



## SKELETON CHAMP LIZZIE YARNOLD

"HAMPSHIRE IS SUCH A WELCOMING COUNTY"

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# HAMPSHIRE LIFE

Your essential guide to the county

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# Provençal Life

From a glass of sun-soaked rosé to a game of pétanque in the garden, FAY WATSON discovers why life is that bit better in Provence

PHOTOS: Camille Moirene

Sitting on my private terrace in Provence, looking over the Mount Ventoux, rolling vineyards and olive groves, I couldn't help but feel inspired by the landscape and feeling of tranquillity it eludes. It is obvious why so many painters, artists and novelists have all been bewitched by the region over the years.

Situated in the south east of France, Provence is known for

its lavender, wine and sun, and as we headed an hour north of Marseille Airport to the small commune of Crillon le Brave, it's clear it has this in abundance.

Our drive led us up to the hilly village, which can trace its history right back to the Roman era. Despite suffering decline in the world wars, since the 1970s the area has been built up and placed back on the map, thanks in no small part to the hilltop escape

of Hotel Crillon le Brave.

The luxurious hotel has taken over a number of houses in the commune since 1989, refurbishing, redesigning and injecting some luxury into them. Now, made up of 36 rooms in eight buildings, most of which used to be family homes, the hotel is truly at the heart of the village.

And that heart lives on in the buildings. My room in Maison





Soudain, named after the village painter Marc Soudain, was slightly tucked away from the rest of the hotel. Designed to retain the history of its features, the 'room' was actually split over three with a living room full of cultural books and antique plates, a beautiful modern bathroom with a freestanding bath, and a double bedroom, containing one of the most comfortable beds I have ever laid my head on.

But, as I alluded to earlier, the pièce de résistance was the small private terrace where you could look over the whole region. And waking up each morning to such a sight seems well worth an investment in a mountain-view.

Part of the charm of the hotel being built around the existing village structure is how quintessentially in keeping with village life it feels, which we indulged in as we played a game of pétanque into the balmy twilight hours of our first night. While my team was robbed of our initial winning streak (I'm still not ready to talk about it), wiling away the hours enjoying a cold glass of Pastis, you can feel any residual stress of the week streaming off you.

Another of the many things that the region is most famous for is its cycling routes, notably the steep climb of Mount Ventoux, which is notorious amongst Tour



de France enthusiasts. I must admit we didn't attempt the mountainous climb during our short stay, but our cycle to the nearby quarry for a picnic did lead to some shaky legs.

And the physical activity makes a great excuse to sample the hotel's luxurious spa treatments at the Spa des Écuries. Set up in a former stable, it offers a selection of rustic rooms with heated massage beds where I was lucky enough to sample one of the newest treatments of a bespoke massage.

The food during our stay was absolutely glorious. On our first night we were treated to the fare from the Bistrot 40K, where all the ingredients are sourced from within 40 kilometres of Crillon le Brave. On the final

night we tasted the upmarket dining option of Restaurant Jérôme Blanchet, with a Menu de Saison of starter, main, cheese and dessert, which is hard to pick a favourite from (although as a self-confessed cheese-oholic, choosing a selection from a tray as big as our table was a memorable moment).

Of course, when you think of Provence, you'd be lying if you weren't thinking about wine (or is that just me?). The staff at the hotel really know their vin so you'd do well to take advantage of the fantastic wine tasting class with the knowledgeable Benoit, who is full of stories behind the beverages.

If what you're itching for is to explore the area, within an hour of the hotel by car is the nearby L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue market, where we finished our trip. Known across Europe for its antiques stalls woven among the streets and streams of the town; it is well worth a visit if you have the chance.

Hotel Crillon le Brave is the perfect spot for couples on a romantic jaunt, just as it is for cyclists looking for a bit of luxury after their gruelling descents.

So if an escape from reality is what you're after, then I'd almost guarantee that from that first sip of rosé, the stress will fall off your shoulders in no time. 🍷

**ABOVE:** Hotel Crillon le Brave is at the heart of the small commune

**TOP RIGHT:** The private terraces provide stunning views of rolling vineyards and olive groves

**RIGHT:** The Spa des Écuries is housed in a former stable



#### TRIP NOTES

Nightly rates at Crillon le Brave are available from €340/£300 per room per night for two people sharing a classic room, including breakfast.

[crillonlebrave.com](http://crillonlebrave.com)