

INSIDE — NEW DISCOVERIES IN SOUTHERN FRANCE + FAVORITE PRIVATE ISLANDS WORLDWIDE

ANDREW HARPER'S Hideaway Report[®]

SEPTEMBER 2020 SINCE 1979

Traveling the world in search of truly enchanting places

Pool at Le Vieux Castillon,
Castillon-du-Gard



Languedoc-Roussillon Revisited

Rolling vineyards, exquisite villages, Roman ruins, open-air markets, profound tranquility

The high-speed train from Paris usually takes just under four hours to reach Avignon, the gateway to Provence. On leaving the city, most travelers drive southeast into the Vaucluse. However, if you cross to the west bank of the Rhône River, you enter the department of Gard in the region of Languedoc-Roussillon. Bounded by

the Cévennes mountains to the north and the Mediterranean to the south, Gard offers much of what American travelers love about Provence but with the added allure of being an unspoiled and uncrowded area, where the traffic on the plane tree-shaded back roads usually amounts to little more than a tractor or two.

True, visitors flock to Nîmes (pop. 150,000), an ancient and atmospheric city of great charm, as well as to Uzès, one of France's most beautiful towns, and to the first-century Pont du Gard, the highest and most dramatic of Roman aqueduct bridges. But much of Gard remains a serene, village-dotted landscape planted with orchards and vineyards.

Hideaway Report editors travel anonymously and pay full rate for all lodging, meals and related expenses.

Since the launch of the Hideaway Report in 1979, featured hotels and restaurants have been selected on a completely independent basis.

For comments and inquiries, please email memberservices@hideawayreport.com.



Remodeled bedroom and patio, Le Vieux Castillon, Castillon-du-Gard

Last year, the opening of several casually chic hotels and a number of outstanding new restaurants prompted us to spend a delightful week of exploration. We began in the exquisitely pretty village of Castillon-du-Gard, located 16 miles to the west of Avignon, where the 34-room **Le Vieux Castillon** has recently been renovated.

We arrived in time for lunch on a shaded terrace overlooking the pool. Afterward, we toured the property, which was created from 18 old stone houses. On a previous visit, eight years prior, the hotel had displayed a traditional Provençal design scheme of chintz fabrics and heavy wooden furniture. Since the renovation, however, it has acquired a new visual identity that is much lighter and

more contemporary. Our Terrace Junior Suite was painted white and came with limestone floors, a white writing desk, a cream-colored sofa and sea-green throws and pillows. The limestone-faced bath had a single stone vanity and a combination tub and shower, while a private terrace was appointed with a table and chairs and two sun beds.

After an excellent dinner of deep-fried stuffed zucchini flowers, and lobster roasted with tandoori spices, we joined the other guests at the poolside open-air Cinéma Paradiso for a showing of “Casa-blanca.” (Movie screenings are staged regularly during the warm-weather months.)

Overall, Le Vieux Castillon is a charming property with a relaxed atmo-

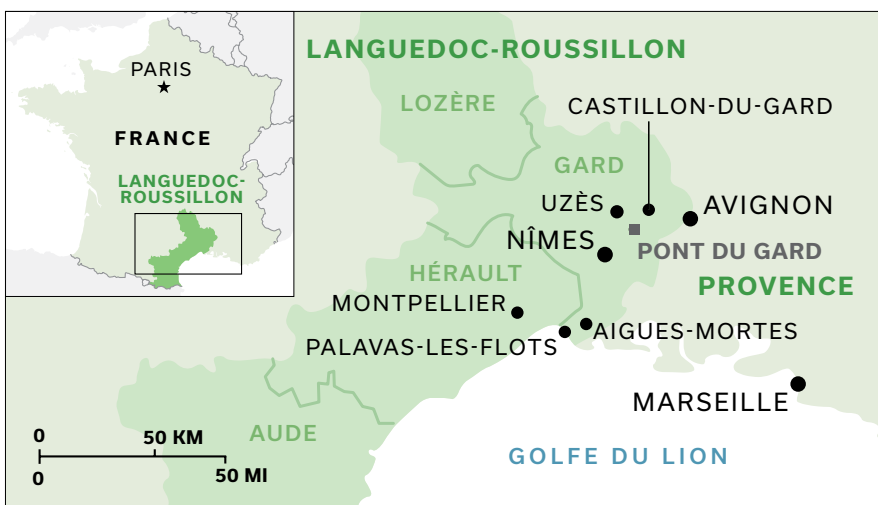
sphere and friendly service. It is a good choice for anyone wanting a hotel with a swimming pool within easy reach of Uzès, 10 miles away.

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“Oh little town of Uzès!” wrote the French novelist André Gide, a keen observer of French social snobberies. “If you were in Umbria, Parisians would be visiting you in herds!” Suffice it to say that Parisians have well and truly discovered Uzès since Monsieur Gide’s lament, and that the town and environs have become a popular choice for their second homes.

The heart of Uzès is the Place aux Herbes, a square shaded by plane trees and surrounded by arcaded buildings, where open-air markets are held on Wednesday and Saturday mornings. Located down a nearby side street is the nine-room **La Maison d’Uzès**, a hotel within a magnificent stone mansion that was once home to the Chambon de La Tour family. It’s a perfect base from which to *flâner*, a wonderful French verb that means to stroll idly with no specific purpose.

We had first stayed at La Maison d’Uzès in 2013 and were looking forward to seeing how the property had evolved in the subsequent years. The welcome from the young team at the reception desk was warm and gracious, and, having checked in, we climbed the spectacular stone staircase to our Chambre Prestige on the second floor. With a high beamed



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‘You must come back in January for the the truffle festival,’ remarked the young woman at the front desk as we checked out, sending us on our way with an ideal reason to return.

LA TABLE D’UZÈS: GILLES TRILLARD
PRESTIGE BEDROOM AND HOTEL EXTERIOR: CHRISTOPHE BIELSA

ceiling and smooth dark-red tile floors, this spacious room had a mostly cream and gray décor, an impressive stone fireplace, a pair of beige armchairs and wonderful views of the town from three tall casement windows. The bath was equipped with a soaking tub with a handheld shower and a single sink.

