



LIFESTYLE OPINION

Chateau De Mercues is a four-star steal with five-star quality

Head to Occitanie in France for a break in a fairytale castle towering high over the Lot river a short drive from Cahors

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The imposing edifice of fairytale castle Chateau De Mercues

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Chateau De Mercues offers a Lot for your money, specifically the muddy brown of the river whose valley it guards, rising with unlikely turrets from the top of a rocky outcrop to the north west of Cahors in Occitanie.

More fairytale than fortress, [this rambling collection of towers, crenelations and ornate balustrades](#) evokes a sense of deliciously camp power, built on the foundation of crumbling religious dominance.



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bedfellows.

And that makes it a shocking steal for those intent on a luxury break on the continent.

Its baffling layout conceals a selection of individual, unusual rooms; a legacy of the building's architectural evolution.



The immense bath of my junior suite at Chateau De Mercues

We're quartered in a junior suite set over two floors halfway up a cliffside turret.

Connected only by a mildly treacherous spiral staircase in Medieval stone (with the main door halfway up), the bedroom sits on top of the palatial bathroom which is dominated by a gigantic ceramic bath on wooden decking.

Both enjoy narrow windows onto the 100ft drop to the river below.

While novel, the layout isn't entirely successful as, fresh from a foot injury, I spend a surprising amount of time hopping between the two, reluctant to transfer due to the tantalising tub.

There's a lot of schlepping up and down uneven staircases under tortured, aged wooden beams once you leave your room too.



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A view of the Lot from my bathroom window at Chateau De Mercues

But the place is so lovely, so intrinsically charming, that each journey is one of intrigue and, often, surprise as you round a corner certain you're about to arrive at the restaurant only to discover a hitherto unexpected corridor leading to a chapel, cellar or someone else's room.

But the real strength of the place (and you'll have to wait a few months to get the best of it) is the exterior.

Whether it's the central courtyard, the al fresco pool or simply the manicured gardens, the views are breathtaking.



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And there's no question you must have a glass of the wine made on-site overlooking the vineyards below where the chateau is pressing ahead with its ongoing mission to reintroduce Malbec to the region.

Its potent, rich wines are matured in an underground cathedral housed beneath a fountain in front of the hotel and, if one were sentimentally inclined, one might imagine each glass contained the very essence of the place, harvested, fermented, crafted and bottled for the enjoyment of guests.

All are, naturally, available in an extensive gift shop.

The food



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Cuttlefish in Sauvignon Blanc sauce from the Bistrot menu at Chateau De Mercues

But drink is only one of the myriad stories I don't have enough space to do justice to here. The other that must be mentioned is the food.

Chateau De Mercues operates two restaurants (although, depending on the day, their food may be served in the same room).

Both Le Dueze and the Bistrot Du Chateau offer cuisine developed by chef Julien Poisot in either fine dining or stripped back form.

The former is a tad on the expensive side for what's delivered, which tends towards expansive flavour with underpowered seasoning.

However, the less expensive option feels and tastes almost as luxurious and comes in just over a third of the price of the Michelin-focussed dishes. It's superb value.

Better still is the restaurant at Chateau De Haute-Serre (also owned by Mercues' proprietor Georges Vigouroux), which offers glassy modern tables in sight of the vines and two courses for 34 euros.

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The short drive from Mercues will put you in the heart of Occitanie offering a plethora of options to explore the likes of Cahors, surrounded by a meander of the Lot or the impossibly pretty Saint-Cirq-Lapopie clinging to the hillside high above the river downstream.

Either way Chateau De Mercues makes an ideal base of operations, at once quiet and relaxed and filled with the exhilaration of its surroundings.

The hotel is on seasonal break until March 24 but you can stay there now for a 10% discount on a room-only basis until it fully reopens.



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- Travellers could also opt to fly into Bergerac or Brieve, which are roughly equidistant.
- **Top tip:** Drive down from the hotel and make a stop [at nearby Cahors](#), a town almost completely surrounded by the river Lot (like a Medieval Isle Of Dogs). The Pont Valentré is worth the trip on its own.

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