

# Travel

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**'If I had to choose a region to stay in for ever, it would be Puglia'**

Chef Theo Randall on his top places to eat in Italy

CHÂTEAU DE MERCUËS



## The 20 best French châteaux

From a fairytale castle in the Dordogne to a manor house in Normandy, **Carolyn Boyd** picks the top B&Bs and historic hotels

### 1 Château de Chenevière Normandy

Not far from the D-Day beaches, this elegant Norman mansion dates from the 18th century and was inhabited by the Germans during the Second World War, when the château was a stud farm. These days guests can enjoy the walled garden, exotic trees, heated outdoor pool

and tennis courts. In the château the 29 bright rooms come with iPod docks and L'Occitane toiletries. Foodies can enjoy the excellent Botaniste restaurant or the pop-up restaurant in the garden during the summer months.  
**Details** Doubles are from €220 (£170), breakfast is €25 (00 33 2 31 51 25 25, lacheneviere.com). The ferry port of Caen-Ouistreham is 40 minutes away

### 2 Château de Mercuès Lot

Wine lovers will adore the Château de Mercuès and its sensational wine cellar, which, along with the winery, is hidden away under the château's terrace. Sip the excellent vintages as you admire the breathtaking views across the Lot Valley. Its owner, Georges Vigouroux, is a pioneer of the malbec grape and has developed a new generation of cahors wines. The château dates from the 13th century and its rooms are a blend of modern decor with classic features, such as polished floors, wood panelling and antique furniture.



**Details** B&B doubles cost from €225 a night (00 33 5 65 20 00 01, chateaudemercues.com). Toulouse airport is 85 minutes away

### 3 Château de Riell Pyrenees

The spa at Château de Riell taps into the hot spring 150 metres below. Its thermal pool is set in an exotic greenhouse, while the bathing pools, used for water-based treatments, are set in green, ivory, black and amber marble. The hotel has 19 rooms and suites in the château and adjoining cottages, and the view of Mount Canigou will make your heart soar. ▶





**Details** Doubles cost from £129 a night, breakfast is €22pp (00 33 4 68 05 04 40, relaischateaux.com). Perpignan airport is 45 minutes away

#### 4 Chateau Ribagnac Limousin

Children's curious fingers tend not to be compatible with the antiques and objets d'art that come as part of a chateau's appeal, but at the fairy-tale Chateau Ribagnac you can relax in the knowledge that there is so much else to amuse your beloved offspring. Let them roam the surrounding parkland, jump around the outdoor play area and swim in the heated outdoor pool. Inside, five suites are set in the towers of the chateau and feature wood panelling, impressive fireplaces and stained-glass windows. Meals made with delicious local produce are served by the friendly

owners. Children are encouraged to eat together while adults enjoy a glass of wine at their own tables.

**Details** B&B doubles cost from €100 a night (00 33 5 55 39 77 91, chateauribagnac.com).

Limoges airport is 30 minutes away

#### 5 Chateau le Cagnard Côte d'Azur

Based in the village of Haut-de-Cagnes with sensational views over the Côte d'Azur, Chateau le Cagnard dates from the 13th century and has 28 light, airy rooms and suites. Each is named after a famous artist who resided in the area, including Renoir, who lived out his final days in Haut-de-Cagnes. The artistic theme also features in the rest of the hotel, with tromp l'oeil paintings and frescoes, while the restaurant offers a retractable roof with 200 hand-painted panels.

**Details** Doubles cost from €150 a night, breakfast is €20 (00 33 4 93 20 73 22, lecagnard.com). Nice airport is ten minutes away

#### 6 Chateau de Noyelles Somme

Just over an hour south of Calais, the Chateau de Noyelles makes a stylish weekend bolt hole. Overlooking the Bay of the Somme, its rooms are decorated in fresh whites and greys, with features such as large marble fireplaces, mirrors and antique furniture. The salon with its huge windows, ornate floor tiles and bijou bar and is the perfect place to relax.

Outside, two gypsy caravans welcome guests looking for something different.

**Details** Doubles cost from €80 a night, breakfast is €14 (00 33 3 22 23 68 70, chateauxhotels.co.uk). Take the ferry to Calais

#### 7 Chateau de la Mouchère Orne

This charming B&B in the heart of the Perche national park makes a great base for exploring the cider farms and antiques markets of this little-known area of Normandy.

