

30 romantic hotels in the Med

Sultry Italian island retreats, chic French castles and cosy Cretan cottages — **Susan d'Arcy** picks the most loved-up places to stay

FRANCE

1 **Château Les Carrasses** Languedoc

This turreted 19th-century castle sets the right tone for romance. As do its luscious suites: whitewashed beams, dinosaur-egg baths, original fireplaces and elaborate chandeliers. Explore Narbonne and its wide-open coastline (good for windsurfing), or bob about in the hotel's infinity pool overlooking vine-clad hills and let afternoons drift by in its winter-garden library, thought to have been designed by Gustave Eiffel. **Details** Doubles from £125, room only (lescarrasses.com). Fly to Perpignan or Montpellier

2 **Domaine de Biar** Montpellier

This wedding-cake château has had a whimsical makeover, worthy of its belle époque architecture. Rooms are named after significant characters in the building's history. The scarlet shades of Henriette are in honour of a former owner's daughter who established the Red Cross in Montpellier, while Taison's lean muscular design was inspired by a stallion from the estate's stable of Camargue white horses. Explore the 125 acres of

grounds in the saddle or go a step further with a horse-whispering class.

Details Doubles from £125, B&B (domainedebiar.com). Fly to Montpellier

3 **Hotel Les Roches** Blanches Cassis

In its 1930s heyday this seafront mansion was a favourite hideaway of Édith Piaf, and after a recent meticulous renovation, you will regret *rien* about a stay here. The updated art deco bedrooms are indecently decadent: eye-catching headboards with brass and black lacquer geometric panels contrast with the tactile taupe velvet furniture. Outdoors is also loaded with wow factor. Terraced gardens studded with ►

► umbrella pines lead to a staircase carved out of the cliff face with direct access to the sultriest stretch of the French Riviera.

Details Doubles from £215, room only (roches-blanches-cassis.com). Fly to Toulon

4 Hotel Château St-Martin & Spa Provence

Compete with the birds for billing and cooing as you have breakfast on your balcony, gazing at the medieval town of St Paul de Vence surrounded by soft-focus hills. That timeless stillness gives this 12th-century Knights Templar castle the edge over rivals down on the coast. Add in bedrooms decorated with French flair, 34 acres of olive groves dotted with cabanas, Michelin-starred dining and a top-class spa, and you will probably decide that the Côte d'Azur is best experienced, pastis in hand, from the hotel's infinity pool.

Details Doubles from £400, B&B (oetkercollection.com). Fly to Nice

5 Les Bergeries de Palombaggia Corsica

Corsica is the Côte d'Azur with its corsets loosened. Palombaggia Beach, a few miles south of Porto Vecchio, is the island's finest stretch of bone-white sand and only a golf-buggy ride from this cute hotel. Its 21 rooms and suites snuggle into a pine-studded hillside and are calmly confident, with whitewashed walls, reclaimed wooden beams, flagstone floors and private terraces.

On a clear day you can see Sardinia. **Details** Doubles from £220, room only (hotel-palombaggia.com). Fly to Figari

SPAIN

6 Palacio Solecio Malaga

Don't turn your nose up at Picasso's home town. Malaga has steadily gained traction as the new Barcelona, with a thriving arts scene, trendy bars, and restaurants from some of the country's most exciting chefs. This revamped 18th-century mansion is the icing on the cake for those in search of a flirty

weekend: slick bedrooms, cocktails in its ornate cloisters tinkling with the music of dainty fountains, and dinner by the acclaimed chef José Carlos García.

Details Doubles from £95, B&B (palaciosolecio.com). Fly to Malaga

7 L'Hort de Sant Cebria Catalonia

It used to be a rural police HQ, but these days the most arresting thing about this creeper-clad B&B near Figueres is the design, which punches well above its room rates. The five rooms and one suite have elaborately carved beds, antique furnishings and glittering candelabras. The local church bells provide a celestial soundtrack (although, fortunately, not through the night). You will feel a million miles from the Costa Brava's beaches, but your sat-nav will confirm they're only two and a half miles away.

Details Doubles from £90, B&B (hortdesantcebria.com). Fly to Girona

8 Es Revellar Art Resort Mallorca

In a sleepy hamlet 30 minutes' drive from Palma, the island's capital, this hotel has thousands of artworks dotted throughout its 15th-century, pink-hued

building and grounds. You will find Picassos in the library and Mirós in the colourful bedrooms. Outside its seven and a half acres of landscaped gardens are adorned with 20 fountains, eight lakes, dozens of sculptures and — a stroke of genius — two alfresco honesty bars concealed amid the borders.

