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INSIDE LANGUEDOC'S COOLEST NEW HOTEL – A PERFECT ESCAPE TO VISIT POST-CANNES

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DEBORAH CICUREL TRAVELS TO LANGUEDOC TO FIND A TRANQUIL SPOT FAR FROM THE BUSTLE OF PARIS OR BORDEAUX, AN ESCAPE FROM THE FRENETICISM OF CANNES...



If you want a laid-back French escape away from the glitz of the Cote d'Azur or the pace of Paris, there's a new hotel in the Languedoc. It offers the laid-back French life, deep in the South of France, in its own stretch of calm.

Château St Pierre de Serjac, which opened in March following a €25m renovation, is an excellent example of how to create pared-back elegance without the frippery so often found in the hotel industry. The wine estate is home to 200 acres of woodland and rolling vines – and there, tucked away among it all, is the Château hotel, a neighbouring Cinq Mondes spa and 36 self-catering properties.

The main Château building, which at one time was the seat of the de Crozals dynasty, has been restored with an incredible eye for detail. With eight spacious bedrooms, a cosy bar and a more formal restaurant, the interior design is deliberate and striking, a mix of colour and traditional decor.

Quirky touches can be seen in everything from the unusual shade of teal that was chosen for the dining room's walls, to the framed pictures of birds that decorate them. The birds once made up the pages of an ornithological encyclopedia. The Château's chandeliers come straight from antique markets and are handpicked for their individual charms. In the hotel's winery and spa, former Avignon street lights have been repurposed for a vintage appeal.



In the bedrooms, I enjoyed the velvet curtains, the mixture of Art Deco, Art Nouveau and Empire-style influences. There are standalone steel baths in the rooms themselves, chandeliers in each room, and oversized beds, good for nursing a night on the wine.

The self-catering properties, once the outbuildings of the estate, now range in size from two bedroom apartments to four bed houses complete with their own private swimming pools. The properties are perhaps better suited to families, eager for freedom and the option to feed pasta to hungry kids.

Talking of children, there's a kids' club, with flower pressing, sporting activities and archeological digs all on the agenda – and the fact that the Château's site was once home to a Roman villa means your kids will be digging up close to home.

Back in the Château, in the bar – once the original Château drawing room and now a relaxed salon in which to enjoy a drink before dinner – a beaming Frenchman awaits your cocktail order, zestfully whipping up drinks you might not imagine to have been able to in such a rural outpost. The best cocktail is the barman's own concoction and should not be missed: the Serjac is a grassy, fresh, summery blend of gin, amaretto and elderflower. It'll have you dreaming long before the wine.

Of course, there are plenty of Languedoc wines on the menu. It's an industry Château St Pierre de Serjac itself will be contributing to, with its winery now modernised and its first vintages to be bottled in 2016.

In what was once the Château's original dining room, you'll find the restaurant. It's formal, but not overbearing. I found traditional French cuisine and, for a change, dishes with Turkish and Italian influences. At breakfast I feasted on freshly cooked pains au chocolat and croissants, each one impossible not to eat.

If ever you tire of eating, there's the spoiling Cinq Mondes Garden Spa to visit. I found eyelash tinting, anti-ageing facials, soothing massages. Everything you might expect. There's also a heated pool, aromatherapy hammam and gym.



The quaint town of Pézenas, a 20 minute drive away, brims with locals on Saturday mornings, when market stalls sell everything from gargantuan fresh strawberries to locally produced soap and everything in between, including clothing, make-up, cheese, meat and books.

Teenagers in thick white trainers, white-haired women clutching little white-haired dogs and charming movie-like couples hand-in-hand were all enjoying the charms of Pézenas the day I visited. They were sitting outside a café, whiling away the afternoon over a cold beer, doing their weekly shop at the market while listening to pavement musicians playing jazz music on the cello, or snapping up old prints at the antique shops that line the streets.

Even a cursory stroll round Pézenas reveals its most enchanting secret: no two doors are the same. There's even a museum, Musée de la Porte, to showcase different doors from the 15th century through to the 20th – though simply walking the streets of the picturesque town and gazing at each unique threshold is enough to turn anyone into a door enthusiast, or at the very least give them a chance to pep up their Instagram feed.

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There's plenty to do in the Languedoc, however relaxed it might be. Take note too of the beaches, the seafood with all their oysters, the dusty clocks in alleyway trinket shops, the rustic bars, and the haphazard antique parlours.

After all that you deserve a glass of wine, and a sleep in an oversized bed, no?

A one-night stay in a room in the Chateau is from €220 (approx. £175). A seven-night stay in peak summer season in a three bedroom house with a pool, terrace and garden is from €5380 (approx. £4300). For further information visit www.serjac.com. To make a reservation email resa@serjac.com or call 03456866505 (UK local rates) or +33(0)4 67 93 12 34. Flights are frequent from the UK: Easyjet fly to Montpellier from London Gatwick, Ryanair fly to Beziers, Montpellier, Perpignan and Carcassonne and British Airways fly to Toulouse.