

COUVENT D'HÉRÉPIAN



A little taste OF HEAVEN

Daisy Finer rounds up five perfectly relaxed European weekends

1 Barceló La Bobadilla, Spain

Tom Cruise, Plácido Domingo, the King of Spain... the guest list goes on for this magical Andalusian-style palace, just 40 miles from Granada. Enveloped in 350 hectares of Mediterranean forest, the whole place sings rural-smart with its whitewashed walls, terracotta roofs and endless courtyards. Make your way through winding corridors, past lovely water features to one of the 70 rooms. And what rooms: buckets of space, the softest beds imaginable, luxurious bathrooms and amazing views, all decorated in Andalusian design (think no clutter, floral fabrics,

wood panelling and dome-shaped shutters). Food is incredible – breakfast groans with everything you could want and their three restaurants include the mouth-watering 'haute cuisine' La Finca. And you've got no need to worry about piling on the pounds – horseriding, biking, quadding, swimming, archery and hunting are all on offer. Or just relax in the spa and have a treatment (the bamboo cane massage is a must).

RATES FROM: from €180
+34 958 32 18 61; barcelolabobadilla.com

2 Grand Hotel Majestic, Italy

Hotel Grand Majestic is a knockout – and makes the perfect escape from the heaving crowds in Lake Como. Situated on sister lake, Lake Maggiore, just a stone's throw from the charming town of Pallanza, this palatial-style property has mind-blowing views of the Alps, oozes romance and shouts old-school sophistication from its spanking white rooftops. Interiors are glorious (picture glittering chandeliers, art deco Florentine lamps and marble columns) and the gardens, leading down to the water, are immaculate. Take a kayaking lesson with former gold Olympian, Beniamino Bonom, lounge on the private



beach or simply flop in the gorgeous little spa. Rooms are equally blissful: spacious, comfy and classic with a balcony giving serious panoramic views. And you can soak in the beauty further downstairs with drinks on the candlelit terrace or whilst tucking into a fantastic dinner which boasts the best fish ever.

RATES FROM: Classic Collection Holidays offers four nights from £645 pp based on two sharing on a b&cb basis and includes return flights from the UK and private transfers. 0800 294 9320; classic-collection.co.uk



Country & Town House

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3 Le Couvent, France

Tucked under the wings of a pale-stone church in the hill-top town of Herepian, Le Couvent was once a 17th-century convent. Think sumptuous not austere though. The white-walled bedrooms are enormous, with heated stone floors and a huge wardrobe. There's a lovely spa hidden under the vaults with a gleaming, blue-tiled pool. Emerge all glowy at supper time to sit with the other guests around a candle-lit table. The food is home-cooked and scrumptious. The same family atmosphere lingers in the communal sitting room with its jolly fire and bursting bookshelf. There's also a snugly grotto-cum-honesty bar, where you can drink yourself under the antique tables. Despite cosy luxury, something of the reverential still languishes. Perhaps it's the majestic stone staircase leading back to your room at night with its lining of flickering tea-lights and heavy, wall-mounted candles, dripping with wax.

RATES FROM: €125 per night.

+33 467118715, garrigae-resorts.com



4 Palazzo Seneca, Italy

This clean minimalistic 16th-century Palazzo has been run by the Bianconi family since the 1850s, and their personal touch is what makes the place so special. Very hands on, they take time to say hello and real pride in their efforts to meld something beautifully traditional with the contemporary. Located in the tranquil town of Norcia in Umbria, it's hard to believe there are still little pockets of life which run at such a slow pace. The only blip is the lack of swimming pool, but the



5 The Oitavos, Portugal

The Oitavos resides, super-sleek, amongst the dunes of the trendy Estoril coast. Barely a year old, it's the final flourish in a list of projects undertaken by its glamorous owners, the Champalimaud family. But don't be put off by its modernness. Floor-to-ceiling windows allow eye-fuls of rolling sand and wiry gorse galloping away to the Atlantic. Minimalist rooms in blues and whites boast salty-aired balconies while downstairs, a bar and enormous restaurant roll onto decking looking out to sea. An infinity pool languishes happily below while the shimmering basement spa is all salty-scrubs and sea-inspired oils. Outside the hotel, there's a swanky racquets club, a pretty tree-lined stable yard and an 18 hole golf course, where you can spend the night. Well, nearly. Request the Mirante Suite, a funky building on the edge of the course where you can watch the sunset from your private pool.

RATES FROM: 4 nights including breakfast at €680 per double room.

+351 21 486 0020, theoitavos.com

real reason that people come here is for the food. Chef Flavio takes top quality local ingredients and transforms them into something sensational such as home-made tagliolini with black truffles, trout with herbs and tomatoes, and beef cooked on a spit with a selection of different sauces. And if you like what you taste, lessons can be arranged with the man himself. Otherwise you can go horseriding or enjoy the spa.

RATES FROM: 3 nights from £675 per person on a B&B basis, including car hire and flights with Ryan Air. *Book through Abercrombie & Kent, 0845 618 22133; abercrombiekent.co.uk*