At the property’s Michelin-starred La Table d’Uzès, chef Christophe Ducros offers a menu of refined contemporary southern French dishes, including the delicious smoked octopus and miso-braised eggplant, ceviche of red prawns with apricots and haricot verts, and roast lamb with black garlic, which we enjoyed for dinner in the courtyard. The young sommelier served us an excellent assortment of wines by the glass, including several from the Domaine de L’Aquaduc, the best local wine producer in nearby Saint-Maximin. Other amenities include a small spa that offers a variety of treatments using L’Occitane products and features a Roman bath with a water wall, chromotherapy and a steam room.

“You must come back in January during the truffle festival,” remarked the young woman at the front desk as

we checked out. This was a tantalizing suggestion for which we were very grateful, since it sent us on our way with an ideal reason to return.

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Few cities live more intimately with their distant history than Nîmes. The town is studded with spectacularly well-preserved Roman monuments, which date to the first century when Emperor Augustus made it the capital of his empire’s Narbonne province, owing to its strategic location on the Via Domitia, the road linking Italia to Hispania (Spain).

The last time we visited Nîmes, we stayed at the charming Hôtel Jardins Secrets. On this trip, however, we were eager to experience the comprehensive renovation of the five-star **Maison Albar Hotels - L’Imperator**, a grand establishment dating from 1929, where Ernest Hemingway once wrote in the bar, Picasso drew, and Frank Sinatra romanced Ava Gardner. All these notables had come to the city for its famous feria, a bullfighting festival held every year for six days at Pentecost and again for three days in September, when matadors take their

chances in the city’s Roman coliseum.

This 53-room hotel (plus eight private villas) has an ideal location in the heart of Nîmes, within walking distance of most of its major sights. On arrival, we were immediately impressed by the way the hotel had been given a contemporary décor without compromising its historic atmosphere. The vintage bullfighting posters and a historic Otis cage elevator have been maintained, but the look of the lobby is now stylishly sleek and colorful.

The young front desk staff proved exceptionally informative and charming, and while our bags were being brought upstairs, one of them showed us around the property. L’Imperator boasts the largest private garden in the city, an outdoor pool, an indoor pool and a Codage spa with a hammam.

Upstairs, our spacious Junior Suite had high ceilings, oak parquet floors, full-length windows with French doors leading to Juliet balconies and views of the plane trees lining the Quai de la Fontaine in front of the hotel. The décor, by Paris-based Argentine architect and designer Marcelo Joulia Naço, included two indigo velvet armchairs and a couch in a sitting

La Table d’Uzès restaurant, Prestige bedroom and hotel exterior, La Maison d’Uzès





Aerial view, Bar Hemingway, spa pool and villa bedroom, Maison Albar Hotels - L'Imperator, Nîmes

INTERIOR PHOTOS: ALEXIS ANICE

area, a writing desk and a large bed made up in white Italian cotton sheets. A brass-framed porthole window brought daylight into a beige limestone-faced bath, which came with double vanities on a stone counter, an oversized soaking tub and a separate walk-in rainfall shower.

The hotel's Bar Hemingway mixes excellent cocktails, and these we sipped in the garden at a table beside a splashing fountain. Afterward, we dined at the hotel's L'Impébrasserie, which overlooks an interior garden, and enjoyed an excellent meal of zucchini salad with fresh goat cheese, mint and tapenade, followed by a local specialty, brandade de morue, a fluffy preparation of soaked salt cod whipped with potatoes and seasoned with garlic and pickled lemon. The wine list featured a reasonably priced selection from Gard and elsewhere in southern France, which had been drawn up by the hotel's talented young sommelier.

The following morning, we walked through Nîmes to the recently opened Musée de la Romanité. The museum, which stands across the street from Nîmes's two-tiered stone coliseum, was designed by Brazilian-born architect Elizabeth de Portzamparc, who has explained that its spectacular draped-glass tile façade was inspired by Roman togas. The museum houses a superlative collection of ancient Roman and medieval art.

After an excellent lunch at La Pie qui Couette, a counter-service restaurant (reservations recommended) inside the city's lively covered food market, we returned to L'Imperator for a quiet afternoon in the spa and beside the pool. Later, we dined at Duende, the hotel's gastronomic restaurant, which is overseen by Michelin three-star chef Pierre Gagnaire, who appointed Nîmes-native chef Nicolas Fontaine, his former sous-chef

in Paris, to execute the menu he designed.

Featuring local recipes and produce, including a deconstructed bouillabaisse, cod cheeks with violets (not the flower, but an iodine-rich Mediterranean shellfish), and red tuna with foie gras and caramelized onions, the tasting menu was a spectacular gastronomic experience. The wine pairing was also brilliant and included what may be the best rosé I've ever had, a 2018 Nénu Collioure, which was fresh, distantly saline and mineral rich.

Before leaving, we asked to visit one of the private villas, all of which benefit from the services of the hotel. These accommodations would be ideal for a family and are furnished with the same contemporary décor as rooms in the main hotel building. Overall, L'Imperator is exceptionally stylish and comfortable, and it is now our recommended address in Nîmes.

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A small spa offers treatments with Eclacé products, which are made with beta carotene-rich pink algae from the salt pans nearby.

An hour's drive south through rolling vineyards brought us to the formidably fortified town of Aigues-Mortes. Surrounded by stone ramparts, this port was constructed in the 13th century by King Louis IX, as the embarkation point for crusaders heading to the Holy Land. It never became the rival to Marseille that the king intended, but it is a unique and atmospheric place today. The ramparts offer views of the striking mauve-colored salt pans of Les Salins du Midi, whose La Baleine brand of sea salt is a favorite all over the world. La Plage de l'Espiguette, one of the most beautiful wild beaches on the French Mediterranean coast, is just a few miles southwest of town.

Terrace at the Hôtel des Remparts



The place to stay in Aigues-Mortes is the new 14-room **Hôtel des Remparts**, which opened in June 2018 and enjoys a perfect location within the walled town, next to the access stairways onto the ramparts. The family-owned and -run property occupies a former military barracks that has been painstakingly renovated to create a hotel of real charm. On arrival, the terrace out front was filled with people enjoying drinks in the shade. Inside, the spacious lobby lounge had limestone floors, exposed stone walls and tall casement windows. It was an airy, welcoming space with tweed-upholstered furniture and dark wood étagères filled with books and decorative ceramics. A charming woman at the front desk checked us in, showed us the small indoor pool and offered to help with restaurant recommendations and reservations.

Our ground-floor Deluxe room was reached via a graveled walkway and came with a small private deck with two canvas armchairs and a table. Inside, we found oat-colored stone walls, limestone floors and a small sitting room with a couch and a writing desk.

