

HOME / ACROSS FRANCE



COUR DU CORBEAU

The 5 best historic hotels in France

Staying in a historic hideaway needn't mean going for something 'vieux jeu'. We find five bolt holes that have made the old new again, in style.



by Rowena Carr-Allinson

If you want to fully immerse yourself in France's rich past there's nothing like staying in one of the country's recently restored buildings. We scoured the country to find the best historic bolt-holes and, from a beautifully restored 12th century abbey to an iconic 18th century hospital, each of them is packed with period character.

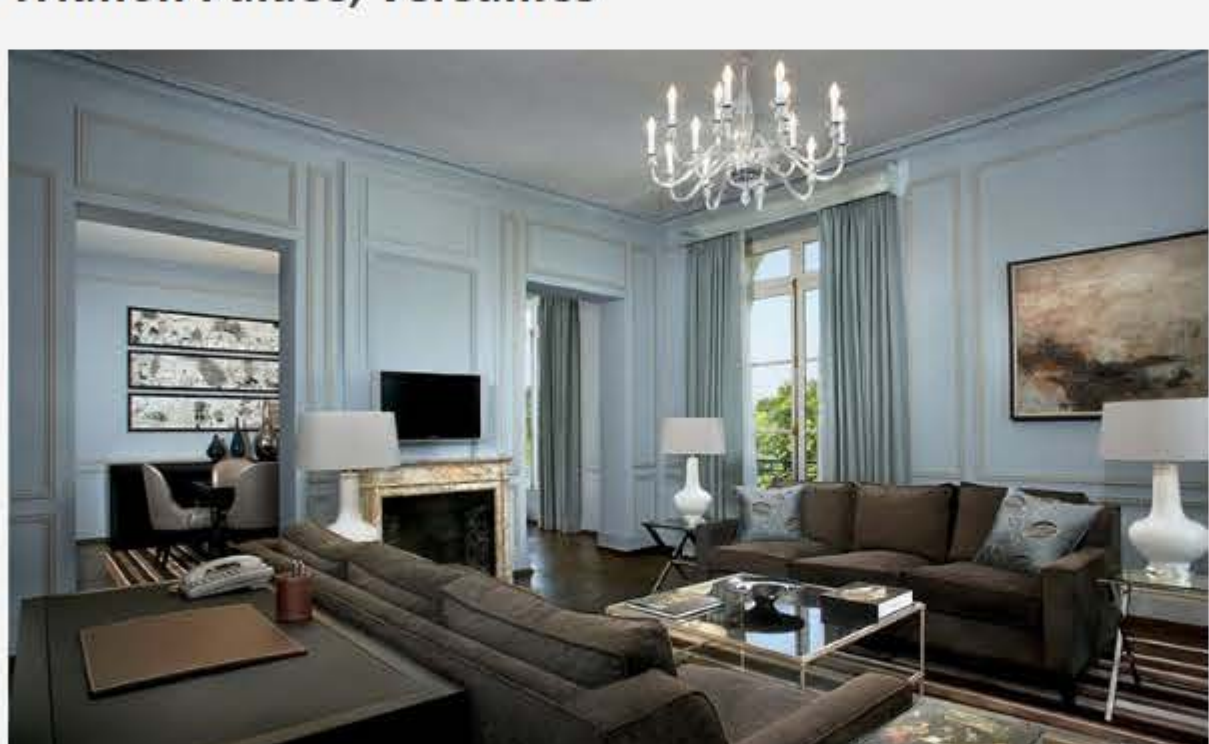
Abbaye De La Bussiere, Burgundy



ABBAYE DE LA BUSSIERE © MICHEL JOLY

It's hard not to be immediately bewitched by the mystical 12th century Abbaye de la Bussiere. The one time Cistercian abbey is now a swish, family-run hideaway with cosy lounges complete with fireplaces and atmospheric stained windows, 'out houses' (recently refurbished into contemporary cool family friendly rooms with superb bathrooms) and a gourmet Michelin starred restaurant: the 1131. Don't miss the 7 course tasting menu, which remains a mystery until the dishes are served. Each course is a veritable feast, from the amuse bouche to the hare soufflé, the scallops with chanterelles and goats' cheese, the duck filet with celery and the very tasty warm Citeaux cheese, eaten with red onion confit and gingerbread. Before desert, the palate is cleansed with a beetroot salad with a twist and finally, there's a delicious chocolate creation to tickle those tastebuds... Magical. www.abbayedelabussiere.fr

Trianon Palace, Versailles



SUITE AT TRIANON PALACE, VERSAILLES

A grandiose hotel dating back to 1907 all gleaming monochromatic tiled floors, chandeliers and vertiginous ceilings; its 199 rooms offer clean lines and contemporary décor with quirky touches, like the camouflage carpets. Trimmings range from the Nespresso machine to the large flat screen TV and a sublime bathroom, all grey marbles, monochromatic mosaic and best of all, a view of the chateau de Versailles from your bathtub! Not to mention a huge Guerlain Spa and pool.