The French and British owners, Marie-Monique and Roger Huss have restored the 18th-century manor house in Arts and Craft and art deco style with toile wallpapers and fabrics.

**Details** B&B doubles cost from €110 a night (00 33 2 33 83 02 99, lamouchere.com). The ferry port of Caen-Quistreham is two hours away

#### 8 Chateau d'Arleens Gers

Escape to the rolling countryside of Gascony with a stay at the welcoming Chateau d'Arleens, just west of Toulouse.

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château are decorated in classic French style, with canopied beds and antique furniture, while the decor in the family apartment in *le fruitier* (like an orangery) is inspired by Provence, with terracotta tiles and wicker furniture. You can also book the cosy cabin in the woods, complete with its own sauna.

**Details** B&B doubles cost from €220 a night (00 33 2 41 42 00 02, briottieres.com). Angers airport is 30 minutes away

## 18 Château de Codignat Auvergne

Step back in time at the atmospheric 14th-century Château de Codignat, where the cosy restaurant is set in a round tower with an open fire. The historic character continues with suits of armour, ancient portraits, tapestries and antique furniture which create a magical atmosphere. As well as the 16 rooms in the castle, you can book the two cottage rooms set next to the pool that have a more contemporary, safari-inspired decor, while the Myrtille family apartment is in a cabin in the grounds.

**Details** Doubles cost from €122 a night, breakfast is €20 (00 33 4 73 68 43 03, relaischateau.com). Clermont-Ferrand airport is 30 minutes away

## 19 Château Cordellian- Bages Gironde

Surrounded by vineyards that supply its world-famous winery, the five-star Cordellian-Bages is a must-visit for gastronomes. The chef Jean-Luc Rochas many accolades include two Michelin stars. He serves a sophisticated menu that blends the best of land and sea. The five-star hotel has 28 modern rooms with their own terraces, as well as a fitness room, outdoor heated pool and a helipad.

**Details** B&B doubles cost from €262 a night (00 33 5 56 59 24 24, cordellianbages.com). Bordeaux airport is 45 minutes away

## 20 Château de Saint Paterne Normandy

This stylish and welcoming château makes a perfect stopover en route to or from the north coast ferry ports. With ten stylishly decorated rooms, the château is as welcoming to families as it is to couples, with two and a half acres of parkland and games, a trampolene, a treehouse and a pool in the grounds. After the children's earlier mealtime, adults will be spoilt by aperitifs in the salon, followed by a meal — cooked by the chef-owner, Charles-Henry de Valbray — in the candlelit dining room.

**Details** Doubles cost from €145 a night, breakfast is €14 (00 33 2 33 27 54 71, chateau-saintpaterne.com). The port of Caen-Ouistreham is 80 minutes away

# The whole place to yourself: châteaux for groups

It might seem a tall order to persuade 25 people to share this fabulous château with you, but when they spy the striking turrets and idyllic pool outside, along with the awe-inspiring interior, they'll be queuing to thank you with a drink at the bar in the château's salon. The achingly cool decor continues into the nine bedrooms, but when it comes to the en suite rooms with double bathtubs, it might be time to draw straws.

**Details** Seven nights cost from £10,710 for 26 people (01442 870055, qualityvillas.com). Limoges airport is just over an hour away

**Château de la Malartrie, Dordogne**  
If you've driven through La Roque-Gageac, chances are you will have spotted Château de la Malartrie nesting in the cliffs at the end of the iconic village. Yet the view of the castle has nothing on the views from it, and while you enjoy the pretty grassed terraces and open-air swimming pool you can gaze down on the canoeists and traditional *gabare* boats floating by on the River Dordogne. Inside, the fireplaces and elegant decor are fit for a king. There are nine bedrooms.

**Details** Seven nights cost from £4,970 for 12 people (020 8003 6557, simpsontravel.com). Bergerac airport is just over an hour away

**Château d'Henri, Mayenne**  
Follow the chestnut tree-lined drive to this turreted 19th-century castle in the western Loire and you will fall under its spell. Set in 29 acres of parkland complete with orchards, a walled rose garden and spring-fed lake, it also offers a pretty outside pool. Inside, there's a wood-paneled music room with baby grand piano and marble fireplace, a circular kitchen in the tower and, for further escapism, a not-so-historic cinema room. The six enormous bedrooms feature dreamy four-poster beds as part of the sumptuous furnishings.