Our Deluxe room at the Hôtel des Remparts, Aigues-Mortes

The bedroom had very high ceilings and a large bed made up with high-quality Italian sheets. A claw-foot soaking tub was augmented by two stone vanities tucked into niches. Quiet, stylish and comfortable, it was exactly the kind of room that I hope to find at a small independently owned and run property in France.

The hotel has no restaurant, but an excellent breakfast is served on the terrace, plus a limited menu of snacks and tapas later in the day. A small spa offers treatments with Eclacé products, which are made with beta carotene-rich pink algae from the salt pans nearby.

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Located just inside the department of Hérault, 15 miles to the west of Aigues-Mortes, the quiet beach town of Palavas-les-Flots has suddenly become fashionable. Its newfound beau-monde celebrity is due to the opening last June of the 72-room **Plage Palace** hotel, which is owned by the Costes brothers, who also own more than a dozen stylish Parisian restaurants and whose Hôtel Costes in Paris is a fashion-world favorite.



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Sliding doors led to a private balcony with full-length white privacy curtains and a glass half-wall that allowed a view of the waves rolling in from the Golfe du Lion.

The Costes brothers settled on Palavas-les-Flots, because it's where they spent their childhood holidays. Doubtless, they're also wagering that this low-key stretch of the French Mediterranean coastline, long popular with middle-class French families, is ripe to be redeveloped as an upscale littoral.

We drove past the hotel several times, since it is unmarked and hidden by tall shrubs and pines and a weathered wooden fence. Once we found the entry, we were greeted by a porter who escorted us down a boardwalk to the reception.

Service at most Costes establishments in Paris is notorious for being haughty and abrupt, but the young team at the front desk were warm and welcoming. A nice woman from Montpellier took us around before showing us upstairs, pointing out the glamorous restaurant and bar, which were designed by Parisian interior deco-

rator François-Joseph Graf; the beach club, with its white-terry-covered sun beds and umbrellas; the beach bar; and the 90-foot saltwater pool set at the edge of the sand. Around the pool a soundtrack of low-key lounge music was playing.

Happily, upstairs, our Luxe Junior Suite Seaview was blissfully quiet. Sliding doors led to a private balcony with full-length white privacy curtains and a glass half-wall that allowed a view of the waves rolling in from the Golfe du Lion.

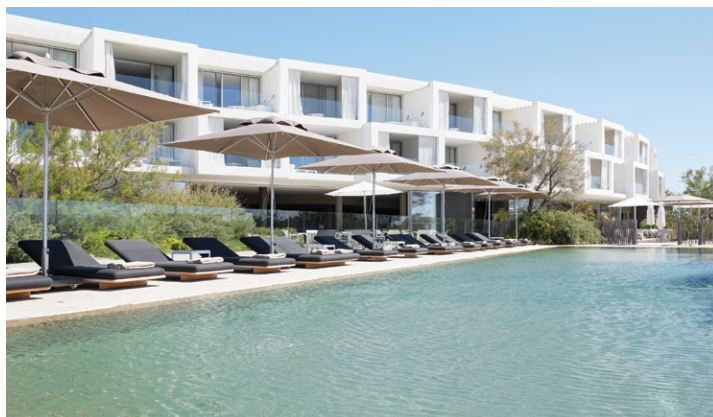
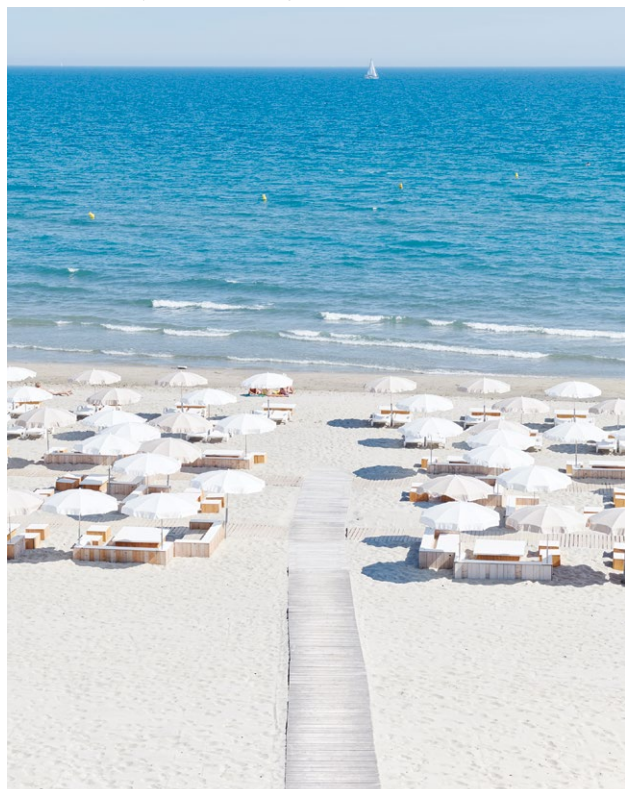
The cubist-style hotel architecture was the work of Paris-based Buttazoni & Associates, but the interiors were done by Paris designer Imaad Rahmouni, who says that the décor of summerhouses on America's East Coast provided him inspiration. Our room, in a soothing color scheme of sand, oyster and white, featured an armchair and a dark

wood-framed rocker, along with a very comfortable bed made up with Bergen Linen sheets. The bath came with gray-painted wood paneling and gray tiles, a claw-foot soaking tub, a walk-in rainfall shower and custom-made amenities by Paris perfumer Olivia Giacobetti.

After a swim in the sea, we lounged by the pool with our books for a relaxing afternoon, which was diminished only by the irritating lounge music. Presumably, this ambiance is calculated to appeal to the Costes' younger fashion-conscious clientele. Before dinner, we spent an hour in the spa, which features two hammams with striking black rock walls, inlaid with mosaics.

Ultimately, our only real disappointment with this property was its restaurant. The menu, an array of dishes familiar to anyone who's been to one of the Costes' Paris restaurants

Beach, pool and junior suite at Plage Palace hotel, Palavas-les-Flots





Salon and Junior Suite at Baudon de Mauny, Montpellier



— carpaccios, tartares, grilled fish and steak, with only a *gardiane de taureau* (bull's meat braised in wine) providing a local reference point — was aggressively priced and the portions were small. Worse, the service was exceptionally slow and disorganized. (An alternative is provided by the excellent seafood restaurant Le Vivier in Le Grau-du-Roi, a 20-minute drive away.)

