

FOR parents who love being in the outdoors, passing on a sense of adventure to children can be rewarding but time-consuming and logistically challenging.

Take it from Zoe Hart, a US-born, Chamonix-based mountain guide and Patagonia ambassador who has just released a series of short films detailing the adventures that she, husband Max Turgeon and their sons, Mathias, 13, and 10-year-old Mica have experienced together.

Titled Parenting: Disaster Style, the short movies follow the family on ski touring, coastal climbing and Alpine climbing adventures in France and Italy.

The term 'disaster style' refers back to the adventures that Zoe and Max threw themselves into before becoming parents. Some of those adventures had the potential to be disastrous due to awful weather conditions or other challenges along the way.

They're far from disastrous parents, of course. Max is a mountain guide and film-maker while Zoe is one of only a small number of fully-qualified female guides in Europe with the International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations.

When first son Mathias was born, they carried on with their adventurous way of life – with all the pros and cons that involved – so that they could share the outdoor spaces which had shaped their own lives.

In the last few years, they've camped in Australia, canoed rapids in Canada and climbed peaks in the surroundings of the Chamonix valley.

HAVING those adventures together cements the family, says Zoe. As well as teaching the boys new skills, outdoor excursions teach them about decision-making, consequences, reward, choice, resilience and the fact that they always have the option to say no if they're uncertain about an activity.

They also teach Zoe and Max a lot. 'I have to consider what will happen if I get injured when they're with me; will they be able to call rescue?' she says. 'Are we in a place where rescue will be possible? Our adventures have also taught me that children are capable of way more than they think they are.'

'The goal is not for them to have bad experiences, the goal is for them to become good, resilient people who know that to take pleasure from the mountains and the outdoors, they also have to give something back.'

At a time when getting children off their screens is almost impossible for many parents, adventures in the great outdoors are a great way for kids to be in the



# Making adventure child's play

Encouraging your little ones to have an outdoor spirit is challenging but rewarding

A SENSE OF ADVENTURE

CATHERINE MURPHY



Teachable moment: Zoe Hart climbing with her son Mathias and, inset, Mica gets to grips with a tricky outcrop

moment and away from the pressures of social media.

So what tips can Zoe offer to Irish parents keen to get their children outside?

'Family adventures don't have to be epic,' she says. 'They can be small, slow, simple and close to home while you plan bigger adventures for holiday time. Find something that fits into your life because otherwise, you probably won't do it. If you're living in Dublin, nature is right on your doorstep with big parks and the coastline.'

Mica's adventures to date have been more substantial than running wild in Irish fields. He faced his fear of climbing during a tiring ski tour in Italy's Aosta Valley

which involved ascending a vertical 350m stairway.

'He hated that part but loved the fact that he managed to do it and that it brought us to a hut in the mountains,' says Zoe.

What if your children don't like a particular activity? 'Don't panic,' she says. 'If they don't like it now, leave it for a while, they might like it later on. Mica didn't like being in cold water when he was younger, now he's into surfing. The boys hated climbing when they were younger so we left that alone for a while then came back to it. It's good to try different things.'

While Mica surfs and snowboards, Mathias skis and kite-surfs and both boys climb.

■ TO BE inspired by and learn more about Zoe's family adventures, check out Parenting: Disaster Style on YouTube. Films will be released on June 18 & 25 and July 2.



DORDOGNE boasts more than 1,000 castles and manor houses, making it one of the most chateau-rich regions in France, with approximately one every 5-6sq km.

This means that exploring Dordogne is best done by car. By French standards, the roads here are very manageable: well-maintained, scenic and not at all intimidating to drive, as long as you don't get distracted by all the stunning chateaux peeping out through the lush green hillsides.

Traditionally, the region is divided into four areas: Périgord Vert (Green) for its lush forests; Périgord Blanc (White) for limestone plateaus and farmland; Périgord Noir (Black) for dense oak woods and truffles; and Périgord Pourpre (Purple), famed for its wine.

This is a place that punches above its weight in culinary terms. Famous for foie gras, truffles, walnuts and duck confit, Dordogne also boasts the Bergerac AOC in the south-west, producing excellent wines – reds like Pécharmant and sweet whites like Monbazillac.

I came for the castles, and I planned to visit a range spanning from the medieval period to the 18th century.

CHATEAU DES MILANDES

TUCKED into the hills of Périgord Noir, Chateau des Milandes is a Renaissance jewel, with turrets, stained glass and delicate stonework – the fairytale chateau I had hoped for. But what truly sets it apart is its former owner – legendary cabaret star and World War II resistance fighter Josephine Baker, who made the chateau her home in the 1940s.

Today, the rooms hold a permanent exhibition that offers an intimate insight into her extravagant, trail-blazing and at times tragic life. Vintage posters, glamorous costumes and wartime memorabilia line the walls, but perhaps the most moving space is the original kitchen, where photographs capture Baker with her 12 adopted children – her 'rainbow tribe' and the heart of her dream for racial harmony.

The chateau's manicured gardens offer breathtaking views over the Dordogne Valley, and throughout the day there are spectacular birds of prey shows that add a theatrical touch. There's also a relaxed bistro and café, with indoor and outdoor space.

It's easy to find too – just

put Route Joséphine Baker into your sat nav.

CHATEAU DE PUYMARTIN

MIDWAY between the medieval town of Sarlat and Les Eyzies, Chateau de Puymartin is a striking fortress with a rare claim – it's still inhabited by descendants of its original family. Built in the 13th century, it was seized by the English during the Hundred Years' War, then destroyed by Sarlat's consuls to prevent further occupation. It was rebuilt in the 15th century, restored again in the 19th and has remained in the same family's care ever since.

