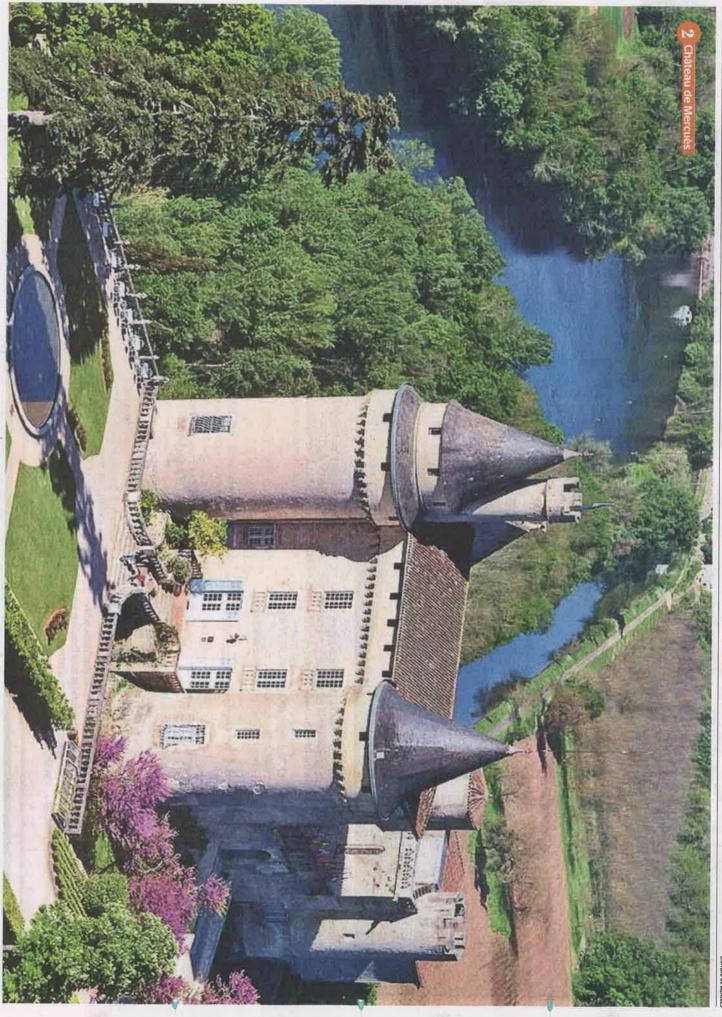


it would be Puglia region to Stay in for ever, 'If I had to choose a

Chef Theo Randall on his top places to eat in Italy



## le 20 best French lâteaux

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

#### Château de Chenevière ormandy

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

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



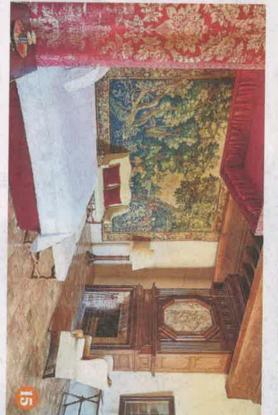
#### 3 Château de Riell

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



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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 Château Ribagnac

Children's curious fingers tend not to be compatible with the antiques and objets d'art that come as part of a château's appeal, but at the fairytale Château 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 château and feature wood panelling, impressive fireplaces and stained-glass windows. Meals made with delicious local produce are served by the friendly

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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

### HE IN CARREST

Based in the village of Haut-de-Cagnes with sensational views over the Côte d'Azur, Château 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 Chalean de Noyelles

Just over an hour south of Calais, the Château 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 33 322 23 68 70, chateauxhotels.co.uk). Take the ferry to Calais