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We concluded our trip to the Languedoc in the city of Montpellier (pop. 285,000), the capital of the Hérault department, located 9 miles to the north of Palavas-les-Flots. There, we stayed at our recommended 10-room **Baudon de Mauny**, a charming property set within a limestone mansion dating to 1777. This historic family-run hotel is located in the heart of the delightful Écusson neighborhood and provides an ideal base from which to explore the old town and its chief attractions such as the Musée Fabre fine arts museum, the Cathédrale St-Pierre and the Jardin des Plantes.

Our Junior Suite blended a traditional look with contemporary comforts and featured vivid wall coverings, high molded ceilings, polished flagstone floors, comfortable period furnishings and modern amenities. Full suites are augmented by separate sitting areas and kitchens. Some rooms can be combined to form two-bedroom apartment-style lodgings that are ideal for families. Public areas include an 18th-century

drawing room, a bar and a breakfast room in a 14th-century glass-enclosed courtyard. Although the hotel has no dining room, numerous delightful cafés and restaurants are located within easy walking distance.

From Montpellier, we took the high-speed TGV back to Paris, arriving at the

Gare de Lyon five hours later. (Some trains cover the 465 miles in as little as three-and-a-half hours). The ease with which it is possible to exchange the Mediterranean world of Languedoc-Roussillon for the northern European ambiance of the French capital is one of the wonders and delights of modern travel. [HR](#)

LE VIEUX CASTILLON 91

LIKE The location in a charming medieval village; the lovely swimming pool. **DISLIKE** The valet parking system backs up when the hotel is busy. **GOOD TO KNOW** Complimentary bicycles are provided for guests who wish to explore the surrounding area. **Lowest Rate:** Standard Room, \$450; **Editor's Choice:** Terrace Junior Suite, \$760. 10 Rue Turion Sabatier, Castillon-du-Gard. Tel. (33) 4-66-37-61-61

LA MAISON D'UZÈS 92

LIKE The historic character of the hotel, the beautifully decorated guest rooms; the excellent restaurant. **DISLIKE** The lackluster breakfast and slow service. **GOOD TO KNOW** The hotel is located on a pedestrian-only street with no access by car. The municipal parking garage nearest to the hotel is Parking Q-Park Uzès Gide, 26 Boulevard Charles Gide. **Lowest Rate:** Superior Room, \$430; **Editor's Choice:** Junior Suite, \$610. 18 Rue du Docteur Blanchard, Uzès. Tel. (33) 4-66-20-07-00

MAISON ALBAR HOTELS - L'IMPERATOR 94

LIKE Impeccable service; attractive, comfortable rooms; outstanding restaurants. **DISLIKE** Turn-down service was not thorough. **GOOD TO KNOW** Le Napoleon, a sumptuous café that's a landmarked historic monument, is just a five-minute walk from the hotel at 46 Boulevard Victor Hugo. **Lowest Rate:** Superior Room, \$380; **Editor's Choice:** Junior Suite, \$530. 15 Rue Gaston Boissier, Nîmes. Tel. (33) 4-66-21-90-30

HÔTEL DES REMPARTS 90

LIKE Spacious and stylish rooms; very friendly bilingual service. **DISLIKE** The lack of a restaurant. **GOOD TO KNOW** Leave your car in public lots A or B and have the hotel validate your ticket for complimentary parking. **Lowest Rate:** Classic Room, \$280; **Editor's Choice:** Junior Suite, \$340. 6 Place Anatole France, Aigues-Mortes. Tel. (33) 4-66-53-82-77

PLAGE PALACE 89

LIKE Attractive and very comfortable rooms; striking seaside pool and beach club. **DISLIKE** Dire service in the restaurant. **GOOD TO KNOW** There is lounge music by the pool, which some may find as irritating as we did. **Lowest Rate:** Garden View Room, \$350; **Editor's Choice:** Luxe Junior Suite Seaview, \$820. 336 Avenue Saint-Maurice, Palavas-les-Flots. Tel. (33) 4-34-08-63-00

BAUDON DE MAUNY 93

LIKE The combination of contemporary design and classic architecture; the ideal location; the delicious breakfast; the tranquil and hospitable atmosphere. **DISLIKE** Access to the hotel in the old town can be tricky, and parking is hard to find. **GOOD TO KNOW** If you plan to arrive after 8 p.m., you will be provided with a door code to let yourself in. **Lowest Rate:** Superior Room, \$200; **Editor's Choice:** Junior Suite, \$240. 1 Rue de la Carbonnerie, Montpellier. Tel. (33) 4-67-02-21-77

Prices quoted reflect average mid-high season rates (including taxes) and are subject to change.

Gard Gastronomy



Amuse-bouche and grilled squid with tomato chutney at Le Skab

Since Gard is still an agricultural region of small farms, locally grown produce stars on menus that change daily to showcase the best of the season. Highlights include asparagus in spring; cherries, apricots, peaches and plums in summer; wild mushrooms in fall; and truffles and game in winter.

Le Grau-du-Roi is the second-largest fishing port on the French Mediterranean coastline, and Gard's seafood, especially octopus, squid, tellines (tiny clams dredged from the delta of the Rhône), razor shell clams, sea bream and sea bass, is exceptionally delicious. Gard also produces excellent olive oil, notably that of Oliveraie Jeanjean in Saint-Gilles, just south of Nîmes. The most distinctive cheese is pélardon, a tangy goat's milk cheese, served fresh, aged or marinated in olive oil with herbs. Two traditional Gardoise recipes appear regularly on menus: gardiane de taureau is a stew of Camargue bull's meat braised in wine, and brandade de morue, a specialty of Nîmes, is a dish of whipped salt cod and potatoes with garlic.

Gard is also a major wine region and produces one of the most famous French rosés, Tavel, which comes from a town of the

same name on the west bank of the Rhône, north of Avignon. Made principally from Grenache and Cinsault grapes, Tavel was the first rosé to achieve AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) status when the system was introduced in 1935. The Costières de Nîmes, as the vineyards surrounding the city are known, also produces some outstanding wines, including organic ones from the Domaine Gassier in Caissargues, especially the lush, velvety red Grenache de Bek. Indeed, across the region a younger generation of winemakers are also producing excellent wines, notably at the Domaine de L'Aqueduc near Uzès and Domaine Roc d'Anglade in Langlade.

