

Condé Nast Traveller

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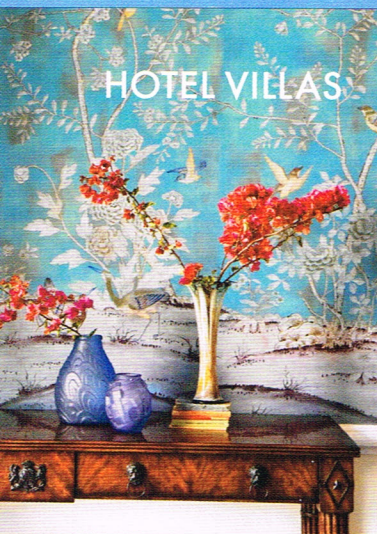
THE WORLD'S BEST FAMILY HOLIDAYS

RIDING • SURFING • FORAGING • ROAD TRIPPING • TREKKING • BEACH BREAKS • CITY HITS



HOTEL VILLAS

TOP-NOTCH RETREATS THAT GET EVERYTHING RIGHT



EUROPEAN ELEGANCE

FINCA CORTESIN, SPAIN

This place is handsome to the core, as fun as fireworks. Gosh, it's smart, with amazing grounds and rose gardens, gargantuan pools and an outdoor Moroccan sitting room. Flowers bloom everywhere, light floods in. The four-bedroom, whitewashed villas, which loop around the edge of the grounds, make a highly comfortable base, and have their own pools for splashing and squawking. Finca's nod to children is more subtle than at other hotels. There is a small but perfectly sweet kids' club in which to paint and make sand sculptures.

But the pleasure is really found in more old-fashioned ways. Every night parents tend to eat out by candlelight under the olive trees on the main terrace, while their amassing children – suspicious strangers on the first day, and now firm friends – make the most of the lawn that seems to stretch for miles and provides all that is ever really needed: space. Games of stuck in the mud, 40/40, leapfrogging, hide-and-seek, cartwheels, grandmother's footsteps, What's the time Mr Wolf? go on into the night as the sun sets and the stars come out. Parents, fresh from the fantastic spa, golf course, or beach club, do nothing but soak up the sun, order another bottle of wine, and relish the fact they are being treated like proper adults at exactly the same time as their children are playing like proper children. It's the most obvious hotel to return to again and again, with or without little ones.

INSIDER TIP The pool at the beach club isn't heated so it's reserved for the hardiest swimmers in spring and autumn.

BOOK IT Carrier offers seven nights in a private villa from £24,150, based on four adults and three children sharing, including breakfast, flights and transfers. +44 161 492 1357; carrier.co.uk. Hotel doubles from about £365. fincacortecin.com

THE CHATEAU REVIVAL

SERJAC, THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

An instant hit when it opened last summer, this turreted castle is the sister property to the wildly popular Château Les Carrasses on the other side of Béziers. Irish owners Karl and Anita O'Hanlon have cracked it with these two French fantasies – all the finger-clicking elements of a hotel but the stretch-your-legs freedom of two-, three- and four-bedroom apartments and villas, with their own kitchens, gardens and heated pools. This means no sleeping with snuffling children in the corner of the room, no having to get dressed for breakfast and no race to snag the best poolside cabanas. The 19th-century château has been meticulously renovated, with a Cinq Mondes spa, smart restaurant (book the baby-sitter) and a bar that serves wines from its own vineyards and nearby Languedoc estates. This year will see the first Château St Pierre de Serjac vintages for sale at the on-site wine shop, there are tastings and tours, and if you can sneak out here in September when the grapes are being harvested you can get stuck in with the process. During the day, children aged four and up have the run of the place with bikes to explore the grounds and a brilliant kids' club with screen-free activities such as bug-hunting, den-building and French cricket. High tea is served at 6pm, followed by mini discos and film nights. With 70 per cent repeat bookings and a glamorous everyone-knows-everyone vibe, this feels like a members' club, but without the joining fee.

INSIDER TIP For the most private gardens, ask for one of the houses away from the main drive or one with a large balcony. Two-bedroom La Cave is particularly good if you have toddlers as it's all on one level.

BOOK IT Seven nights in a two-bedroom house from about £1,790. Hotel doubles from about £190. +33 4 67 93 12 34; serjac.com

