a private consortium who converted it into luxury flats. The complex was listed as an historical monument in 2011.



Website Invisible Bordeaux offers an online guide to some of the sights, stories, curios and lesser-known landmarks to be enjoyed in and around Bordeaux, France. The site, which first went live in December 2011, aims to scratch through the surface of the city and its surrounding area, enabling visitors and residents alike to get beyond the traditional postcard-friendly sights... which aren't so bad either!

The website is fed by Tim Pike, an Englishman in France who works in the communications department of a leading aviation electronics company. When not writing he can often be spotted riding a vintage yellow bicycle or strumming a guitar.

The Invisible City concept was first developed by Adam Roberts at Invisible Paris and has also been rolled out by Jan Liebelt at Invisible Lyon. If you too would like to join our small but perfectly-formed network, get in touch!

These walks are also available as interactive guided tours for iPhones via GPSmyCity.com. Recommended real-world guided tours include those provided by the Bordeaux Office de Tourisme and Bordeaux Walking Tours (www.bordeauxwalkingtours.com).



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invisiblebordeaux@gmail.com

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