Within the past few years, Gard's restaurant scene has quietly developed into one of the best and most reasonably priced in France. This is because many talented chefs are forsaking large cities to open restaurants in a region with fine produce, reasonable rents and an excellent quality of life. Here is a selection of our favorites.

LA TABLE 2 JULIEN

Housed in an old stone house in a pretty little village a few miles from Uzès, young chef Julien Lavandet's restaurant is deservedly popular for its good-value market-driven

chalkboard menu. Expect dishes like burrata with shrimp beignets and tomatoes, and red mullet with satay sauce and black rice. It is possible to eat outside in good weather. *12 Route d'Uzès, Montaren-et-Saint-Médiers. Tel. (33) 4-66-03-75-38*

RACINES

After cooking his way around the world, chef Axel Grousset-Bachelard opened this intimate bistro on a narrow lane at the edge of Uzès last year to immediate acclaim. The menu changes daily and follows the seasons of local organic produce. If they are available, try the tomato gazpacho with wasabi, and the hake with hollandaise sauce. *1 Rue Masbourguet, Uzès. Tel. (33) 4-66-63-30-59*

LA PIE QUI COUETTE

The chef at this counter-service-only restaurant inside of Les Halles de Nîmes market cooks a different chalkboard menu daily using the best produce from surrounding stalls. It is a local favorite for dishes like steak tartare and brandade de morue. There is a great selection of wines by the glass. *Open only for lunch. Reservations recommended. Les Halles de Nîmes, Rue Guizot, Nîmes. Tel. (33) 4-66-23-59-04*

LE LISITA

Just across the street from Nîmes' Roman coliseum, the terrace of this modern bistro is an excellent choice for lunch or dinner and comes with a remarkable view. The reasonably priced prix fixe menus feature contemporary takes on southern French dishes, including grilled bull steak with carrots and red wine sauce, and cod in tomato bouillon. *2 bis Boulevard des Arènes, Nîmes. Tel. (33) 4-66-67-29-15*

LE SKAB

A short walk from the Musée de la Romanité, this casually elegant Michelin-starred restaurant offers the inventive cooking of young chef Damien Sanchez, an outstanding wine list, excellent service and outdoor dining in summer. The menu evolves but runs to dishes like mackerel with cauliflower panna cotta, and saddle of rabbit stuffed with Spanish ham. *7 Rue de la République, Nîmes. Tel. (33) 4-66-21-94-30*

RESTAURANT ALEXANDRE

Chef Michel Kayser has won two Michelin stars for his refined contemporary southern French cooking at this restaurant in the countryside just outside of Nîmes. Expect dishes like zucchini flowers

Counter seating and grilled razor shell clams with pesto sauce at La Pie qui Couette



stuffed with truffle mousseline, and roast Aveyron lamb with tomato tartare and potato purée flavored with hay. *2 Rue Xavier-Tronc, Garons. Tel. (33) 4-66-70-08-99*

ENTRE VIGNE ET GARRIGUE

Serge and Maxime Chenet, a father and son team, offer an appealing menu of fresh, light and intelligently creative dishes at their restaurant in an old stone farmhouse. Try the truffled foie gras with a mango-and-balsamic-vinegar condiment, and then the roasted guinea hen fillet with red-cabbage beignets, figs and a sauce poivrée. Vegetarian menus are available. *Mas Saint-Bruno, 600 Route de Saint-Bruno, Pujaut. Tel. (33) 4-90-95-20-29*

LE PATIO'NÉ

With a patio for summer dining, this friendly restaurant serves very good contemporary French cooking with international inspiration. Begin with a smoked salmon and crunchy vegetable spring roll with a peach-and-coriander dipping sauce, followed by beef fillet with a crust of blue cheese and crushed macadamia nuts, and pistachio mascarpone with fresh raspberries. *16 Rue Sadi Carnot, Aigues-Mortes. Tel. (33) 9-82-31-51-73*

VOLVER

Chef Krishna Léger's charming restaurant with a spacious terrace for outdoor dining has become hugely popular since it opened a year ago. The market menu changes constantly but runs to dishes like ceviche in tiger's milk marinade with cherries and cucumbers, and fillet of sole with apricots. The monthly bouillabaisse night — call ahead — has become a local favorite. *1 bis Chemin de la Carcarie, Rond point de Servies, Serviers-et-Labaume. Tel. (33) 4-66-20-48-99*



Selection of olives at market in Nîmes

Shopping Highlights

A trip to Gard provides abundant opportunities to bring home pantry staples such as jam, honey and herbs, which are sold at open-air markets like the one in the Place aux Herbes in Uzès on Saturday mornings, or in Les Halles de Nîmes, the city's wonderful covered food market. Other items to look for in the open-air markets include dried lavender sachets, table linens, olive-wood cutting boards, olive tapenade, baskets and faïence. Gard was a major pottery-producing region even before it was settled by the Romans, and it still has many ateliers where ceramics are handmade today. The region's other well-known handicrafts are baskets and furniture woven from willow, reeds and other grasses. Their quality is vastly better than the similar Asian imports found in American stores. Since opening hours change and some ateliers are open by appointment only, it's strongly advised to call ahead before visiting our recommended artisans.

LES HALLES DE NÎMES

This much-loved covered food market in the heart of Nîmes is a lively, colorful and fragrant place to shop for edible souvenirs. It also has one of the best cheesemongers in France, Vincent Vergne, who is an MOF (Meilleur Ouvrier de France), the highest award given by the French government to culinary and gastronomic professionals. *5 Rue des Halles, Nîmes. Tel. (33) 4-66-21-52-49*

ATELIERS DE NÎMES

Denim was born in Nîmes (the word is a conflation of de Nîmes, from Nîmes) and Guillaume Sagot is single-handedly trying to revive this historic fabric in its birthplace. From a light-filled workshop in the city center, Sagot, a trained tailor, hand-cuts many of the washed-denim jeans for men and women that he sells under his Ateliers de Nîmes label. *2 Rue Auguste Pellet, Nîmes. Tel. (33) 9-53-40-15-89*

OLIVERAIE JEANJEAN

Located just outside of Nîmes, this award-winning producer makes some of the best olive oil in France from seven different varieties of olives. It also sells tapenades and cosmetics made from olives. *2373 Chemin des Loubes, Saint-Gilles. Tel. (33) 4-66-87-42-43*