DELUXE ROOM IN PALACE BUILDING

Another reason to visit? The 2 Michelin star Gordon Ramsay restaurant and the Veranda restaurant where a glorious buffet breakfast is served overlooking green fields dotted with sheep. Don't miss the freshly made pancakes or the classic Tarte Tropezienne - quite the breakfast treat! There's no doubt that it's real killer asset is its location, just a few steps away from the legendary Palace of Versailles it's just off the Royal Domain and France's most famous castle. www.waldorfastoria3.hilton.com

Intercontinental L'Hotel Dieu, Marseille



INTERCONTINENTAL MARSEILLE HOTEL DIEU

One of the city's most iconic landmarks, the one-time hospital dating back to the 18th Century has been given a new lease of life as a luxury hotel with hip decor, top-notch service and great views over the Vieux Port and a gourmet restaurant. Retaining plenty of original features, it's been transformed with the utmost taste and style. What's more, it has a sleek Clarins spa in the basement for some serious pampering. There's also an amazing buffet breakfast one can linger over on the huge terrace overlooking the Med. Prefer to linger at twilight? Grab a sunset drink at Le Capian where the mixologist has a reputation for mixing a mean cocktail. With easy access to the metro, buses and the harbour below, it's also perfectly located to explore the old town, the dreamy 'calanques' and the impressive Mucem museum. www.ihg.com/intercontinental/marseille

Hotel de Paris, St Tropez



ROOFTOP POOL AT HOTEL DE PARIS

Anyone who has watched the famous 'Gendarme de St Tropez' movies might recognise this building, set right on the famous seaside resort's harbour-side. The walls that once housed the actual Gendarmerie de St Tropez (featured in the films) now host those wishing to stay in designer style in town! Revamped by the famous Sybille De Margerie, the entire hotel oozes St Tropez chic with a touch of nostalgia. From its restaurant "Le Pationata restaurant" with its cool 70's inspired décor, Paco Rabanne styled metallic chandeliers and five star service to l'Atrium bar where local Brigitte Bardot is honoured.



BEDROOM, HOTEL DE PARIS

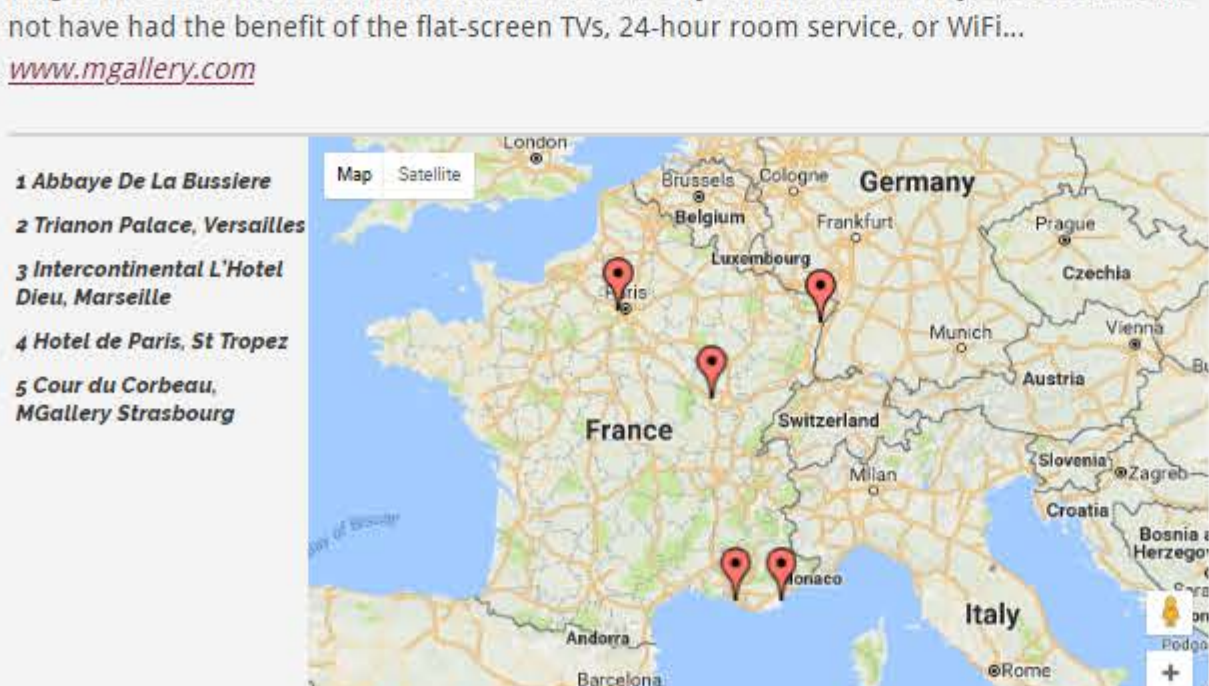
The 60's and 70's era are celebrated in the rooms too, where bright colours clash with florals. The cherry on this cake? The rooftop 'Les Toits' with its pool, bar and restaurant: the perfect place to while away an afternoon overlooking those famous terracotta tiles. www.hoteldeparis-sainttropez.com

Cour du Corbeau, MGallery Strasbourg



BEDROOM AT THE COUR DU CORBEAU

This 16th-century building, a skip away from the Palais Rohan and the Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Strasbourg blends history and the contemporary perfectly. The oak beams, inside and out, give the Cour du Corbeau authenticity, while the modernised Neo-Baroque furnishings in the rooms, matched with sleek simple taupe and aubergine add certain chic. Dating back to 1528, each room has its own identity while the charming interior cobbled courtyard is just the place to relax with an aperitif. A typical Alsatian inn, the old coaching inn is actually a listed historic monument, and has seen the likes of Frederick II, the King of Prussia, Voltaire and Maréchal de Turenne stay under its roof. They, however, would not have had the benefit of the flat-screen TVs, 24-hour room service, or WiFi... www.mgallery.com



- 1 Abbaye De La Bussiere
- 2 Trianon Palace, Versailles
- 3 Intercontinental L'Hotel Dieu, Marseille
- 4 Hotel de Paris, St Tropez
- 5 Cour du Corbeau, MGallery Strasbourg

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