

DorsetECHO

Rustic chic in the heart of Provence



Marian Feltham revels in the continental elegance of Crillon Le Brave Hotel and Spa in Provence...

IF YOU are already familiar with Provence then I won't need to spend too much time explaining that this luxury hotel nestles in the heart of one of the most sought after regions in south eastern France.

If you have not yet been to Provence it is time you did, to see what all the fuss is about... and if you've enough cash I can't really think of anywhere better.

Crillon Le Brave five star Hotel and Spa from the outset appears to be an eclectic collection of unrelated houses that date back to medieval times.

The receptionists greet you with charm and a sense of reverence from behind an informal table.

You soon learn that the houses have all been purchased from the locals, property by property over a long period of time, to create one of the most unusual and bewitching

collections of hotel rooms. Each building houses a varying number of rooms and you have your own key to access the particular house you are staying in and then the room key. Think rustic chic, quality fittings and stone walls steeped in history. Antique furniture and small windows tempting you to peek out at the spectacular views of the mountain and more. The air is like fine wine (a cliché I know but no less accurate for being so) and the visitor knows that the atmosphere is rarefied from the outset.

You have arrived at a retreat for those who are looking for a touch of seclusion to recover and rejuvenate from the rigours or the mad world that you would need to live in to pay for such indulgence.

The swimming pool is simply stunning with individual tiles that glisten because they have gold within them – a metaphor for the

location on its own steep hill within the foothills of Mount Ventoux.

There are 18 suites and 15 rooms to choose from. The terracotta tiles on the floor have clearly been there for a long time and you may be getting the impression this is an old hotel, but that's the trick. The owners have managed craft each room with unusual antique furniture and artworks to create an ambience within the architecture that is worthy of the hotel's excellent reputation.

There's the opulence of enormous beds with satin cotton sheets, Bose audio, flat screen TV, internet access, mini bars, safes and of course air conditioning. All the things you'd expect from a fabulous hotel amidst the serenity of a monastery.

And if it is fine dining you want there are two restaurants: La Table de Ventoux, which can cater for a more simple pallet, or for the gourmards there is a gastronomic restaurant. This is a whole new level of dining magnificence. Dependent upon the weather, which can be changeable given the proximity to the mountain, most guests choose to sit outside amid the vines and creatively manicured gardens, and take in the view.

Some of you might want to avail yourselves the glorious Spa des Ecuries and lie in state while being

pampered in the 18th century vaulted former stables. The up-and-coming British brand Bamford is present in all the rooms as the chosen toiletries supplier and it is in the spa where you can treat yourself to more Bamford treatments.

The location affords the more energetic visitor a number of different ways to add to your enjoyment. The hotel has a number of bicycles which you can take for a cycle if you don't mind the odd hill climb. Beware because there are cyclists everywhere as the mountain is a serious scalp on the tour of the greatest cycle rides in France.

Art and culture are on your doorstep and there are many famous sights within car striking distance. We took a drive up the mountain to look back at the sweep of topography and marvel at the beauty of the region. On another day we visited the Pont du Gard Roman aqueduct and the beautiful walled rampart city of Avignon.

If you do go exploring you will need to avail yourselves of the wonderful breakfasts, buffet style and healthy. We also went down into the nearest village one evening for dinner and had a marvellous herb steak grilled on an open hearth.

Unsurprisingly the hotel is listed in the best of the best Relais and Chateaux collection.



factfile

- Bedrooms from 340 euros. Suites from 550 euros. All include breakfast. Rates vary with seasons.
- Breakfast, a full buffet with extensive selection, canine in 'La Grange' Bar from 7.30am until 11am.
- Restaurant Jérôme Blanchet offers seasonal menus from 79 euros from 7.15pm to 9.30pm. Bistrot 40K is open seven nights a week in busier months with a blackboard menu at 49 euros per person.
- Lunch is served in 'La Grange' Brasserie or on the terraces from 12.30pm - 3.30pm.
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