Details Doubles from £120, B&B (esrevellarartresort.es). Fly to Palma

9 Hotel Torralbenc Menorca

One of Spain's coolest hoteliers, Pablo Carrington, is behind this Balearic

beauty on the southern coast near Cala'n Porter. He has tastefully reinvented a traditional finca, giving the bedrooms in its bougainvillea-draped outbuildings some New York loft attitude, all calming neutral minimalism in high-spec limestone

and wood finishes. In the evening enjoy Michelin-starred dining and the hotel's own wines, and in the day roam the nearby wild olive forests and quiet coves.

Details Doubles from £220, B&B (torralbenc.com). Fly to Mahon

10 Casa Vilella Sitges

Sitges is to Barcelona what Brighton is to London — only better, given that the Spanish party town comes with a coastline blessed with golden sand rather than ankle-twisting pebbles. Courting Catalans make a beeline for this hotel because it's only a stumble from the beach and its soothing rooms pair well with a hangover — so too its sun-trap terrace and pool. Just over the promenade it offers a prime spot for people-watching, or you can snooze to the sound of the sea.

Details Doubles from £135, B&B (hotelcasavilella.com). Fly to Barcelona

PORTUGAL

11 Grand House Algarve

This grande dame was the Algarve's original luxury hotel, and a recent facelift means that it's back to its Roaring Twenties best. Public areas are nautical but nice, its beach club sizzles spectacularly, and its bedrooms are decorated in shades of champagne, with intricate cornicing and glinting crystal chandeliers. Its location is centre stage in Vila Real de Santo Antonio, a sleepy historic town that overlooks the Guadiana River, which separates Portugal from Spain. Faro is 50 minutes' drive to the west and Seville two hours to the east.

Details Doubles from £175, B&B (grandhousealgarve.com). Fly to Faro

12 Fazenda Nova Tavira

Yes, they welcome children here, but only during Easter and July. For the rest of the year this stylish reinvention of a 19th-century farmhouse is strictly for those old enough to appreciate its well-stocked vinyl library, stylish zebra

rugs that swank up its rustic interiors, calm bedrooms and very cool saltwater pool. Tavira, the Algarve's prettiest

town, is on your doorstep, as are the biscuity beaches and pink flamingos of Ria Formosa Natural Park.

Details Doubles from £195, B&B (fazendanova.eu). Fly to Faro

13 Petra Segreta Sardinia

The Bergerettos' is a marriage made in hospitality heaven. Luigi is an award-winning chef, Rosella a renowned architect, and their conversion of a traditional farmhouse is enchanting. That it is also hidden away in the hills above the Costa Smeralda, arguably the Med's most glamorous coast, gives it extra kudos. The 25 bedrooms are subtly seductive, with lots of billowing muslin and delicately carved woods, and, of course, the dining is top-notch.

Details Doubles from £145, B&B (petrasegretaresort.com). Fly to Olbia

14 Le Sirenuse Amalfi Coast

This Positano landmark is so full of Italian exuberance that even the most uptight Brits enjoy being serenaded by the band of old-timer musicians shamelessly jamming it up every night in the hotel's candlelit restaurant. Bedrooms share that carefree joy, with dazzling white walls, handmade Vietri tiles, antique furniture and elegant wrought-iron balconies that overlook the town's pastel-coloured houses and photogenic duomo. As Dean Martin might have said back in the day, that's amore.

Details Doubles from £395, B&B (sirenuse.it). Fly to Naples

15 Palazzo Presta Puglia

Unlucky thirteen? Not in the least at this under-the-radar gem in Gallipoli, where the ten rooms in the 17th-century palazzo and three in a nearby annexe are as over-the-top as an Italian starlet. Decorated in

rich reds and moody blues, they are fairy-dusted with quirky ornaments collected from across the globe. After lazy breakfasts on the roof terrace, days are spent sunbathing on the town's golden beaches and nights whiled away in the hotel's speakeasy-style library bar.

Details Doubles from £90, B&B (palazzopresta.it). Fly to Brindisi

16 Sextantio Le Grotte della Civita Puglia

Matera is a Unesco-protected settlement dating from the Stone Age and famous for its "sassi" (atmospheric cave dwellings). Many have been transformed into upmarket restaurants, boutique shops and hotels, including this authentically upgraded bolt hole. Each room is lit by candles, beds are rustic wooden numbers, linens are handmade on traditional looms, and bathrooms have upcycled stone troughs as basins and rickety farm ladders as towel racks. The perfect setting to release your inner caveman (or woman).