#### V Charles and the

181818T

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

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

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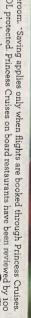
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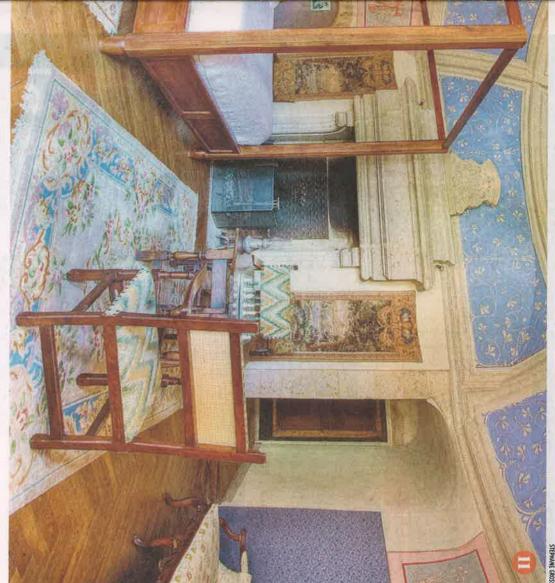








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The 19th-century château is surrounded by 155 acres of parkland and offers an outdoor pool, tennis court and uninterrupted views of the Pyrenees. Guests are encouraged to make themselves at home by the owner, Sally Mayo, whose home-cooked meals are served in the wood-panelled dining room or on the pergola-shaded terrace. Details B&B doubles cost from €160 a night (00 33 5 62 69 40 36, chateauarlens.com). Toulouse airport is 90 minutes away

### 9 Château de la Motte

For fairytale turrets and towers, look no farther than the Château de la Motte, where the Swedish owners, Henrik and Liliane Lantz, have given the 18th-century château a new lease of life with antique furniture and artworks collected during their years in the antiques trade. They offer B&B in the seven rooms and suites, as well as evening meals on request. There are bikes to borrow, an outdoor swimming pool and a sauna.

Details B&B doubles cost from

€110 a night (00 33 4 77 66 64 60, sawdays.co.uk). Lyons airport is

## O Château de la Treyne

Perched on a cliff above the River
Dordogne, the elegant Château de la
Treyne is the stuff fairytales are made
from. The turreted castle dates from the
14th century and has 17 individually
styled rooms, some with four-poster
beds, others with sensational bathrooms,
and all featuring antique furniture and
sumptuous fabrics. It is surrounded by
parkland, including a bewitching rose
garden. Its pièce de résistance is its terrace,
where you can enjoy Michelin-starred
cuisine as the river glides gently by.
Detalls Doubles cost from £200 a night,
breakfast Is £25 (00 33 5 65 27 60 60,
www.chateaudelatreyne.com). Brive
Dordogne Valley airport is half an

#### 11 Château de la Flocellière Vendée

Turrets and towers are de rigueur when it comes to châteaux, but most castles have nothing on those at Château de la Flocellière, an Ilth-century fortress with a magnificent keep. Its five enormous guest rooms are decorated in suitably opulent style, with chandeliers, canopied beds and antiques galore. Two separate buildings, the keep itself and the Louis XIII wing, are available for rental and sleep 10 and 14

cost from €175 a night (00 33 2 51 57 22 03, sawdays.co.uk). Nantes airport is just over an hour away 12 Château de la

Set on Brittany's north coast not far from Mont Saint-Michel, Château de la Ballue will delight garden lovers with its Italian baroque-inspired garden with topiary, terraces and triangular flowerbeds as well as a truly amazing maze. Elsewhere in the garden a heated outdoor pool, spa and sauna offer a

chance to relax. Inside the I7th-century castle there are five guest rooms, decorated in classic style, with canopied beds and antique furniture.

Details Doubles cost from €210 a night, breakfast is €20 (00 33 2 99 97 47 86, sawdays.co.uk). The ferry port of Saint-Malo is 50 minutes away



In days of yore it may have been the servants who were consigned to a château's outbuildings, but at Château de Courban the best place to stay is in the converted 16th-century pigeonnier (dovecote). This amazing circular room features rustic beams and natural stone, complete with original pigeonholes and a bathroom on a separate floor. In the main château 25 rooms and suites await, with a gourmet restaurant and a Nuxe Spa.

