

Sasha Slater

The salon Chinois; the fountain is now a swimming pool; the grounds of the château



have at the Hôtel de Crillon, which is the last word in Parisian luxury. It's a very long way from our own French hideout.

But we seemed to settle in just fine. There are no TVs in the rooms (it would be sacrilege), so at suppertime, while my husband and I tucked into a French '75, melon soup and turbot, the children unwound next door in the bar with *Stranger Things* and a pasta carbonara. The Vuitton-clad staff took it all in their stride. And then, it being the hottest evening ever, a midnight swim in the circular pool (once the château fountain) beckoned. It beckoned again the following day and we spent our time exploring the hotel's gardens, admiring the interiors and panting quietly by the pool in the unfeasible heat. They also offer horse-riding, motor racing in Le Mans, balloon rides, mountain biking and antiques in the nearby towns, or you can simply wander through the 80-acre grounds.

It definitely caused us a pang to leave. But then, bundling back into the air-conditioned cool of the Land Rover, complete with a gourmet picnic delivered up by the hotel's staff, was no hardship. We felt like we'd already had a summer holiday before it even began.

French fancy

A château in the Loire has been remodelled as a hotel, in the very finest style

EVERY YEAR FOR my whole life, we've been coming to the same remote little corner of south-western France to a charming, if dilapidated, house my slightly hippy parents bought before I was born. More recently, I've been driving down here in an ancient Volkswagen Touran. But last Christmas it died by the side of the road about a mile from our front door. This led to hair-tearing, tears, an unbelievably expensive repatriation of said Touran and a decision on my part never to trust it on such a road trip again. It was time for an upgrade.

So this summer, we rented a sleek new Land Rover and resolved to break the monotony of French motorways in the most glamorous way possible. Outside, the Loire Valley roasted in 40-degree heat. Inside, despite having loaded up with our two children, a niece, two inflatable fried-egg pool toys and a clarinet, we purred through the landscape in comfort before arriving at the Château du Grand-Lucé.

This hotel, about half an hour from Le Mans, only opened its doors in June. But what doors they are. It's a 1760s

neoclassical jewel of a place, with a roomful of Chinoiserie paintings by the same artist Marie Antoinette commissioned to decorate the walls of the Petit Trianon. Even the most insignificant little corridor boasts hand-painted de Gournay wallpaper. Each individually decorated room has huge windows overlooking either the formal garden with its box hedges in which red squirrels cavort, or the medieval village of Grand-Lucé. And the toiletries are the same as they



CHATEAU DU GRAND-LUCÉ

Doubles from £650 (chateaugrandlucé.com).

THE OUT

THE OUT powered by Jaguar Land Rover is the on-demand car-rental app for adventurous Londoners. Prices start at £295 for a weekend getaway in a selection of cars including Land Rover Discovery Sport HSE (theout.com)

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