Details Doubles from £200, B&B (sextantio.it). Fly to Bari

17 Sikelia Pantelleria Sicily

Giorgio Armani has a home on starkly beautiful Pantelleria, the volcanic island that belongs to Sicily but lies closer to the Tunisian coast. It is an intriguing mix of European, Arabic and African influences, so Sikelia's 20 suites — converted from ancient domed stone houses — look more Moroccan than European, but their dimly lit, dramatic interiors exude understated Italian chic. The wellness offering is a suitably sensual experience: hot springs, mud baths and caves upcycled as natural saunas.

Details Doubles from £315, B&B (sikeliapantelleria.com). Fly to Trapani

MONTENEGRO

18 Aman Sveti Stefan Budva

The tiny fortified island village of Sveti Stefan rises off the Montenegrin coast just along from Kotor. It's a dreamy pink confection, with 50 exquisite rooms and suites in 15th-century fishermen's cottages that have been renovated by the master of understated luxury, Aman. It's shockingly expensive, but such a rare and special place that, if you can afford it, you won't be disappointed.

Details Doubles from £900, B&B (aman.com). Fly to Tivat

MALTA

19 Iniala Harbour House Valletta

This is one of 2020's most eagerly awaited new hotels, and when it opens this month it will set a new benchmark for Malta. Its 23 box-fresh bedrooms are spread across four 17th-century townhouses and cater for all tastes, from low-key minimalist to lavishly maximalist. It has a very cool pool in a restored vault and expertly crafted cocktails at its rooftop bar, with views over Valletta's Grand Harbour.

Details Doubles from £302, B&B (iniala.com). Fly to Valletta

GREECE

20 Soho Roc House Mykonos

Soho House's laid-back luxe is completely in sync with the island's fun-loving boho vibe. So decor manages a sexy pas de deux between organic purity (warm-toned plaster walls, sensuous drapes of linen and tasselled hammocks) and barefoot hedonism, courtesy of DJ sets celebrating the transcendental power of music, alfresco massages and moreish cocktails at its beach bar. The bar is also, happily, the best spot to soak up the island's glorious sunsets.

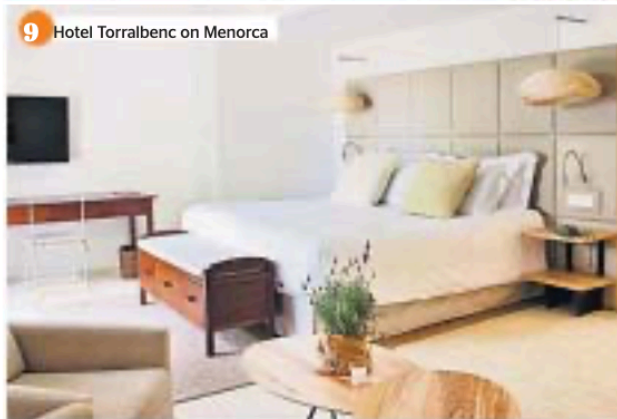
Details Doubles from £190, B&B (sohohouse.com). Fly to Mykonos

21 Kapsaliana Village Hotel Crete

Abandoned in the 1950s, this soulful



14 Le Sirenuse on the Amalfi Coast



9 Hotel Torralbenc on Menorca

17th-century hilltop hamlet has been rescued and revived in consummate style. The 22 rooms fashioned from crumbling cottages retain their craggy charm, with chunky walls, wood-beamed ceilings and open fireplaces, although

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Sikelia Pantelleria
off Sicily



18 The Aman Sveti Stefan in Montenegro

► swanky furniture and rainforest showers add welcome 21st-century gloss. The far-reaching views through the olive groves down to the sea are a bonus. **Details** Doubles from £145, B&B (kapsalianavillage.gr). Fly to Heraklion or Chania

22 Andronis Luxury Suites Santorini

Oia's dramatic sunken volcano is the backdrop to this boutique hotel, which occupies the peachiest location to capture the caldera in all its glory. Its setting is so head-turning, in fact, that there is a marriage proposal on its terraces every other day. And you will swoon at the 29 white-on-white rooms carved into the cliffside too. They are the last word in sophistication, with hot tubs or pools, private balconies and admirable attention to detail. For example, you can choose your bathroom amenities: Aivita, Molton Brown or Chopard. **Details** Doubles from £450, B&B (andronis-suites.com). Fly to Santorini

