

## CHIC WITH A BASQUE TWIST

Imagine a French bolt hole with sea views, an infinity pool and elegant rooms furnished in shades of blue and taupe and Toile de Jouy fabric... **La Réserve** ticks all of the above. The 41-room, four-star, boutique hotel is perched on a cliff top overlooking the Atlantic – a 20-minute stroll down the coastal path from the sweeping bay and genteel town of Saint-Jean-de-Luz. Less glitzy than its neighbour Biarritz, the relaxed holiday vibe makes it the perfect place to kick back on the beach, explore the narrow shopping streets, go for a promenade or sip coffee in the square looking over the harbour.

Head back to the hotel for a dip in the pool, relax in the gardens or enjoy some inventive cuisine in the hotel restaurant Ilura. Chef Fabrice Idiart uses locally sourced ingredients (*foie gras*, lamb from the Pyrenees, freshly caught fish) to give a regional Basque twist to a full French dining experience.

All the rooms have views across the grounds and are reasonably priced for the locale (but note, standard rooms are small, so it's worth going for an upgrade, from €40; about £35; per night). There are also the three-star Residences, with multiple bedrooms for larger groups and longer stays.

You won't need to hire a car if you're happy to simply wander back and forth from town, but if you do, there's scope to explore and

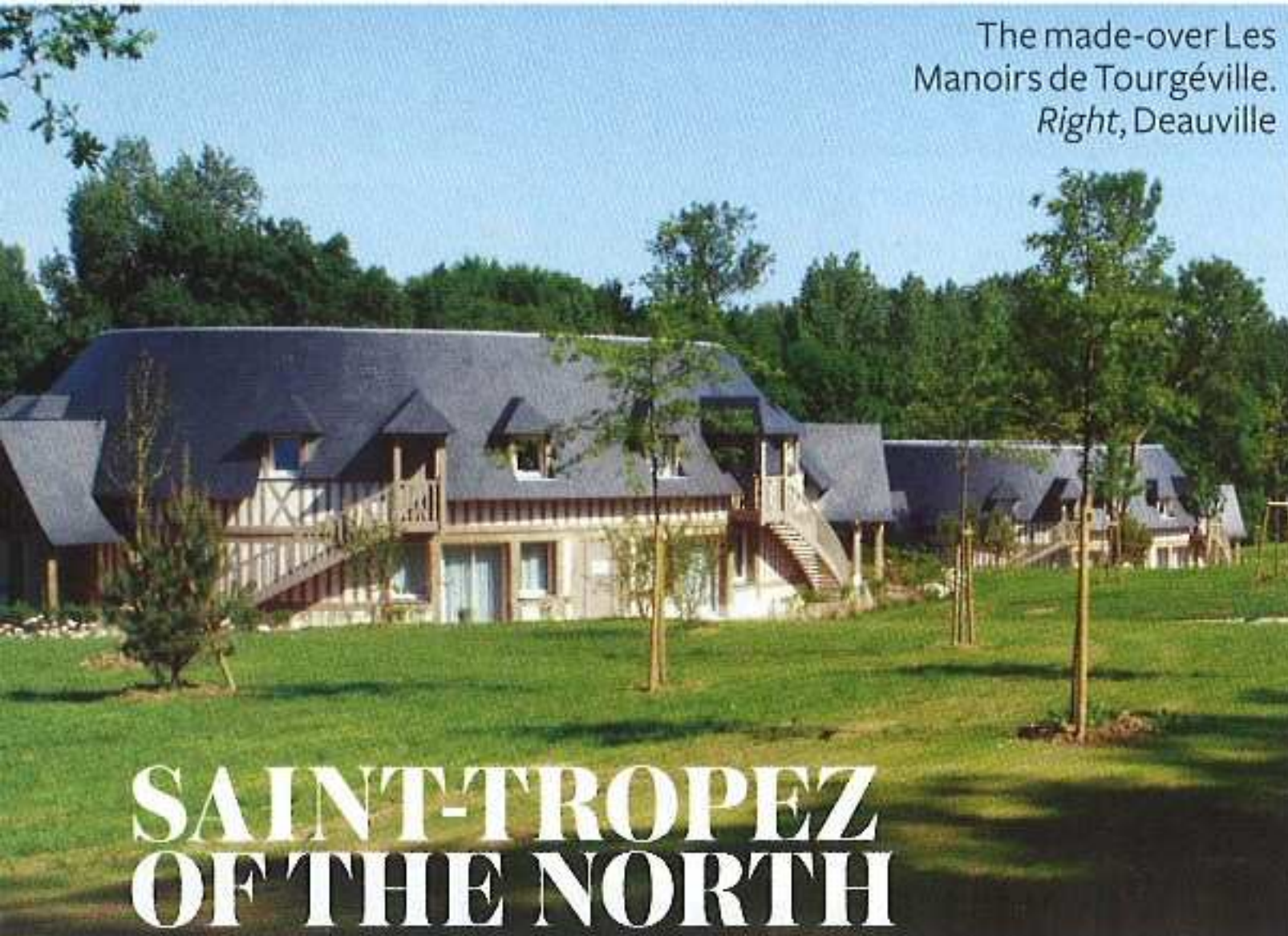


La Réserve pool and, right, a standard room

there's plenty on the doorstep. To the north is Biarritz, nestled between wild beaches favoured by surfers. To the south and just over the border into Spain are the cultural sights of Bilbao (don't miss the Guggenheim), the Rioja region – a wine-taster's heaven, Pyrenees hilltop towns, plus the bustling beachside city of San Sebastián (all within a few hours' drive). **Camilla Kay Rooms at La Réserve** (00 33 5 59 51 32 00; [hotel-lareserve.com](http://hotel-lareserve.com)) start at £85 per night. **Ryanair** ([ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com)) flies to Biarritz from London Stansted from £42 return, including taxes.



The made-over Les Manoirs de Tourgéville. Right, Deauville



## SAINT-TROPEZ OF THE NORTH

**Les Manoirs de Tourgéville** is a chic Normandy retreat, set in verdant parkland, once owned by legendary French film director Claude Lelouch. Nearby Deauville, with its windswept beach and pretty portside streets, has been a Parisian A-listers' hangout since the Thirties and the likes of George Clooney, Brangelina *et al* can be spotted at the town's American Film Festival every September.

After years of obscurity, Les Manoirs was given a makeover last summer by Antoine Chevanne of Hôtel Byblos, Saint-Tropez fame. He has created 57 pretty, luxe/modern rooms (each named after Hollywood characters) around a manicured courtyard, adding a café, an indoor pool and mini-spa, and a 50-seater cinema.



Architecturally, Chevanne has retained the basic structure, but his mother Mireille has reconfigured the interiors. Well-stuffed sofas, polished stone floors and fireplaces and muted palettes deliver a low-key country aesthetic. He has also added four circular "Manoirs": self-contained villas, each with eight bedrooms. It's as if Chevanne has created a Hôtel-Byblos-of-the-north: here is a place to simply sunbathe, read, swim in the indoor pool, have a mineral scrub or facial

