

CASTLE OF ADVENTURE

Leona Gerrard heads to the Languedoc's Château Capitoul in the south of France to sample the region's active offerings

Pyrenees views from an expansive terrace, masterfully concocted cocktails and bathrooms adorned with marble are but some of the delights on offer at Château Capitoul, set in the Languedoc region of the south of France. Add to this bike rides, e-scooting, sea swimming and yoga, plus a spot of spa time and salt-lake exploring, and my three-day break in this lush location nestled in the heart of the Massif de la Clape, has all I could wish for from a restful yet active getaway.

Château Capitoul is the brainchild and third sustainable château renovation project of Irish businessman Karl O'Hanlon, his wife Anita Forte and winemaker Laurent Bonfils. Having already visited his second 2016 acquisition – Château St Pierre de Serjac – and been truly mesmerised by its vast vineyard-laden location and opportunity to ride road bikes, I was eager to see if Château Capitoul offered the same active delights. Flying time to Capitoul's nearest airport, Montpellier, is an hour and 50 minutes, and we arrive at the hill-top château by car within an hour. There's plenty



The view from the chapel's summit



Bonfils' barrels

of time to unpack, settle in and sample a cocktail from the 'beach bar' on the terrace, from which you can see the Bonfils vineyards below. Dinner is in the château's Asado restaurant, where we sample some local lobster and Bonfils wines, before heading to bed in the thoughtfully decorated Art Deco-inspired space.

ROAD BIKE, TO E-BIKE
The last time I visited this region, I enjoyed some splendid road biking in the Haut Languedoc natural park; this time, we'll be mixing it up with a spot of e-biking to the summit of Notre Dame des Auzil chapel, a shrine to all the mariners lost at sea, situated in the



The infinity pool at Château Capitoul

heart of the Massif de la Clape. We meet our guide Hugo Blanquier in the château's carpark, who briefs us on the different power modes, and it's not long before we're turbo-charging our way over rocks and gravel to the chapel. As an obsessive road biker, I'm surprised just how strenuous the ride is – dodging the rocks in this ancient landscape takes a level of competence – but I enjoy the experience immensely, and I'm grateful for the boosts of power on this hot day. The route also makes a reasonably strenuous one-to two-hour waymarked hike with an elevation of 100m, and you'll pass vineyards and ruins on your way, taking in panoramic views from the memorial chapel, which is well worth a visit. Lunchtime baguettes laden with French



Biking to Gruissan

cheese hit the spot, and our downward traverse is taken with caution.

SALTY SCOOTING

The next adventure on the itinerary is e-scooting, this time to explore Gruissan's salt flats, a sublime display of pink lakes set against a pale blue horizon. We scoot along the vast and exposed salt flats as our guide, Jerome Serny, tells us about their surrounding ecosystems. Le Salin de Gruissan is situated between the Mediterranean Sea and a lagoon known as l'Étang de l'Ayrolle, and in this fishing village close to Narbonne, salt has been harvested in the summer months by hand. All this talk of salt is thirsty work, so thankfully a fresh seafood lunch awaits, taking in the serene dusk-like landscape.

The afternoon is spent at leisure, and that means some time in the spa and a few laps of the château's outdoor infinity pool, finishing off with a glass of rosé to watch the sun set over the Pyrenees, and daydream about tackling those mountains on my next cycling adventure.



Massif de la Clape



E-scooting is a great way to explore the salt flats

ONE PEDAL FORWARD, TWO PEDALS BACK

The following day sees us upon the saddles of non-powered mountain bikes, which you can hire from the château's reception. From here, we cycle along an off-road coastal track to Gruissan. The route is also ideal for runners, and we pack our towels and swimsuits in the hope of a sea swim before lunch. We fight the wind on our way, but the sunshine and salty sea air is welcome after a few weeks of bleak Blighty. The sea, albeit a tad choppy, looks inviting, and it's clear that this is the place for local watersports, windsurfing in particular. By the time we return 'en velo' to the château, it's hard to believe that we've had so many wonderful adventures in so short a time; it's endless fun.

Thankfully, it doesn't have to end just yet, as the evening brings a wine-tasting and pairing at the château's Mediterranean restaurant, before sinking into the fluffy duvet and a restful slumber. Next morning, we're dressed for yoga as we enjoy croissants and homemade granola



Breakfast on the terrace



Yoga at the resort

on the terrace one last time, before making our way to one of the 44 self-catering villas on the property for a yoga class. It's meditative and gentle, and we're encouraged to relax our bodies as we chant. But my mind is reeling, and I feel energised and alive, after three days of jam-packed, good-for-the-soul adventure.

TRAVEL FILE

Hotel rooms at Château Capitoul are from €200 per night, based on two people sharing on a bed and breakfast basis. Self-catering villas at Château Capitoul cost from €345 per night in a two-bedroom property with private garden. For more details or to book, see chateaucapitoul.com

For e-scooter hire with Jerome Serny, see trottup.fr

For e-bike hire with Hugo Blanquier, see languedoc-vtt-evasion.com

You can fly to Montpellier with EasyJet from London Gatwick. Flights start from £46 per person return in low season. Visit easyjet.com