**Details** Seven nights cost from £3,500 for 15 people (020 3733 7280, dominiquesvillas.co.uk). The ferry port of Caen-Ouistreham is two and a quarter hours away

**Château Leneuve, Bergerac**  
This 13th-century château is surrounded by 30 acres of well-tended gardens and woodland and makes a great base for exploring the Dordogne Valley to the east, with its golden-stone villages,



gardens and caves. To the west and south lie the Bordeaux vineyards. There are five bedrooms, each with newly renovated en suite rooms, while the reception rooms feature grand fireplaces and opulent fabrics.

**Details** Seven nights, with two hours of housekeeping daily, cost from £4,959 for ten people (01242 787800, reidsavannah.com). Bergerac airport is 25 minutes away

**Château de La Vigne, Loire**  
Spend summer evenings dining alfresco at this charming 19th-century home after spending your days exploring the local vineyards and world-famous châteaux. The main château offers five bedrooms decorated in a tasteful blend of white and natural wood. The coach house, farm cottage and apartment, sleeping a further 19 guests, can be rented.

**Details** Seven nights cost from £2,725 for 14 people (chezrous.com, property reference 13673). Tours and Poitiers airports are an hour and a quarter away

**Château Aubenas, Provence**  
Deep in the wilds of the Luberon, this elegant château was once a retreat for French royalty. These days guests can enjoy their escape from the real world with a superb outdoor heated pool in the discreet grounds of the 16th-century castle. Inside, the historic building has been given a modern makeover, with bright, minimalist decor with splashes of colour and carefully chosen pieces of antique furniture. Children will love the dormitory room — one of five bedrooms — complete with toys and games and its own cosy cubbyhole.

**Details** Seven nights costs from £2,665 for 12 people, including maid service (020 3773 9227, cvvillas.com). Marseilles airport is an hour and a quarter away

**Château la Perrière, Loire**  
Children wanting to play at being princes and princesses will be spoilt at this pretty château, that overlooks the stately Château de Chinon. With a playroom, paddling pools and ping pong and all the baby/child paraphernalia provided, parents can relax while youngsters gad about the pretty gardens. Inside, the décor is a pretty mix of greys and pastels.

**Details** Seven nights costs from £2,000 for 12 people (07976 282850, sawdays.co.uk). Tours airport is 50 minutes away



**Château Rigaud, Bordeaux**  
Play at being king and queen at Château Rigaud, and you won't need to lift a finger. This ultimate party house allows you to relax and enjoy time with friends or family while the château's team of nannies, chefs and a concierge take care of your every whim. The medieval château found between Bordeaux and Saint-Émilion sleeps 18 in super-stylish bedrooms, with a cinema room, playrooms and a bar. Outside, the swimming pool, gardens and meadows are perfect for whiling away summer days.

**Details** Weekend rentals on a full-board basis with limitless Bordeaux wines cost from €11,000 for 18 people, including airport transfers. Weekly rentals for up to 26 people staying on a self-catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0270149, chateaurigaud.co.uk). Bordeaux airport is an hour away

**Château Morvan, Burgundy**  
There is many a tumble-down castle in France but at Château Morvan, close to the unspoilt regional park of the same name, the rustic qualities are more eye-catching than usual. Exposed walls and concrete floors are carefully blended with vintage furniture and oriental rugs, with wonderful results. There are three enormous reception rooms, four double bedrooms and a room with four singles, so it's the ideal place for a two-family escape to the heart of France.

**Details** Seven nights cost from £3,403 for 12 people (0800 1387999, oliverstravels.com). It is a five hour and 40 minute drive from Paris, or Orly airport is two and a half hours

**Château du Breuil, Loire**  
History lovers will adore Château de Breuil, between Loches and Amboise in the Loire Valley. The owner and architect, Roxanna McDonald, collects historic artefacts and uses them to great effect in this 15th-century château that she rescued from near-ruin. Climb the stone staircase to the three bedrooms, where cosy country-house decor and bathrooms with roll-top baths await. Garden lovers should visit the nearest village, Chédigny, famous for its rose bushes.

**Details** Seven nights cost from €900 for eight people. An annexe sleeping six further guests is available (00 33 2 47 92 55 88, sawdays.co.uk). Tours airport is 40 minutes away

Carolyn Boyd