23 Kinsterne Hotel Peloponnese

This 600-year-old mansion's natural spring fills the glass-topped reflecting pool on which its dining tables "float" before flowing down into a freshwater swimming pool tucked into the lemon groves. Bedrooms mix original vaulted ceilings and Ottoman fireplaces with mid-century furniture and wall coverings made from local antique lace. Most look on to the medieval castle town of Monemvasia, the kind of heartwarming view that could put marriage counsellors out of business. **Details** Doubles from £130, B&B (kinsternahotel.gr). Fly to Athens or Kalamata

24 Orloff Hotel Hydra

No beaches and no cars means that those with children in tow won't be so keen on this island. Its reputation as Greece's artiest island also helps to ensure a stylishly adult ambience for its impressive summer exhibitions. The Orloff occupies one of its grandest 18th-century mansions, with eight perfectly judged rooms featuring classic

sugar-cube architecture offset by blasts of blue as bright as the Aegean beyond. There are also plenty of patios, courtyards and verandas for quiet, quality time.

Details Doubles from £129, B&B (orloff.gr). Fly to Athens

CROATIA

25 Adriana Hvar Spa Hotel Croatia

If music be the food of love, glamorous Hvar island is playing it just right. It hosts an annual open-air summer festival from June to September, with jazz, classical and folk on the schedule. And this design hotel is in the thick of the action, presiding over the glittering waterfront, with playfully zingy bedrooms, one of the country's best spas and a chilled rooftop pool and bar. **Details** Doubles from £105, B&B (suncanihvar.com). Fly to Split

TURKEY

26 Avalon Kabak Beach Lycian Coast

Oludeniz is probably Turkey's most famous beach. A few miles along the coast, Kabak is just as magnificent,

but with its white-sand cove guarded by the gnarly fingers of the pine-carpeted Taurus Mountains, is quieter. Wisely, Avalon's 11 bungalow bedrooms, perched above Kabak, don't try to compete with that setting. They stick to stripped-back simplicity, with locally crafted four-poster beds, planter chairs and French doors that open on to Mother Nature's finest work. The resort is also adults-only, which helps to preserve its pin-drop peace and quiet. **Details** Doubles from £100, room only (kabakbeach.com). Fly to Izmir

27 Sabrina's Haus Bozburun peninsula

This section of Turkey's Turquoise Coast, 30 miles from Marmaris, remains blissfully sleepy. There's no vehicle access to this gorgeous hideaway, so you arrive by speedboat, and water is a constant theme thereafter. Fourteen

of the 17 breezy white rooms and suites have hot tubs; Miss Sabrina, the hotel's custom-made speedboat, can whizz you to empty bays for Crusoe days à deux, and each evening one lucky couple get to dine on the candlelit floating pontoon. **Details** Doubles from £412, half-board (sabrinashaus.com). Fly to Dalaman

28 Hotel Villa Mahal Kalkan Bay

This boutique is small but perfectly formed, as you will appreciate from the first sight of its 17m infinity pool, cantilevered over a forested hill and appearing to cascade into the deep blue sea beyond. Its beach club also plays with your senses, with lounging platforms built over a section of coastline fed by freshwater underground springs, so the water tastes sweet rather than salty. Rooms are soothing cream cocoons, pepped up by the occasional splash of zesty colour, and all have private terraces. Kalkan, a 20-minute walk away, offers a change of pace. **Details** Doubles from £255, B&B (villamahal.com). Fly to Dalaman

29 Macakizi Bodrum peninsula

Turkbuku village is home to Turkey's most glamorous beach scene, and this boutique resort is where the interiors are pale and the action is interesting, especially when celebrities such as Mick Jagger and Kate Moss check in. The bougainvillea-festooned suites are an ode to stealth wealth, with designer furnishings by Rifat Ozbek and paintings by local artisans. The palm-shaded pool is laid-back, food is by Aret Sahakyan, one of the country's star chefs, and the hotel has its own boat that is perfect for exploring deserted coves and enjoying on-deck wine-tasting workshops. **Details** Doubles from £330, half-board (macakizi.com). Fly to Bodrum

CYPRUS

30 Casale Panayiotis Kalopanagiotis

In the slow-paced mountain village of Kalopanagiotis eight cottages have been transformed into pampering lairs for the loved-up, with contemporary furniture, modern art and wood-burning stoves bringing warmth to the exposed stone walls, thick wooden doors and beamed ceilings. Outside are spectacular mountain hikes, or you could repair to the spa with its rasul mud chamber, hydrotherapy pool and excellent massages. You're spoilt for choice at mealtimes with four restaurants, including Kava, a subterranean dining room, for that extra-special occasion. **Details** Doubles from £80, B&B (casalepanayiotis.com). Fly to Paphos



Adriana Hvar Spa Hotel
in Croatia