ATELIER VIME

Run by Frenchman Benoit Rauzy and Englishman Anthony Watson, Atelier Vime in Vallabrègues offers a selection of vintage items made of wicker, rattan or cord. Some are signed by famous

designers (Janine Abraham, Tito Agnoli, Louis Sognot, Audoux-Minnet), while others were made by anonymous craftsmen in villages with a tradition of production dating back centuries. The atelier also offers a full range of contemporary handmade French wicker, including lamps, tables, baskets and objets d'art. *21 Rue Nationale, Vallabrègues.*

LAURENT PASSE

One of the most inventive furniture makers in France, Laurent Passe most often works with wood or other materials that he's re-covered to give them a second life. His work can be seen at the Atmosphere gallery in Uzès, or by appointment at his showroom in Beaucaire. *8 Rue de l'Enclos, Comps. Tel. (33) 6-61-70-67-03*

VAL D'OSIER

Basket weaver Valérie Lavaure makes not only distinctive baskets but also wicker, straw and raffia handbags in her atelier in Uzès. She will work on special commissions and custom-made projects. *Carrignargues, Uzès. Tel. (33) 6-31-41-86-66*

CERAMIQUES PICHON

Founded in 1802, this family-owned ceramics atelier produces traditional handmade southern French ceramics, including marbledware — different colored clays are mixed together to create a distinctive swirling pattern — and delicate latticed bread baskets and bowls. It also sells plates, pitchers, vases and many other objects. This is an excellent place to shop for gifts. *Pont des Charrettes, Uzès. Tel. (33) 4-66-22-11-86*



Private Islands: The Ultimate Escapes

During these unprecedented times, private island resorts provide a refuge from reality. An exclusive buyout is now an attractive option for an extended family or a group of friends who are searching for safety, seclusion and harmony with nature. The following 15 properties rank among our favorite private islands worldwide.

MOZAMBIQUE

Azura Quilalea Private Island

This rustic-chic resort set on an 86-acre island offers everything from gourmet cuisine to its own private reef. Nine thatch-roofed air-conditioned villas built of coral stone are laid out along two white-sand beaches on Mozambique's northeast coast. They feature four-poster beds, sitting-dining areas, butler service, private decks furnished with sun loungers and daybeds, and baths with free-form tubs and mosaic showers. The four revamped Kusi Villas include private plunge pools, and the Villa Quilalea has a small private beach. Amenities include a spa offering treatments that take inspiration from Africa. The scuba diving here is among the best in the world. Dhow cruises

and sea turtle-watching in season (June–September) are also available. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 18 guests per night: \$12,650; Nightly rate: Kusi Villa for two, \$1,900. (All meals and house wines and spirits included.)*

TANZANIA

&Beyond Mnemba Island

Located 3 miles off the northeastern tip of Zanzibar, this romantic retreat on the Indian Ocean atoll has just 12 airy rustic bungalows. Built of local timber and handwoven coconut palm matting, they are set along a dazzling white-sand beach backed by casuarina trees. Each suite has its own personal butler, a tree-shaded veranda and a stylish bath with a stone shower connected by a palm-covered

walkway. Days are spent gazing at the azure sea and pristine coral reefs beyond. For the more energetic, snorkeling, kayaking, fly-fishing and scuba diving are all available. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 22 guests per night: \$33,840; Nightly rate: Banda for two, \$3,520. (All meals, house wines and spirits, laundry and return ground transfers included.)*

FRENCH POLYNESIA

The Brando

Occupying the private island of Tetiaroa, once owned by Marlon Brando, this exceptionally glamorous resort is a 20-minute flight from Tahiti by private aircraft. In many ways, this is the fantasy tropical island with flawless beaches, swaying palms and an aquamarine lagoon. The 35 one- to three-bedroom thatched beachfront villas have decks with plunge pools and outdoor tubs. Dining options include Les Mutinés for fine French cuisine in a formal dining room, the Beachcomber Café for local specialties and a new teppanyaki restaurant overseen by chef

Kaito Nakamura. All the expected island activities such as snorkeling, kayaking and scuba diving are available. This haven also has a full-service spa, and cultural experiences can be arranged, including traditional Polynesian dance lessons, music classes, weaving instruction and cooking courses. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 82 guests per night, three-night minimum stay required: Contact Andrew Harper Travel, (800) 375-4685. Nightly rate: Villa for two, \$4,815.*

BELIZE

Cayo Espanto

Set on a 4-acre islet, this stunning resort is a 10-minute speedboat ride from Ambergris Caye on the Belize Barrier Reef. The seven guest cottages, each with a heated infinity plunge pool set into a sundeck, showcase chic open-air living and the magnificence of the surrounding ocean. The most exclusive lodging is an overwater bungalow with glass floors at the end of a 150-foot dock. The resort lacks a central restaurant, but meals tailored for each guest are served on private verandas or at beachside tables. The calm and shallow translucent waters are ideal for bonefishing but are mostly too shallow and rocky for swimming. Sailing,

plus scuba diving in the nearby Hol Chan Marine Reserve, can be arranged. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 18 guests per night: \$50,000; Nightly rate: Casa Ventanas for two, \$2,000. (All meals, beers and house spirits and airport transfers included; minimum stay may apply.)*

SEYCHELLES

Cousine Island

This tropical island sanctuary on its own 62-acre nature reserve is a 15-minute helicopter ride from Seychelles International Airport. Sugar-white sands, crushed seashell paths and immense gray granite boulders unique to the Seychelles are all part of the property's

extraordinary appeal. The four guest villas, designed in a French Colonial gingerbread style, come with private infinity pools and are nestled along a deserted beach. Overlooking a central pool, a pavilion houses a library, a bar and a dining room for Creole, Asian and Western cuisine. Guided nature and bird walks complement swimming and snorkeling excursions in the clear turquoise sea. Other hotel amenities include a Ligne St. Barth spa in a separate beach house, a fitness facility and a PADI-certified dive shop. This is the ultimate in sunbaked, barefoot luxury. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 12 guests per night: \$28,000; Nightly rate: Luxury Villa for two, \$4,750. (All meals, laundry and airport transfers included.)*