Inside, Puymartin is a time capsule – original furniture, Aubusson tapestries, carved woodwork and a superb collection of 17th-century paintings give it the feel of a lived-in museum. Every castle needs a ghost story – here it's the 'white lady', imprisoned in the tower for adultery. The chateau's atmospheric gloom suits the tale.

It's also very family-friendly, with interactive areas designed for children. The outdoor café serves seasonal dishes made from local ingredients, fresh, wholesome and totally free from processed shortcuts.

CHATEAU DE COMMARQUE

I TYPICALLY lean toward the elegance of Renaissance chateaux, but Chateau de Commarque's haunting medieval ruins have a unique pull. Built in the 12th century to protect a key crossroads in the Vézère Valley, it once housed up to six noble families, each with their own tower-hall, a rare snapshot of feudal coexistence.

Abandoned in the 16th century and swallowed by forest, the fortress remained untouched for centuries. When rediscovered in the 20th century, it was almost perfectly preserved.

In the 1960s, Count Hubert de Commarque, a descendant of the original lords, bought the site and began painstaking restoration. Beneath the ruins, he discovered a cave with 12,000-year-old carvings, proving humans had occupied this spot for over 15,000 years.

Today, Commarque is a working archaeological site. Count Hubert's presence still looms large – if you are lucky, you may even spot him overseeing operations when you visit.

Commarque may lack romantic turrets, but its raw authenticity and deep historical roots are unforgettable.



# Dordogne: the land of castles

Home to more than 1,000, the French region gives a fascinating glimpse at chateau life, with incredible architecture, intriguing history and stunning food



BY SARA COLOHAN

CHATEAU DE CASTELNAUD

BUILT in the 12th century on a rocky outcrop, Chateau de Castelnaud faces its historic rival, Chateau de Beynac, across the Dordogne River. Its strategic position made it a key stronghold during the Hundred Years' War, frequently switching hands between the English and French before being reclaimed by Charles VII in 1442.

Later, it played a significant role in the Wars of Religion before falling into disuse in the 17th century.

In the 1960s, the Rossillon family began restoring the fortress, transforming it into

a museum of medieval warfare. Today, it attracts over 230,000 visitors annually, showcasing a vast collection of weapons, armour and full-scale siege engines. There is even an entire room dedicated to the crossbow, which was both fascinating and mildly terrifying.

Brave the rampsarts if your legs can withstand the steep climb, and you can enjoy valley views as dramatic as the chateau's history.

CHATEAU DE FAYOLLE

BUILT in 1766, Chateau de Fayolle is steeped in history, but its public life is just beginning. New owners Flor-

ence and Gregory Mangeret have big plans to restore the property and transform it into a hub for theatre, festivals and creative events. Though steeped in history, Fayolle had never been open to the public, until now.

That sense of local pride is palpable, with volunteers pitching in to bring the chateau back to life. After a decade of abandonment, it became a cult spot for urban explorers. As a clever nod to that, the new owners now offer an Urbex-style tour – visitors climb through a window and, by torchlight, explore unrestored rooms frozen in time.

It's raw, real and ideal for those who don't want the

usual manicured chateau experience.

If climbing through a broken window isn't how you imagined your tour of a chateau to go, they also organise the Servants' Tour, which adds theatre and humour, with actors dressed as 18th-century staff guiding guests through the estate.

With 55 hectares of grounds still being uncovered, Fayolle's semi-derelict charm is part of its magic, and the owners are wise to let that character shine through.

ACCOMMODATION

OF COURSE, all this travelling between chateaux made me think, why just visit them when you can sleep in one?

Dordogne is full of charming historic properties that let you live the chateau dream overnight.

En route to my accommodation I passed Saint-Léon-sur-Vézère, which is worth a stop for its absurdly pretty stone buildings and river views. It's officially one of France's most beautiful villages and plays host to a celebrated classical music festival each August.

Nearby Montignac, home to the famous Lascaux caves, offers an excellent base in the shape of Hotel de Bouilhac (from €172), a 17th-century townhouse with cool, contemporary rooms and one of the best restaurants in the region, Ro-bo, run by Kiwi chef Nick Honeyman and his wife Sina. It's ambitious cooking, but fantastic, and it was lovely to see them both there working when I visited.

In Saint-Cyprien, Hotel L'Abbaye (from €328) blends 18th-century charm with sleek modernity, perfect for exploring the Périgord Noir's 'golden triangle'. Another family-run business, the owners personally check guests in. We had a dinner reservation at Agustines restaurant in the heart of the village, so they gave us a lift in their vintage Renault.

I drove on to the Isle Valley to stay at Chateau de Lalande (from €540), a four-star retreat near Saint-Astier. With its classical interiors and peaceful atmosphere, it's the ideal place to wind down if you've spent days driving, climbing steps and towers, and maybe over-indulging in foie gras. Because yes, you will eat well in Dordogne, and duck, in all its forms, is on every menu in every restaurant.

But the region has a proud and punchy culinary identity that goes well beyond duck. There's an abundance of walnut, black truffles and incredible river trout, washed down with plenty of excellent local wines.

Well, it's only fitting that Bergerac produces majestic wines to match all the majestic castles.

Dordogne will give you incredible views, gripping history and a culinary landscape as layered as its castles; just don't forget your walking shoes – and maybe a bottle of Monbazillac for the road.

TRAVEL FACTS

Fly with Aer Lingus Dublin to Bordeaux from €17 return, [aerlingus.com](http://aerlingus.com). See [dordogne-perigord-tourisme.fr](http://dordogne-perigord-tourisme.fr) for more details. For more from Sara, follow @less\_ordinary\_traveller on Instagram.