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## Honeymoon Review: Crillon le Brave, France

A "village within a village"- this Provençal hotel is a truly unique offering in the heart of one of France's prettiest regions.

by MARIE-CLAIRE CHAPPET / July 31, 2023 in Travel 0



### Why go?

Crillon le Brave stands apart from other Provence hot spots. This sublime rural bolthole is a village within a village, a peaceful oasis in one of France's most unspoilt regions. The untrodden paths and breathtaking views of the Luberon lie beneath you as you relax entirely. It was the very first stop on our own honeymoon and the memories tethered to this idyll will be cherished forever. Trust me, this is a place that will steal your heart and won't ever *quite* give it back.

### Honeymoon style

Many destinations purport to live out the 'relaxed chic' vibe, but few do it with as much aplomb as here. The fact is, Crillon le Brave may be internationally renowned, but it is still, as part of the esteemed Gallic hotel group Maison Pariente, quintessentially French. This means both an air of ineffable *je ne sais quoi* and unflappable ease (matched in the service- they won't fuss over you but they will still deliver) and an easy, breezy sense of seamless style.

The clientele here is a real mix; some young families, but mostly couples. All seem to seek out the same atmosphere; a quiet sense of cool. It is unwaveringly relaxed here, while still having a buzz. The bar and restaurants are busy and chatty- and open to non-hotel guests- but the main pool area and the hotel's distinct winding pathways, cobbled streets and staggered, meticulously designed gardens exude a sun-dappled laziness. In fact, the noise you are most likely to hear is the soft click clacking of a game of petanque.



## Set the scene

Crillon le Brave sits atop the existing medieval village from which it takes its name. Its hilltop perch means one of its unique selling points is the view. From your room, from the pool, from the restaurant, you will practically get whiplash peering over at the patchwork quilt of undulating fields below you, cut through with winding roads most likely to house intrepid cyclists and a few sleepy cars. This is the Luberon, the 'pre-alps' of Provence; known for its staggering beauty; all rolling hills, vineyards and olive groves in the shadow of Mont-Ventoux, a mountain which is occasionally an infamously gruelling stage of the Tour de France and which you can (as tempting as that sounds) also cycle around while you stay at the hotel, with bikes available to rent. If sweating isn't your thing – you could also opt for one of their vintage car offers instead. Slightly more glamorous I think.

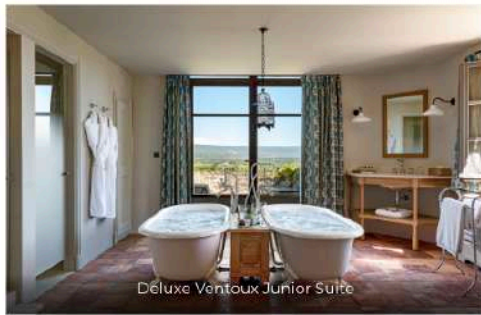
The hotel's village-within-a-village feel is not artificial. The family-run venture was gradually put together from private houses within the village from 1989 onwards, with its most recent acquisition in 2019. This means that rooms are scattered around a few blond stone houses set in amidst twisting cobbled pathways and up craggy stone steps. You climb down steps to herb gardens and a gravelly petanque playground, past bubbling fountains and wisteria-clogged walls to reach restaurants, terraces and the pool. It gives you the feel of living in a rented *gîte* in a Provençal village, but with all the perks and amenities of a five-star luxury hotel.



## Rooms

As befits Maison Pariente's 'home away from home' mantra, and Crillon's own identity as a collection of previously private homes, each room feels cosy and intimate. There is none of the sterility of some luxury hotels. Each room or suite has its own identity, and feels like a real bedroom or living area. All the spaces in the hotel were designed by French decorator Charles Zana, who brought an elevated homeliness to it all; interspersed with clean modern lines and curious touches that nod to the region (the wicker donkey heads in the bar are a standout).

Rooms are all, whatever your price bracket, spacious and comfortable. Most boast those ludicrous views and are decked out with the usual amenities, from mini bars to TVs. All come with individual touches of their own, like double baths, window seats, terraces or balconies, stone fireplaces or antique writing desks. Whichever room you choose, you will feel like a guest in your outrageously stylish French pal's house.