Cayo Espanto, Belize



Cousine Island, Seychelles





Four Seasons Private Island at Voavah, Maldives

MALDIVES

Four Seasons Private Island at Voavah

This private island sanctuary is located in Baa Atoll, the Indian Ocean's first UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Seven stylish guest lodgings include Water Villas stilted above the lagoon that boast two bedrooms and decks with pools and hammocks. The main Beach House features an open-air lounge, a restaurant serving locally sourced seafood dishes, a fitness area and a library. Beach barbecues can be arranged. Days can be filled with spa

treatments, yoga and meditation classes and certified scuba instruction. Jet skiing, sailing, windsurfing and boating excursions on *Voavah Summer*, the resort's 62-foot two-cabin luxury yacht, can also be arranged. Swimming with reef sharks or diving with manta rays are two of the more exhilarating activities. The property supports numerous marine conservation programs, including a pioneering coral-propagation project. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 22 guests per night: \$55,000. (All-inclusive; resort available only as buyout.)*

FLORIDA, UNITED STATES

Little Palm Island Resort & Spa

Reached via launch from a shore station, this tropical retreat occupies the lush 5-acre Little Torch Key, a 30-minute drive north of Key West. The 30 oceanfront thatched bungalow guest suites feature vaulted ceilings, four-poster canopy beds, separate living areas, indoor-outdoor showers and private verandas. A fine restaurant is complemented by the Palapa Bar. As well as a freshwater lagoon swimming pool and a small white sand beach, amenities include a spa, a fitness center and a private marina. Snorkeling and scuba excursions, birding, sailing, fishing charters, and helicopter and seaplane tours can be arranged. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 60 guests per night, three-night minimum stay required: Contact Andrew Harper Travel, (800) 375-4685. Nightly rate: Island Escape Suite for two, \$1,200.*

Little Palm Island, Florida



AUSTRALIA

Lizard Island

Located on the outer Great Barrier Reef, and accessible only by private plane, this glamorous Robinson Crusoe-like resort is set on a remote 2,500-acre island, surrounded by crystalline lagoons edged by dazzling white sands. The 40 rooms offer spacious living areas with

floor-to-ceiling windows leading onto private terraces. Beachfront Suites feature paths that extend directly to the beach. Modern Australian cuisine with Mediterranean and Asian inflections is served at the restaurant, and picnic baskets for beach lunches can easily be arranged. Amenities include a tennis court, full-service spa, fitness center and freshwater pool. Spectacular outer-reef snorkeling and scuba diving are both available, as are black marlin and big-game fishing (September–December only). *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 80 guests per night, two-night minimum stay required: Contact Andrew Harper Travel, (800) 375-4685. Nightly rate: Beachfront Suite for two, \$2,110.*

GEORGIA, UNITED STATES

The Lodge on Little St. Simons Island

This serene retreat on the 11,000-acre private barrier island of Little St. Simons houses 16 rustic but comfortable wood-paneled rooms in an original hunting lodge and several outlying cottages. Delicious Lowcountry dishes are served in a cozy dining room. An atmospheric lounge encompasses a massive stone fireplace, bookshelves and an open bar. The island provides sanctuary for a wealth of flora and fauna, including nearly 330 species of birds. Naturalist-led

bird-watching walks along wild beaches are not to be missed. The property has the relaxed air of a much-loved holiday home and the exceptionally hospitable and charming staff only heighten the timeless and stress-free atmosphere. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 32 guests per night, two-night minimum stay required: \$6,960; Nightly rate: Tom House for two, \$575. (All meals and boat transfers included.)*

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

Necker Island

This 74-acre private island owned by billionaire Richard Branson is a 35-minute boat ride from Beef Island airport on Tortola. The vibe is laid-back, but the service is unfailingly polite and proactive, while the on-site amenities

are sophisticated and state-of-the-art. Eleven Balinese-style guest rooms include a Master Suite with a private outdoor whirlpool and deck, and the stand-alone Leha Lo room offers 180-degree views from a wraparound deck. The Great House, a central common area perched on a hillside, comprises a bar, a four-person hot tub and a dining area with a rooftop terrace. Next to the Beach House are two tennis courts, plus a free-form infinity pool and a seaside bar. All usual water sports are available, and Pilates and yoga classes, plus guided island hikes and spa treatments, can be arranged. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 40 guests per night: \$105,000; Nightly rate: Bali House Room for two, \$5,000. (All meals, wines and spirits, and return launch transfer included; minimum stay required.)*

Lizard Island, Great Barrier Reef, Australia



Necker Island, British Virgin Islands





Petit St. Vincent, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

ST. VINCENT & THE GRENADINES

Petit St. Vincent Private Island

This privately owned 115-acre islet, rimmed by coral reefs and white-sand beaches, offers a glorious natural setting and an unsurpassed sense of privacy. Twenty-two freestanding oceanview stone cottages are simply but elegantly furnished and come with louvered windows and wood-tone lanais with hammocks. With no in-room phones, televisions or Wi-Fi, the soundtrack at this resort is the lapping of the waves and the rustle of the surrounding palms as

the trade winds blow through. Locally inspired dishes are served at the open-air hillside restaurant or at the casual beachside bar. Aside from the Balinese spa, the resort's chief amenity is its PADI-certified dive center, created by Jean-Michel Cousteau and staffed with resident naturalists and marine biologists. The Tobago Cays, with some of the best snorkeling in the Caribbean, are within easy reach. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 44 guests per night: \$36,630; Nightly rate: Cottage for two, \$1,640. (All meals included; minimum stay required.)*

Ratua Island Resort, Vanuatu



TURKS & CAICOS

Pine Cay Meridian Club

Set on the privately owned 800-acre island of Pine Cay, this delightfully informal resort comprises 13 shore-line lodgings with alcove living areas, indoor-outdoor showers and screened porches. Decorated with vibrant Haitian paintings and colorful handcrafted furnishings, the accommodations back a spectacular 2-mile-long deserted white-sand beach. Some guest units lack air-conditioning, but overhead fans and louvered windows circulate the island's year-round breeze. For more privacy, request one of the two Luxury Beachfront Cottages. The property encompasses a cocktail lounge, a casual grill and a small freshwater pool, plus a new gym and spa. Days are filled with calm ocean swimming, sailing, biking, fishing and windsurfing. Snorkeling forays to the nearby national park reef can be arranged. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 26 guests per night: Contact Andrew Harper Travel, (800) 375-4685. Nightly rate: Luxury Beachfront Cottage for two, \$1,500. (Minimum stay required.)*

VANUATU

Ratua Island Resort

This family-owned ecolodge on a private island encompassing a mature coconut plantation is a 50-minute flight north of Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu.

