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# 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. ▶



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

#### 4 Château Ribagnac Limousin

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

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](http://chateauribagnac.com)). Limoges airport is 30 minutes away

#### 5 Château le Cagnard Côte d'Azur

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](http://lecagnard.com)). Nice airport is ten minutes away

#### 6 Château de Noyelles Somme

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 3 22 23 68 70, [chateauxhotels.co.uk](http://chateauxhotels.co.uk)). Take the ferry to Calais

#### 7 Château 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](http://lamouchere.com)). The ferry port of Caen-Ouistreham is two hours away

#### 8 Château d'Arlens Gers

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

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, [chateaurarlens.com](http://chateaurarlens.com)). Toulouse airport is 90 minutes away

#### 9 Château de la Motte Loire

For fairytale turrets and towers, look

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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](http://sawdays.co.uk)). Lyons airport is 90 minutes away

## 10 Château de la Treyne Lot/Dordogne Valley

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.

**Details** Doubles cost from €200 a night, breakfast is €25 (00 33 5 65 27 60 60, [www.chateaudelatreyne.com](http://www.chateaudelatreyne.com)). Brive Dordogne Valley airport is half an hour away

## 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 11th-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 respectively.

**Details** B&B doubles cost from €175 a night (00 33 2 51 57 22 03,

[sawdays.co.uk](http://sawdays.co.uk)). Nantes airport is just over an hour away

## 12 Château de la Ballue Brittany

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 17th-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](http://sawdays.co.uk)). The ferry port of Saint-Malo is 50 minutes away

## 13 Château de Courban Burgundy

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 3 80 93 78 69, [chateaudecourban.com](http://chateaudecourban.com)). Paris Orly airport is two and a half hours away

## 14 Château de Vollore Auvergne

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

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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 spectacular.

**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

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

**More châteaux next page**

## 15 Château de Bagnols Beaujolais

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.

**Details** Doubles cost from £175 a night, breakfast is £20 (00 33 4 74 71 40 00, relaischateaux.com). Lyons airport is 50 minutes away

## 16 Château des Allues Savoie

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 Briottières western Loire

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