



Lynne Coates is a travel journalist and photographer, focusing on destinations that combine luxurious accommodation with inspiring locations.

# THREE KEYS, THREE STARS & ONE VERY SPOILED STOMACH



RELAIS &  
CHATEAUX

Landing at Limoges Airport a short drive brings us to, La Chapelle Saint Martin, the first of three Relais & Châteaux hotels we will visit during a tour of the Dordogne region, each with a Michelin star. Uniquely different, and true to the prestigious Relais & Châteaux ethos, the family owners of the hotels are fiercely proud of their heritage, culture and gastronomy, with a passion to deliver the finest hospitality for their guests.

*From candlelit cheese caves to cliff-top châteaux, this Dordogne escape drifts between three Relais & Châteaux gems where family pride, Michelin flair and a serious love of good living turn every stop into something quietly unforgettable.*

## — LA CHAPELLE SAINT MARTIN —

**W**e check into our 'Maison Bourgeoise' style rooms, before meeting with Aude, the charming 'Maîtresse de Maison', who invites us to join her for champagne and canapés before dinner. She tells us the hotel has been family owned since 1970, and has fourteen rooms, three suites and a villa. The property stands in 40 acres of parkland, with an organic garden and bee hives, keeping the kitchen supplied with fresh produce.

The elegant lounges and dining rooms, decorated with an eclectic mix of antiques, rare objects and unique artworks, reflect the owners' love of art and design. Gilles Dudognon, Aude's husband and co-owner of the hotel, was, at twenty-four, the youngest chef in France to be awarded a Michelin star. He has now been joined by son Henri, who he is training to follow in his footsteps.



a recently opened museum dedicated to the production of leather. An immersive, multi-sensory experience takes us through the cycle of tanning to finished goods. Particularly fascinating is the story of leather glove manufacturing, with exhibits from historic collections. Arriving at La Maison du Fromage, the renowned, (and oldest) cheese shop in Limoges, which offers more than 250 different French cheeses, we enjoy a candle-lit cheese tasting with wine, in a cave beneath the shop. This experience is unique and definitely one for cheese lovers!

Lunch follows in La Table du Couvent, a former 12th century convent, known for its open-fire oven, where the chef cooks giant cuts of meat. Fortunately for us non-meat-eaters, there is also a choice of delicious vegetarian dishes. Both the shop and the restaurant are part of the La Chapelle Saint Martin collection, overseen by Gilles.



Gilles is passionate about French cuisine, and he invites us into the kitchens, where we meet his team as they fastidiously prepare our dinner. He proudly boasts about some of his famous guests, one being Hilary Clinton plus bodyguards! Dinner is served on exquisite Bernardaud crockery, (Limoges's famous porcelain brand). My fish, on a depiction of Leonardo da Vinci's 'Last Supper', is a sight to behold! Breakfast the next morning is equally visual, elegantly laid out, with a mouth-watering choice of fresh, locally produced food. It is difficult to know where to start, or when to stop!

We bid Aude 'au revoir' and take a short drive through the beautiful Limousin countryside towards Limoges, stopping en route to visit 'Cité du Cuir',



## LE VIEUX LOGIS

In the picture-perfect village of Trémolat, in Périgord, we check into Le Vieux Logis, an absolutely charming hotel. This former priory and farm was lovingly restored by a local family who, over time, was extended, becoming the hotel it is today. The present four owners, previously members of staff, inherited the property from the family, who entrusted them to preserve the spirit of their treasured family home.

We join Estelle, one of the owners, who now manages the property, for pre-dinner drinks. She explains how they maintained the character of the property when updating the décor, adding original artworks and contemporary touches. The hotel now has twenty-five rooms and suites, two dining rooms, and several lounges. The passion of Estelle, and her husband Vincent, (who is the chef), for Le Vieux Logis, is palpable, clearly cherishing their inheritance. We enjoy a wonderful dinner in the atmospheric restaurant, a former tobacco-drying shed.

