



Uncovering The Charm of Limoges and The Dordogne

Fusing Michelin starred dining, rich history and impeccable service, **Ange Seddon** discovers three owner-led Relais & Châteaux hideaways in Southwest France

Upon landing at Limoges Airport, I began my journey to visit three Relais & Châteaux properties, each with its own unique character yet having a 'shared heartbeat' in their endeavour to bring refined hospitality, with restored classical French architecture, stunning gardens and grounds, and Michelin starred dining. The Limousin region is steeped in history from Asterix and Obelix through Richard Coeur de Lion to an industrial age of porcelain and leather. None of which I knew about until I had the opportunity to visit.

La Chapelle Saint Martin

My first stop was La Chapelle Saint Martin (LCSM), a restored Napoleonic villa turned boutique hotel, located only ten minutes from Limoges town. The family-owned and run hotel offered a range of facilities such as an outdoor pool, padel, squash and tennis courts and delightful little picnic booths (Les Ruches à manger) dotted around the grounds where homemade gourmet food, table linens and outdoor games can be provided. They even have vintage 2CVs that you can hire to explore the surrounding region.

The hotel itself is beautiful, combining the traditional with the contemporary seamlessly. The décor is subtle elegance with fabric lined walls, the use of local porcelain and leather, and a mix of delicate and bold artwork. You must look ➡





a dark, candle lit cellar with a dirt floor. Sounded scary? It was anything but. Whole wheels of maturing cheeses were awaiting and a simply laden table with candles, bread, wine and most importantly, an assortment of cheeses to try. It was a cosy, almost theatrical setting. I would highly recommend a visit.

As if that wasn't enough, I walked further through the town to La Table du Couvent, also owned by LCSM. This 12th century monastery has been meticulously restored and transformed into a delightful restaurant that highlighted the finest Limousin produce, including dry aged meats expertly cooked in the huge open fireplace. Paired with classic French accompaniments of pomme dauphinoise and pomme purée, I dined like a king.

Le Vieux Logis Hotel

My second location, Le Vieux Logis Hotel, Trémolat in the Perigord region was a different place altogether, but no less charming or elegant. Originally a family farmhouse and tobacco warehouse, it has been sympathetically restored by highly skilled interior designers and landscape architects, but keeping its rustic, farmhouse charm.

They became part of Relais & Chateaux in 1955. Open all year round there are 25 rooms, 2 dining rooms, lounges, meeting rooms, stunningly beautiful gardens and an outdoor pool.

The hotel has a beautiful story; the previous owners didn't have any family to pass on this amazing legacy, so chose four close, loyal members of staff and bequeathed it to them, requesting they maintain the spirit of this 'family holiday in grandmother's house' and they continue to do them proud.

My evening began in the lounge with champagne and meticulously made, delicious canapés, looking like perfectly presented objet d'art. I then moved to their Michelin starred dining room, with its vaulted, farmhouse ceiling. It had a very homely, yet elegant feel to it. With a focus on seasonal and local cuisine, chef Vincent Arnould presented a procession of courses, each delicious and exquisitely crafted. Ingredients such as foie gras, locally caught bream, local cheeses, figs poached in red wine with a sesame ice cream, all complemented by local wines from Bergerac, Monbazillac and Percharmant; it was a culinary delight. The foie gras crème brûlée brought happy tears; it was so delicious.

After a restful sleep in the cloud-like bed, a reluctant farewell was bid as I headed back through the serene countryside.



Discovering Dordogne

Driving through the Dordogne was like being in an impressionist painting of a bucolic landscape adorned with burnished bronze leaves, their autumnal hues enhanced by dappled sunlight.

I visited two distinct yet similar places that showcased the heritage of the region. Firstly, the Caves of Lascaux, famous for their prehistoric art which have been closed to the public since 1963 to preserve these rare works. The impressive museum has a spectacular replica of the paintings that were discovered, earning Lascaux its well-deserved reputation as the 'Sistine Chapel of the Périgord'.

My second subterranean adventure was the Gouffre de Padirac, where I descended 103m underground into a network of caves, rivers, lakes and jaw-dropping geological formations that really have to be seen to be believed. Gliding along a crystal clear river, I witnessed an incredible underground cathedral adorned with stalactites and stalagmites created over thousands of years, yet only discovered 130 years ago. It was absolutely breathtaking.

I also visited the picturesque village of Domme, a small but historic place with some of the most enviable views across the Dordogne valley and the most Instagrammable high street. Well worth a stop on your travels.

Chateau de La Treyne

My final destination looked like something straight out of a fairytale. The Chateau de la Treyne was a remarkable sight. You could tell instantly that behind the elegant façade, the past had been preserved with respect and the present celebrated with the finest hospitality. Inherited by the family in 1982, they have worked tirelessly to modernise the aristocratic home, whilst retaining its incredible history. With 18 rooms and suites, a heated outdoor swimming pool, tennis court, canoes and many other local activities that can be organised for you, this place has everything you need.

Upon check-in, I was taken to the Louis XIII room, a beautiful junior suite that was huge and had dual aspect views of both the Dordogne river and the perfectly manicured gardens. It was tastefully designed without compromising the architectural charm.

Lunch was held in the rather grand dining room and was a perfect introduction to the culinary expertise and genius of chef Stéphane Andrieux. I always encourage people to look up when exploring a new place - the ceiling here alone was a historical and visual delight.

Afterwards, I joined the owner Stéphanie Gombert for coffee in the sun-drenched gardens and learned all about



the evolution of this spectacular chateau, its Michelin starred restaurant, the gardens and its woodlands, where you can hunt for truffles.

After an afternoon of exploring the region, dinner began with champagne and canapés on the terrace overlooking the majestic river as the sun slowly went down. It was enchanting. The menu featured two of my favourites, scallops and lamb, which delivered an incredible gastronomic experience. A coffee and chocolate delice dessert concluded the meal, not with a bang, but with a graceful bow. It was a masterclass in elegant dining. Served with a beautifully crisp sauvignon blanc from Bergerac, a perfect pinot noir from Burgundy and finishing with a local dessert wine, Monbazillac.

Final Thoughts

Run by the owners themselves, each hideaway delivers first-class service and a genuine sense of welcome in its idyllic, tranquil setting. I would go back to any one of these places in a heartbeat. There is an ambience of serene sophistication, achieved through thoughtful design with focused and outstanding dining. Showcasing a refined interpretation of regional tradition, each flavour told a story. In these places, details matter, as they should; they delivered a hospitality experience that went beyond mere accommodation.

In a world that celebrates loud, these places are quietly extraordinary, and I would choose that over loud every time. ■

chappellesaintmartin.com
chateaudelatreyne.com
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