in the wellness spa area and consume good food.

Do book a table at the Le 1899 restaurant for chef Emmanuel Andrieu's impressive modern take on Norman cuisine. And, if you're having a long, boozy lunch, sit outside in the sun and do try the *Terrine Normande* (a sweet omelette with apples) for dessert.

If you're intent on activity, the hotel provides bicycles for a bucolic foray into the Normandy backwaters. Or go to Deauville for a day on the beach, a plate of mussels in a portside restaurant, or a film if you've blown into town during the festival. **Lydia Bell Rooms at Les Manoirs de Tourgéville** (00 33 2 31 14 48 68; [lesmanoirstourgeville.com](http://lesmanoirstourgeville.com)) start at €140 (about £125) per night, b&b, based on two adults sharing. **CityJet** ([cityjet.com](http://cityjet.com); 0871 666 50 50) flies to Deauville three times a week from London City from £69, including taxes.

Hôtel Crillon le Brave Provence is spread over seven houses



## WINE-LOVER'S HAVEN

Bringing a dose of shabby-chic glamour to a sleepy Provençal town just east of Avignon, **Hôtel Crillon le Brave Provence** is made up of 32 bedrooms, which look out on to glistening vineyards and rolling valleys. The rooms are spread over seven old village houses (connected by bridges, alleyways and hidden courtyards, so do pack flats) and each house has its own charm and character – think exposed brick walls, marbled bathrooms and open fires. Look forward to daily sundowners on your private terrace, with a glass of Gigondas and a bowl of local nearly apple-sized olives.

The hotel's restaurant offers a feast: regional cured hams, duck breast with liver, bull fillet and roasted monkfish tail with red peppers. The *pièce de résistance* is the roast leg of lamb, served with fondant potatoes, onion confit and red wine jus. And the strawberries with lavender sugar for pudding will change your life.

Visiting the hotel's mini spa is a must (book in advance, as there's only one treatment room); the menu incorporates Provence Santé products, known for their natural and results-driven ingredients; the hot-stone massage is a treat after hiking up the local hillsides.

The best thing? The Crillon is all about what *not* to do. Lie lazily by the heated pool or sit in a nearby café and people-watch. But active types, don't worry: you can also play golf or tennis, go horse-riding on Mont Ventoux, kayak on the Sorgue river, or go cycling. For sightseeing, there's the Châteauneuf-du-Pape vineyards, Lubéron, Gordes, or larger cities of Avignon and Aix-en-Provence. And who cares if your jeans feel a little tighter, the in-house wine and cheese tasting is a total hoot. **Alice Ripman Rooms at Hôtel Crillon le Brave Provence** (00 33 490 65 61 61; [crillonlebrave.com](http://crillonlebrave.com)) start at €250 (about £220) per night. **EasyJet** ([easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com)) flies from London Gatwick to Marseille (75-minute hotel transfer) from £24.99 per person one way. ■

