

The Oxford Times

Laid-back Riviera luxury

SOPHIE GRUBB takes advantage of relaxed travel rules for a taste of style at the Hotel Lou Pinet in Saint-Tropez

AS the tourism industry tentatively reopens after the spread of coronavirus, a taste of post-lockdown luxury in the French Riviera is a tempting prospect.

Of the many beautiful destinations dotted along the Côte d'Azur, none is more iconic than Saint-Tropez.

Boasting golden shores, decadent cuisine and designer shops, its timeless glamour has lured in the rich and famous for the best part of a century.

It became a favoured spot for fashion designers such as Coco Chanel in the 1920s, and remains one of the Mediterranean's most magnetic forces for those who can afford it. From the sleek super-yachts anchored in the port to the tasteful attire of people wandering the streets, there are signs of opulence at every corner.

For travellers seeking a more subtle elegance, the new Hotel Lou Pinet has perfected the art of laid-back luxury.

The five-star boutique hotel was taken over in 2017 by the family-run Maisons Pariente group, and was soulfully transformed before reopening in summer 2019.

It is made up of a cluster of buildings that resemble traditional French farmhouses, with mottled roof tiles and mint green shutters on the windows, looking out to a huge turquoise swimming pool.

The decor inside oozes character, with colour and art enlivening the simple elegance of the rooms and restaurant area.

Each room is distinct with hand-picked pieces of art, and even the mini fridge - neatly disguised as drawers - is well-stocked with bottles of wine and high-quality snacks.

Outside, the lush landscaped gardens carry the perfume of lavender plants and tall pine trees, which give the hotel its name.

Winding stone steps lead down into a cave-like retreat, where the



Pool-side at Lou Pinet



A shady retreat from the blazing sun at Lou Pinet, Saint-Tropez

hotel's tranquil spa is located. Treatments include a range of massages and facials, body polishing and detox wrapping, all using beautifully-scented lotions and oils from the prestigious Tata Harper skincare brand.

Style has been retained while also implementing new hygiene and safety restrictions. Arrival times will be requested so that arrival time can be organised while maintaining social distancing.

Staff greet guests while carrying luggage with white cotton gloves as do serving staff in the restaurants who also wear caps with face shields. Tables are distanced, rooms cleaned with hot steam devices and table wear and gym equipment sanitised.

The hotel is in an ideal location within strolling distance of the town and offers a free shuttle service to and from the centre and to the stunning Tahiti beach.

On those rare rainy days, a vineyard tour makes for a pleasant afternoon out - Château des Marres was well worth the visit during our stay, most popular for its crisp rosé wine.

Other attractions are subject to strict social distancing rules and many popular events have been cancelled or postponed, so check before you go.

There are plenty of chic cafes and acclaimed restaurants in the



The Beefbar at Lou Pinet

vicinity, but the tastiest meal we ate during our trip was conveniently only a minute's walk from our room - at Hotel Lou Pinet itself.

The Beefbar restaurant on site lays claim to being the best meat restaurant in Saint-Tropez, offering sumptuous steaks including incredibly tender wagyu.

Don't miss the indulgent truffle and parmesan fries on the side, or the smooth mash potato with gravy, which is utterly indulgent but absolutely worth the calories.

For a snack or starter, Beefbar also offers street food-style taster dishes - the sea bass ceviche with mango was a particularly memorable



Saint-Tropez is the pearl of the French Riviera

culinary highlight, as was the tortilla with tuna tartare and creamy guacamole. These are best enjoyed at sunset in the intimate garden bar, while sipping on a deliciously refreshing signature cocktail or a chilled glass of Provençal rosé.

Fairy lights and lanterns light up the outdoor bar after sunset, making it even more magical.

We ended our holiday here feeling relaxed, pampered - and undoubtedly a few pounds heavier.

VISITE...

GETTING THERE: British Airways is among flight operators offering direct routes to Nice Airport, and Saint-Tropez is a little more than an hour's drive from there. Cannes Airport is slightly closer.

STAY: The new Hotel Lou Pinet. Nightly rates start at €430 on a bed and breakfast basis.

More details and booking at loupinet.com