Details Doubles cost from £99 a night, pigeonnier from £199, breakfast is £18 (00 33 380 93 78 69.

chateaudecourban.com). Paris Orly airport is two and a half hours away

## 14 Château de Vollore

The imposing 12th-century fortress might have frightened off its enemies in the past, but these days all visitors are welcome at the five-room chambre d'hôtes. The château is owned by descendants of General Lafayette, famous for his role in the American War of Independence. As such, there is a wealth of family heirlooms and war memorabilia. Set high in the Auvergne hills, the château has its own beautiful gardens and the surrounding views of the Livradois-Forez regional park are

Details B&B doubles cost from €200 a night (00 33 4 73 53 71 06, chateauvollore.com). Clermont-Ferrand airport is 45 minutes away

## 15 Château de Bagnols

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Indulge your regal fantasies by staying at the sensational Château de Bagnols in the heart of Beaujolais wine country. Restored in the 1980s to a superb standard, its moat, drawbridge and honey-coloured stone will have you in awe, while the much-in-demand restaurant, 1217, headed by the Michelin-starred chef Jean-Alexandre Ouaratta, will excite your taste buds. Choose historic château suites with jaw-dropping frescoes, fireplaces and tapestries, the more modern Chai suites in the former wine cellar, or the Jardin suites in the château's outbuildings. minutes away Details Doubles cost from £175 a night, breakfast is £20 (00 33 4 74 71 40 00, relaischateaux.com). Lyons airport is 50

## 16 Château des Allues

Get back to nature with a stay at Château des Allues, where the chef-owner, Stéphane Vandeville, is dedicated to his enormous garden. He grows dozens of different vegetables and herbs in 88 raised beds, which he then serves with the evening meals at his friendly B&B. Set in the Alps between Chambéry and Albertville, it has sensational views from the eclectic bedrooms.

Details B&B doubles cost from €140 a night (00 33 6 75 38 61 56, Chateaudesallues.com). Lyons airport is 75 minutes away

#### 17 Château de

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#### Briottières Loire

Set in 120 acres of parkland, the family-run Château de Briottières is idyllic. Swim in the charming outdoor pool, explore the nearby forests on the free bikes or roam the pretty walled gardens. Then eat a home-cooked meal on the terrace, enjoy drinks in the fabulous salons or have a game of French billiards. The ten rooms in the



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 château are decorated in classic French style, with canopied beds and antique furniture, while the decor in the family

## 18 Château de Codignat

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, relaischateaux.com). Clermont-Ferrand 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 irport is 30 minutes away

## 19 Château Cordeillan

Surrounded by vineyards that supply its world-famous winery, the five-star Cordeillan-Bages is a must-visit for gastronomes. The chef Jean-Luc Rocha's 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, cordeillanbages.com). Bordeaux airport is 45 minutes away

#### 20 Château de Saint

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 trampoline, 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

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awe-inspiring interior, they'll be queueing 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 draw straws comes to the en suite rooms with double bathtubs, it might be time 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 It might seem a tall order to

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

swimming pool your coperral swimming pool your 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 If you've driven through La Roque-Gageac, chances are you will have spotted Château de la Malartrie nestling 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

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-panelled
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

## 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,

Château du Bre B | 4 國白

> gardens and caves. To the west and south lie the Bordeaux vineyards. There are five bedrooms, each with newly renovated en sulte 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) airport is 25 minutes away

#### 19 guests, can be rented. Details Seven nights cost from £2,725 for 14 people (cheznous.com, property reference 13673). Tours and Poitiers airports are an hour and a quarter away 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

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

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 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

There is many a tumbledown 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

Details Seven nights cost from £3,403 for 12 people (0800 1337999, oliverstravels.com). It is a five hour and 40 minute drive from Paris, or Orly airport is two and a half hours 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

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



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 0370148 chatcauticuld of the control of the control of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis cost from €18,000 (0330 0370148 chatcauticuld of the catering basis chatcauticuld 0270149, chateaurigaud.co.uk). Bordeaux airport is an hour away

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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-Émillon
sleeps 18 in super-stylish bedrooms,
with a cinema room, playrooms and
a bar. Outside, the swimming pool,
gardens and meadows are perfect
for whilling away summer days.