## Food & Drink

The hotel boasts two restaurants; one gastronomic (Le Madeline) and the other more 'relaxed' (La Table du Ventoux). The former sits in a quiet square overlooking the Ventoux and has its own unique identity, feeling slightly- though still at the heart of the hotel- like its own entity. The other is at the top of Crillon, on a wide terrace where breakfast is also served, alongside those panoramic Luberon views.

Both are headed up by executive chef Adrien Brunet, famed for his eco credentials (more on which later). La Table du Ventoux is where he brings to the forefront his medley of exquisite Provençal cuisine; blending humble and classic fare like pissaladière, with pork from the Ventoux and cheese from Manon. Locally sourced and expertly finished, this is some brilliantly tasty French cooking, marrying excellence with simplicity. This approach traces throughout the hotel, extending to the bar menu, where even the club sandwiches are a knockout.

Le Madeline is an altogether more elaborate affair, with painstakingly crafted dishes drawing from local producers (all named and thanked in each menu) with striking but successful flavour profiles, like basil and sardine, eel and eggplant and a riotously good wine menu. It is a must for a special and very romantic dinner. (Even if you don't like eels). Any evening at Crillon is best finished up at the bar, on the ground floor of one of the oldest houses in the hotel. It has a sleek, laid back vibe and is fully stocked with as many great board games as it is whiskey bottles and great cocktails.

Should you want to, you can also have a special picnic prepared for you, and the staff will recommend several prime locations in which to lay down your red checked blanket. We did this, and enjoyed our delicious treats in a nearby romantic olive grove.



## The Story

The nine houses of Crillon le Brave were acquired over a period of years from 1989 onwards by a Canadian couple, Peter Chittick and Carolyn Fairbairn, who fell in love with the village in 1988. They bought the first house (still called La Maison Roche, which is the heart of the hotel) turning it into a small *hôtellerie*. They gradually bought up several other adjacent and interconnecting buildings around the village, making Crillon the uniquely sprawling destination it is today. In 2018, they sold to Maison Pariente – a boutique French hotel collection boasting three other properties in the country, all of which prioritise a homely feel. They have rejuvenated the style of the hotel while losing none of its charm.

## Eco-friendly

Executive chef Adrien Brunet recently obtained the prestigious 'Ecotable Label' - as a mark of his ecologically responsible approach to cuisine, with almost all ingredients locally sourced.



La Madeleine Restaurant

## Family Friendly

Crillon prides itself on its accessibility for families and we saw several – with children ranging from babes in arms to preteens- during our stay. Many of the suites can accommodate three people (and most can also have extra beds and/or cots added) and the Deluxe Two Bedroom Suite is a self-contained mini house, ideal for families. The hotel will also offer plush toys, bibs and bathrobes and slippers for your little one.

The hotel also offers myriad experiences which are family friendly, from bike hire to kayaking to exploring local villages and tailor-made experiences forged by the concierge.

## Spa

Set in the cavernous underbelly of the hotel, under vaulted arches of an old stable building, Spa des Écuries offers an impressive range of treatments considering it is not the largest space. There are body treatments, facials, massages and nail and beauty appointments on offer, as well as using the lovely products of American organic beauty brand Tata Harper and French probiotic brand Aïme. We opted for (what else, when on honeymoon?) a couples' massage, in the candlelit, arched main treatment room. It was so deliciously relaxing I actually nodded off and woke up expunged of all the stresses of wedding planning.

Should you need revitalising as opposed to relaxing; there is also a fully-stocked gym with a private trainer available on request. My husband informs me it is a very good gym. I was too busy drinking cocktails by the pool I'm afraid.



## Location

Set in the heart of the Luberon region of Provence, Crillon le Brave is the ideal base for exploring all that this stunning part of France has to offer. The villages of the Luberon are world famous for their charm and beauty and are all a short drive or cycle away. You are also an easy drive from some of the heavy hitters of the region- the historic pull of Avignon and Arles, the allure of Aix-en-Provence or even a trip to the vibrant city of Marseille. This bucolic idyll will provide the perfect peaceful place to hang up your cap after a day exploring Provence.

Crillon le Brave is just over an hour's drive from Marseille Provence Airport, with regular flights from London on British Airways, Easyjet and Air France.

**To Book:** [crillonlebrave.com](http://crillonlebrave.com)

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