Thirteen 200-year-old Indonesian teak wood farmhouses offer private patios that face gardens and a semiprivate stretch of beach. Stylishly appointed, they feature vaulted thatched roofs, canopy beds with mosquito netting, leather armchairs and baths with wood-floored showers. Breezes supplemented by ceiling fans ensure restful nights in comfortably cool temperatures. A main clubhouse comprises a seafood restaurant and a cinema; a small overwater spa is located nearby. You may want to spend your day fishing, snorkeling, mountain biking, swimming with horses (an activity unique to the island), or maybe just tuning out the world on a chaise longue shaded by a giant vutu tree. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 38 guests per night: Contact Andrew Harper Travel, (800) 375-4685. Nightly rate: Deluxe Beachfront Villa for two, \$700.*

CAMBODIA

Song Saa Private Island

This idyllic family-owned resort on an unspoiled dot in the pristine Koh Rong Archipelago is a 45-minute speedboat ride from Sihanoukville on Cambodia's southwest coast. The 24 luxurious accommodations include Ocean View Villas, which feature thatched ceilings and wooden decks, outdoor showers and infinity pools. Overwater Villas are augmented by direct ocean access from balconies. Two restaurants include the

waterside Driftwood Bar for a tapas-style menu. In addition to a private beach and large pool, activities include kayaking in the surrounding archipelago, guided rainforest tours and snorkeling trips through nearby coral gardens led by a marine biologist. Wellness programs and spa treatments can be booked. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 58 guests per night: \$50,000; Nightly rate: Ocean View Villa for two, \$1,860. (All meals, house wines and spirits, speedboat transfers and laundry included.)*

FII

Wakaya Club & Spa

This exclusive sanctuary is set on a remote 2,200-acre private island of astonishing beauty. Emerald lagoons and shell-strewn beaches edge a forested, mountainous

interior teeming with exotic birds. Ten cottage suites feature living areas, covered decks, indigenous timber floors and cathedral ceilings. As the lavishly appointed rooms lack televisions and phones, the tranquility of the resort is undisturbed. A restaurant pavilion offers Fijian-Continental meals that emphasize fresh seafood and local game. Eighty percent of the ingredients served come from the island or the surrounding sea. Amenities include a freshwater grotto-like pool, a spa, a tennis court and nine holes of golf on an informal course. Cultural excursions can also be arranged. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 32 guests per night: \$44,000; Nightly rate: Ocean View Bure for two, \$2,000. (All meals, house wines and spirits, and a 50-minute massage per person per stay included.)* 

Wakaya Club & Spa, Fiji



Song Saa Private Island, Cambodia



Private Islands on Our Radar

The idea of a private island is one of the most alluring and romantic in travel; here are four that we are yearning to visit



Time + Tide Miavana, Madagascar

PANAMA

ISLAS SECAS

The Islas Secas, an archipelago made up of 14 islands, are located 20 miles off the Pacific coast of Panama. Louis Bacon, an American hedge fund manager and environmental philanthropist, purchased the islands and created an eponymous ecolodge composed of nine lavish casitas. The stylish guest lodgings, all immersed in vibrant tropical vegetation, afford magical sea views, and most are augmented by plunge pools and outdoor soaking tubs. The restaurant is housed in a cathedral-like bamboo structure and serves "ocean-to-fork" cuisine. Activities range from marlin and tuna fishing on the legendary Hannibal Bank, to snorkeling with whale sharks, and scuba diving in the nearby Coiba National Park. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 24 guests per night: \$30,000. Nightly rate: Casita Mirador for two, \$2,000.*

INDONESIA

MISOOL ECO RESORT

Accessible only by boat, this retreat is set on a remote island in Indonesia's Raja Ampat

Islas Secas, Panama



archipelago. It lies at the heart of the so-called Coral Triangle, which is home to nearly 600 kinds of reef-building coral and more than 2,000 fish species. For serious divers, the sea life experienced here is incomparable. A conservation center on the island helps maintain the astounding biodiversity. The lodge itself is built entirely of reclaimed tropical hardwoods, while the accommodations comprise eight Water Cottages on stilts, four North Lagoon Villas and seven South Beach Villas. The cuisine employs locally sourced, organic ingredients; a spa features signature natural scrubs, oils and extracts. Aside from diving and kayaking, birding, cultural visits and cooking classes are available. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 40 guests per night: \$114,700. Nightly rate: Water Cottage for two, \$6,200. (Minimum stay required.)*

AUSTRALIA

SATELLITE ISLAND

This 76-acre private island getaway, owned by Melbourne couple Kate and Will Alstergren, lies just off the southern coast of Tasmania in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, a 90-minute drive and five-minute boat ride from the Tasmanian capital, Hobart. The three-bedroom Summer House and the two-bedroom Boathouse are decorated in natural hues and a combination of antiques, local furniture and material salvaged from the island itself. Development here merges seamlessly with the lush greenery of the endemic plants. The island has no restaurant, so a private chef is engaged for the duration of your stay. Days can be spent diving for abalone, beachcombing, touring the island's salmon farm and swimming in the pristine surrounding waters. Children under

the age of 12 are not permitted on the island at any time. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 8 guests per night: \$3,850 (two-night minimum stay required).*

MADAGASCAR

TIME + TIDE MIAVANA

Located off the northeastern coast of Madagascar, Nosy Ankaio is the largest island in the Levens Archipelago. When Time + Tide Miavana opened there in May 2017, travelers in search of exotic locales soon took notice. (The resort was designed by Silvio Rech and Lesley Carstens, the architects responsible for North Island in the Seychelles.) Fourteen one- to three-bedroom glass pavilion-like villas feature handcrafted furnishings and hand-dyed textiles, local Malagasy stone accents and private pools. The island is ringed by 3 miles of white sand beaches, and the surrounding waters have exceptional marine biodiversity. Indoor and outdoor restaurants serve fresh seafood as well as Italian-inspired cuisine. Activities include diving, fly-fishing and lemur trekking with a private guide. *Exclusive buyout for a maximum of 40 guests, seven-night minimum stay required: Contact Andrew Harper Travel, (800) 375-4685. Nightly rate: One-bedroom Villa for two, \$5,800.*

HOTEL RATINGS

- 🌿 **99-100** — A truly great hotel, among the finest of its kind in the world
- 🌿 **96-98** — An exceptional hotel of great individuality and distinction
- 🌿 **93-95** — An outstanding hotel of genuine sophistication
- 🌿 **90-92** — A fine hotel with considerable charm about which we have minor reservations

89 & Below — A hotel that did not meet the required standards

Find all of our recommended hotels at [HideawayReport.com](https://www.HideawayReport.com).

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