Vincent pops out of the kitchen to chat with us, explaining his use of locally-sourced, seasonal ingredients. Course after delicious course is placed before us and I make the mistake of saying "yes" to the cheese, (who could say no!) as that leaves little space for the divine desserts. After such a feast, I am more than ready to head to my suite, just a short walk from the main building. A cosy sitting room leads into a spacious bedroom, with elegant furniture, and classy portraits,



together with a super-size contemporary bathroom. I admit to falling a little in love with Le Vieux Logis - it has a seductive ambiance, and I am smitten.

Next morning, I take a stroll around the enchanting gardens, with their trickling stream, bronze sculptures and manicured trees. This is a tranquil haven for guests, with a dreamy alfresco terrace for dining during summer months. It is easy to see why the original owners loved this little corner of France.

Guests can easily walk into the sleepy little village of Trémolat, with its pretty houses and beautiful Romanesque church. The surrounding countryside is

idyllic, perfect for hiking and cycling. I am loath to leave Le Vieux Logis, but we must say 'au revoir' to Estelle and her delightful team as we have one more of these exquisite properties to visit.



## CHATEAU DE LA TREYNE

Perched magnificently on a cliff top, overlooking the Dordogne River, the 14th century Chateau De La Treyne, was originally a medieval fortress. The chateau has undergone many restorations, passing through four families, until the Gombert family took ownership in 1982. They completely renovated it, creating a unique luxury hotel while maintaining the authentic character of the medieval structure. The interior design tastefully merges historic influences with opulent décor, and contemporary luxury. The eighteen rooms and suites, all individually designed and named, are fully equipped with modern-day necessities.

My room is appropriately named 'La Favorite'. A sumptuous suite, with a separate sitting room, huge bathroom with an elaborate gold bath, and far-reaching views over the Dordogne River, I feel (at least temporarily) like a true châtelaine. The owner, Stéphanie Gombert, welcomes us with champagne and animatedly describes the mammoth project to restore the chateau, sharing before and after photographs.

As we take a walk around the beautiful gardens, Stéphanie tells us that the chateau extends to 300 hectares, with a formal French garden and a rose garden. Facilities include an outdoor infinity pool, tennis court, and a Romanesque chapel secreted amid the woodland, for weddings.

That night we dine in the elegant, Salon Louis XIII. Chef Stéphane Andrieux, is a native of Périgord, whose reinterpretation of regional cuisine earned a Michelin star in 2001. My dish of poached wild brill, cauliflower puree and braised cauliflower, served with a lemon butter emulsion, and green curry dressing, was delicious, and so beautifully garnished it was almost too pretty to eat!

There are plenty of activities for guests. Especially popular are canoeing, kayaking and fishing on the Dordogne River. Nearby, major attractions include the famous Gouffre de Padirac, an astonishing geological

masterpiece of caves, descending 75 meters underground. A boat ride takes visitors through the caves between the thousand-year-old walls of the Grande Pendeloque, with geomorphological structures and gigantic stalagmites and stalactites - a jaw-dropping experience. We visit the picturesque UNESCO-listed village of Rocamadour, dramatically perched on a cliff and ranked among the five 'Most Beautiful Villages in France'. It is also known as a pilgrimage destination with the Grand Escalier, (steep steps) leading to a sacred sanctuary.



The Dordogne certainly lives up to its fine reputation of captivating charm and culinary excellence, with these three, Relais & Chateaux hotels, epitomising the French philosophy of 'L'art de vivre' - appreciating the finer things in life.



RELAIS & CHATEAUX HOTELS: [www.relaischateaux.com/fr](http://www.relaischateaux.com/fr)  
 LA CHAPELLE SAINT MARTIN: [www.chapellesaintmartin.com](http://www.chapellesaintmartin.com)  
 LE VIEUX LOGIS: [www.vieux-logis.com](http://www.vieux-logis.com)  
 LE CHATEAU DE LA TREYNE: [www.chateaudelatreyne.com](http://www.chateaudelatreyne.com)  
 GOUFFRE DE PADIRAC [www.gouffre-de-padirac.com](http://www.gouffre-de-padirac.com)